



PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL FEMININE INTEGRATION: A STUDY IN THE ALCHEMIST

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Abstract

Conflicts in human beings are millennia-old. Many thinkers down the corridors of human history have proposed ways and means of resolving conflicts in human persons. One of the substantial paths to conflict resolution in human individuals is found in the Jungian psychological thought. Jung holds the view that an individual could resolve the inner conflicts by integrating the anima or animus, the feminine image in man or the masculine image in woman. Once a person becomes conscious of his / her anima or animus and integrates it as a part of his / her personality, the major conflict in him / her is resolved. The wisdom in the Jungian thought is that when a person adequately integrates the characteristic of the other, masculine or the feminine, the person experiences inner harmony. The current paper studies how the protagonist in *The Alchemist* who is predominantly masculine goes on integrating the feminine elements he encounters in the cosmos and particularly in the female characters he meets. The paper also analyzes the kind of integration taking place in the protagonist of *The Alchemist* as something psychological and spiritual. The paper is an invitation to every reader and listener to initiate a similar integration in oneself, resolve conflicts and experience harmony in oneself and in one's relationship with others in the society.

Keywords: *Feminine, Integration, The Alchemist, Psycho-Spiritual Reading.*

1. Introduction

Integration is conceived as a process by which the fragmentary aspects in a person are combined to form a meaningful whole as a result of which the person experiences harmony. As the human society is by and large male-dominated, the need to integrate the feminine in one's personality in order to experience a balance and inner harmony is of uppermost importance. The theme of such integration is overtly or covertly visible in many modern and postmodern literary artists one of whom is Paulo Coelho. His world-renowned work, *The Alchemist*, is a text worth-scrutinizing for the theme of feminine integration and the resultant harmony, hence the current paper focuses on feminine integration in *The Alchemist*.

2. Paulo Coelho and the Alchemist

Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian author who has become a celebrity around the world and captured the imagination of the readers, particularly the young with his slogan of 'Follow your own dream,' has authored more than a dozen novels, one of which is *The Alchemist*. This novel tells the tale of a boy who dares to leave behind the familiar shores and go forth to attain his goal. The long challenging journey exposes him to multifarious experiences one of which is an internal process of integration of the feminine, which is studied in detail in the forthcoming section.

3. Feminine Integration in the Alchemist

Santiago, the protagonist in *The Alchemist* who yearns to move beyond his present life of learning inside a seminary and routine agricultural occupation of his parents, knowing that the only way to know the world is through travelling and the only ones among his people who travel are the shepherds, decides to become a shepherd. Even though he gains tremendous experience as a shepherd, the recurrent dream drives him beyond the shepherd's life in search of a treasure. As he goes on his search for a mysterious treasure, which in itself is feminine, he realizes his own inner longing for the feminine, encounters many a feminine element on the way, integrates them and attains harmony. Integration takes place in him gradually in the psychological and spiritual realms. He too keeps integrating wisdom through many realizations in the company of the old wise king and the alchemist.

3.1. Psychological Integration

Psychological integration occurs in Santiago primarily in the pattern of Jungian anima – animus. The word 'anima' in analytical psychology means "the feminine principle as represented in the male unconscious" (Colman 39). It is also understood as the "supra-individual soul-image of the woman in the unconscious of the man" (Eysenck 55). The anima in men develops into four stages. The anima develops in a man in four stages, as Eve that represents "instinctual and biological" (Jung 186) aspects, as Helen that represents the "romantic and aesthetic" aspects, as Virgin Mary that represents the moral virtues and as Sophia that represents "wisdom transcending even the most holy and the most pure" (195). Santiago integrates the feminine of all the four stages and attains harmony within.

Ever since he meets the merchant's daughter of Tarifa, he is thoughtful of her. She dominates his imagination and fills his heart and he keeps visualizing 'sheering of sheep' in her presence and telling her stories about shepherding and winning her admiration. While he has met many women and girls in his wandering life, he has spoken to the sheep, his companions about



only one “girl, the daughter of the merchant” (AC 4) and he even is ready to “live in one place, with the girl” (6). He is clearly fascinated to her and keeps cherishing her memory. His very thought about her is “exciting” (6) to him and he keeps thinking of her “flowing black hair, ... bright Moorish eyes” and wishes that the day with her “would never end” (5). He admits that he has not thought of other women ever “since I (he) met the merchant’s daughter” (10). All these instances go to prove, that he is fascinated towards the physical charm of the merchant’s daughter as and because his own anima formed of physical beauty appealing to instincts and biological reactions (Jungian Eve) is projected on her, and that he is also drawn to her inquisitive admiration for his shearing the sheep and stories of achievements as and because his anima formed of aesthetic and romantic dimensions (Jungian Helen) is projected on her. In other words, the merchant’s daughter, among all women he has met, most suits Santiago’s anima at the moment. And by ‘active imagination’ (Jung recommends for integration), Santiago integrates the physical and aesthetic beauty of the merchant’s daughter, his own anima at the moment. And that initial integration of the feminine fills Santiago with some cheer but the longing continues.

If the merchant’s daughter has represented the Eve-Helen stages (first two stages of Jungian anima) of Santiago’s anima, Fatima, the girl of Al Fayoum oasis captures the soul of Santiago at once and it is certain that she represents the Mary – Sophia stages (the latter two stages of Jungian anima) of his anima. On meeting Fatima, Santiago at once realizes that he has met his girl, his anima in fullness. At that moment of meeting Fatima, “time stood still and the soul of the world surged within him” (88). He feels ecstatic and realizes that “it was love, something older than humanity, more ancient than the desert” (88). As it has been there in every human person since the inception of humanity, his anima has been there since the beginning of times, and in him since his birth, growth and upto this point of time, and now projects itself completely on to Fatima who best represents it (Santiago’s anima) and he is in love “in the presence of the only woman in his life” (89). He observes her lips “poised between a laugh and silence” (88) and as she smiles, he too does it. As he recognized his woman in Fatima, she too “recognized the same thing” (89) in him. Both of them realize that they are in the presence of their soul-mate. Santiago feels, he “had loved her before he even knew she existed, ... that his love for her would enable him to discover every treasure in the world” (90). Fatima was already in his soul, thus his anima. He expresses his soul filled love to Fatima the following day, “I want you to be my wife. I love you” (91). She responds with the utmost charm and readiness and sometime later she articulates her love in a mature way, “You told me that you loved me. Then you taught me something of the universal language and the soul of the world. Because of that, I have become part of you” (92).

And their meetings and conversations thereafter reveal that Fatima represents all the four stages of Santiago’s anima, Eve-Helen-Mary-Sophia, and the vice versa, for Fatima too is in complete love with Santiago. Fatima tells Santiago that she has been “waiting for you (him) at the oasis for a long time” and with his coming into her life, she has forgotten her past, her traditions and the way desert women are expected to behave for his sake. She was just waiting for her present and tells him, “my present has arrived, and it’s you” (92). This behavior of hers reminds a learned person of Thirunavukkarasar’s song which celebrates a devotee’s love for Lord Siva, ‘ahandrall ahalidathar aasaarathai’ (‘defied the social customs’), which means that the devotee, out of total love for her lover, dares to defy the social traditions. Fatima does it here out of love for Santiago. She commits herself to be “a part of your (his) dream, a part of your (his) destiny” (93). And she is prepared to face with any eventuality in their relationships and lets him freely move towards his treasure, in complete trust, which is born only in true love. As Santiago is prepared to leave the oasis, he, as a typical masculine representative, tries to explain his love for her, but Fatima stops him from any analysis of love and tells him, “Don’t say anything, one is loved because one is loved. No reason is needed for loving” (116). These words of love explicate her maturity, integrity and wisdom, a true representation of Jungian ‘sophia.’ At this moment, Santiago too enters the language of the soul and tells her, “I love you because the entire universe conspired to help me find you” (117). For the first time they embrace each other and she lovingly tells him that she who had been looking to the desert “with longing” would now do it “with hope” (117). Santiago on the other side considers Fatima as a “treasure greater than anything else” (110) and “worth more than treasure” (113).

Finally, after the endless ordeals when he finds his treasure, he is immensely pleased and at that moment, experiences a kiss from far away and his soul speaks out in ecstasy, “I’m coming, Fatima” (161), an utterance of climactic union with Fatima, ‘a greater treasure’ and his anima. All these words and expressions go to substantiate the fact that Fatima is the charming Eve, romantic Helen, virtuous Mary and the Wise Sophia to Santiago, thus his anima, and Santiago is the athletic champion who has accomplished his mission, professor of learned counsel, and the mediator of transcendental experience and wisdom for Fatima, her animus. It is also vivid that both Santiago and Fatima have projected their positive anima and animus onto the other as a result of which both feel a part of the other, united in soul.

3.2. Spiritual Integration

Encountering and integrating supernatural persons and powers, Santiago undergoes a spiritual integration and experiences harmony. From the time he meets Melchizedek, the old wise king who mysteriously knows the name of the merchant’s daughter and several things about Santiago, the boy takes the old king’s guidance and lets himself be intuitively guided by



the supernatural powers, the signs, omens, the language of the heart and the soul of the world. Santiago begins to believe in the old king when he hears the other uttering words of assurance: “I always appear in one form or another, ... in the form of a solution or a good idea, ... make it easier for things to happen” (22). When Santiago further hears the old king telling him that the previous week, he had taken “the form of a stone” for the sake of a miner in pursuit of emerald. Santiago senses the immense supernatural power of the old king, then on believing more strongly in the supernatural guidance. In fact, this encounter with the old king initiates him into his search for the treasure and the boy does it confidently when the king gives him the two stones, white and black in colour, “Urim and Thummim” (28). They stay with Santiago reminding him of the old king and the guiding power of the supernatural elements. The boy begins to, with faith, read the signs and omens placed by God on his way, and take guidance from them for his life and the life of others. He recurrently understands the mighty things “written by the same hand” (73), God. He becomes more and more powerful with more and more integration of the supernatural forces.

Santiago grows to understand the “universal language” (67), the language of the heart and when one is close to the heart and understand its language, he is the “closest to the Soul of the World” and this soul of the world is “always a positive force” (75). Understanding all these and practicing it in his personal life, Santiago gradually becomes more and more integrated with the supernatural powers. His encounter with the alchemist at the oasis is initially frightening but soon the boy realizes the rarest blessing and guidance he gains from the encounter. The alchemist guides the boy through the desert and the his supernatural powers to read the signs and follow the heart very closely. The boy is gifted with many realizations. The encounter with the alchemist fills the boy with a “strange sense of joy” (105). The boy realizes that he has already integrated “courage, the quality essential to understanding the language of the World” (106). The boy integrates more and more powers in the company of the Alchemist and moves towards his destiny. He empowers himself by conversing with the wind, the sun, the earth, the supreme hand, with confidence he acquires from the alchemist. There occurs a simum, the desert storm as never before and remembered for generations, all caused by the boy. The alchemist is proud to have found a “perfect disciple” (146) and he goes on to tell the boy that he only “evoked what you (the boy) already knew” (146). These words of the alchemist go to prove that the boy has well-integrated the supernatural powers. To sum up, guided by the old kind and the alchemist, the boy Santiago grows to read the omens and signs placed by God, listen to the heart, understand the language of the world, interact with the soul of the world, and converse with the cosmic powers and thus undergoing a spiritual integration which gifts him with immense joy and harmony and places him with the treasure, the mysterious feminine and the personal feminine, Fatima.

4. Conclusion

Santiago who is engrossed in his dream of attaining the treasure, in his long pursuit of his dream, matures through integrating the many feminine elements in the cosmos. His maturing is enhanced by the presence of the feminine in his life and an interior harmony blooms as he integrates the feminine in and through the encounters with the merchant’s daughter and Fatima. Santiago’s integration is a harbinger of harmony for everyone who yearns to resolve inner conflicts and experience harmony. Integration of the feminine, in the style of Santiago, comes as a major path to harmony, for individuals and the society.

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