



A Journeying Soul: The Valkyries by Paulo Coelho

Dr. Shruti Joshi

Assistant Professor,
Vivekanand College, Kolhapur (Autonomous)
Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra.

Abstract

Paulo Coelho is the Brazilian novelist famous worldwide for his inspirational novels. His novel *The Valkyries* is a magical story of forgiving the past and believing in future. As in his other novels, the protagonist of this novel too undergoes a journey which symbolizes his growth towards obtaining his personal destiny. Coelho employs the archetypal model of the Hero's Journey as explained by Joseph Campbell and Christopher Vogler. The narrator of this novel, Paulo, and his wife Chris travel for forty days into the Mojave Dessert. He is on the task of meeting and speaking to his guardian angel in order to break the curse – 'People always kill things they love most.' They meet the Valkyries (the mysterious warrior women biking through the dessert) who help them in fulfilling the task. The reader gets a message to overcome the odds of life to live to the fullest. Coelho hints that we can find the key to unlock the door to the heaven in our heart itself. However, we need to create or find the heaven that is here and now. This paper traces the inspirational element in Coelho's novel through the hero's quest model as employed in *The Valkyries*.

Keywords: The Archetypes, Hero's Journey, Valkyries, Inspirational.

Introduction:

The Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho has become a global phenomenon in Inspirational Literature because his works have a life-enhancing effect on his readers. Almost all of his fictional and non-fictional texts have been translated into nearly fifty-six languages and are widely read in 150 countries.. Through his characters, he discusses certain fundamental questions of human life and tries to offer answers to them. That imparts a universal appeal to his books. His readers receive messages that inspire them to review their lives in a new light and strive for happiness. Themes like fate versus willpower, personal legends, omens, love, marriage, the soul of the world, spiritual quests for redemption, and self-enlightenment are the highlighting points of his major works. In almost all of his novels, his major characters embark on an adventure in search of an ultimate truth or a final spiritual destination. During their journey, they encounter people who help them through the hurdles on their way to spiritual awakening and self-discovery. We can observe an obvious semblance with the archetypal hero-journey which gives an aura of mystical adventures to Coelho's stories. Paulo Coelho, being a follower of the New Age philosophy, has travelled extensively for various pilgrimages. These journeys have helped in the gradual awakening of his spiritual self. His narratives gain authenticity due to these unique experiences.

Paulo Coelho's fourth novel *The Valkyries: an Encounter with Angels* was written in 1992. It is also an autobiographical account of Coelho's journey in the Mojave Desserts undertaken in 1988 to fulfill a task given by his spiritual master. It is a magical story of forgiving the past and believing in future. It is an amazing combination of exotic setting, adventures, drama and magical story-telling technique. It is at once an adventure of the modern day and an odyssey in a metaphysical sense. The narrator of this novel, obviously Paulo, travels for forty days into the

Mojave Desert along with his wife Chris. He is on the task of meeting and speaking to his guardian angel in order to break the curse –‘People always kill things they love most.’ They meet the Valkyries (the mysterious warrior women biking through the desert) who help them in fulfilling the task.

Mythology and the New Age :

‘Valkyries’ are characters from the Norse (Scandinavian) mythology. They are the nymphs at the Anglo-Saxon pagan deity Wotan’s palace. They function as messengers of the gods leading the heroes to their deaths and then to paradise. They decide which soldiers die in battle and which live. They bring the chosen dead to the afterlife hall of the slain Valhalla, which is ruled by the god Odin. In the mythology, Valkyries also appear as lovers of heroes, daughters of royal men, sometimes accompanied by ravens, swans or horses. In Coelho’s novel, the Valkyries are a group of mysterious warrior women in strange black clothes, riding on motorbikes from city to city in the desert. They speak about angels, God and paradise. They are said to be warriors of light and lead a mysterious, libertine life. They are the ones who help the hero in being able to see his guardian angel.

The Tradition of magic, to which Paulo Coelho belongs, believes in the presence of spirit guides and guardian angels. Gene (Paulo’s spiritual guide) explains that there are four kinds of entities in the invisible world that everyone can make contact with. They are – the elementals, the disembodied spirits, the saints and the angels. The elementals are pure vibrant forces of nature like earth, fire, water and air. They are understood as ‘beings’ through physical representations of dwarfs, fairies, salamanders etc. One can only use their powers, as they do not teach anything. The disembodied spirits are the souls of the dead that wander between one life and another. Some of them are highly evolved and are great masters. However, what they teach is nothing new but the knowledge we can gather on this earth. The saints are the true masters who have lived once among us and now are closer to the light. Their lives are lessons for us to imitate. They can be invoked through constant prayers and things change through miracles. The angels are highly evolved spiritual beings having universal knowledge. They are the all consuming love in motion and growth. They are beyond good or evil and are the messengers of love.

Paulo Coelho, being the believer of the New Age philosophy, follows the Tradition. The followers of the New Age Movement are interested and involved in spiritual practices in order to understand the miracles of human life and to solve the issues of human existence. They try to explore the possibilities of other realities and psychic abilities. As Coelho convinces through his work, we can find the key to unlock the door to the heaven in our heart itself. However, we need to create or find the heaven that is here and now. As the ordinary souls have forgotten the ancient wisdom and ability of spiritual evolution, there are spiritual guides and angels who help us on our journeys on this earth. These angels help us learn and grow, assist and escort us. Paulo (in the novel) explains that in our childhood we all are made aware of the presence of angels who take care of us. As we grow up, such ideas appear ridiculous. However, all religions and their messengers talk of this universe populated with angels. They are messengers of birth and death, light and darkness, hope and knowledge, hell and paradise. They take whatever form we imagine. Though they are visible for those who believe in their existence, they are always there whether we believe in them or not. If tried hard, we can have the ability to consciously communicate with these guardian angels. The magi of the Tradition and the Valkyries in this novel are actually the psychics who have attained this ability. Paulo the narrator is assisted by them in his task of being able to see and speak to his angel. In the usual hero - journey model, the supernatural aid comes along the road during the hero’s trials. In this novel, the trial itself is to find the supernatural and the hero is aided by his earthly guides or mentors.

The Archetypal Hero Journey:

An archetype is a constantly recurring symbol or motif in literature, art or mythology. Archetypal images are perceived in human dreams, visions and fantasies, and they vary across or within cultures. The dominant archetypes influence and control human thoughts and behaviour. There are numerous character archetypes (e.g. the Self, the Shadow, the Hero, the Wise Old Man etc.) and situational ones (e.g. the quest journey). In the myths and legends from all over the world, a typical pattern of a hero’s journey – physical and spiritual – gets repeated. Joseph Campbell, in his seminal work – *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968) – explains the ‘monomyth’ of hero’s adventure. He divides the journey of his royal hero in different stages and sub-stages as:

1. Departure or call to the adventure (dawn of spiritual awakening and the appearance of a herald or initiator)
2. Hero’s refusal or acceptance (of the call)
3. Meeting a supernatural guardian
4. The road of trials or ordeals (meeting with a goddess, atonement with father, the hero’s magic flight, the reward)
5. The return of hero (to share his blessings with the community).

This typical mythical hero is depicted as a god, a prophet, a saint, a world-redeemer or a lover. The whole journey of the hero is explained in a nutshell by Campbell as:–

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won. The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men. (2014:28)

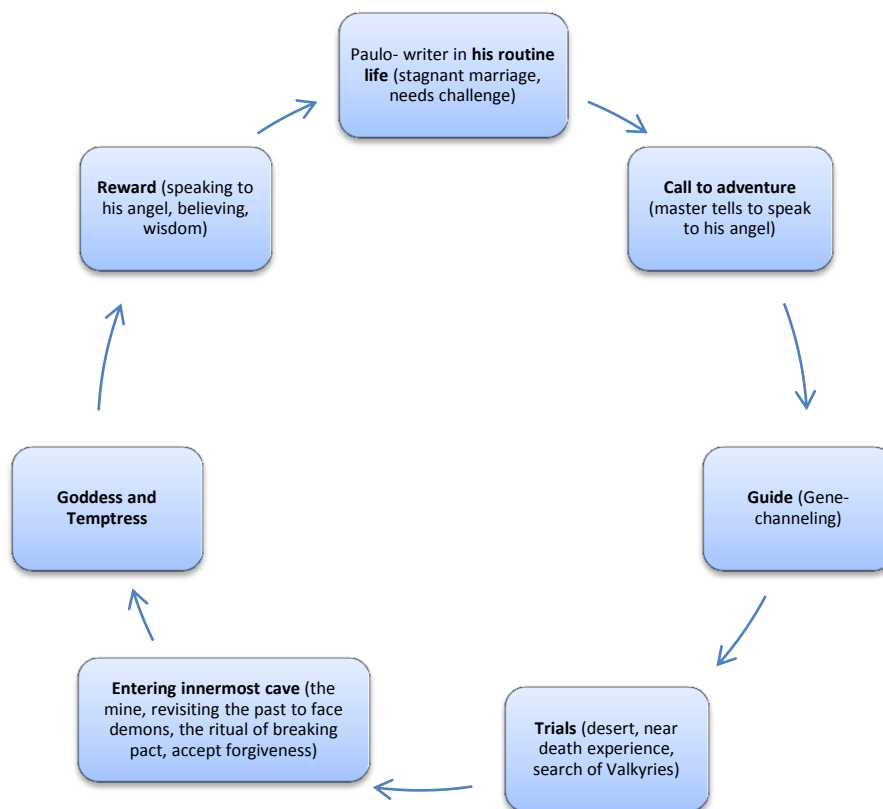
Christopher Vogler, in his *The Writer's Journey*, presents his own version of the mythical hero's journey as a 'set of principles for living' and 'a manual for the art of being human' (2007: xiii). According to Vogler, all kinds of stories, and not only myths of adventure, trace the stages of the Hero's journey and the protagonist of every story is the hero on a journey. For Vogler, the hero's journey can be a guide not only for art, literature and movies, but also can give an insight about people's own lives and ordeals. It can provide abundant time-tasted strategies for survival, success and happiness. Vogler's hero journey model is similar to that of Campbell's, with the following stages:

1. Hero in the Ordinary World
2. The Call to Adventure
3. Refusal of the Call
4. Meeting with the Mentor
5. Crossing the First Threshold
6. Tests, Allies, Enemies
7. Approach to the Inmost Cave
8. The Ordeal
9. The Reward
10. The Road Back
11. Resurrection
12. Return with the Elixir

This paper analyzes *The Valkyries* with reference to an eclectic model (Fig.1) based on these two models by Campbell and Vogler.

Paulo's journey of foreshadowing in the desert progresses in the following manner:

1. Hero in his Ordinary World: Paulo, in novel, is a 39 years old writer. He has studied magic for seven years. His spiritual master 'J' teaches Paulo about the never-failing love, about the intricate paths of magic and about



(Fig.1 The Narrator's Journey in *The Valkyries*)

life-transforming forces. J knows that Paulo will eventually realize his greatest dream i.e. to be a famous writer.

However, as he knows his disciple very well, he worries that Paulo might feel that he does not deserve what he receives. There is one more issue in Paulo's life. He feels that his marriage has become stagnant. 'He needed some strong passion in his love, in his work, in almost everything he did in his life' (85). It is not just the spiritual search that he has embarked on. He has got fed up with his marriage, though he loves his wife and so it is complicated.

2. Call to Adventure:

J gives Paulo a new task. Human beings are cursed as they always destroy the things they love. Paulo himself has seen his dreams falling apart just at the moment of achievement. He is aware that in nature, everything that moves needs to pause at some time. The same is true of his relation, love, work and adventure. However, if his dissatisfaction and restlessness continues, nothing in his life would last for long. He would destroy all that he loves in frustration. But J tells him that this curse can be broken if Paulo completes the task and the task is: 'to speak to his guardian angel'.

3. The Guide:

The journey of Paulo and his wife Chris begins from Los Angeles. In the Mojave Desert, Paulo and Chris meet Gene, a Master in the Tradition. He is only 18 years old, but knows a great deal about most of the mystic spiritual sects, reincarnation, Sufism, the Church etc. He is powerful in the paranormal processes and has already seen and talked with his angel and has learnt it from the Valkyries.

First, he teaches them about 'the second mind' or the unconscious. The second mind is something that goes on at the back of our mind. It keeps working continuously without our wish or control. So we have two minds working at the same time. To have an access to the invisible world and develop one's intuitive powers, one has to live in the present, the here and now; and for that one has to control the second mind. The individuation process begins with our confrontation with our dark unconscious. The two parts of our mind- the conscious and the unconscious- are to be separated. When we control the unconscious thoughts and concentrate on the conscious mind, we are 'here and now' and we are able to acknowledge our Persona and Shadows as well. So, for Paulo and Chris, to take their first step towards their goal, they must learn to be in the present. With Gene's guidance they learn to grow their souls by 'looking at the horizon' and feel free. They learn 'Channeling' their mind towards the unknown.

4. The Trials:

Paulo and Chris walk into the vast and dangerous desert. They lose the dimensions and sense of time. Gradually panic, fear, irritation and exhaustion sets in. In the heat of desert, they feel exhausted, light-hearted and euphoric. Chris feels relaxed and free, while Paulo cares about nothing. Even their nakedness (they have removed their clothes due to the heat) does not bother them. They keep thinking about the appearance of their angels. The extreme tiredness due to dehydration in the desert sun leaves them with a near death experience. When they are at the edge of sanity, they are rescued by a man. Gene feels that when we start to think about our angels, they begin to manifest themselves through others in the beginning and soon, their presence becomes real. The truck driver who rescues them is an instrument of Paulo's angel and it conveys them that it really exists. They are told to look for the Valkyries to learn more about the angels.

The next stage of their journey is their search for the Valkyries. Valkyries live in the desert, moving to different places all the time. Paulo and Chris find the clues left behind by the Valkyries, follow them and reach the place where they finally meet them at a luncheonette. They are eight women in black leather jackets and colourful bandannas over their faces. The eldest of them, Valhalla, instantly gets attracted towards Paulo. Chris, having achieved certain powers (premonitions) through channeling, feels that something strange is going to happen between Paulo and Valhalla. He tells Valhalla that he wants to 'see' his angel, since he already knows how to speak with him. To convince her, he reveals his secret identity as a magus of the Tradition. Further, Paulo explains his desperate need of her help. The unknown is becoming too familiar to him, which is really dangerous. The challenge of 'seeing' his angel will cure him of the idea that his achievements so far are too small. He will continue loving his rewards and that is his main task. Valhalla agrees to help him and introduces three conditions to converse with one's angel - 'Break a pact. Accept forgiveness. And make a bet' (99).

5. Entering the Innermost Cave:

As the first step towards his goal, Paulo needs to slay his personal demons. In an abandoned gold mine, Valhalla orders him to break his pact with the darkness. When Paulo was 26 years old, he had already practiced magic for six years. He wrote songs with the mantras from magical ritual. Whoever sang those songs would be invoking the forces of darkness. He prospered on account of his occult studies and power of magic. One morning, when he was alone at home, he felt dizzy and engulfed by darkness. It was not any drug hallucination. He felt as if something was pulling him into a black hole and heard noises of laughter, things breaking. It was real. It was something he and his friends had aroused during their magic rituals. It was the price of invoking the evil. He repented for denouncing God and felt ashamed of his weakness. He and his girlfriend made an exchange with the

Lord, offering everything in return for the salvation of their souls. They were saved from damnation due to the pact with God. For many years, he lived in terror. He had made a pact to abandon his dreams and paid the price for seven years. Later, he tried to rebuild his life. Every time he achieved success, something ruined it. Actually, he promised himself that he wouldn't grow again. Thus, he destroyed his beloved dreams. More than the Lord, he himself had been severe to himself.

He has never been able to feel calm since his tryst with the evil. He is afraid that his successful life- a loving wife, his Master J, his books- will be destroyed. He is ashamed of himself to confess his timidity because of his ego. He promises Valhalla that he won't ever interfere in God's will and action. When he comes out of the mine, he passes the threshold into a world of light leaving behind the darkness he had inhabited for years. For years, he has thought that God has punished him, but he himself has punished him to destruction. This realization helps him in breaking the pact. He is relieved by the feeling that in future, he would face the problems in love, work and magic with the help of his angel. Thus, Paulo's faith in the Divine is restored.

Paulo and Chris follow the Valkyries in the desert from place to place for a month. The Valkyries preach people at gatherings about the approaching new age and the open gates of heaven. It will be 'the world of people who are able to see the transformations that are occurring, of people who have the courage to pursue their dreams and listen to angels' (142). Only the person who is not ashamed to follow his heart and able to talk to angels can enter the gates of heaven. Ordinary people stop following their dreams as they have duties to follow, responsibilities to fulfill. Humans are manifestation of the God. Those who believe this will be able to see the transformation in the world and the open gates. Paulo believes in this new world (actually an old world newly remembered) and that's why he has travelled so far to find the angel.

They continue travelling in the desert. Paulo and Chris practise channeling and talk with their angel. The channel is not opened completely. Yet, they feel the presence of angels through feelings of protection, love and peace. During these sessions, they hear unknown phrases, have intuitions and feel joy. They are sure that their angels are happy at being spoken to.

The second trial for Paulo is to perform the 'Ritual that Demolishes Rituals' and accept forgiveness by using hatred. In the ravines of the Golden Canyon, Paulo and Chris meet the Valkyries. Paulo has to act like a victorious warrior in his castle. Rotha, the youngest Valkyrie, has to perform the role of a humiliated prisoner of war. She is punished by Paulo who wants to extract a secret from her. In the beginning, it is very difficult for Paulo to torture and humiliate his victim. But soon, the demons are left loose in him. Paulo is shocked to see his capability of cruelty. In his life, he has always forgiven others because of his cowardice. He has nourished hatred for years and has been forgiven by others, but never learnt to forgive them in return. He has believed that happiness is not for him and he is unworthy of blessings, and so has suffered greatly. At the end of the enactment of hatred, Valhalla evokes the four elements of nature. It is opening the channels of universal energy and using it for healing of the wounded souls. "And for this we accept forgiveness. There is no more guilt, and we can return to paradise (186)...the gates are open. We are worthy to enter"(187), she declares. Her role in Paulo's quest is over. She has taught him to break the pact and accept forgiveness. The last trial of making a bet with his angel has to be performed on his own. So, the Valkyries leave Paulo and Chris and the two continue traveling in the desert.

6. The Reward:

Paulo is very anxious to see his angel as only two days are left of their journey, and he will soon have to return to his routine life. So, frustrated, he makes the bet with his angel. This is the third and last stage of reaching his goal. Then he goes out to the desert alone for the last time. This part of the journey helps him to restore his faith in his angel as well as his true love. He has spent 38 days in the desert, away from his routine life in the city. His soul has died many times and revived the process of encountering his guardian angel. He faces death, is humiliated and reenters the darkness of his psyche. He discovers that he has never accepted God's forgiveness though he talks about it. He falls in love with the Valkyrie woman, his fantasy. However, he realizes that the fascination with Valhalla would not have lasted for long. As soon as the real person behind the imagined face is revealed, they would have fled away from each other. With his wife Chris, Paulo shares his weaknesses, hatred and frustrations. She has stood with him in all odds. He learns the difference between infatuation (which is a spice to life and he would like to experience it again) and love (which is worth everything and can't be exchanged with anything in this world). At the beginning of this journey, he has felt that his marriage is doomed and he has lost his wife forever. However, by the end of the journey, he finds her again (though she is a changed person herself). He believes in true love now.

Paulo makes a bet with his angel in the name of all his faith in God, life, work and his Master; so that his angel shows up. One has to believe and pass on the belief to the next generation – the belief that angels exist to guide and protect us and we need them. Paulo's angel dictates him to write a passage from Isaiah – of hope that has been forgotten by the humanity. For Paulo, it is a miracle. Soon 'an intense light' shines near him and the angel writes his name on the sand. He departs with the final words – "Believe. The gates are open for a while"(233).

Paulo's last introspection is the rewarding self-realization that—

We are responsible for everything that happens in this world. We are the warriors of the light. With the strength of our love and of our will, we can change our destiny, as well as the destiny of many others. (240-41)

Paulo Coelho wants to convey this philosophy to his readers. According to the Tradition, there will be a new sophisticated war between the believers in human race and its gifts; and those who deny the future. The angles will show us the right path in this war. One has to find his guardian angel through processes like channeling and develop the spiritual powers. To save our planet and heal humanity, it is important to believe in love-of God and our fellow beings. We have to accept our defects and believe that we deserve a happy life. As Coelho has argued in his novel *The Pilgrimage*, Love that consumes all i.e. agape is stronger than all injustice and evil in this world. It helps us to grow and become a part of the transformation in this changing world. Being able to love, we will be able to understand the miracles and magic of love. With this wisdom, Paulo completes his task and his journey in *The Valkyries* ends.

Works Cited:

- Coelho, Paulo. *The Valkyries: An Encounter with Angels*. Translated by Alan R. Clarke, 20th ed., HarperCollins, 2012.
- . *The Pilgrimage: A Contemporary Quest for Ancient Wisdom*. Translated by Alan Clarke, 16th ed., HarperCollins, 2007.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton University Press, ed. 2014.
- Campbell, Joseph, and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. Anchor Books, 1991.
- Joshi, Shruti M. *Paulo Coelho's Select Fiction: A Study in Inspirational literature*. A Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Dec.2017.
- Lynch, Gordon. *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty First Century*. I.B. Tauris, 2007.
- Thaker, Mrinalini. *A Critical Study of Paulo Coelho's Novels*. Paradise Publishers, 2014.
- Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure For Writers*. 3rd ed., Michael Wiese Production, 2007.
- Whitworth, Belinda. *New Age Encyclopedia: A Mind-Body-Spirit Reference Guide*. New Page Books, 2003.