

## Selfies of the Soul: Spiritual Regeneration in New Age Fiction

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### Abstract:

*People are acutely responsive to how others perceive, evaluate, and feel about them. The handprint drawings on Cave walls to the latest smartphone self-portraits or 'Selfie' clearly demonstrate people's obsession for a pictorial representation of the self. We live in a world where hedonistic materialism and instant gratification have seeped deep into our culture and psyche. The great malady of the twentieth century implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is 'loss of soul', and loss of meaning. But deep inside the core of every person, soul selfies exist. No society in human history has successfully maintained moral life without the aid of religion. Soul selfies are the religious lens through which we look at our lives. In a postmodern world there are no universal religious or ethical laws, everything is shaped by the cultural context of a particular time and place and community. Most often rejecting reason and science, New Age religion or New Age spirituality arose as a discontent with traditional religious beliefs. Some of the most celebrated contemporary fiction captures and reflects this turbulent situation of spiritual engagement, uncertainty, and experimentation. The objective of my presentation is to examine 'Paradigms of Spiritual Regeneration in New Age Fiction'. With this intent, a comparative study of the novels *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho (Brazilian), and *The Immortals of Meluah* by Amish Tripathi (Indian), which are considered as best sellers in the spiritual genre, is taken up and analyzed thematically.*

**Key words:** Selfies of the soul, religion, spirituality, New Age fiction, *The Alchemist*, *The Immortals of Meluah*, spiritual regeneration

## **Introduction**

Human beings, as social animals, have always been driven by the need for approval and self-affirmation. People are acutely responsive to how others perceive, evaluate, and feel about them. But at the same time we also need to approve of ourselves in order to feel true inner peace and security. Self-expression has always been a motive behind painting, music and literature. Life experiences, human emotions, and triumph or failures of society were the inspiration for poems, songs and legends which were transmitted to succeeding generations orally as well as in the written form. These forms were shared for a number of reasons- of gaining adoration from others, reveling in successes of the past, coping with grief, and finding an ability to relate with one another despite vastly differing life stories (Coombs 222). The deep rooted human desire for a pictorial representation of the self can be traced back to the early handprint paintings on walls more than 4,000 years ago. The rise of the painted portrait in Renaissance Europe helped to deepen people's sense of individuality. Today, technology allows us to control how others perceive us. Although photographic self-portraits have been around since 1839, it was not until the invention of the compact digital camera that the 'selfie' boomed into popularity. These smartphone self-portrait or 'selfie' is the new form of self-expression of the digital age which bolsters visibility and individual presence online. They are almost like a visual diary and is viewed as an extension of our natural construction of self.

The Self is both the most basic and the most difficult human problem- that is presumably why philosophers, anthropologists and psychologists from Plato onwards have

grappled with it. The Self maybe an illusion, at best an artifact in constant process of re-creation. There is probably some continuity between the idea of the soul and that of the self. Soul speaks of a person's relation to divinity, while 'Self' speaks of a person's relation, both to others and oneself-though Soul may in part serve this function too. The great malady of the twentieth century implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is 'loss of soul', and loss of meaning. But deep inside the core of every person, soul selfies exist. The Greek philosopher Socrates had a strong sense of the value of a virtuous life. He said, "An unexamined life is not worth living". Most people avoid leading an examined life. It's not that they don't have time or make time. They just actively avoid examining their lives. But when a person starts doing so they begin to get to know themselves better and to realize the true meaning and value of their lives. Soul selfies are the religious lens through which we look at our lives and which provides us with a wide-angle view - a transcendent perspective from which we see more clearly our connectedness: who we are, where we fit in, and what we ought to do. Just like with the Selfie pictures we show to others, the ones we show to ourselves leave an impact. They are the deepest, most firmly believed snapshots of who we are. Soul selfies are what dictate and impact how we view our own identity.

We live in a world where hedonistic materialism and instant gratification have seeped deep into our culture and psyche. Gone from the postmodern mind is Aristotle's "golden mean", his wisdom that happiness comes not from pleasure, prosperity or fame, but from a life lived in accordance with moral virtue, tempered behavior and a moderate possession of wealth (Young 112). The dominating ideals and principles in the formation of character that influenced Greek philosophy and art and eventually shaped Western civilization are now mostly forgotten or sidelined. No society in human history has successfully maintained moral life without the aid of religion.

While it is true that Christianity has played the greatest role in shaping the new Western civilization, the present postmodern society considers religion as superstition. Most often rejecting reason and science, New Age religion or New Age spirituality arose as a discontent with traditional religious beliefs. The so called New Age Religion is not a religion at all, but a vast syncretism (or mixing) of numerous religious and philosophical ideas. In a postmodern world there are no universal religious or ethical laws, everything is shaped by the cultural context of a particular time and place and community. For postmodernists every society is in a state of constant change; there are no absolute values, only relative ones; nor are there any absolute truths. In a postmodern world individuals work with their religious impulses, by selecting the bits of various spiritualities that 'speak to them' and create their own internal spiritual world. Some of the most celebrated contemporary fiction captures and reflects this turbulent situation of spiritual engagement, uncertainty, and experimentation.

The objective of my presentation is to examine 'Paradigms of Spiritual Regeneration in New Age Fiction'. This paper demarcates a specific field of study by analyzing popular works of spiritual fiction, than spirituality as it has been found in 'literature' throughout world history. Therefore the objective of this paper is to define and analyse the 'new age spiritual genre'; the reason why they are in demand and to study how spirituality has today come to embody the 're-enactment' of the modern west, acquiring resonance even in India. It is an interdisciplinary study as the enquiry tries to merge the scholastic methodologies of cultural studies, with that of theology, philosophy, cultural anthropology, travel narratives and also psychology. With this intent, a comparative study of the novels *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho (Brazilian), and *The Immortals of Meluah* by Amish Tripathi (Indian), which are considered as best sellers in the spiritual genre, is taken up and analyzed thematically to bring out the elements which make

them suitable for the certain basic 'formulaic' structure of New Age Fiction.

The modern fiction landscape is being bombarded by an assortment of refreshing styles of writing. Many of the New Age fictions are on the borderlands of religion and popular imagination. The ever-increasing boom in the popularity of New Age fictions in many ways parallels the growth of the New Age religious movement since the mid-1970s. During the 1980s-90s the term 'New Age' was consolidated in popular terminology as a standard expression conveying a general idea of alternative cultural trends, particularly connoting ideas and practices concerned with 'spirituality' (Selling 183). Alternative/ New Age Spirituality has been deeply researched of late by sociologist like Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, religious studies scholars like Daren Kemp, Michael York, Steven Sutcliffe and theologians like J. Gordon Melton. Their studies give us a deeper understanding, historicizing the movement and placing it in perspective. But their studies are mostly limited to sociological ethnographic accounts whereas Adam Possamai, another sociologist has linked this phenomenon with popular culture and has done considerable work in the field of documenting *religion in popular fiction*.

The study of religion, media and popular culture is a maturing discipline and is associated with the creation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1964. Possamai documents the rise of religions in popular fiction to have been motivated by popular film series like *The Star Wars* and *The Matrix*. While the visionary mode of writing with its specific content appears throughout the literature of numerous cultures in many ages, the term "Visionary Fiction" has only recently come into vogue. Since Visionary Fiction concerns itself with consciousness and its evolution, it requires a spiritual component. Its focus is on the mystical inner journey of spiritual awakening. Besides telling a good story, VF enlightens and encourages readers to expand

their awareness of greater possibilities. Visionary Fiction embraces spiritual and esoteric wisdom, often from ancient sources, and makes it relevant for our modern life. However, as Gurian notes, it should not be equated with religious fiction: “Religious fiction is a phrase that generally means Christian fiction.” Where religious literature is pre-structured by a religion, ‘new age literature’ tends to be the opposite: employing loose adventure formats which can be laden with personal wisdom teaching. The topography or structure of the narrative is not very important in new age literature: the teaching is most important. Unlike Visionary fiction, in Spiritual fiction (as in new age literature), spirituality rather than mental ability drives the plot. Given its spiritual component, VF works are often found in some combination with spiritual and new age fiction. Gurian recognizes this and qualifies himself by noting that “a lot of visionary fiction is very spiritual” and acknowledging that “in the publishing market, visionary fiction, spiritual fiction, new age fiction and even new age nonfiction all blur together for marketing purposes.” Many works of speculative fiction/fantasy (paranormal, supernatural, utopian, dystopian, apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, science fiction, magical realism, alternative history) have substance beyond the sensational and purpose beyond entertainment, some enough to be classified as VF. What all these new age novels have in common is that the authors weave spiritual and metaphysical themes into strong story lines that keep readers want to get lost in an enthralling story that captivates their emotions and nourishes their spirit.

Other works that very pertinently link ‘religious’ overtones to postmodern English fictions include Fantasy fiction (a popular example being the *Twilight* series) which are often found in conjunction with New Age specialty books in book stores. There is more often than not a discernable overlap of content (themes, imagery, and ideas) and readership between Fantasy literature and other New Age groups, and one can

regard fantasy as forming an important part of the imaginative discourse of the cultural milieu. Such analysis of the 'literary' especially the 'popular' in conjunction with 'culture', gives an insight into the interrelationships between popular culture and postmodern 'religion' and points out the void that remains in the field of scholarship on New Age Fiction. It is a matter of concern that the thriving popular fiction with New Age content has not been seriously undertaken, nor has its expanse been documented. It has often been overlooked although sociologists and theologians focus on New Age Religious Movements and lifestyles and its resultant corporate culture. On a related plane, the 'self-help genre' has attracted some academic scrutiny, mostly from a market studies perspective.

As noted by F.R. Leavis, literary study delimits a particular field for itself, the high cultural or canonical tradition, by excluding from it the texts of mass or popular culture. A critical exploration of their *alternative* stances regarding established or institutionalized religions is made not to make any value judgment on authors or texts but rather to analyse texts for generic conventions and thus establish the reasons for their popularity at this specific point of time in history and also to understand the authors' capacity to envisage myths imaginatively.

Post-modern religion encourages a disintegration of old dichotomies such as fact and fiction, real and imaginary. A synthesis of some traditional ideas with a new slant often result in a hybrid cocktail of beliefs and practices highlighting the perennial need of individuals for community and identity which is still an important aspect of being human. As a result, historical accuracy is often dismissed or re-worked in the search for something that is felt should be present for all of us, but is now missing. Legends become history, and fiction reality, dissolving the real and the imaginary. Identity is continually negotiated, often mythologized, and sometimes re-invented. What were once considered fixed religious frameworks, based

on inerrant texts, become experimental forms based on individual preferences; boundaries are open, permeable, and unpredictable. The spiritual quest also takes individuals on voyages of discovery to distant places.

The journey is universally recognized as a narrative in many cultures. Since the earliest times, the act of travelling, of proceeding from one place to another, has been seen as a natural metaphor-- for learning, for the acquisition of knowledge and experience. Indeed the metaphor of travel pervades Western literature. But all metaphors of travel are not alike in their implications, although 'journey archetype' lies at the heart of many well known works. Some of these journeys now form the core of our folklore, history and myth. In fact, "travelling is one of the oldest and largest clusters of metaphors in any language" (Adams 14). The Greek Epics contain different types of journey—the quest, the odyssey, and the adventure, all of which have served as powerful master plots in literary narratives. The different stages of travel--departure, voyage, encounters on the road, and return--provide any story with a temporal structure and at the same time help the readers to understand the personal life and mental development of the traveller. As a voyage of self discovery, of exploring new landscapes or as an escape from a stress filled situation, the travel thus inscribed is not only a geographic and cultural process but also a metaphor for the enabling movement of thought itself.

All cultures are "travelling cultures" (Clifford, 1997: 17-46) and cultural identity is "the result of negotiation and intercultural transfer, for the powerful as well as the powerless, for "natives as well as strangers" (Koshar, 7). As Bakhtin opines for the traveller the journey is "the process of becoming" and "awareness of idea of oneself through experience of the other" (115). In Literature, the notion of travel is closely related with the notion of telling / writing. It is often said that travellers have stories to tell. However all metaphors of travel are not



alike in their implications. According to Clark (1998, 2000) travel as a metaphor can be illuminating because travel puts people into situations where they must act in ‘conjunction and connection’ with unfamiliar others. As we travel, we encounter images that prompt us “to identify ourselves and our desires with the landscape, by asking ourselves how any man would fare who had to live in it.” As travelers we experience in each new place “a concrete, three-dimensional, shared reality” within which we must, at least imaginatively, identify ourselves (343). In Burkean terms, what travelers encounter are alternative “scenes” for both identity and action, and those scenes are the “grounds for identification” (Clark 49). Travel is the great metaphor for embarking on a journey of emotional, psychological, and spiritual growth. All travel is inner travel, a way of finding out more about us. Many trips continue in the mind long after movement in space and time has ceased.

Many mythological narratives talk about such journeys, both geographical as well those that lead to spiritual growth and regeneration. The perennial myths are those that persevere and project a timeless truth which points the way to our ultimate destiny. To pursue this destiny is the hero’s journey. Joseph Campbell’s monomyth, or the hero’s journey, described in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), is a basic pattern that its proponents argue is found in many narratives from around the world. Campbell held that numerous myths from disparate times and regions share fundamental structures and stages. In a monomyth, the hero begins in the ordinary world, and receives a call to enter an unknown world of strange powers and events. The hero who accepts the call to enter this strange world must face tasks and trials, either alone or with assistance. In the most intense versions of the narrative, the hero must survive a severe challenge, often with help. If the hero survives, he may achieve a great gift or “boon”. The hero must then decide whether to return to the ordinary world with this boon. If the hero does

decide to return, he or she often faces challenges on the return journey. If the hero returns successfully, the boon or gift may be used to improve the world. Campbell describes 17 stages or steps along this journey. Very few myths contain all 17 stages. These 17 stages may be organized in a number of ways, including division into three sections: *Departure* (sometimes called *Separation*), *Initiation*, and *Return*. “Departure” deals with the hero’s adventure prior to the quest; “Initiation” deals with the hero’s many adventures along the way; and “Return” deals with the hero’s return home with knowledge and powers acquired on the journey.

Most of the New Age Fictions like *The Alchemist*, *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Celestine Prophecy*, *Chasing Rumi*, *Where Pharaoh’s Dwell*, *Bridges* all deal with the journey motif. The protagonists of all these novels undertake journey that lead to inner transformation. According to Brazilian storyteller Paulo Coelho, journeys liberate us from what society tries to impose on us, and being who we want to be. You never repeat some experiences in your life. Most experiences provoke a transformation in you. So, when you live something, live it fully because you never know when this is going to happen again and not only that, if it even happens again, it will not have the same impact. Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* is the magical story of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who yearns to travel in search of a priceless worldly treasure. From his home in Spain he journeys to the markets of Tangiers and across the Egyptian desert to a fateful encounter with the alchemist which transforms his life. In the first book of the Shiva Trilogy, *The Immortals of Meluha* by Amish Tripathi, we travelled with the Tibetan chieftain Shiva as he explored the land of ancient India, more than 4000 years ago, in search of his destiny. Patricia Cori’s *Where Pharaoh’s Dwell* is based on her horrifying experience which propels her on a journey of exploration into the question of human immortality, leading her back to Egypt, again and again where she unravels the origins

of the ancient Egyptians' obsession with the resurrection of the soul in the novel. In Roger Housden's *Chasing Rumi*, Georgiou, a young Greek icon painter, is compelled to travel from the hills and piazzas of Florence to the green domed mosques of Konya, Turkey, on discovering a poem by the thirteenth-century Sufi dervish Rumi. Through encounters with Christian and Islamic mystics, and guided by forces he cannot name, Georgiou gradually learns to follow his own heart. James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* narrates the main character's journey to find and understand a series of nine spiritual insights on an ancient manuscript in Peru and is about spiritual awakening. W. S. Williamson's *Bridges* is about Jessie, a young American woman journey into the heart of Africa and halfway around the world to Europe and South America, through three different cultures on three different continents and crosses into an unknown dimension of human existence.

*The Alchemist* presents a simple fable, based on simple truths. Paulo Coelho introduces Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who one night dreams of a distant treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. And so he sets off: leaving Spain to literally follow his dream. Along the way he meets many spiritual messengers, who come in unassuming forms such as a camel driver and a well-read Englishman. In one of the Englishman's books, Santiago first learns about the alchemists--men who believed that if a metal were heated for many years, it would free itself of all its individual properties, and what was left would be the "Soul of the World". Of course he does eventually meet an alchemist, and the ensuing student-teacher relationship clarifies much of the boy's misguided agenda, while also emboldening him to stay true to his dreams. "My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy confides to the alchemist one night as they look up at a moonless night. "Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself," the alchemist replies. "And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every

second of the search is a second encounter with God and with eternity". An old man, the king of Salem, the first of various spiritual guides, tells the boy that he has discovered his destiny: "to realize one's destiny is a person's only real obligation". So Santiago sells his sheep, sails to Tangier, is tricked out of his money, regains it through hard work, crosses the desert with a caravan, stops at an oasis long enough to fall in love, escapes from warring tribesmen by performing a miracle, reaches the pyramids, and eventually gets both the gold and the girl. In literature, the metaphor of a desert is frequently used to suggest a barren point in one's life, and just as his fellow travelers in the journey of life find highs and lows along the way, it is no coincidence that Paulo Coelho has moved his protagonist from Spain to Egypt across the Sahara. Although the desert is a place devoid of life Santiago meets both Fatima, the girl he loves, and the alchemist, the mentor who will help him fulfill his Personal Legend, at the oasis of Al-Fayoum. The oasis in literature represents a place of healing and regeneration, and in Santiago's case it is of both his body and spirit. Water and trees abound, and the oasis is literally teeming with life, especially of the human variety. Santiago saves the lives of thousands by interpreting his vision for the village chieftains. Although he is tempted to stay on at the oasis as counselor to be with Fatima, he knows the alchemist is right in urging him onward to first finish what he has started. While it was the Englishman who describes the Soul of the World, it is the desert woman Fatima, who teaches him the Language of the World; and an alchemist who says, 'Listen to your heart". It was Santiago's repeated dreams about the treasure by the Pyramids that awaken his spirit to venture beyond the confines of his homeland to discover more about himself and about life. Unlike the baker whose youthful ambition to venture further in life was surpassed by his wish for comfort and stability, Santiago is able to prioritize discovery of his own Personal Legend over all else. He at first doubts the

meaning of his dream, and hesitates to heed the gypsy fortuneteller in setting out for Egypt. But the appearance of the spiritual king Melchizedek persuades him that he must embark on this quest to be at peace with himself. We accompany Santiago on the journey of self-growth; witness how he overcomes challenges and how despair does not bring him down.

Amish Tripathi, the popular Indian writer, felt that his life was devoid of any meaning or self. Ultimately he decided to take the spiritual route. He started reading on different philosophies and the Indian mythologies. Once while watching a program he learned that in ancient Persia, demons were known as Devas (a term reserved for the Gods in Indian mythology), and angels were called Asuras (a term reserved for demons in Indian mythology). He claims, "It set me thinking that this was exact opposite of our Vedic etymology where evil was Asura and gods were Devas. It struck me that if the two civilizations were to confront each other, they would be at stark odds and calling each other evil". Tripathi felt that no subject was better than Shiva, one of the major Hindu deities and the destroyer of evil; his journey and stories about him would deliver the philosophy that he wanted to convey, to his readers. He noted that the Hindu Gods were probably not "mythical beings or a figment of a rich imagination", but rather they were once human beings like the rest. It was their deeds in the human life that made them famous as Gods.

In his most famous novel, *The Immortals of Meluah*, Amish Tripathi follows the hero, Shiva's journey from Tibet to India. Shiva, as a young warrior is fighting for his tribe high in the Himalayas at the banks of the legendary Mansarovar Lake, unaware of his destiny as the saviour of men. Meluha is a near perfect empire created by Lord Ram and follows the dharmic way of life. The inhabitants of Meluha, the Suryavanshis are awaiting the arrival of the *neelkanth*, the blue throated savior but the cannabis smoking hero is not sure if he is the one. But

soon he realizes that he has to become *Mahadev* and save the world. The Suryavanshis of Meluha are immortal due to the consumption of somaras-the magic potion created by mixing a few things with the water of the sacred river Saraswati. The once proud empire and its Suryavanshi rulers face severe crises as its primary river, the sacred Saraswati, is slowly drying to extinction putting the somaras production at risk. They also face bold and devastating terrorist attacks from the east, the land of the Chandravanshis who have joined forces with the Nagas, a cursed race with physical deformities. The present king of Meluha, Daksha, sends his emissaries to North India in Tibet to invite the brave tribal Chieftain of the Gunas, Shiva to Meluha. Shiva accepts the invitation and moves to Meluha with his tribe. On the way, they halt at Srinagar and are received by Ayurvati, the Chief of Medicine of the Meluhans. Shiva and his tribe are impressed with the Meluhan way of life. On their first night of stay at Srinagar, the Gunas wake up amid high fever and sweating. The Meluhans, under Ayurvati's orders, carry on the healing process. However, Ayurvati finds out that Shiva is the only one devoid of these symptoms and that his throat has turned blue. The Meluhans announce Shiva as the Neelkanth, their fabled saviour.

Shiva is then taken to Devagiri, the capital city of Meluha, where he meets King Daksha. While staying there, Shiva and his comrades, Nandi and Veer Bhadra, encounter a beautiful and mysterious woman, who has a look of penance on her face. They later come to know that she is Princess Sati, the daughter of Daksha and is a Vikarma, an untouchable in this life due to sins committed in her previous births. Shiva tries to court her, but she rejects his advances. Ultimately Shiva wins her heart and they decide to get married, even though the Vikarma rule prohibits them from doing so. Enraged by the so-called obsolete law, Shiva declares himself as the Neelkanth and swears to dissolve the Vikarma law. Daksha allows Sati to get married to Shiva, amid much joy and happiness.

In *The Immortals*, the interpretation of caste and the concept of 'vikarma' are quite thought provoking. In the 'perfect' society of Meluha all women give birth to their children and give them up to the State to bring up. This is known as the 'maika system. Every child is given equal opportunity and takes up a profession as per his or her natural talents. In this way the privileges of caste and class become irrelevant and a just and fair society is created. Families adopt a child at age 16. Under the same system, those affected by misfortune (eg the handicapped or a woman who gives birth to a stillborn) are known as *vikarmas*-- a carrier of bad fate and therefore an untouchable. They have an inferior status in society and accept this as their Fate. The logic being that it is frustration inside a person which creates rebellion and discontent in society.

During his stay in Devagiri, Shiva comes to know of the treacherous wars that the Chandravanshis are carrying on the Meluhans. He also meets Brahaspati, the Chief Inventor of the Meluhans. Brahaspati invites Shiva and the royal family on an expedition to Mount Mandar where the legendary Somaras is manufactured using the waters of the Saraswati river. Shiva learns that the potion which made his throat turn blue was actually undiluted Somaras, which can be lethal when taken in its pure form. However, Shiva was unaffected, which was the first sign that he was the Neelkanth. He also learns that Somaras was the reason why the Meluhans lived for so many years. Brahaspati and Shiva develop a close friendship and the royal family returns to Devagiri. One morning, the whole of Meluha wakes up to loud noises coming from Mount Mandar. Shiva and his troops reach the hill to find out that a large part of Mandar has been blasted off and many of the inventors killed. There is no sign of Brahaspati, but Shiva finds the insignia of the Nagas, confirming their involvement in the treacherous wars of the Chandravanshis.

Enraged by this, Shiva declares war on the Chandravanshis. With consultation from the Devagiri Chief

Minister Kanakhla and the Head of Meluhan Army, Parvateshwar, Shiva advances towards Swadweep, the land of the Chandravanshis. A fierce battle is fought between the Meluhans and the Swadweepans in which the Meluhans prevail. The Chandravanshi king is captured but becomes enraged upon seeing the Neelkanth. The Chandravanshi princess Anandmayi explains that they too had a similar legend that the Neelkanth will come forward to save their land by launching an assault against the “evil” Suryavanshis. Hearing this, Shiva is dumbfounded and utterly distressed. With Sati he visits the famous Ram temple of Ayodhya, the capital of Swadweep. There he meets a priest from whom he comes to know about his karma, fate and his choices in life, which would guide him in future. As Shiva comes out of the temple, he notices Sati standing out of the temple waiting for him and a Naga standing near a tree. The book ends with Shiva charging to save Sati. The novel thus narrates Shiva's journey from being a mortal to fulfilling his destiny as Mahadeva.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has examined how New Age spiritual fictions reflect paradigms of spiritual regeneration in the wider social context. The rising popularity of New Age fictions speaks of ordinary readers getting stories that they would describe as positive and triumphalist, where good overcomes evil. One of the attractions of such New Age spiritual fiction is that it is moral in a reassuring way. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida enjoins us to “respect the otherness of the other”. Readings New Age Popular Spiritual fictions clearly offer a fascinating range of encounters with otherness by making us reconsider the very relation between “self” and “other”. The novels examined -*The Alchemist* covers everyday obstacles-losing hope, self-doubt, procrastination, settling, dreams, personal development, love and talks about them without



judgment or ridicule. It just tells the readers how to overcome obstacles in our life journey and why it is so important to challenge those states of mind and attitude that prevent us from fulfilling our destiny. Fighting for one's dreams and listening to one's inner voice is what humans were born to do. We also learn that there are two different types of alchemy: scientific alchemy and spiritual alchemy. While the gold that scientific alchemy yields is tempting, Coelho's beautiful fable teaches us that the spiritual aspect of alchemy is the important one. Santiago's quest for his Personal Legend is full of lessons. The fear of failure prevents many people from realizing their Personal Legends. Settling for "good enough," these people stop listening to their hearts and listen instead to the comforts of having come this far and achieved this much. Coelho touches on religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam but never forces them on the reader. He conveys the message that spirituality comes in a spectrum of forms. Santiago did not give up on his dream because he possessed magical powers but rather because for every downfall he was met with a reminder of how strong he could be if he trusted himself, believed in his dream and permitted the Universe to guide him. These are words all humans have access to and can apply to their everyday lives.

People in India are obsessed with religion and mythology. Amish expertly exploited Indians obsession with Gods and religion. As a mythical fiction, *The Immortals of Meluha* heralds an exciting new wave of fantasy writing inspired by the ancient civilizations of the East. The book lays emphasis more on morality than religion. The most important thing about this book is that it written about Lord Shiva but in a humanized form. Tripathi created a character that had all the characteristics of 'Lord' Shiva and still was a human, just like us. He had problems, he smoked marijuana, he fell in love, he got frustrated, and he had to encounter many problems in course of his life journey. For the first time, people

could related to the God they worshiped. He became one of us. The human character combined with the divine image captured the imagination and attention of Indians like never before. Amish based his story on a radical idea that all Gods were once human beings; it was their deeds in the human life that made them famous as Gods. This was an idea that seems to have appealed to the New Age readers and that is precisely why it has topped the best sellers list.

To conclude, Religion and Spirituality both are paths that lead to God or to that higher consciousness. Modern man is desperately trying to find succor from his personal and public angst and where codified religion seems to have failed, people have turned to New spirituality and to the many new age self-help books and popular spiritual fictions that seems to offer the succor they seek. As an end note, in a seeming paradox, religion too seems to make a comeback although in new forms.

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