

Cultural Assimilation as a Survival Technique in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*

In today's world of globalization, the flow of people from one geographical setting to another necessarily demands a person to employ his/her techniques of assimilation. While employing such techniques there might be potential risks as well. A person at least has to survive in the strange place where he/she reaches willingly or unwillingly. Hence, this study is about the unravelling of the cultural assimilation techniques employed by the protagonist, Santiago in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. It investigates how Santiago applies his techniques of cultural assimilation and succeeds in overcoming the difficulties he faces in course of his journey in search of the treasure.

Culture is the shared values, beliefs, norms, rituals and standard by a group of people in a certain geographical context. David Korten describes culture as "a system of customary beliefs, values, perceptions, and social relations that encodes the shared learning of a particular human group essential to its orderly social function" (76). Hence, culture can be understood as the common understanding and agreement of a group of people in order to operate their daily life in a systematic way. The relationship among the people living in a particular geopolitical situation forms a common understanding regarding their way of living. Since different societies in the world have their distinct ways of living in an organized way following their own norms, standards and societal assumptions, the cultural practices vary from one place to another to a relatively variant degree. In today's world of globalization, cultural assimilation has become necessary for all the human beings. Regarding today's global culture, Arjun Appadurai states, "Cultural transactions between social groups in the past have generally been restricted, sometimes by the facts of geography and ecology, and the other time by active resistance to interactions with the other" (27). The process of cultural assimilation matters a lot for the success or failure of a person or group in the culture of the host society.

Cultural assimilation is a process in which a person or group adjust themselves into a newer culture either it resembles to that of their culture of the origin or not. But they

gradually learn how to live life in their own in that newer culture and society by learning everyday activities including language, behaviour, norms, rituals and the way of living. Cultural assimilation demands some changes in the migrants' behaviours, assumptions, norms or standards to the extent that the host cultural society may acknowledge. Siobhan Holohan and Holohan admit that the most common form of assimilation is cultural assimilation where the minority groups adapt the everyday practices of the dominant culture through language and appearance:

The most commonly understood form of assimilation is that of cultural assimilation. This involves ethnic groups taking on the cultural signifiers of the host nation. Here minority groups are expected to adapt to the everyday practices of the dominant culture through language and appearance as well as via more significant socioeconomic factors such as absorption into the local cultural and employment community. It is agreed that, in this regard, assimilation becomes easier for the children of immigrants who are invariably socialized and educated in the culture and history of the dominant society from a young age. (Holohan)

The process of cultural assimilation goes through several vicissitudes. However, the techniques the migrants use in course of assimilation matters a lot how much difficulty they might face.

Keefe and Padilla define assimilation as the “social, economic and political integration of an ethnic minority group into mainstream society” (18). The assimilation occurs due to various reasons such as migration, conflict, travel, tourism, research and so on. American sociologist and cultural scholar, Milton Gordon breaks the assimilation process into seven subprocesses. His subprocesses consist of acculturation or behavioural assimilation; structural assimilation or access to societal institutions; amalgamation or marital assimilation; identificational assimilation; attitude receptional assimilation or the absence of prejudice; behaviour receptional assimilation or the absence of discrimination; and civic assimilation or the absence of value and power conflicts. In the novel *The Alchemist*, the

protagonist, Santiago applies his cultural assimilation techniques in the foreign places in course of his journey towards the Egyptian pyramids. In this study, the researcher analyzes his techniques with applying the assimilation theory introduced by Gordon and relates with the five dimensions of global culture by Arjun Appadurai. In order to evaluate the cultural aspects found in the novel, Santiago's cultural assimilation process is analyzed with the view of cultural homogeneity rather than heterogeneity.

Coelho's *The Alchemist* is enriched with cultural assimilation. It is based on a Jorge Luis Borge's *Tale of Two Dreamers*, which in turn is based on a tale from the book *One Thousand and One Nights*. It is also referred in the novel as well, "It looks like *The Thousand and One Nights*, said the Englishman, impatient to meet with the alchemist" (48). The writing in *The Alchemist* is in the conversation sense, which can easily assimilate the readers with the protagonist. The protagonist's experience is similar to everyone sharing his experience with people and instructing them the right way of life. His writing can be understood more by the words of Chester E. Eisner who opines, "This is the reason behind the fame of Coelho which he has achieved by using only those people as character which he himself has lived" (145). He attempts to learn alchemy as the protagonist Santiago tries to learn it.

Santiago visits different parts of Arab and Africa, and learns their language and culture in order to collect the treasure. By learning local dialects, their social activities and culture, he easily assimilates himself into the host cultural society both socially and financially. Here, a question arises, how he revives from the miserable conditions he faces in the completely strange cultural societies. Hence, the main aim of this study is to explore Santiago's motives behind exercising his tricks to assimilate himself into the culture of the natives. Furthermore, this study examines Santiago's mission of influencing the locals with unraveling the reason of his cultural assimilation techniques for his project.

Today's world is well familiarized with the trend of globalization. The countries and the international or regional organizations of the world along with the development of science, information and technology have fueled the globalization. Accordingly, it has

provided a wide ground for the flow of global culture in modern world. This study analyzes Santiago's cultural assimilation in the newer cultural societies he visits during his journey as an example. It will help the readers to get the ideas and techniques of interaction in the strange cultural societies. It will further show the direction towards cultural homogeneity in the present context of contracting world with the development of information, science and technology. Therefore, this study, on the one hand, will be helpful for the researchers of cultural assimilation theory. To the second, in today's worldwide trend of globalization, it will become helpful for getting insights to anyone who wants to assimilate him/herself into a strange cultural society as well.

Since *The Alchemist* is a famous novel worldwide, there have been conducted numerous researches and studies on it. Among the various studies, some notable and relevant to this research project are taken for reference here.

Regarding this novel, Stephen M. Hart opines that Paulo Coelho has portrayed the fusion of different cultures into a one. He says that *The Alchemist* celebrates cultural hybridity:

The Alchemist celebrates cultural hybridity. Coelho's eyes are those of hybrid in which there is no single overriding monofocal vision of reality. The protagonist is portrayed as standing of the crossroad between various ancient cultures: he simultaneously is intersected by Christian, Hebraic and Arabian culture. The forces of different culture melt into each other. The journey of Santiago draws intersected culture within his experience. He becomes a character who has learnt various ancient cultures of the world. (311)

Hart mainly focuses on the aspects of cultural hybridity in the novel. He seeks for the mingling of several cultures with each other in order to form a newer hybrid culture different from the original cultures of the native or host societies. Though Santiago has learnt various cultures during his journey, he does not establish a different "hybrid" culture after gaining various cultural experiences.

Mohammad Mahmoud claims that Paulo Coelho is influenced by Al-Tanukhi for his writing of *The Alchemist*. He remarks, “It is apparent that Coelho is influenced by Al-Tanukhi as the later lived long time ago before the first” (127). Analyzing the narrative of *The Alchemist* in terms of motive, place, time, dream and the plot, he compares the narrative of *The Alchemist* with *He Saw in His Dreams That His Richness Would be in Egypt* by Al-Tanukhie. For this, he says, “Although the two works belong to two different times and different literary genres, they have many similarities as they met in many occasions from the beginning of the narration till its end” (131). However, Coelho has declared that he had been inspired by Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, “Because I was fascinated by Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*. The main character in that book is also named Santiago” (“Oprah”).

Similarly, Bambang Irwan also seeks influence of Islamic culture in *The Alchemist*. He states, “There are Islamic cultures found in *The Alchemist* novel, based on the theories of During (2005) and Yahya (2009), they are: shepherd, caravan, broker and commission, and falconry” (47). He mainly analyzes the evidences of Islamic culture prevailed in the novel. However, the term ‘shepherd’ is also used as a metaphor for the God as the ‘care-taker’ or ‘nurturer’ in Christian culture as well. The readers can noticeably find the elements of Christian culture in the novel.

Muhammad Hasan Khoso et al. study the pertaining postmodern literary style in *The Alchemist*. They remark:

Paulo Coelho’s novel, *The Alchemist* is an embodiment of postmodern literary stylistic techniques. Like other postmodern literary writers, he also has narrated the story by using various narrative techniques. The plot and characterization of the novel is fragmented due to overlapping of time and magical events. The events either historical or religious are parodied not apparently but ironically. The author has pasted various ingredients from the previous works of writers and religious books including the Bible and Quran. (131)

As Hasan Khoso et al. claim, Paulo Coelho belongs to the era of postmodernism in literature and some evidences in *The Alchemist* carry the features of postmodernism as well. His book touches most of the crucial aspects of postmodernism.

Some researches also admit that Coelho's *The Alchemist* is correlated with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalyst theory, as Rasidya Alfi Nurfajrin observes:

... There are some influences of Santiago's dreams on his life. Santiago always remembered his dreams, he looked for the meaning of his dreams, and he attempted to make his dream true. ... There are some meanings of dream according to psychoanalysis such as the wish fulfillment, realization of an apprehension, and a reflection as its content. (60-61)

Santiago has attempted to make his dream true. However, Santiago's progress is fueled by the motivation from different characters like Melchizedek and the alchemist in the novel. Unless he had been forced by Melchizedek, he would not have pursued for the treasure of his dream he had.

Some studies are focusing on Santiago's decision-making process. They admire Santiago's intellect of making right decision instead of the dilemmas he faces throughout his journey. Lily Hasanah remarks:

Santiago's process of making decision seen from Søren Kierkegaard's existentialism explain about Santiago's freedom, dread and subjectivity, the influence of the concept 'the world is untruth' towards Santiago's decisions, and also about the presence of the community in Santiago's decision making. Because of the freedom he has, Santiago must consider each choice in every dilemma. (56)

Coelho has presented the states of dilemma faced by Santiago and his intellect of making right decision depending on his choice in his book. Santiago is portrayed as a character who has a motive of enjoying life with posing challenge. He accepts the challenges life has given to him and at the same time, at the time of decision-making, he thinks a lot in most of the cases.

Anna Pavlova Murta on the other hand seeks for the elements of transnational literature, popular culture and postmodernism in *The Alchemist*. He states, “In *The Alchemist*, Coelho represents cultural hybridity not as a hindrance of the human potential, but on the contrary, as an amplification of it” (95). He further states, “A nostalgic response to postmodern life, Coelho’s narratives are about physical journey that lead to the betterment of the individual by means of transcultural social relations. Narrative progression in his novels is propelled by the hybrid subjectivities that are forged dialogically in the contact zone between culturally diverse characters” (162). Murta’s view strongly reflects the transcultural social relations depicted in the novel. Coelho seems to have reflected the formation of cultural hybridity through transcultural relationship not merely as a hindrance of human potential; rather it is justified as an amplification of it.

This study is different from the above studies since it concerns on the discussion of Santiago’s cultural assimilation techniques he adopts throughout the journey in search of the hidden treasure. Very few researches have talked about the cultural aspects of the novel and none of them have discussed about the cultural assimilation process. Hence, this study explores the cultural assimilation techniques employed by Santiago and analyzes them with applying Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of global culture, Milton Gordon’s theory of assimilation and Arjun Appadurai’s five dimensions of global culture in order to induce how he has become successful to overcome the difficulties he faces.

This study is mainly relates to the theory of cultural hybridity in global culture proposed by Homi K. Bhaba. Bhabha has introduced his theory of cultural hybridity with bridging a connection between colonialism and globalization in his book *The Location of Culture*. In his book, Bhabha talks about cultural hybridity, ambivalence, cultural difference, enunciation and stereotypes, mimicry and third space. His central idea is that of hybridization which incorporates the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism resulting with cross-cultural relationship and contact. Bhabha observes hybridity mainly through the post-colonial perspective: “Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting

forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal. Hybridity is the reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” (112). His idea of ambivalence views culture as consisting of opposing perceptions and dimensions where there is a duality of people who are hybrid of their own cultural identity and the colonizer’s cultural identity. Bhabha presents cultural difference as an alternative to cultural diversity:

“Cultural diversity is an epistemological object– culture as an object of empirical knowledge– whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity. (Bhabha 34)

In this study, Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity is taken for reference in order to correlate Santiago’s process of cultural assimilation in *The Alchemist* with the cultural flow of modern world’s globalization.

This study also refers to the theory of cultural assimilation proposed by Milton Gordon and the theory of global culture. Gordon’s sevenfold subprocesses of assimilation include behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation, amalgamation or marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation and civic assimilation. The cultural assimilation process of Santiago in the novel is analyzed on the basis of these seven subprocesses. Similarly, Appadurai’s dimensions of global culture include ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples and ideoscaples.

Milton Gordon introduced the theory of assimilation in his book *Assimilation in American Life*. He compares the terms ‘acculturation’, ‘amalgamation’ and ‘assimilation’ with each other and differentiates them with illustrations. Although, these processes relate with “meeting of peoples” (Gordon 68), he also makes variation of each term in order to

differentiate assimilation and to divide the process of assimilation into further types. He puts background for the proposed variables of assimilation and gives an example of fictitious places 'Sylvania' and 'Mundovia'. He takes Sylvanians as the group of people with same race, religion and previous national extraction. There in the fictitious place of Sylvania, he has supposed a group of people called Mundovians who differ in their previous national background, religion and cultural pattern of the host group to come and adjust them gradually in Sylvania. He further imagines that the Mundovians' second generation has "thrown off any sense of peoplehood based on Mundovian nationality" and "has entered and been hospitably accepted into the social cliques, clubs, and institutions of the Sylvanians" (Gordon 69) without any prejudice or discrimination and without raising any value conflict issues in Sylvanian public life, they adjust themselves in the society. The process of assimilation goes step by step from the acquisition of culture and language; structural assimilation; marital assimilation; identificational assimilation; absence of prejudice and discrimination; and to the absence of value and power conflict.

Though Gordon has introduced the variables of assimilation by studying the process of assimilation of the migrants from several parts of the world into America, it seems relevant to be used in the other contexts related to assimilation as well. Therefore, in this study, the researcher has taken Gordon's theory of assimilation as a reference for studying the process of Santiago's assimilation in the foreign lands. However, William and Ortega, after measuring the validity of Gordon's assimilation subprocesses, conclude, "the process as well as the pattern of assimilation varies across groups" (708). It indicates that Gordon's assimilation variables are also subject to fluctuation of the degree of influences. Thus, this fluctuation is equally feasible for this study as per the assimilation process in the novel.

This study is further analyzed with reference to Appadurai's fivefold dimensions of global culture: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples and ideoscaples. Appadurai introduced these dimensions in his book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* in order to analyze the interflow and differences of global culture,

technology, finance, media subjects and ideologies in a large-scale variety. Appadurai forms the basis of disjuncture and differences created by these 'scapes' created in the verge of globalization. However, among the five dimensions, the aspects of 'ethnoscapes' seem to have been dominantly reflected in the novel.

In *The Alchemist*, Santiago, as a visitor sets up his journey from Andalusia to Egypt to collect treasure. His journey to Tangier leads him to the desert of Egypt and there he meets an alchemist who leads him to the pyramids. When he visits different places of Africa, he begins to listen to the local dialects, observes their social characteristics, and then skilfully impresses them. While travelling from Andalusia to Egypt, he makes his own policies to manage the problem of diversity and multiplicity so that he can easily preside over the native people. Along his way towards the pyramid, Santiago faces various obstacles and manages to overcome them by acculturating himself according to the host societies' preferences. He tries to learn different languages, cultural practices, and daily lifestyle of the native people and then accommodates himself accordingly.

The story of *The Alchemist* starts with Santiago's recurring dream. In the dream, a child tells him about the treasure which remains beneath the pyramids in Egypt. Since then he makes a strategy to collect this treasure to make his own by hook and crook. He uses his knowledge, intellect and different strategies to influence and impress native people in one way or the other. In the beginning, he faces many challenges and difficulties. Eventually, he succeeds to overcome them, however.

Santiago's cultural assimilation starts from the time when he decides to become a shepherd instead of his family's choice to become a priest as a source of pride for a simple farm family. He compares his parents with sheep who work hard just to have food and water. Coelho writes, "His parents had wanted him to become a priest, and thereby a source of pride for a simple farm family. They worked hard just to have food and water, like the sheep" (4). He has studied Latin, Spanish and theology. However, his desire since his childhood was to know the world rather than knowing the God and man's sins being just a priest. However, he

does not have courage to tell his desire of knowing the world to his father. One day he discloses his desire by summoning up his courage to his father. This indicates that his motive of life is more important for him than his family's expectations from him. Moreover, he has a strong desire of traveling throughout the world and assimilating himself in the newer cultures and societies. Although he does not have any idea of how to adjust himself in the unknown places, societies or cultures he may face during his travel, he opts to travel. His father plays a vital role in order to open the gate of his journey of knowing the world. Although being frustrated with his son's desire at first, Santiago's father suggests Santiago with a genius idea of buying a flock of sheep and become a shepherd, for which he gives money as well to buy sheep. Here, Santiago easily accepts the idea of being shepherd. He does not hesitate to live a shepherd life. It indicates that, he has strong desire of knowing the world and for this; he is ready to face any challenges.

Here, Santiago's shepherd life can be considered as a culture. In his shepherd life, he starts to adjust himself with his own style. Although, he has to sleep under the open sky and wander through the pastures every day in the same manner, he enjoys his shepherd life with his sheep taking them as his friends. Bambang Irawan accepts that the relationship between Santiago and his sheep was more than just the relationship between human beings and animal: "Shepherd will also easily understand the needs and condition of his sheep whether his sheep is getting sick or not. So, relationship between shepherd and his sheep is more than just relationship between human and animals" (42). He is a literate person having knowledge of Latin, Spanish and theology. He is aware of how to make his shepherd life comfortable in the way he can. It can be realized in the novel while the narrator says, "He swept the floor with his jacket and lay down, using the book he has just finished reading as a pillow. He told himself that he would have to start reading thicker books: they last longer, and made comfortable pillow" (1). He enjoys his time by reading books and telling the stories in the books to his sheep and talking with them about his feelings though he would not get any reaction from them. He learns about the pastures and lands around Andalusia. He knows the

best pastures for his sheep. He knows how to feed them, how to take care of them and how to rare them. He knows everything about each member of his flock: “He knows which ones is lame, which one is to give birth two months from now, and which are the laziest. He knows how to shear them and how to slaughter them” (15). He knows how to sell their wool to the merchants in the city nearby as well. However, for him, “the only things that concern the sheep are food and water” (3).

Through this, Santiago has kept his sheep under his control. He learns that his sheep rely upon him in the manner that “if he became a monster and decided to kill them, one by one, they would become aware only after most of the flock has been slaughtered” (3). They trust him and they have forgotten how to rely on their own instincts, because he has leaded them to nourishment. Here, as Santiago becomes successful to assimilate himself in the ‘culture’ of his shepherd life, the motive of the author becomes clear that somebody can easily assimilate among the native dwellers if s/he could skillfully employ the cultural assimilation techniques. The point here can be analyzed as the starting point of Santiago’s motive of employing his cultural assimilation as a survival technique. Here, Santiago’s process of acculturation in his shepherd life can be related to Gordon’s ‘cultural or behavioral assimilation’ and ‘identificational assimilation’ at the same time. It is because, on the one hand, Santiago both behaviorally and culturally assimilates in the shepherd life. He learns how the sheep are living their life, what are their expectations, what is to be done in the shepherd ‘culture’. On the other, Santiago develops the sense of ‘shepherdhood’ in him. He loves to be called shepherd. He does not have any other identity than a shepherd during the time.

Santiago’s assimilation in shepherd life distorts as he has a recurring dream. He has the same dream twice within a span of week. In his dream, he was in a field with his sheep when a child appeared and began to play with his sheep. Although, he did not like the child’s activity, she seemed to be able to play with them without frightening them. The child went on playing with his sheep for quite a while, and suddenly she took him by both hand and

transported him to the Egyptian pyramids. She further told that if he would go there he would find the hidden treasure. However, while she was about to show him the exact location, he woke up both times. He becomes eager to know the meaning of the dream, and for this, he decides to visit a Gypsy woman in Tarifa of whom he has heard that she can interpret the dreams.

While Santiago tells the Gypsy woman about his dream, to his amazement, she firstly demands one-tenth of the treasure and that he has to give the portion of the treasure to her only if he could find it. As Santiago promises to give her one-tenth of the treasure, the woman simply tells him that he will find the treasure and become a rich man, “And this is my interpretation: you must go to the Pyramids in Egypt. I have never heard of them, but, if it was a child who showed them to you, they exist. There you will find a treasure that will make you a rich man” (7). This interpretation of the Gypsy woman disappoints him as the woman has told what he has already known. To his disappointment, he himself promises never to believe in the dreams and to continue his shepherd life, “He decided that he would never again believe in dreams” (8). Here, the author presents Santiago as a person having normal human instinct who does not solely believe the things without having facts. Santiago wants to remain on his own shepherd life and keep on traveling wherever he wants. At this point, he finds himself free to make a choice. It can also be realized in the following statement:

He owned a jacket, a book he could trade for another, and a flock of sheep. But, most important, he was able every day to live out his dream. If he were to tire of the Andalusian fields, he could sell his sheep and go to sea. By the time he had had enough of the sea, he would already have known other cities, other women, and other chances to be happy. (6)

Santiago’s freedom of choice leads him to the unforeseen journey beyond the sea, even though, being fueled by the motivation from an old king he meets in Tarifa.

In the novel, Melchizedek, as he declares himself as the king of Salem, plays the role of the character who has to invoke Santiago’s Personal Legend and the role of carving path

for Santiago's journey of cultural assimilation. The king tells Santiago that each individual has a Personal Legend, something that they truly desire, which is their purpose in life to accomplish: "There is one great truth on this planet: whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it's because that desire originated in the soul of the universe. It's your mission on earth" (12). The king meets Santiago with a purpose. Santiago becomes convinced with the philosophical arguments given by the king to assure him.

Santiago gets surprised while Melchizedek talks about his dream. Melchizedek even writes down the names of Santiago's father, mother, name of the seminary he attended in his childhood and even the name of the merchant's daughter, which he has not known up to now, but he has fantasized love with her. However, Santiago gets further irritated while the king directly demands him one-tenth of his sheep so as he would tell how to find the hidden treasure. While Santiago insists that he has already promised with a Gypsy woman to give one-tenth of his treasure, the king says, "If you start out by promising what you don't even have yet, you'll lose your desire to work toward getting it" (14). The king urges him to pursue his dream of searching his treasure. The king further says that he is helping him to realize his destiny at the point where he was about to give it all up. He induces Santiago with many philosophical messages.

The most important of the messages Melchizedek imparts Santiago is what he says, "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (12). He talks about 'mysterious force', 'soul of the world', 'language of the world' and finally about the Personal Legend in Santiago himself. Santiago gets fascinated with the king's rationales and after thinking a daylong, he decides to sell his sheep and give one-tenth to the king. The king in turn gives him two precious stones Urim and Thummim and suggests him to follow the omens the stones may reflect. Between the two stones, the black one indicates 'yes' and the white one as 'no'. However, the king suggests Santiago to make his own decisions if he can. The king also tells him about a tale, which carries the very meaning "the secret of the happiness is to see all the marvels of the world, and never to let the drops of oil on the spoon

to spill” (18). Here, Coelho has created the characterization of the king as a ‘mysterious force’ to urge Santiago to follow his dream and it makes him to travel towards the deserts where he has not been before. In addition, it makes him to assimilate in the place and culture very new to him alone.

As Santiago reaches in Tangier, he finds the culture, people and society very strange there. Coelho reveals that the most problematic thing for oneself to adjust in the newer culture is the language of the native. Coelho writes, “Besides this, in the rush of his travels he had forgotten a detail, just one detail, which could keep him from his treasure for a long time: only Arabic was spoken in this country” (19). Santiago tries to assimilate in the Arabic culture of Tangier. However, he fails to recognize the right person in the new society. While he meets a Spanish-speaking boy in a bar, he trusts him and discloses his plan to travel to the Egyptian pyramids. He also shows up all the money he has with him to the boy thinking that he would be a guide for him in the journey. However, he gets suspicious over the bar owner who has actually been there to help him. With this misjudgment, the boy robbed Santiago with nothing left except his old pouch. Here, Coelho presents the most problematic situation of Santiago in course of his cultural assimilation process. Santiago finds himself lost in a different country, a stranger in a strange land, where he could not even speak the native language. He is no longer a shepherd, and he has nothing, “not even the money to return and start everything over” (22). Coelho’s indication here is to display the problematical situation in order to make one aware of the possible drastic situation in a strange land. Santiago disregards himself as being “too insignificant to conquer the world” (22). However, he tries to assure himself, “I’m an adventurer, looking for treasure” (23). Here, Santiago uses his self-motivation as a tool to encourage himself in such dreadful situation in front of him.

In the early morning of the next day Santiago has been robbed, he helps a candy seller to assemble the stall. The candy seller gives him a candy, which Santiago eats forgetting about his present condition. Here, he learns that he has to work in order to make his living easier in a strange land. He also learns that not all the languages depend on words:

While they were erecting the stall, one of them had spoken Arabic and the other Spanish. And they had understood each other perfectly well. There must be a language that doesn't depend on words, the boy thought. I've already had that experience with my sheep, and now it is happening with people. ...If I can learn to understand this language without words, I can learn to understand the world. (24-25)

Here, Santiago's process of assimilating himself in the newer culture of Tangier can be associated with Gordon's behavioral assimilation or acculturation. Though Santiago has not learnt the local language in Tangier, he uses his intellects, symbolic language and gestures at least for his survival.

The 'scape' here can also be further associated with Appadurai's ethnoscape. Santiago is a single person to assimilate in the newer societies. The difficulties posed due to the ethnic differences in the foreign lands were to be faced only by him. He has not learnt the target language before going to a newer place as most tourists, or visitors do. The 'scape' between his native language and the foreign language creates problem for him in course of his assimilation. However, it adds a brick of confidence in Santiago that he feels himself capable of understanding the world and adjusting himself in a foreign culture even without knowing the native language.

Santiago's meeting with a crystal shop merchant and his adjustment in the shop within a short span of time in Tangier further reflects Coelho's indication of strategy of assimilation. While Santiago first sees the crystal shop, he asks the crystal merchant to let him clean the crystal glasses so as the merchant might give him something to eat. Fortunately, the crystal merchant has already been noticing that Santiago is wandering in troubles. His religion, Muslim, has taught him that he should feed the hungry ones to make his Allah happy. For this, the crystal merchant says, "You didn't have to do anything. The Koran requires me to feed a hungry person" (26). He compares Santiago's cleansing of the crystals with cleansing of their negative thoughts. The crystal merchant has noticed the good omens from the very first day of the boy in the shop. He says, "I'd like you to work in my

shop. Two customers came in today while you were working, and that's a good omen" (26). Here, Coelho builds up the connection between the thoughts of Santiago and the crystal merchant as the relationship of humanity. Santiago does not only become able to establish himself as the crystal merchant's worker in order to revive from his dreadful situation, he also becomes able to put some money aside with applying his creative techniques that result the crystal merchant's business to flourish. By convincing the merchant in spite of his conservative nature, he applies the idea of crystal display case and selling tea in the crystal glass for the travelers around the hill of Tangier. His idea works as expected, the business increase profoundly and the merchant increases commission for Santiago as well.

Santiago has almost dropped his idea of following his dream while working in the crystal shop. Mainly, he becomes discouraged by the crystal merchant's view: "Even if you cleaned my crystals for an entire year... even if you earned a good commission selling every piece, you would still have to borrow money to get to Egypt. There are thousands of kilometers of desert between here and there" (26). With this disappointment, he has started to think for buying his sheep again and returning to his shepherd life with the money he has earned in the crystal shop. Here, the crystal shop can be regarded as another 'culture' for Santiago. He succeeded to assimilate in the crystal shop and with the crystal shop merchant as well. The crystal shop merchant too admits this fact as well:

You have been a real blessing to me. Today, I understand something I didn't see before: every blessing ignored becomes a curse. I don't want anything else in life. But you are forcing me to look at wealth and at horizons I have never known. Now that I have seen them, and now that I see how immense my possibilities are, I'm going to feel worse than I did before you arrived. Because I know the things I should be able to accomplish, and I don't want to do so. (31)

Santiago's assimilation and success in the crystal shop works as the further pull factor for him to assimilate in the newer cultures. He has become confident enough to assimilate himself in any Arabic culture as he has learnt the Arabic culture and has become somehow

able to speak Arabic language. With his survival after the calamities and success in assimilating in Tangier, he desires to explore newer places. This motive of Santiago can be understood in the novel as the narrator says, “Tangier was no longer a strange city, and he felt that, just as he had conquered this place, he could conquer the world” (34). It makes clear that although Santiago has told the crystal shop merchant that he wants to return to his shepherd life with the money he has earned in the crystal shop; his inner desire is something more, that is to explore the newer places.

In Tangier, Santiago has indulged himself into the native culture culturally, behaviorally and structurally as stated in the novel, “He dressed in his Arabian clothing of white linen, bought especially for this day. He put his headcloth in place and secured it with a ring made of camel skin. Wearing his new sandals, he descended the stairs silently” (32). It reflects that Coelho has strongly presented the cultural hybridity in the novel. Santiago’s presence as an Arabian boy reflects what Homi K. Bhabha differentiates cultural diversity from the cultural difference. Santiago’s presence as an Arabian boy further reflects Bhabha’s concept of “mimicry”, though apart from his colonial perspective of ‘mimicry’. Santiago imitates the local cultural activities and implies them in his life without any prejudice; rather he feels comfort and intimate.

The point here can be analyzed with Gordon’s three steps of his assimilation variables: cultural or behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation and identificational assimilation. Santiago has behaviorally assimilated as he dresses in the Muslim attires, although he originally has come from Christian background. To the next, his transformation of the dressing style signifies to the structural assimilation as well. Here, Santiago accepts the dressing code of the native culture where he spends a whole year. The dress of the host culture has become more important to him than his native cultural dress. For him, even the smoke of hookah has become more important than the bottle of wine, which he used to carry with him during his shepherd life. It signifies that Coelho has reflected cultural, behavioral and structural assimilation of Santiago in the host culture of Tangier.

Coelho's reflection here also correlates to what Appadurai states, "The central paradox of ethnic politics in today's world is that primordia (whether of language or skin color or neighbor or kinship) have become globalized" (41). In today's globalized world, a person cannot remain fundamentally rooted to his/her original cultural practice. His cultural inclination flows accordingly as per his/her accommodation in the newer cultural societies.

After deciding not to go back in the shepherd life, but to follow his dream accepting the potential challenges, Santiago travels towards the desert from Tangier. With this, his next journey of assimilation starts in the desert. The environment of desert, the caravan and traveling on the back of camel all were new things for him. He meets an Englishman as a companion in the journey of caravan who keeps himself busy in reading books about alchemy most of the time.

While the Englishman first sees Santiago, he judges Santiago as an Arab boy. In his narration, the Englishman regards Santiago as:

A young Arab, also loaded down with baggage, entered, and greeted the Englishman. ...The young Arab took out a book and began to read. The book was written in Spanish. That's good, thought the Englishman. He spoke Spanish better than Arabic, and, if this boy was going to Al-Fayoum, there would be someone to talk to when there were no important things to do. (36)

The above statements further clarify how Santiago has assimilated himself in the Arabian culture. His cultural transformation has made him look like an Arab boy rather than what he was in real, a Spanish. Furthermore, it signifies the ethnoscapas as in the global cultural flow as Appadurai states, "The central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thereby proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular" (43). Here, Coelho has reflected the influence of Arabian culture as the host culture, which has cannibalized Santiago's native culture and has made him indulged in the host culture.

On the other side, the point here relates with the product of cultural hybridity of Bhabha and Gordon's theory of identificational assimilation. Coelho presents with the developing sense of 'peoplehood' and 'ethnicity' of the native culture of Tangier in Santiago. Santiago accepts the host culture's identity without any prejudice. Santiago appears as a person having mixed cultural identity of his origin and the culture of Tangier.

During the journey towards the desert, the caravan has to stay in the oasis called Al-Fayoum as there was tribal war prevailing in the desert. While living in the oasis, Santiago meets Fatima and falls in love with her. Here, the name of the girl, Fatima too is the product of cultural assimilation. Though depicting her as an Arab girl, Coelho has named her with a name from Christian society. Regarding her name, Fatima says, "It's the name of the Prophet's daughter... The invaders carried the name everywhere" (51).

In the same way, instead of being a Muslim girl, Fatima becomes ready to forget her tradition and culture after she meets Santiago. She says, "I have been waiting for you here at the oasis for a long time. I have forgotten about my past, about my traditions, and the way in which men of the desert expect women to behave. Ever since I was a child, I have dreamed that the desert would bring me a wonderful present. Now, my present has arrived, and it's you" (53).

Here, the girl's name Fatima, her easy utterance to the word 'invaders', and Santiago's readiness to marry Fatima can be associated with Gordon's process of marital assimilation or amalgamation. The Christian name, Fatima in the Arabian society is the result of amalgamation or large-scale intermarriage between the people from Christian and Arabian cultures.

Fatima becomes more attached with Santiago when he tells his whole life story to Fatima. Coelho writes:

'The day after we met,' Fatima said, '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 a part of you... You have told me about your dreams, about the

old king and your treasure. And you've told me about omens. So now, I fear nothing, because it was those omens that brought you to me. And I am a part of your dream, a part of your destiny, as you call it.' (53)

Here, the openhearted Fatima supports Santiago to assimilate in the newer society of the oasis.

One day Santiago reads an omen, which saves the natives of Al-Fayoum from the unforeseen attack by the tribal armies from the desert. As he tells about the omen to the tribal chieftains of the oasis, the leader of the group regards Santiago as Joseph, one character of Bible:

Two thousand years ago, in a distant land, a man who believed in dreams was thrown into a dungeon and then sold as a slave... Our merchants bought that man, and brought him to Egypt. All of us know that whoever believes in dreams also knows how to interpret them... When the pharaoh dreamed of cows that were thin and cows that were fat, this man I'm speaking of rescued Egypt from famine. His name was Joseph. He, too, was a stranger in a strange land, like you, and he was probably about your age. (59)

Here, the presence of Santiago for the tribesmen is compared to that of Joseph who saved Egyptians from famine and made them the wealthiest of the peoples. This traditional belief of tribesmen facilitates Santiago to gain trust of the native people.

After Santiago's prediction about the omen, the dwellers of the oasis prepare to save the oasis from the possible attack. Santiago's prediction comes true, and the things go as they have planned as well. With this success, the tribal chieftain calls Santiago to present him with fifty pieces of gold. He then repeats the story about Joseph of Egypt and asks him to become the counselor of the oasis. Santiago's succeeds to assimilate in Al-Fayoum due to the knowledge he has got from Melchizedek about reading the omens. Although the story of the oasis is based on spiritual realism, it can be associated with the techniques of cultural assimilation as well. Although he was a newcomer in the oasis, he becomes able to predict

the omens thereby at the oasis. He takes the omen seriously. He does not simply ignore what he envisages. He has felt himself as a part of the oasis also as it has given him shelter during the tribal wars at the desert. On top of this, he has found Fatima at the oasis whom he loves more than himself. For this Santiago remarks, "I've found Fatima, and, as far as I'm concerned, she's worth more than treasure" (66). Due to his attachment with the oasis, he dares to speak out of the omen to the tribal chieftains and he becomes able to save several lives including the oasis itself. He becomes able to make the oasis live and powerful again as well.

Here, Coelho's arrangement of Santiago's attachment to the oasis is similar to Gordon's attitude receptional assimilation where there is absence of prejudice. Furthermore, this can also be related with Gordon's behavior receptional assimilation where there is absence of discrimination between the native dwellers and the newcomers. The process of assimilation in case of Santiago at the oasis, Al-Fayoum is fueled by his love relationship with Fatima where prejudice and discrimination become out of concern for them. Apart from their cultural, social or geographical background, Coelho presents Santiago and Fatima as two human beings of matching gender who share common feeling of natural love. Moreover, it makes clear that Coelho's motive in the novel is to reflect cultural homogeneity without disregarding the essence of cultural heterogeneity in the world.

Just before the day of the attack on the oasis, Al-Fayoum, the alchemist, whom the Englishman has come to meet in the oasis, meets Santiago in appearance of a warrior. Firstly, the alchemist scares Santiago for predicting the omen. However, Santiago manages to satisfy the alchemist with his straightforward and confident answer without being diverted by the fear of the alchemist's sword pointed on his forehead. The alchemist judges Santiago's courage and tells him he has already known that Santiago will come at the oasis and need his help as well. Furthermore, the alchemist interestingly reveals that the person whom he has been waiting is no other than Santiago instead of what Santiago has thought to be the Englishman.

The alchemist accompanies Santiago in the same way as Melchizedek has accompanied him in Tarifa. He assists Santiago throughout the journey towards the pyramids with due support and motivation. As Santiago refuses to continue his search of treasure and stay at the oasis instead because of his love with Fatima, the alchemist reassures him, "Love never keeps a person from pursuing his destiny" (67). He persuades Santiago with several philosophical messages. He encourages Santiago to thrust up his hidden power. He suggests Santiago to listen his heart, "Listen to your heart. It knows all things, because it came from the Soul of the World, and it will one day return there" (71). Coelho has represented the alchemist as a surreal or metaphysical being. The alchemist as a 200 years old person and his presupposition about Santiago's coming at the oasis are beyond normal sense as well. However, he cordially supports Santiago in his assimilation in the Al-Fayoum oasis and in the places they journey together ahead towards the Egyptian pyramids.

During their journey, one day, three armed tribesmen approach to Santiago and the Alchemist, and check their bags. From the alchemist's belongings, the tribesmen find a small flask filled with a liquid (the Elixir of Life) and a yellow glass egg slightly larger than a chicken's egg (the Philosopher's Stone). They ask the alchemist that what they are. The alchemist unswervingly says, "That's the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of life. It's the Masterwork of the alchemists. Whoever swallows that elixir will never be sick again, and a fragment from that stone turns any metal into gold" (75). The Arabs laugh, as they do not believe his answer. However, Santiago interrogates the alchemist that why he has told everything to the Arabs about his belongings. The alchemist answers, "To show you one of life's simple lessons... When you possess great treasures within you, and try to tell others of them, seldom are you believed" (75). This statements show how the alchemist assists Santiago in building up his strategy of assimilation in the strange places. With this, the alchemist instructs him to remain always cautious in the strange places.

After the interrogation, the tribesmen take Santiago and the alchemist to their camps regarding them as the spies of the tribe during the wartime. In order to save their lives, the

alchemist applies his tricks. He threatens the tribesmen with the fear that Santiago is an alchemist and he can turn himself into wind and destroy the tribe with his blow. As Santiago was unaware of the idea, the alchemist instructed Santiago not to show his fear, rather become brave. The alchemist keeps on encouraging him to become brave and optimistic. While the day comes for Santiago to show his extraordinary power, he climbs on top of a cliff. He communicates with the desert using his knowledge of the 'Language of the World' and tells it to help him to transform into the wind in order to save him. However, desert recommends Santiago to ask to the wind for help. Then Santiago communicates with the wind as well. However, the communication ended while the wind also recommends him to ask to the sun for help.

Santiago further communicates with the sun as well. However, Santiago's communication with the sun also ends up by getting recommendation from the sun, "Speak to the hand that wrote all" (93). Then, while Santiago turns to communicate with 'the hand that wrote all,' he finds the universe at one place and he thinks that he find the God's soul as his soul as Coelho writes, "The boy reached through the Soul of the World, and saw that the Soul of God was his own soul. And that he, the boy, could perform miracles" (86).

Here, Santiago's communication with the desert, the wind, the sun and the God here denotes his assimilation with something beyond the natural belief. Santiago's assimilation here can be regarded as 'supernatural assimilation.' Santiago's process of communication is beyond the realistic understanding and out of the law of nature.

Santiago has succeeded to gain control over the tribesmen with his techniques of 'supernatural assimilation'. The tribesmen get convinced that Santiago has been able to transform himself into the wind. They get convinced with Santiago's power described by the alchemist. They bade a farewell with an escort party to the alchemist and Santiago until the distance from the tribe where they want. Here, Santiago has assimilated himself in the culture of the native tribesmen. His cultural assimilation techniques become successful in the verge of his life and death. Though the ideology of the alchemist works here and as he knows how

to transform himself into the wind, he uses Santiago for the role of transforming into the wind. It is also inferred in the novel, as the narrator says, “After all, the alchemist continued to live in the desert, even though he understood the Language of the World, and knew how to transform lead into gold. He didn’t need to demonstrate his science and art to anyone” (91). The point here can be analyzed with Appadurai’s model of global culture. The difference generated between those people who belong to the category of the alchemist as in the novel and the common people who use their knowledge in order to ‘highlight’ their ‘self’ rather than highlighting others’ in today’s globalized world wryly depicts the ‘ethnoscapes’ here.

Throughout the novel, Santiago succeeds in assimilating in various newer places with the help of his assimilation techniques and with the support from the persons around him. He gets support from the old king, Melchizedek, in the beginning, the crystal merchant in Tangier, the Englishman during the journey of desert, from Fatima and the alchemist, respectively, during his journey. Though he has found the treasure not in the Egyptian pyramids as in his dreams, but at the old abandoned church from where he has started his journey, he becomes able to recognize the usefulness of cultural assimilation as a survival technique in the strange societies.

The title, *The Alchemist*, of the book is very symbolic. The title denotes Santiago as an alchemist who transforms himself from a shepherd to a mature, wealthy and knowledgeable person. Regarding the meaning of the title, *The Nation* writes:

‘Alchemist’ means the ‘art of transmuting metals.’ That is both a philosophy and an ancient practice focused on the attempt of to change base metals into gold. As we proceed to the story, we found that Santiago goes through, more or less, the same process, and attains wisdom and maturity. In short, his personality and life completely transforms like that of a metal, which passes through the process of alchemy. (*The Alchemist- the Lessons of Life*)

On the other hand, while we relate the title, *The Alchemist*, with the cultural assimilation process in today’s globalization, we can find the process of assimilation as the

process of alchemy as well. In the process of cultural adjustment, a person has to transform him/herself according to the cultural prerequisites of the host society and he/she has to adjust gradually in that society. In *The Alchemist*, Santiago, as an alchemist, succeeds to transform himself into the wind in demand of his time to save his life in the new cultural society. He learns the local languages, dialects, living standards and changes himself accordingly as well. Hence, the title of the book, *The Alchemist*, seems to reflect the process of Santiago's step-by-step learning of cultural assimilation techniques and making himself mature to accommodate properly in the host society as in alchemy.

From this study, it can be generalized that cultural assimilation process is indirectly or directly associated with the sector of traveling and tourism, intra-national, international or regional migration, post-marital relationship, trade, adventure, research and many others where the interchange of cross-cultural values occurs. This study furthermore suggests that in today's world of globalization, cultural assimilation can be used as a survival technique as well by the tourists, travelers, visitors, refugees or other people who have to adjust or survive in the societies different from their native culture, willingly or unwillingly. Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* clearly depicts this sort of cultural assimilation process. In the novel, there are several components of cultural assimilation process that replicate Gordon's cultural or behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation, amalgamation or marital assimilation, identificational assimilation and attitude or behavior receptional assimilation. Similarly, it is also equipped with the aspects of Appadurai's ethnoscaapes among his five dimensions (ethnoscaapes, mediascaapes, technoscaapes, finanscaapes and ideoscaapes) of global cultural flows. Coelho has clearly depicted the difference and disjuncture of the global cultural flows in his novel through Santiago's cultural assimilation process. Santiago's journey from Andalusia of Spain to the pyramids of Egypt in search of the treasure is fully set with cross-cultural assimilation.

The process of cultural mixing and hybridization of culture in *The Alchemist* reflects what Homi K. Bhabha theorizes in his *The Location of Culture*. Coelho's book depicts the

global context of cultural hybridity alongside Santiago's cultural assimilation process in the various cultural societies in course of his journey. Bhabha's ideas of ambivalence, cultural diversity, mimicry, cultural difference and the overall location of global culture are also found in Santiago's cultural journey.

Santiago's cultural assimilation techniques in the novel help him to adjust and accommodate with the native peoples in the foreign lands and cultures throughout his journey in search of the treasure. His learning of life from the persons he meets, dreadful situations he faces and the supports he gets in course of his quest of dream help him in doing so as well. It can be induced that Coelho seeks for the cultural and religious homogeneity in the present world. The writer's attempt through the novel seems to be creating the universal uniqueness among the human species in this culturally and religiously heterogeneous world. The author adapts the personal quest, the awareness of omens, the soul of the world, the language of the world, and the idea of listening to one's heart as the guiding principle to synergize the essence of cultural assimilation techniques.

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