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INITIATION OF THE HEROES IN *THE PILGRIMAGE* AND *DISCOVER YOUR DESTINY*:

A CAMPBELLIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The present paper aims to attempt a comparative study of Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage* and Robin Sharma's *Discover Your Destiny* in the light of Joseph Campbell's theory of Initiation on the Spiritual Journey as contained in his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The paper shows how the protagonists in both *The Pilgrimage* and *Discover Your Destiny* in the manner of Campbell's hero, meet their guides as they cross the threshold, how they are aided, tested by the human and the mysterious forces and also how they eventually meet their destiny. At the same time attempt has also been made to translate the postulates of Campbell's philosophy in terms of the needs and aspirations of the modern man.

Keywords: personal legend, spiritual journey, initiation, inner potential, numerology, metamorphosis, authenticity, apotheosis, atonement, betterment, contribution, Ultimate Boon, interdependence,

There are certain writers who have a great understanding of human psychology and their depiction of the contemporary world transforms their narrative into deeper human consciousness to make the world appear worth living. The works of Paulo Coelho, the modern Brazilian writer and Robin Sharma, the modern Indo-Canadian writer have the capacity of this transformation. Their appreciation for their works of each other and the influence of Joseph Campbell, the great mythologist and psychoanalyst shows the scope of the comparative study of these two renowned writers. Paulo Coelho is an eminent Brazilian novelist of the 21st century and Robin Sharma is a celebrated Indo-Canadian writer of the present times. Both Coelho and Sharma are the writers of extra ordinary expertise. Their works are best sellers all over the globe, translated into hundreds of languages of the world and have proved to be an elixir for the problems of the modern times. More than 210 million books of Coelho have been sold till now in more than 170 countries and are translated into 80 languages. His *The Alchemist* alone is translated into 61 languages with the

selling of 65 million copies which has created a Guinness world record for becoming the most translated book by any living author. On the other hand Robin Sharma has written 11 international bestsellers that are published in 60 countries and 70 languages. His *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* was an immediate international bestseller with 3 million copies sold in 50 countries. Both the prominent writers are motivational speakers and have helped the ordinary people to achieve extraordinary things. Towards the close of the 20th century with Paulo Coelho, the theme of the Brazilian fiction shifts to a philosophical aspect which deals with a spiritual journey of man to attain self-realization. This was an innovative approach in the Brazilian fiction. Coincidentally through Robin Sharma, the Indo-Canadian literature also took a philosophical and spiritual turn. The works of both the writers proved to be very valuable from the practical and motivational perspective for the modern readers.

The modern man is the storehouse of many mental and physical diseases and often becomes a victim of depression in running the rat race. He is deviating from the spiritual moorings and self which hinders his personal growth and finds difficult to cope with the rapidly changing world as a result is surrounded by the feeling of emptiness. It is here that both these motivational writers come to the rescue of the modern man. Both Coelho and Sharma have followed the magnum opus of Campbell *The Hero with the Thousand Faces* to try to enlighten the modern man. This seminal work discusses the theory of journey of the archetypal hero of the world mythologies. His theory has been applied by many modern writers. His philosophy finds its appropriate expression in his own repeated phrase "Follow your bliss". So directly or indirectly Coelho and Sharma apply Campbell's theory of the spiritual journey which adds value to their work.

The present paper attempts to do a comparative study and a critical analysis of Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage* and Robin Sharma's *Discover Your Destiny* in the light of Joseph Campbell's theory of initiation on the spiritual journey as depicted in his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The healing power of Campbell's work draw draws strength, wisdom and inspiration from mythology and transforms it to the modern value system. Coelho and Sharma like Campbell write with a purpose to give a new direction and perception to the modern man. Their approach is to deal with the problems of the modern man and through their purposeful writing provide them solutions. The very instance of relocating the world with the modern man's own desire for continuous betterment is mentioned by Robin Sharma in the introduction of *Discover Your Destiny*.

We may not like suffering when it visits us, but it serves us so very well: it cracks the shell that covers our hearts and empties us of the lies we have clung to about who we are, why we are here and how this remarkable world of ours really functions. Once emptied, we can be refilled with all that is good, noble and true. Troubles can transform, if we choose to allow them to do so. As Joseph Campbell wrote: "Where you stumble, there your treasure lies."

(Sharma 3, 2004)

Even Coelho's influence on Sharma is visible as Sharma often quotes Coelho in his work and on the other side Coelho also appreciates Sharma publically, even the jacket page of *Discover Your Destiny* is highlighted with Coelho's comment, "Robin Sharma's books are helping people around the world live great lives."

Looking to the similarities between both these renowned writers of different countries and culture, it will be interesting to compare Coelho's *The Pilgrimage* and Sharma's *Discover Your Destiny* in the light of Campbell's theory on initiation, Campbell argues that the only way to the heroes personal legend is by exposing the hero to a series of test and challenges where the hero has to undergo "The Road Of Trails". This is described as the initiation state of the journey by Campbell. As the hero begins his journey he is afraid but is always helped by some benign power which helps him to continue his odyssey to find the secret of the self. To quote Campbell:

Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage.

(Campbell 81)

Viewed in this context *The Pilgrimage* also reflects on the hero's initiation journey. This is the first work of Coelho which appeared in 1987. As the title suggest it is a contemporary quest of ancient wisdom carried out on the legendary road across Spain, travelled by the pilgrims of Santiago. This work is a journal of soul that asserts that every journey is an attempt to discover oneself which goes in agreement with Campbell's theory of Initiation. The novel opens as Paulo fails in his initiation into the order of RAM i.e Rigor, Adoration and Mercy. He has lost his sword because of his pride and has to find it again on the road to Santiago. The master of the tradition orders Paulo to go on the pilgrimage to Santiago. So Paulo's initiation is marked by his search for the sword that represents his tradition where he is directed by the master and is aided and guided by his guide Petrus. At the outset of the journey, we find in Paulo in Campbell's words, "the modern enlightened individual" who even rationalizes god and devils. But initiation can only begin after a total surrender to God. The first advice Petrus gives Paulo is to surrender his ego and break the modern intellectual perception that the outward busy life and work is more important than exploring of the inner world. This surrender of intellect, ego and self towards God and the guide helped Paulo attain self-realization during the journey. So at the outset Coelho anticipates, "Even if I were not able to find my sword; the pilgrimage along the Road to Santiago was going to help me find myself." (Coelho 15, 1987). During the journey Petrus teaches 11 RAM exercises or rituals to Paulo which helps him discover his inner potential and teaches simple but significant life lessons.

Viewed in this context Sharma's *Discover Your Destiny* which was published in 2004, seems to reflect the theory of Campbell through the protagonist Dar Sanderson. Dar is a highly ambitious executive who is surrounded by the feeling of emptiness as he lacks happiness and peace. Like Coelho's Petrus, Dar also gets a supernatural help in the form of 'the light' when he tries to attempt suicide. At that moment the magical words in the form of 'the light' brings a kind of a spiritual awakening. "Your life is a treasure and you are so much more than a treasure" (Sharma 10, 2004). So with this supernatural aid and his own realization of his emptiness led Dar to his Initiation journey. At this right stage he meets Julian Mantle who becomes his guide in his spiritual journey. Julian rightly explains,

So many of us have shifted our focus from a quest for the external to a voyage into the internal. For many, the human journey has become an inner journey. We have realized that the gateway to lasting success does not swing outward, it opens inward. The greatest treasures are the treasures that lie within.

(Sharma 30, 2004)

It is Julian who guides Dar to shift his focus from the external to the internal. This is a similar kind of advice which Petrus gives to Paulo. As Vilma-Iren MIHALY has rightly observed, "The *Prologue* and the *Epilogue* of the novel clearly mark the beginning and the end of Paulo's inner and outer journey. The whole *El Camino* is an "in-between" phase for the protagonist, followed by his regeneration into society as a newborn person, having learnt that in order to succeed in finding his own path not only knowledge was needed but also humility towards the simple folk, towards life itself." So at the outset of the spiritual journey of both the Coelho and Sharma heroes, their guides help the heroes to look inside which is again very much apt of the Carl Jung philosophy by whom Campbell himself is inspired. In the words Carl Jung, "Who looks outside dreams, who looks inside awakens."

According to the Campbellian theory of journey woman plays an important role. Woman either comes as a Goddess to guide and help the hero or comes as a temptress to hinder his journey. In *The Pilgrimage* female characters play a significant role in the spiritual journey of Paulo. First is Paulo's wife who not only forces him to take the pilgrimage but she drops him till Madrid from where Paulo initiates his journey. There Mme Lourdes directs him towards his guide Petrus and then at the later stage the old woman with her dog becomes instrumental as through her Paulo learns to face his fears. The appearance of the Goddess like nun at the crucial stage of his journey is to rekindle his faith and hope when he was at his lowest. In *Discover Your Destiny* there are only two marginal women character but both play a significant role in the journey and transformation of Dar Sanderson. The first is Rachael, his wife who leaves him in a shattered condition in the opening of the book which led him to self-introspection. He admits, "I have discovered that pain and adversity are powerful vehicles to promote personal growth." (Sharma 13, 2004). Another woman is Sasha his friend who comes at a later stage of Dar's life and establishes his faith in the basic goodness of people and the power of love.

As the journey advances both the heroes of Coelho and Sharma moves towards what Campbell calls “Atonement with the Father” This is the stage of reconciliation of the humankind with God. Here to attain this state the role of guide is very important. As Rumi rightly says,

Whoever enters the way without a guide will take a hundred years to travel a two day journey.

Viewed in this context in *The Pilgrimage* Petrus explains Paulo the importance of three types of love Eros (intimate love), Philos (friendship and affection) and Agape(brotherly love i.e the love of mankind for his fellow beings and God).Through his teaching Paulo understood that it is Agape the highest love which has the capacity to transform an individual. Application of this has the capacity to change his own world. As Petrus explains,

You have learned how to be reborn, how to stop being cruel to yourself, and how to communicate with your messenger. But everything you do from now on and every good result that you take with you from the Road to Santiago will make sense only you have also experienced the love that consumes.

(Coelho 106, 1997)

Apart from explaining Paulo the power of love so many other life learning lessons were practically taught by his guide Paulo through the series of exercises. For instance the ‘water exercise’ helped Paulo learn that learning will only make sense if it is applied to real life, if it helps in facing life challenges. This is beautifully explained by Petrus through the example of a hammer. So going through these 11 exercises helped Paulo grow on the odyssey of his spiritual journey.

Even in *Discover Your Destiny*, Dar Sanderson’s spiritual journey from emptiness to self-realization is guided by his guide Julian Mantle. He teaches him the “Never Quit Attitude” which helps Dar discover his destiny and the purpose of life. So it is because of Julian he was able to reach his self-actualization and reclaim his authenticity.

With such learning both the heroes of Coelho and Sharma are now ready to reach Campbell’s “Apotheosis” i.e the elevation to the divine status. This is the stage of overcoming all fears, the release potential of the hero. In *The Pilgrimage* after the fierce fight with the dog Legion, Paulo succeeds in overcoming all his fears and conquers his self with this act of hero hood. This is his release potential to the elevation to the divine status. In *Discover Your Destiny* ‘apotheosis’ is attained by Dar by following the seven steps of Self Awakening which led him to the close of the ‘Integrity Gap’ which is the path of self realization. This return to the wholeness helped Dar achieve a higher status. The obituary writing attempt helped Dar to lift him to his higher self. This was the moment of ‘apotheosis’ for Dar as he rightly followed the slogan,

Within your heart, all answers lie. Walk towards your fears and then you’ll learn to fly.

(Sharma 146, 2004)

After conquering all the fears according to Campbell's theory the hero reaches 'The Ultimate Boon' i.e. he reaches his goal, his search gets over with the total transformation of the self. In *The Pilgrimage* with the elevation of the self, Paulo is on the verge of attaining his goal. But this final journey of achieving the goal, of self-realization is to be travelled alone by the hero and accordingly Petrus also leaves Paulo on the onward journey. All the exercises performed and the challenges faced helped Paulo gain inner strength and profound wisdom. The journey itself proved to be the journey of meditation and self introspection. It helped Paulo to bring out a miraculous transformation in his self. Paulo, the pilgrim progresses spiritually as he advances geographically. During the spiritual journey, Paulo realizes his personal legend and the way to find it with courage and commitment. The journey in search of the sword turned out as a realization of the purpose of life:

...when we want something, we have to have a clear purpose in mind for the thing that we want. The only reason for seeking a reward is to know what to do with that reward. This was the secret of my sword.

(Coelho 213, 1997)

So this spiritual journey made him realize his limitations as he himself admits,

I have walked so many miles to discover things I already knew, things that all of us know but are so hard to accept.

(Coelho 220, 1997)

This is the message what Coelho gives to the modern man through *The Pilgrimage*. As Campbell aptly says, "The agony of breaking through the personal limitations is the agony of Spiritual growth." (Campbell 163)

In *Discover Your Destiny* Dar reaches his 'Ultimate Boon' by knowing his limitations, overcoming his fears and realizing the purpose of life. His total metamorphosis is visible through his own words,

I felt so connected to other human beings. My confidence and desire to be a great human being exploded. And my business soared.

(Sharma 186, 2004)

So through *Discover Your Destiny*, Sharma gives the message of interdependence and contribution to the society. Modern man should shift his focus from independence to interdependence and competition to contribution.

Thus, Campbell's theory of Initiation finds an appropriate interpretation in Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage* and Robin Sharma's *Discover Your Destiny*. Both the works have the male protagonist who undertakes a spiritual journey with the help of the able guide who meets him at the right time

after the hero is directed to the path by some person or supernatural aid. During the journey the hero undergoes many trials and ordeals and by facing them he gains wisdom, courage and clarity to overcome them which in fact are his own limitations and fears. At the end of the journey the hero undergoes a complete metamorphosis by self-actualization and returns back with a purpose to contribute to the world through his enlightenment and experience.

Apart from this it is also interesting to note that in both the works the digit 7 is a common factor. In *The Pilgrimage* the digit 7 is repeated several times. The distance is 700 kms, 7 days of travelling at the same place, the initiation of journey is after 7 months and the meeting is also with seven people. On the other hand in *Discover Your Destiny* also there are 7 stages of Self-Awakening. May be it leads to the numerology where seven is a sacred number which refers to wisdom and spirituality. Also in both the works the heroes have to take practical exercises to learn and in both the works the journey becomes more important than the objective, it turns out to be the journey of recovery and discovery. Both the narratives are a guide to self mastery for the readers as they teach the similar lesson that on every turn of life there is a mystery waiting to unfold which leads us towards constant betterment and transformation. In both the works at the end of the journey their respective protagonist discovers the secret of the self.

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