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Paulo Coelho's Belief in the Magic and Its Expression in His Select Novels

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Abstract: -

This paper aims to study the employment of the magical realities in *The Alchemist*, *The Pilgrimage* and *The Zahir* by Paulo Coelho. It also presents Coelho's beliefs in magical elements of life and its expression in his select novels. The study is based on the approach of magical realism to analyze the matter. In order to gain additional understanding and insight from the perspective of magical realities, the topic of magical thinking will be investigated in relation to Paulo Coelho's life and works. The emphasis on the commonplace, the ordinary, and the familiar is one of the main characteristics of magical realism. Paulo's works' closest resemblance to reality is one of their best qualities. He makes magic a part of our everyday reality. By analysis, this study demonstrates how magic is clearly present all around us and also demonstrates that magic is more human than divine.

Keywords: - Magic, Magical realism, Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*, *The Zahir*, *The Pilgrimage*

Introduction: -

I consider myself a magus because I'm a person who tries to develop his talents and power. In that sense, everyone can be a magus." (Arias, 103) Juan Arias has written these lines in his biography of Paulo Coelho: *Confessions of a Pilgrim* and these lines are admitted by Coelho himself. Prior to being well-known for his writing, Paulo Coelho was renowned as a powerful magus. He now desires to be recognized as the author of works whose translation rights are



contested on a global scale. His works go beyond simple fiction, which is why they stir up tumultuous emotions and unbreakable ties. Paulo Coelho experienced a traumatic birth when he was born on August 24, 1947, in Rio de Janeiro. He began to have a crisis of faith in the latter stages of his life and left to seek for new spiritual encounters, turning to drugs, hallucinogens, sects, and magic while travelling throughout Latin America. The majority of his writings are novels, although he has also authored and published more than 25 volumes overall, including essay collections and newspaper articles. An inspirational tale of self-discovery, *The Alchemist* (1988), first published in Portuguese, is a modern classic that combines magic, mysticism, wisdom, and wonder. It has affected the lives of countless readers across decades and sold millions of copies globally. *The Pilgrimage* (1987), describes Paulo Coelho's travels across Spain on the famous San Tiago Road. In *The Pilgrimage*, Coelho describes the extraordinary hardships that helped him find his inner strength, knowledge, and a supernatural sword that marked his entry into the Tradition's exclusive secret society. *The Zahir* (2005) exhibits the search for the narrator's missing wife who has been his obsession and he does so with the help of Mikhail who can hear 'voices' from his childhood. It is discovered that Coelho's success and his ability to produce creative works are both influenced by magical thinking, which is seen as a vital and enabling component in his life. The best thing about his works is how closely they resemble reality. He makes magic a part of the world we live in. The study is based on the approach of magical realism which is often known as magic realism and it is a literary technique that applies myth and imagination to actual events.

Objectives: -

- 1) To discover Paulo's faith in the magical realities.
- 2) To find out elements of magical realism in *The Alchemist*, *The Pilgrimage* and in *The Zahir*.
- 3) To exhibit magical powers as possessions of human beings to explore within.



Research Method: -

Because there is no requirement for a calculation in this study, the researcher has employed a qualitative approach. A literary genre known as magic realism places stories in the real world but includes fantastic, unreal aspects. The literary genre of magical realism first appeared in South America in the middle of the 20th century, but it has since spread to other parts of the world. Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison, and Salman Rushdie are a few of the most well-known authors who write in the magical realist style. The writings of magical realism challenge us to look beyond the boundaries of the known and this is what this study attempts to find out in the selected novels of Paulo Coelho.

Significance: -

As a generation, we are more organized than ever in the way that we survive. The world has never been more affluent than it is now, thanks to our age. The problem is that we are clearly not the happiest, most loving, or most serene people. It is now time to find out what is wrong. All our ancient scriptures opine that the solution to that problem lies within. Paulo Coelho deems that being a magus means nothing but knowing and developing the gifts and the power that we all human beings possess and the true magus is the one who struggles to bring things out of hiding. The proposed study displays how the protagonists of the select novels recognize and develop their potential to unlock the powers and treasures they already have within. By using uncommon or magical powers in their daily lives, individuals are able to fulfill their desires and find inner peace. Without seeming overly dramatic and fantastical, Paulo Coelho serves as a portal that lets the readers enter a world of magic. When we open a Paulo Coelho novel, it's strange how we may instantly be transported to a world rife with fantastical possibilities. By creating tales that inform us of the world's limitless potential, Paulo Coelho bridges the gap between reality and enchantment. He inspires his readers to have faith in the power of the universe.

Paulo's Belief in the Magical Element of Life: -

“I am a magus, as all human beings are. Of course, I follow a Catholic spiritual tradition, but I firmly believe we all possess gifts we don't develop, because official wisdom, that empty space, refuses them, labels them superstitions or whatever. I'm a



person who tries to develop my gifts and power, and that is what it means to be a magus, which doesn't make me any better or worse than the next person.” (Arias, 105)

Thus, Paulo views magic in a totally different light, viewing it as a force that we all have, at least potentially. To him, being a magus means developing a cognitive power not always accepted by official wisdom. A magus is a normal person, but one who is aware of other realities, other movements, other currents beneath the surface of things. First of all his birth was the starting point of his magical thinking because prayer and St. Joseph were said to be responsible for his survival. (Morais, 38) Again the traces of his strong relationship with the angels can be seen in his conversation with his mother. Once he said,

“Do you know why I am being naughty today, Mama? It is because my guardian angel is not working” (Morais, 39).

The relationship Paulo had with God and his prayers had a big impact on his early years. His parents and the faith-based institutions he attended, which upheld stringent Catholic values like faith, respect, and diligence, served to reinforce all these. (Morais, 41) Paulo began using cannabis in his twenties and isolated himself from parental supervision.

Satanism, magic, and the occult were introduced to Paulo along with his growing drug use. He began to think that the devil had an effect on his life and that predestination existed. In a sense, Coelho continued to believe in magic, but he switched his focus from white magic to black magic. He made a deal with the devil, also known as the "Prince of Darkness," out of frustration that he was still an unknown author, promising him his soul if the demon fulfilled all of his wishes (Morais, 221). Paulo decided to forego the temptations and cancelled the arrangement just a short time afterwards. (Morais, 222). After all his experiences of dealing with magic, he talks of both the sides of magic; positive and negative. He says to Arias,

“Magic can be very dangerous. I would say it's like nuclear energy, it depends on the uses you put it to. You can make atomic bombs or generate light with it. So not all nuclear energy is good, nor all types of magic. You need to know how to tell the difference.” (Arias, 123)

Thus, he firmly believes that we can invoke that side of magic in our everyday life to which we give power; to which we grant to manifest.



Expression of Magical Realities in the Select Novels:-

Paulo Coelho believes that travelling is one of the best methods to discover your brilliance and magic; it frequently appears in his writings. His characters frequently go on long distances to discover who they are and uncover their true higher selves. They do this by traversing dry regions of Northern Spain and deserts. As magical realism is distinguished by the mingling of magical or supernatural aspects with realistic locales, people, and circumstances, the expression of the same is found out, here, in the selected novels by Paulo Coelho. He frequently uses symbolism, metaphor, as well as components of myth and folklore, to build a deep and multi-layered story.

In *The Alchemist*, the writer has displayed through the main character that we all human beings have the power to create magic in our real life. The protagonist of the novel, Santiago, a shepherd lad from Andalusia in Spain, sets out towards the Egyptian desert in search of a treasure he saw in a recurring dream. He travels to several towns and cities in Spain, Tangier, and the Sahara Desert. He comes into contact with a variety of people who provide him priceless insights and experiences that aid in his understanding of the universal language and the accomplishment of his own destiny. A variety of individuals he encounters, including a gypsy woman, an alchemist, and a king, offer him advice and assistance in learning the purpose of life. Omens and signs are one of the major aspects of magical realism in *The Alchemist*, which is one of its main themes. Santiago receives signs from the natural world, such as bird flight or wind movement, during the course of the narrative. These signs are not presented as exceptional, but rather as a normal aspect of the world. Omens provide Santiago with direction for his quest and give him confidence that the Soul of the World has approved of it. As explained by Melchizedek, omens are a component of the Universal Language of the World, and if Santiago is able to access this language, he will always be able to decipher its meaning from his surroundings. Paulo writes,



“In order to find the treasure, you will have to follow the omens. God has prepared a path for everyone to follow. You just have to read the omens that he left for you.”
(Coelho, 28)

Santiago receives two stones from Melchizedek: Urim and Thummin, which are black and white respectively. He argues that by posing objective queries, the stones can assist Santiago in interpreting the omens. The white stone denotes "no," whereas the black stone denotes "yes." As Santiago continues on his trek to the pyramids, he observes butterflies as a sign that he has made the right decision to give the old man his sheep in exchange for the treasure. Santiago observes two hawks flying in the desert before one of them attacked the other. This portends the arrival of a war party to attack the oasis.

Where Santiago's tears drops on the walk to the pyramids, a scarab beetle surfaced. This was a sign pointing out to Santiago where his treasure was concealed. Thus omens serve to show Santiago's spiritual development throughout the narrative. He is frequently told by the alchemist that all of nature, no matter how small or large, is made up of the same essence, and that by connecting with a single grain of sand, he is doing so with God. Then his transformation in the wind which is the greatest representation of magical realism is described:

“The boy reached through to the Soul of the World, and saw that it was a part of the Soul of God. And he saw that the Soul of God was his own soul. And that he, a boy, could perform miracles.” (Coelho, 145)

Santiago must comprehend the platonic message that permeates this novel and how he is a part of nature, a part of God, and as a result is able to perform miracles, which is why this test in which he turns himself into the wind is so crucial. Santiago can only reach his Personal Legend by understanding this crucial lesson.

Coelho employs magical realism in *The Pilgrimage* to describe the inner journey of his protagonist and to explore spiritual issues. The story follows the author, who also serves as the protagonist, as he sets out on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Paulo Coelho and his mystical instructor Petrus travel across Spain in search of a miraculous sword which symbolizes his inner strength. The main character, Paulo, has a



number of magical encounters and visions that transcend reality and fantasy throughout the book. Regarding his old sword which he had used for more than ten years and which, he says, had been a great help to him during hundreds of magical operations, he says,

“Now it was so be devoured by the earth, the iron of its blade and the wood of its hilt returning to nourish the source from which its power had come.” (Coelho, 2)

Regarding his new sword with which he is about to be honoured, he anticipates,

“From then on, I was no longer required to remain silent. No longer did I have to hide my capabilities nor maintain secrecy regarding the marvels I had learned to accomplish on the road of the Tradition. From that moment on I was a Magus.” (Coelho, 2)

Thus the sword here symbolizes the power that each common man could have in order to create miracles in his life hence it appropriately connects the fantastical elements with the everyday world. The introduction of Petrus, a mysterious guide who appears to possess supernatural abilities, is one instance of magical realism in the book. As well as telepathically speaking with Paulo, Petrus has the ability to hover, disappear and reappear at will. These skills are not logically or scientifically explained; instead, they are simply accepted as being a part of the story's magical setting. The occurrence of many spiritual creatures along the journey is one of the novel's most notable instances of magical realism. These spirits, including the devil, the Saint of Death, and the Virgin Mary, are depicted as actual, living people who communicate with the main character and other characters in the narrative. These paranormal events are subtly incorporated into the story and are portrayed as a typical aspect of the pilgrimage journey. The dog and the lamb are two significant symbols that stand for various aspects of the protagonist's journey. The dog is a metaphor for the protagonist's more animalistic, primal aspect. It also symbolizes his fears and scepticism, which are frequently connected to his survivalist tendencies. The protagonist is reminded by the dog that in order to move forward in his journey and get at his destiny, he must face and get past his fears. The innocent, spiritual, and pure side of the protagonist's nature is represented by the lamb, on the other hand. On his journey, the main character comes upon the lamb, which serves as a poignant reminder to him of the value of forgiveness and compassion. The dog and the lamb



stand for the duality of the human experience as a whole. Thus Paulo creates the atmosphere of magical realities by making the use of symbols and metaphors too.

Paulo Coelho's book *The Zahir* uses the literary device of magical realism to fudge the lines between reality and fiction. After his wife Esther departs mysteriously, the book's protagonist Paulo, a writer, sets out on a voyage of self-discovery. He encounters people and circumstances as he travels across various parts of the world that test his understanding of reality and drive him to face his most profound fears and aspirations. The narrator and Esther are living in Paris at the start of the novel, but Esther leaves for no apparent reason. In pursuit of the clues, the narrator visits Kazakhstan, the country where Esther was born. He then journeys to other regions of Russia, including Moscow and Siberia, where he encounters individuals who aid in his understanding of the nature of love, freedom, and sense of accomplishment. If we talk about the elements of magical realism in the novel, the *zahir* is a mystical idea that symbolizes a thing or idea that seizes one's attention and turns into an obsession. Once his wife leaves in the story, the main character develops an obsession with the concept of the *zahir* and starts to perceive it everywhere. Another illustration is Mikhail, a mysterious guy who appears to have magical abilities and who acts as Paulo's guide. The ambiguity in Mikhail's persona, which combines elements of realism and the otherworld, contributes to the mystical tone of the book. He is the person who can hear the Voices as he says to the narrator in the novel. When the later asked him about Esther's whereabouts, he replies,

“...but the voice tells me that now is not the moment, that no one should interrupt her encounter with the energy of love. I respect the voice, the voice protects us, protects me, you, Esther.”(Coelho, 146)

Again he adds to the blending of fantasy and this earthly world when he mentions the Lady who is described as an invisible to the others but visible only to Mikhail. He says,



“But the voice has been speaking to me ever since I was a child, when I first saw the Lady.” (Coelho, 147)

This lady is described as an extremely white young girl floating above Mikhail while donning a white dress with a blue belt. His visions of that girl continue for a whole year and he keeps on hearing the ‘voice’. As he says about the miraculous tree as pointed out by that girl,

“The visions continue for a whole year. My mother tells some of her closest friends, who tell other friends, and soon the tree is covered in scraps of fabric. Everything is done in the greatest secrecy; the women ask about loved ones who have died; I listen to the voice’s answers and pass on the messages.” (Coelho, 191)

Despite not speaking the language, she communicates with Mikhail in a language he can grasp. In the end, we see the protagonist himself is also in tune with the voice and admits regarding his search of his wife,

“The voice says that it will only allow these things to happen when the time is right.” (Coelho, 151)

Thus, as he moves forward on his physical as well as spiritual journey, he experiences more and more magical moments in his life awakening his soul and feels that we frequently experience this sort of understanding right after the magical moment has passed. He goes through the understanding which points out at the features of magical realism in true sense that the visible world is always a manifestation of the invisible universe. Thus the mystical and spiritual aspects of the human experience are investigated through the lens of magical realism.

Conclusion: -

Here Paulo appears to think that as humans are magical beings, one must embark on a path of self-discovery in order to properly unleash their genius and magic. Here, in his chosen novels for the study, in order to explore subject matters like spirituality, love, and the search for meaning, magical realism's facets help to create a dreamlike atmosphere. They also invite the reader to think about the possibilities of a world beyond what they can see and touch, challenging their perspective of reality in the process. In *The Alchemist*, we can see the



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expression of Paulo's belief in Omens and signs as he firmly believes, **“Omens are an alphabet you develop to talk to the world's soul.”** (Arias, 1)

In *The Zahir*, as the narrator becomes more and more preoccupied with finding Esther, the reader questions whether the experiences he is having are actually supernatural or simply the product of his own mental state. The employment of magical realism throughout all the RAM techniques in *The Pilgrimage* reinforces the notion that reality is more complex than what can be described by science and reason alone and adds to the sense of wonder and mystery. Magic is defined by Paulo as both art and science in his writings and he firmly thinks that his wishes and thoughts have an impact and strive to control events and circumstances. He reveals to us how magic is evident all around us. Simply said, we don't look in the proper places with the right stuff of dedication.



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