

## **The concept of GURU in Indian philosophy, Its interpretation in the ‘soul of the world’ concept in -The Alchemist - Paulo Coelho**

*Uma Devi Nandan*

*Keshav Memorial Institute of Commerce and Sciences, Hyderabad – 500029*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The In the Novel “The Alchemist” by Paulo Coelho we find the main character Santiago leaves his home Andalusia in search of a treasure. The King of Salem encourages him to find the treasure in Egypt. He learns to read the omens by Urim and Thummim. He understands that there is a language of the Universe without words and all things are one. During his treasure hunt he understands the world has a Soul of its own. The boy constantly endeavors to find meaning to the signs of the universe. The guidance given by the Alchemist helps him to listen to his own heart. The Alchemist character says “everything has a Soul” – including the inanimate objects like rocks and water. The boy constantly endeavors to find meaning to the signs sent by nature.

I seek to interpret the concept of the Guru (who is Omnipresent) as proposed by Indian thought and philosophy in the boy’s search for the ‘soul of the world’. Guru Dattatreya in Avadhuta Gita Says the Pancha Bhootas are his Guru. The beings created in this universe have taught him the presence of the all pervading God and his oneness. I seek to find answers for The Principle of favorability as proposed by the Alchemist, the interpretation of omens, listening to the heart, contemplation to seek the truth. The boy realizes that “life is generous to those who pursue their destiny”.

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## INTRODUCTION

The rich Indian tradition and culture gives supreme position to the Guru in the society and also individually. In ancient times the pupil used to go in search of a Guru to attain knowledge and wisdom. The Guru in turn wholeheartedly imparted the knowledge he possessed to his disciples in the Ashrams. The sloka: Guru Madhaye sthitham viswam , viswa madhye sthitho Guruh; Guru viswam nachonyasti tasmai sri Guruva Namaha, tells us, that a Guru's presence is Omni present. This whole world is Guru himself. Apart from him there is no world. I offer my prayers to the Guru. After the creation of the universe and the three deities Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar , the Omnipresent Parameshwar acquired the form of Dakshinamurthy (the form of Viswa Guru) to guide the universe. Also the ever popular sloka : Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu Gurur Devo Maheswarah Guru Sakshath Parabrahma Tasmai Sri Guruve Namaha. Explains that Guru is the embodiment of the Three deities Brahma (the Creator) , Vishnu (the Protector), Maheswar (the Destroyer) of the Universe. In the great epic of The Bhagavatham there is a section named 'Avadhuthopakhyan'(Avadhuta Gita) where we find the manifestation of the three deities as Guru Dattatreya explaining how he realized the Brahman. He says the Pancha bhootas (the Earth, light, fire, wind and sky) are his guru also the beings created in this universe taught him the presence of the all pervading God and his oneness.

In the Novel "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho we find the main character Santiago, the shepherd boy leaves his home Andalusia in search of a treasure. In a fateful encounter with the old man who calls himself as the King of Salem he hears about the treasure in Egypt. He tells him that his destiny awaits him. He encourages him saying that a 'mysterious force' is waiting to guide him. He gives him two stones Urim and Thummim which will enable him to read the Omens sent by the Universe. After losing everything he has, he learns to read the omens. He understands that there is a language of the Universe without words and that all things are one. During his treasure hunt he meets the Crystal ware Merchant and learns to 'cleanse his mind of negative thoughts'. The meeting of the Englishman in search of the Alchemist, the leader of the caravan and the fateful

meeting with the Alchemist in the desert will give him the experience to interpret the signs sent by Universe. The Desert, The flight of the Hawk, the wind, the Sun and the life around him will teach him to understand the ‘Soul of the World’. He understands that world has a Soul of its own. Whoever, understands the language of the signs sent by the universe will have the elixir of life. The guidance given by the Alchemist helps him to listen to his own heart. The Alchemist character says “everything has as Soul” – including the inanimate objects like rocks and water. The boy constantly endeavors to find meaning to the signs sent by nature.

I seek to interpret the concept of the Guru as proposed by Indian thought and philosophy in the boy’s search for the ‘soul of the world’. I seek to find answers for The Principle of favorability as proposed by the Alchemist, the interpretation of omens, listening to the heart, contemplation to seek the truth. The boy realizes that “life is generous to those who pursue their destiny”.

#### Character of Santiago

Santiago the Protagonist of the novel is an adventurous, curious, grateful young boy of sixteen who loves to travel. He was educated in many languages in the seminary before he announced to his father, a poor farmer that he likes to be a shepherd and not a priest. “His father said no more” (Coelho 9). Melchizedek, the King of Salem tells the boy that he has his own personal legend he encourages him by saying “The secret of happiness is to see all the marvels of the world, and never forget the drops of oil on the spoon” (Coelho 32). He gives him the Urim and Thummim. Santiago now tries to realize his dream of finding treasure near Egyptian Pyramids. On his journey to find his personal legend he works in a crystal ware shop in Tangiers. There he learns to read the omens through his intuition and creativity. He becomes an asset to the crystal ware merchant as business flourishes. Sitting in the shop with the money earned and the two stones, he reflects that his sheep taught him something very important: that there was a language in the world that everyone understands. Taking leave of the merchant he sets forth on the journey once again. He seeks out a caravan crossing the desert and he holds Urim and Thummim in his hand. He remembers the old king telling him that he is always nearby whenever someone wants to realize his Personal Legend. He meets the English man on the Caravan, who is in search of an Alchemist to train himself. He introduces Santiago to the world of the Alchemy and the Oasis. He explains that everything in the world including objects has a soul. He calls it as the Soul of the World. He interprets the omen of the Hawks correctly portraying the imminent war in the Oasis. Through the use of Omens Santiago

earns respect and position among the Oasis people. By reading the books given by the English man he learns the interconnectedness existing in the Universe that they can be simply engraved on an Emerald Tablet. Alchemists realize their Personal Legends by discovering the Soul of the World. Santiago, while searching for the Alchemist finds his true love in Fatima through the feeling of the Soul of the world. During the stay in the desert Santiago experiences the vision of the Hawks and interprets it as an Omen predicting war. His vision turns out to be true. Soon, he will meet the Alchemist who tests his courage and his search for life in the desert. The Alchemist observes your eyes show your strength of the Soul. He explains that Alchemy is penetrating the soul of the world and discovering the treasure reserved for you. (pg 130) The Alchemist leads the boy Santiago through the desert to the pyramids. Santiago leaves Fatima telling her that he is going out to seek his personal legend and declares his intention of marrying her. She encourages Santiago in his pursuit bravely. The Alchemist encourages him to pursue his personal legend by saying, "love never keeps a man from pursuing" (pg 116). He tells him Gold is the symbol of evolution. The Alchemist teaches him to listen to his heart because 'it came from the Soul of the world'. He understands to listen to his heart, resolves to listen to it. He also understood that the Soul of the world tests the man until he becomes the master. In the desert he talks to the wind about the limitless possibilities of the people and the winds. He understood from the wind that a man cannot turn into a wind and love has its limitations. He also talks with the Sun about love which reciprocates with love and respect to the Earth by keeping its distance giving plants life; warmth and food. (pg142). He understands from Sun that the power of love nourishes the world. The Sun advises the boy to go and ask the Hand. The Hand teaches him that the Hand moved the Universe to evolve as a masterwork. It reached to the Soul of the world which is part of the Soul of the God. Hand he understood has the power to transform everything. The Alchemist leaves him to pursue his own personal legend, near the pyramids he sees in the sand a scarab beetle, and remembers that these beetles are a symbol of God. Because of this omen, he begins to dig into the sand at the place where the beetle was. Ultimately after getting beaten and snubbed for his pursuit he understood that the treasure is in the roots of the Sycamore.

## THE CONCEPT OF GURU

In Indian tradition and culture, GURU occupies the highest pedestal. The definition of Guru is as follows: GU means 'darkness of ignorance' and RU means 'who dispels this ignorance. In another

definition, we find that he is "One who reveals the 'Guri' (target) to the disciple". He does this by removing the darkness of ignorance. The worldly education we get from the teachers does not tell us the real meaning of life and its relation with the all pervading universe. However, a true Guru is the one who makes his students realize the absolute truth. This is done by the Guru after he finds the disciple competent enough to receive the knowledge. In 'Avadhuta Gita', the first sloka:

ईश्वरानुग्रहादेव पुंसामद्वैतवासना ।

महद्भयपरित्राणाद्विप्राणामुपजायते ॥

Explains, the desire to gain the knowledge of non-duality arises in humans by the grace of the universal mind, as Ishvara, the manifested reality or the universal mind. In Avadhuta Gita Guru Dattatreya answers that One's own self is one's chief guru. He sought knowledge from 24 Gurus including water, the Earth, the Wind, the Space, the Moon, the Sun, the Sea and the Arrow maker. He elaborates that from water he learnt Purity of Self, from Earth he learnt Patience, from wind he learnt detachment from everything and doing the duty, from space pervading presence in all bodies, from Sun to give back in richer form and Sea to be in our limitations.

Likewise, a student also should have certain qualities to receive this knowledge as told in the Bhagavath Gita 4th chapter 34th sloka.

tad viddhi praṇipātena

paripraśnena sevayā

upadekṣyanti te jñānam

jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ

tat—that knowledge of different sacrifices; viddhi—try to understand; praṇipātena—by approaching a spiritual master; paripraśnena—by submissive inquiries; sevayā—by the rendering of service; upadekṣyanti—initiate; te—unto you; jñānam—knowledge; jñāninaḥ—the self-realized; tattva—truth; darśinaḥ—the seers.

A student must seek knowledge by complete surrendering of his Self to the Guru and patiently serving him. He should seek answers by knowing the answers from his Guru only to attain the

knowledge of Brahman. This quality will dispel the darkness within enlightening the disciple to understand the Brahman.

### INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT

Santiago being curious is constantly searching for answers, during his search for the Personal Legend and the treasure. He learns the importance to listen to the nature from the camel driver. He slowly understands how to listen to his heart and understand the omens sent to him by the Universe. He constantly questions the English man and the Alchemist, the nature and the signs of the desert and patiently understands the answers given to him. The omen of Hawks and its interpretation, The finding of life (snake) in the desert as asked by the Alchemist, His understanding of the love for Fathima as interpretation of the Soul of the world, taking a chance to express his love for her, his talk with the Wind, the Sun, the Hand, when among the soldiers of the Army Camp, are all examples of Santiago learning the interpretation of the Soul of the world and the principle of favorability. He takes the chance of digging in the desert at a place of citing the scarab beetle and chance realization after the observation by the chieftain who beat him up for not finding the treasure result in his getting the treasure is the principle of favorability. In the conclusion of the novel he understands the change of the winds nature as it brings him the Kiss sent by Fathima. He is now at home, in understanding the all pervading consciousness of the world called the Soul of the world.

### CONCLUSION

In this interpretation of the concept of Guru in the life of Santiago we find that every decision taken by Santiago in his journey to find the treasure is a new lesson he learnt at every step. He was able to achieve all this by his patience, his willingness to undergo suffering to find the truth and his constant endeavor to find answers for the questions he has in his mind. The teachers he will learn from are human beings and the elements of nature like The Hawks, Snake, Scarab Beetle, Wind, Sun, Earth (sand), the Desert, Hand (symbol of the all pervading presence of God) .The two stones he receives from Urim and Thummim during the start of his journey; though he did not use them much helped him to learn the omens. He at the end becomes self sufficient individual who learnt the very nature of the Universe and how to live in it.

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