

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECOCENTRISM AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN THE ALCHEMIST

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### Abstract

*In the present world, the status of environment is a crucial issue. Despite the efforts of Government and Ecocentric groups, the issues of the environment have remained status quo. And this particular key issue has been observed by many scientists, philosophers and writers throughout the world. Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian novelist also dealt with such issues for preserving the nature. The terms Ecocentrism and Anthropocentrism are like two poles. The Ecocentrism believes in nature as the centre for man while Anthropocentrism believes in self-centeredness of man. In the Alchemist, Paulo Coelho inculcates the Ecocentric values among the readers. One can observe these ethics in the actions and thoughts of Santiago, a protagonist. Santiago a shepherd boy and his affection for the sheep conveys the message of love for the animals. Paulo Coelho's perspective of Ecocentrism can be elucidated when we find Santiago's growing interest for nature, desert and sea. On his journey to find the treasure, he comes across many creatures and things on the earth. He begins to learn many things from the animals, things and desert. Coelho, as a believer of Ecocentric values, reveals that it is man's responsibility to save and protect earth and nature. In the Alchemist, the glimpses of anthropocentric philosophy can be seen where, man is self-centered. As a human being, the shepherd boy also longs for treasure. In order to fulfill his dreams, he sets out on journey in the search of treasure. He ultimately meets the Alchemist, who possesses the wisdom to convert a metal into gold. Santiago's love for Fatima, prove his love for his fellow beings. In The Alchemist, Coelho advocates the message of love and belief in God. Santiago follows his dreams and pursue till the end. His mind always filled with the thoughts of the loved one, i.e. Fatima. Through the character of Santiago, Coelho expounds the significance of ecosystem and the ethics of humans on the earth, for creating healthy minds on the earth.*

**Keywords:** *Ecocentrism, anthropocentrism, ecosystem, humanity, self-interest and destiny.*

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECOCENTRISM AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN THE ALCHEMIST

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Globally, the ecosystem is worsening day by day by the impact of Global warming. Despite the efforts of Government and Ecocentric groups or organizations, the issues of the environment have remained unsolved. And this crucial issue has been observed by many scientists, philosophers and writers throughout the world. Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian novelist also dealt with such issues for preserving the nature. The present paper is an attempt to explore the ecocentric as well as the anthropocentric ethics as valued by the writer himself.

The terms ecocentrism and anthropocentrism are like two poles. The Ecocentrism believes in nature as the centre for man while anthropocentrism believes in self-centeredness of man. According to a dictionary, ecocentrism is a philosophy or perspective that places intrinsic value on all living organisms and their natural environment, regardless of their perceived usefulness or importance to human beings.”<sup>1</sup> Ecocentrism is Greek word which means center. It is used in ecological political philosophy to denote as nature-centered. According to an Environmentalist,

“Ecocentrism can be seen as one stream of thought within environmentalism, the political and ethical movement that seeks to protect and improve the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities.”<sup>2</sup>

Anthropocentrism is also a philosophy. Anthro is a Greek word which means human being. It considers human beings to be the most significant entity of the Universe and interprets or regards the world in terms of human values and experiences. It is considered to be profoundly embedded in many modern human cultures and conscious acts. According to a dictionary, “Anthropocentrism is considering human being as the most significant entity of the Universe. anthropocentrism interprets or regards the world in terms of human values and experiences.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Alchemist, Paulo Coelho inculcates the ecocentric values among the readers. One can observe these ethics in the actions and thoughts of Santiago, a protagonist. Santiago a shepherd boy and his affection for the sheep conveys the message of love for the animals. The manner Santiago tries to protect the flock from the wolves gives a message of protection of animals. “He decided to spend the night there. He saw to it that all the sheep entered through the ruined gate, and then laid some planks across it to prevent the flock from Wolves.”(Coelho,1). When Santiago woke up in the morning, sheep also started stirring. It gives him a feeling that some mysterious energy bound his life to that of the

sheep, they are so used to me that they know my schedule," he muttered. Thinking about that for a moment, he realized that it could be other way around: that it was he who had become accustomed to their schedule."(Coelho,2) Santiago believed that sheep were able to understand what he said. So he read them parts of his books that made an impression on him. He would tell them of the loneliness or the happiness of a shepherd in the fields. Sometimes, he would also speak to them about the girl, the daughter of a merchant. (Coelho,4) It suggests that man and animals can understand their feelings. As a shepherd, Santiago shares his feelings and emotions with the animals. He closely observes them and their schedule which make him to understand them.

Santiago not only observes the animals but also learn from them. It is evident from his conversation with a merchant's daughter, "Well, usually I learn more from my sheep than from books." (Coelho,5). The ecocentric values can be noted when Santiago considers the slaughter of sheep as a monstrous act. He feels that the sheep trust him and rely upon him; therefore he owes a responsibility to protect them but not to slaughter them. "If I become a monster today, and decided to kill them one by one, they would become aware only after most of the flock had been slaughtered, thought the boy. They trust me and they have forgotten how to rely on their own instincts, because I lead them to nourishment."(Coelho,7)

Paulo Coelho's ecocentric views can be elucidated when we find Santiago's growing interest for nature, desert and sea. On his journey to find the treasure, he comes across many creatures and things on the earth. He begins to learn many things from the animals, things and desert. He is also impressed by their elemental forces. "I've learned things from the sheep, and I've learned things from crystal, he thought. I can learn something from the desert, too. It seems old and wise." (Coelho,70). Santiago travels in the desert, by adjusting himself to the surroundings. Later on when he reaches Oasis where water, palm trees and shelter and other people were present, he reminds the significance of nature in man's life. He believes that instead of reading a book, he could be benefitted by observing the caravan or people, wind and camel. He can learn many things from them.

"The boy too had his book and he had tried to read it during the first few days of the journey. But he found it much interesting to observe the caravan and listen to the wind. As soon as he had learned to know his camel better and to establish a relationship with him, he threw the book away."(Coelho,72).

The writer thus insists on the understanding between man and nature.

Coelho as a believer of ecocentrism, reveals that it is man's responsibility to save and protect earth and nature. According to him, Earth and nature are inseparable from human life. Everything on the earth contributes in the development of man. It becomes evident when Santiago say's "Everything on Earth is being continuously transformed, because the earth is alive... and it has a soul. We are part of that soul, so we rarely recognize that it is working for us."(Coelho,75).The significance of Earth and nature becomes clear with Santiago's reflections over the nature. He also believed that everything on the earth had a soul.

“He also said that this was not just a human gift, that everything on the face of the Earth had a Soul, whether mineral, vegetable or animal-or even just a simple thought.(Coelho,75).

Santiago’s impressions on trees and animals also emphasize the significance of nature. The impulses he receive signify many things, which Santiago calls as a world language.

“Although the vision of the date palms would someday be just a memory, right now it signified shade, water, and a refuge from the war. Yesterday, the camels groan signaled danger, and now a row of date palms could herald a miracle. The world speaks many languages, the boy thought.”(Coelho,82).

Santiago watches the Hawks as they drift on the wind. Their flight made a kind of sense to him. He followed their movements and tried to read something into it. He believed that the birds were trying to explain him the meaning of love. “ I am learning the language of the world, and everything in the world is beginning to make sense to me... even the flight of the hawks,” he said to himself. And in that mood, he was grateful to be in love. When you are in love, things make even more sense, he thought.”(Coelho,95). Santiago senses the language of Hawks as a message of love. Through the character of Santiago, the writer advocates the message of love to fellow human beings as well as to the nature. Santiago observes and learns the language of the horses.

Santiago’s impressions on the natural world also prove Coelho’s ecocentric ethics. According to Coelho, natural world resembles paradise. God created it for the humans and he wishes men to understand the marvels of nature. If they are wise enough to understand ecocentric ethics, they can create a paradise on earth.”The wise men understood that this natural world is only an image and a copy of paradise. The existence of this world is simply a guarantee that there exists a world that is perfect. God created the world so that, through its visible objects, men could understand his spiritual teachings and the marvels of his wisdom.”(Coelho,121). Coelho advocates that even a single grain of sand will lead to a great wisdom to understand the desert and its creatures.

“You are in the desert. So immerse yourself in it. The desert will give you an understanding of the world; in fact, anything on the face of the earth will do that. You don’t even have to understand the desert, all you have to do is to contemplate a single grain of sand, and you will see in it all the marvels of creation.”(Coelho,122).

When humans understand the marvels of creation, they simply begin to love the nature and preserve it.

The conversation between the boy and the desert, also between the boy and the wind prove his great understanding of the nature and earth. The shepherd boy believes that all the creatures on the earth are interdependent, which is nothing but the ecosystem. The interdependence of man and creatures and nature can be clearly seen, when the boy say’s,

“That’s why you are created the game in the first place to nourish the falcon. And eventually, man will nourish your sands, where the game will once again flourish. That’s how the world goes.”(Coelho,138).

The shepherd boy spreads the message of love among the creatures saying the soul of the world. He believes it is love that binds all together; so the soul of the world becomes one thing only.”(Coehlo,143) In his conversation with the Sun, Sun’s comments are remarkable for ensuring the interdependence of creatures on the earth.”From where I am, “the Sun said, “I can see the soul of the world. It communicates with my soul, and together we cause the plants to grow and the sheep to seek out shade. From where I am and I am a long way from the earth- I learned how to love. I know that if I come even a little bit closer to the earth, everything there would die, and soul of the world would no longer exist. So we contemplate each other, and we want each other, and I give it life and warmth, and it gives me my reason for living.”(Coehlo,143). The words of Sun reflect his views about love that binds everything together and gives a reason to live a life.

In the Alchemist, the glimpses of anthropocentric philosophy can be seen where, man is self-centered. As a human being, the shepherd boy also longs for treasure. In order to fulfill his dreams, he sets out on journey in the search of treasure. In order to gain treasure, he travels from his home i.e. Spain, to the exotic deserts. He ultimately meets the Alchemist, who possesses the wisdom to convert a metal into gold.

On his journey to fulfill his dreams, Santiago denies his father’s wish to see him as a priest . Instead, he tells his father that he didn’t want to become a priest, but wanted to travel. He was able everyday to live out his dream. He wanted to make his life interesting by making his dreams come true. He even dreams of a girl, who turned out to be Fatima. On the way to find his treasure, he meets Melchizedek , an old man, who promise him to tell the way to find the hidden treasure, that makes him realize his destiny. When the occasion of making a choice between the flock and treasure arises, he inclines towards treasure.

Santiago feels bitter and weeps as he finds himself far from home. He thinks that God is unfair to him, as the shepherd boy finds himself very long from his dreams. He becomes sad. He also visits the old woman to seek her help for the interpretation of his dreams. Santiago not only believes in ecocentrism but also to anthropocentric values. He shows a great faith in friendship and good relations. He always made new friends. He has his own philosophy of life. He respected every individual, though his idea doesn’t match with others. It becomes evident when he says, “Everyone has his or her own way of learning things,” he said to himself. “His way isn’t the same as neither mine, nor mine as his. But were both in search of our destinies, and I respect him for that.”(Coehlo,80). Santiago’s love for Fatima, prove his love for his fellow beings. When he meets Fatima, he learns the language of world that everyone speaks and everyone understands is love and humanity.

“It was the pure language of the world. It required no explanation, just as the universe needs none as it travels through endless time. What the boy felt at that moment was that he was in the presence of the only woman in his life, and that, with no need for words, she recognized the same thing.”(Coehlo,89).

He even considers that dreams without love are futile and meaningless. "Without such love, one's dreams would have no meaning."(Coelho,89). Santiago's love for Fatima deepens as he stays in the desert for a longtime.

Coelho advocates the message of love and belief in God. He states that people cannot control their feelings. When good things happen in their life, they become happy and if bad things occur they suffer. They ignore the present. But Coelho advises that men should live in the present and leave the future for God. He emphasizes that God reveals the future, so man should live in the present following the teachings of God.

"The future belongs to God, and it is only he who reveals it, under extraordinary circumstances.... If you pay attention to the present, you can improve upon it. And if you improve upon the present, what comes later will also be better. Forget about the future, and live each day according to the teachings, confident that God loves his children. Each day, in itself, brings with it an eternity."(Coelho,99)

Till the end, Santiago follow his dreams, wishes and pursue the till the end. His mind always filled with the thoughts of the loved one, i.e. Fatima. Similarly, his mind and heart are longing for the treasures that were hidden in the deserts. But in the search of his dreams and treasures, his heart and mind encounters with God and eternity, which reminds him about the true treasure. When he achieves his treasure and fulfills his dreams, he remembers his love, Fatima, to be a true treasure.

The writer thus advocates the philosophy behind ecocentrism and anthropocentrism. He advocates that ecosystem and its values are inseparable from human centered ideas. But the amalgamation of both ecocentric and anthropocentric values contribute in creating a healthy earth and healthy minds. Through the character of Santiago, Coelho expounds the significance of ecosystem and the ethics of humans on the earth, for creating healthy minds on the earth. He believes that, despite of the Global warming and other natural disasters, man can elevate himself from those obstacles for living a good life. An Environmentalist aptly said,

"The best choice for nature and mankind to co-exist is to develop and embrace environmental ethics; from understanding the idea of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, and from being an individualist, to showing concern about the globe that we are living." (Ching an wu)

Santiago's positive perspective towards life on the earth elevates him from his ordinary being. His association with the Alchemist motivates his pursuit for destiny. The shepherd boy through his actions and thoughts conveys the message of love for nature and for fellow human beings. He even advocates the love that speaks the language of the world. He ultimately learns that everything in the world is a treasure; if we are happy. The character of shepherd boy is instrumental to value the nature. His manners reflect the idea that anthropocentrism and ecocentrism recognize that man's well being is dependent on the well being of ecology. Therefore, man should realize that the understanding the ecology is the prime duty of man thus saving the lives of human beings from any sort of destruction. In the Alchemist, the writer exposes the significance adaptation of ecocentric and

anthropocentric values through the character of Santiago. The thoughts and actions also reflect the philosophy of nature centered and human centered values which contribute in the creation of perfect human beings.

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