

Manifestation of Existentialism In Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and *The Winner Stands Alone*

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the existential aspect in Paulo Coelho's two fictional work *The Alchemist* and *The Winner Stands Alone*. One of the significant characteristics which Coelho's characters exhibit is their ability to choose. His protagonists dominantly showcase traits of free will and self-expression through their choices. They make choices which throughout the novel remain least effected by anxiety and despair. Existentialism is a philosophical notion that clearly lay emphasis on individual's existence, their freedom of thought and the choices and preferences they adopt. The present paper tries to understand this concept in undertaken novels through Jean Paul Sartre and Soren Kierkegaard's theory of existentialism. The protagonists of these works clearly manifest these qualities and take responsibilities of their choices. They prove the motto of their existence through the journey they undertook and also embrace the struggles and hardships faced during this task. Coelho as a writer asserts that his characters take decisions on what is their choice rather than what is rational. Their choices ultimately make them winners at last.

Key Words: Existentialism, free-will, choice, self-expression, existence, rational.

Introduction

The present paper discusses the existential concept in *The Alchemist* and *The Winner Stands Alone*. Existentialism is one of the various philosophies which emerged in continental Europe and became popular in mid-20th century. The philosophers during this period have common interpretation about human existence which suggests that an individual stresses more on its problematic character and its concreteness. Soren Kierkegaard is regarded as the founder of this philosophy and is known as father of existentialism. Existentialism concept was influenced by the rise of nihilism where religious concepts seemed to be replaced by secular and scientific views. This concept mainly laid stress on individual human lives and their individual approach towards their sufferings which contrasted with the romanticism which was more inclined to the whole of nature and proposed human beings as a part of that wider picture. The prominent feature of existentialism is that man is nothing else than what he makes of himself. This theory laid emphasis on individual's freewill to explore their existence which is based on their choices. This theory suggests that an individual is defined by his existence which totally depends on his relationship with his surrounding people and things. It further elaborates that an individual should have the ability to choose and should be able to responsive to understand the meaning and direction of his life. Kierkegaard believes that every- one should give meaning to their life and should never rely on social norms his protagonists and religion for his choices. Making choices and taking decisions on those choices are the very core of existentialism. From the existential analytical view anxiety and despair are the basic themes of existence which generates while making decisions and facing troubles but on a deeper level it deals with the search for foundational and supporting structure for existence.

Discussion

Freedom of choice is an attribute which Coelho had adhered to while sketching his characters. This quality is indispensably found in nearly all his protagonists. Coelho believes that it is one of the important philosophical assets for existence. He suggests, "the truth is when you choose you live it all at once, all of

it, everything. At the moment you exercise your power of decision, all the ways are already there concentrated in this way". (Arias, 223).

The protagonists of these two works are on a journey to seek their destiny. During this journey they often think about the meaning and purpose of it and its impact on their life. Their journey is the reflection of their motives and choices. This is one of the fundamental aspects of both fictions. Santiago in *The Alchemist* and Igor in *The Winner Stands Alone* justify their purpose through actions which depend on their choice. "Choosing is perhaps the most difficult thing any human has to do". (TWSA 139).

Both these fictional works clearly illustrate the dilemma of Santiago and Igor about their decisions and their efforts to justify their decisions based on subjectivity. They impart themselves freedom to take decisions. As Kierkegaard opposed the traditional orientation view which prefers objectivity and proposed that when it is about the question of existence individual's own subjective truth is "the highest truth attainable". (1846[1941]182). This statement comprehends that the abstract reality of life and truth related to the philosophical detachment will always remain inferior to the physical truth of the related individual. According to Kierkegaard "the real subject is not the cognitive subjectthe real subject is the ethically existing subject". (1846[1941]281). From this prospect Santiago and Igor exhibit true existential spirit as they know how to lead their life and are aware that what are to do rather what they need to know. The two works unveil the ideology and philosophy that existence is a dynamic and spontaneous procedure of self-making and self-improvement. Their circumstantial choices revealed them the real content of victory which once seemed unattainable.

Santiago in *The Alchemist* is a shepherd from Andalusia, who often dreams about a hidden treasure near the pyramids of Egypt. His parents want him to become a priest so that he can lead a respectful life and he loves to travel. One day he told his parents about his dream and his desire to go to pyramids to pursue his dream. When Santiago started his journey and reached the town he was robbed off his money but finally decided not to quit and keep on moving. He worked with the crystal merchant there and learnt about crystals and Arabic language. He moved further with his earned money and met Fatima at the Al-Fayoum oasis. He decided to move further with the alchemist towards the pyramid and finally reach there. Santiago undergoes a series of dilemma whether to or to move further. He always chose to move towards his destination. Santiago journey is thus a dynamic process of self-making through his choices.

Igor, in *The Winner Stands Alone* is both the protagonist and villain. He is a veteran of Afghan war, a successful businessman and owner of a mobile company in Russia and a self-confessed workaholic. His biggest asset according to him is his wife Ewa, who betrayed and married a fashion mogul Hamid from the middle-east. Igor has come to Cannes where Ewa and Hamid had to attend the Film Festival. Igor has come to Cannes with the solo mission of bringing his wife back. Igor is a self-made man and has earned his identity and name through tough choices he made during his career. His existential personality is reflected through his choices and subjective decisions. In Cannes Igor very carefully executed his plan and kills three people randomly to send a message to his wife about his intention and obsession. Igor is very aware of his ill actions and often faced anxiety and guilt. He sometimes condemns himself but continues his act of killing. He kept assuring himself about his main motive and though negatively but justifies Sartre's comment that sometimes, "there are no excuses behind us nor justification before us". (Sartre, 1946[2001...296]). But at last Igor realizes that it's useless to win love for a betrayal. He understands the pain behind his motives, "....but now he can see the light, the revelation has finally come". (TWSA 322). Igor keeps on destroying universe defining his choices and clearly saw his own world collapsing. He had decided to be true to himself rather than morally correct. Here he justifies Kierkegaard theory that the subjective truth of any individual is far higher in comparison to his moral conduct. "What man wants is simply independent choice, whatever that independent choice may cost and wherever it may lead. And the choices of course, the devil only knows what choices". (1846[2009,20]).

Santiago and Igor both are committed towards their choices. They both rely on present situations and adopt practical approach rather than blindly following oriental adaptation. As Santiago confers, "well, usually I learn more from my sheep than from my books". (The Alchemist, 5). Igor remains unaffected from the fake glamour of the 'superclass' and be what he is "he's rich, he has an interesting job and loves what he does". (TWSA 12). Both are existential characters and do what they have decided. Santiago was

robbed off his money and gold twice and Igor was betrayed by his wife but they relentlessly approach their desired task. Their incidences correlate with the experience of nothingness and absurdity and they attempt to embellish meaning to their discovery. This correlates with Sartre's *Nausea* protagonist who often affirms about being alone but is capable to march like a regiment which goes down on a city where the hero is full of anguish like Igor.

Coelho's protagonist in these two works deal with love as an existentialist. Santiago's first love with wool merchant's daughter was not more than an infatuation which hinders him from progressing. Fatima, on the contrary, whom Santiago met at the oasis is ready to wait for him until he comes back after seeking his treasure "if he abandons that pursuit it's because it wasn't true love". (The Alchemist, 115). Igor believes that, "In this world only love deserves absolutely everything. Nothing else makes sense". (TWSA, 132).

Existential philosophy denies any static or stagnant position of individual. An existentialist is a dynamic personality and is always in action. This quality leads him to attain specific purpose. Santiago and Igor display this trait and remain unaffected by any turbulence and never quit. Both of them fit in the Kierkegaard's analysis that existentialist is an individual who is different from others not because what he may become or transcend into but they have the quality to go beyond their limits and transform and upgrade themselves positively. Santiago and Igor both may be considered as men of extremes. They both leap out from their comfort zone to go beyond their limits to pursue what they want to achieve. During this parade of struggle they also discover themselves and their true 'self'. Discovering themselves is one of the core factors of an existentialist. Coelho has named all his protagonists warrior of lights, "accepting oneself as a person who cannot be polarized by fears who struggles against them and carries on in search of the personal legend; on the collective plane; by avoiding all forms of cultural, political or religious fundamentalism avoiding everything that could be taken as exclusion of others, of those who are different and by opening oneself enthusiastically, to all new experiences". (Arias, 81).

Conclusion

The present paper is an attempt to understand the existentialist qualities of the two protagonists undertaken for study. These two characters represent the existential breed which crosses all hurdles to attain their respective goals once they have decided. Their goals depend on their choices. Santiago pursues it for treasure and Igor for his lost love. In the process of they finally explore themselves and understand the meaning of their existence and discover their self. Whatever they have been looking for in the outer world was there within them. According to Kierkegaard 'self' of anybody is actually set of relations which is between individual and the world around them which is beyond their body and brain. Coelho very clearly justifies his point regarding the existential portrayal of his characters, "You can choose between two classic paths, meditation or the good fight, but you have to choose. If you're a monk, Trappist or Buddhist or whatever, you enter a monastery and devote yourself to constant meditation, but if you are a person who needs action, you're going to be a Jesuit, amore war like spirituality. But you have to choose between yoga of action or yoga of inaction. You can't stop, because there is no evil or good, as God said, what there is, is motion. And in the sense that there is motion, we often see things as evil or good". (Arias, 214).

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