

Chapter 4

Cultural Hybridity in Paulo Coelho's Fictional World

“His eyes are those of the hybrid in which there is no single, overriding monofocal vision of reality. Instead, it is a culture of palimpsest in which different cultural surfaces slide over one another, supplanting each other momentarily.” (Hart 311)

Proceeding with the words of Stephen Hart on Coelho, this chapter is a critique on the select novels of Paulo Coelho namely *The Alchemist* (1988), *The Zahir* (2005), *The Witch of Portobello* (2006) and *Aleph* (2010). His select novels are analyzed on the basis of the study of the works by cultural theorists like Ortiz (1970), Rama (1974/1982), Canclini (1989), Gilroy (1993), Bhabha (1994), Hall (1996), Pieterse (1996) and Parekh (2000) on the concept of cultural hybridity and the various phenomena like creolization, transculturation, multiculturalism and cross-culturalism associated it. Coelho is a phenomenal transnational literary symbol and conquers the galaxy of world literature. His works wander over and above the culture they have been created. They have been converted into more than eighty languages and over three hundred fifty million books have been sold worldwide. Paulo Coelho is a great admirer of Jorge Luis Borges. And like Borges' works, Coelho's novels are postmodern allegory with a hint of magic. He has always acknowledged the fact that there is “much of Borges in his works, beginning with *The Alchemist* (1988) that brought him worldwide fame” (Arias viii). Coelho's literary works employ magical realism narrative technique to unearth the protagonist's quest for self-awakening, and all the four novels that are selected for analysis in the context of cultural hybridity include magical realism. As discussed earlier in chapter 3, magic realism is a literary genre with Hispanic origin. It is a postcolonial phenomenon and in the postcolonial discourse, the ambivalent and heterogeneous concepts of culture and identity, the idea of hybrid culture and

identity are interpreted with the technique of magic realism narrative. It places a significant emphasis on illustrating the distinctive features of cultural hybridity, the cross-pollination of cultures as observed in phenomena like transculturation, creolization, multiculturalism and cross-culturalism. He thus, embraces the approach of the 'Third-World cosmopolitans' and employs the concept of magic realism in the context of postcolonial cultural studies, and highlights the aspects of another concept, which is cultural hybridity. As a result, his select novels subtly address the themes like cultural mutation, creolization, hybrid identities, and the mutable state of identity, transculturation, cross-culturalism and multiculturalism, indicating that the author is a transnational personality who represents for his multicultural readership.

4.1. Outline of the Select Novels: Highlighting the Genre of Magic Realism

The genre of magic realism in the narratives of the Coelho's select novels are employed to "depict reality objectively but with a magical dimension" (Hart 115). His fictional world is created through the blending of fantasy and reality. In Coelho's select novels, features of cultural hybridity are depicted using the magic realism technique from the viewpoints of postcolonial cultural studies. The protagonists and other characters in Coelho's narratives interact with the elements from diverse cultures and come to the understanding of their personal legends. They transform their outlooks on life and become transcultural individuals. The characters, aware of the interactions between diverse cultures, acknowledge the phenomenon of cultural hybridity and adapt themselves to the course of cultural alterations. They constantly change by adopting the elements from other cultures. Additionally, they develop transcultural identities in their personalities during this process. *The Alchemist* (1988) is a postmodern allegorical novel. The novel follows the narrative of the journey of Santiago, a young Andalusian shepherd, to the Egyptian pyramids to pursue a treasure on the basis of his faith in his cyclical dream sequences and omens. *The Zahir* published in 2005 is a novel on the themes of love and self-awakening, with autobiographical anecdotes and it has

been translated into forty-four languages. The plot revolves around the narrator, a best-selling novelist in France and his search for his missing wife, Esther. *Zahir* is an Arabic word and it means ‘conspicuous’. It is believed that the term was introduced during the eighteenth century in the Islamic tradition. It means a discernible charisma of a person or a thing, which cannot go unnoticed. As the narrative unfolds it is clear that the narrator is in search of the ‘obvious’, the *zahir* which will define the meaning of his life. And as he pursues the journey to find his missing wife, Esther, it awakens a self-knowledge in him through which he comprehends that the *zahir* of his life is and always has been his wife. *The Witch of Portobello* (2006) is a novel written by Coelho and it is a tale about a woman who was born to a Romani Gipsy mother without wedlock. She was then adopted by a rich Lebanese couple and christened as Sherine Khalil. She, however, rechristened herself as Athena in the later phase of her life. The novel revolves around the life of Athena, her pursuit of self-knowledge, and her personal legend. *Aleph* (2010) is an autobiographical account, Coelho’s quest for self-discovery. The book can also be considered a travelogue; there are descriptions about his journey throughout Europe, Africa and Asia. He considers himself to be a born pilgrim and goes on an incredible journey that is adventurous, completing 9,288 kilometres of the Trans-Siberian railroad from Moscow to Vladivostok which is one of the longest routes in the world. On his journey, he meets other minor characters who help him to gain more knowledge about what he seeks in life. The novel focuses on the concept of the *aleph*, the first letter of the alphabet in a Hebrew word and also in Arabic and Aramaic. It is known as *qi* in Chinese and according to the magical tradition, it is a form of a divine energy. He discovers the point of the *aleph* which further initiates a mystical voyage through time and space, present and past. The names of the chapters are quite interesting – ‘Chinese Bamboo’, ‘Tea Leaves’, ‘The Soul of Turkey’, ‘Hilal’s Eyes’, ‘The Ipatiev House’, etc. and collectively, they symbolize transnationalism.

In *The Alchemist* (1988), the segments of the recurring dream and omens serve as the framework for magic realism. Santiago, the protagonist, resembles “Joseph’s role in the Old Testament” and he is capable of

interpreting the “objective phenomena, rather than simply dreams, as omens of future events” (Hart 309). When he perceives the omen that the *Al-Fayoum* oasis would be attacked, he is already a transcultural individual with a hybrid identity who had come in contact with the other characters from diverse cultures like the Moroccan crystal merchant in Tangier; Melchizedek, King of Salem (present day Jerusalem) in Tarifa, the English merchant and a two hundred years old alchemist in the *Al-Fayoum* oasis. The two hundred years old alchemist who dwells in the *Al-Fayoum* is enigmatic and believed to possess the ultimate knowledge of alchemy, the Master Work that consists of two parts, liquid (the Elixir of Life, antidote for all illness) and solid (Philosopher’s stone, which converts metal to gold). And it is from him, that Santiago learns to connect to the Soul of the World, a positive force that governs all things. He then gains a magical ability to interpret the omens in the desert and comes to understand the world around him. He also discovers that he is capable of performing miracles in the desert. Thus, an Andalusian Christian boy then decodes an omen in a foreign land for the foreigners influenced by a foreign culture, which is the Islamic culture of the alchemist. The omniscient narrator narrates an incident where Santiago reads an omen in the *Al-Fayoum* oasis:

“Suddenly, one of the hawks made a flashing dive through the sky, attacking the other. As it did so, a sudden, fleeting image came to the boy: an army, with its swords at the ready, riding into the oasis.”

(*Alchemist* 105)

The Zahir (2005) includes instances of a Kazakh man entering a trance while experiencing epileptic fits and also specifically whenever he is practicing a kind of a dance form that resembles the Sufi whirling. In the novel, these episodes are conveyed through the narrative technique of magic realism. The dance is a part of the cult Mikhail is involved in. And this cult to which he is involved in was commenced by a French woman, Esther and later guided by Mikhail himself. The cult revolves around the practice which includes the

sessions of spiritual healing through story-telling medium on Thursdays in an Armenian restaurant. The knowledge of this particular cult was given to him by Esther. Then Mikhail creates a new tradition by combining Esther's notion with the one he was nurtured in. The adherents of this new tradition come from a diverse cultural backgrounds. During their meetings, they share folktales from other cultures and experience a collective cathartic moment in which they achieve spiritual ecstasy. In the novel, the unnamed narrator also visits the meetings conducted by Mikhail's cult members few times:

“Mikhail, who appears to be in a trance and is still gazing at some point in the distance, begins: ‘In the words of the Mongolian creation myth...’” (*Zahir* 90)

In *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), the episodes where Athena has hallucinations about the visions of saints and angels include aspects of magic realism. For instance, Athena aka Sherine Khalil told her mother, Samira about the vision where “she'd seen ‘a woman dressed in white, like the Virgin Mary’” (*Witch of Portobello* 23). The narrative technique of magic realism is also employed in the episodes of esoteric dance style (which resembles the dance performed by the sect of Sufism) followed by the cult members of “Pilgrims of the Vertex” guided by Athena. Athena, a Romani gipsy by birth, and raised in a Lebanese culture become transcultural later in her life. She then began a new cult implementing her knowledge gained by encountering cultural elements from the diverse cultures with a group of individuals who called themselves “Pilgrims of the Vertex”. While performing the esoteric dance that she had learned from a Polish man, Pavel Podbielski, she entered into a trance which guided her into an ethereal space in the quest of the so called the Vertex, the highest point. And in the plight of ecstasy, she mutated into the soul of the omniscient Goddess, her divine side and alter ego, Hagia Sofia. In the state of her divine side, Hagia Sofia, she preached and sermonized the individuals of “Pilgrims of the Vertex” sharing her transcultural knowledge and perceptions. Athena also stated that the spiritual world and the earthly world were merged together whenever she performed the esoteric dance. In the novel, Athena

described about her encounters with the spiritual world in the plight of ecstasy which was attained while performing the esoteric dance:

“When you dance, the spiritual world and the real world manage to coexist quite happily.” (*Witch of Portobello* 70)

Likewise, *Aleph* (2010) explores the mysteries of the transcendental world amalgamating it with the real one. The segments where the narrator and Hilal enter the *aleph* are the moments when the narrative technique of magic realism is explicit. The narrator, due to the phenomenon of *aleph* meets Hilal who is a transcultural Turkish woman in love with the Russian culture. *Aleph* is depicted as a gateway through which the narrator and Hilal travel to revisit the realm of their interwoven past life through space and time. It is implied that the concept of *aleph* in the discourse of the novel *Aleph* (2010) is transcultural and transcendent. The narrator expresses his experience at the point of *aleph* in the chapter “Hilal’s Eyes”:

“I’m looking at the light, at a sacred place, and a wave washes over me, filling me with peace and love... I can see myself...at the same time, I can see elephants in Africa...Buenos Aires...mountain in Switzerland...fish in the ocean...– and everything is simultaneously very clear and very large, very small and very quiet. I am in the Aleph, the point at which everything is in the same place at the same time.”
(*Aleph* 78-79)

Thus, all the four novels selected from Coelho’s literary oeuvre incorporate the magical realism genre which assists the narrative perspectives to explore the elements of cultural hybridity.

4.2. Personal Legend And Cultural Hybridity

The protagonists and some of the characters in the select novels of Coelho come across the attributes and individuals from the other cultures, sometimes through rendezvous and at the other times as coincidences. This

kind of interactions initiate dynamic changes in the thought processes of the characters involved and they achieve their ‘personal legends’ through self-enlightenment. In *The Alchemist* (1988), Santiago from Andalusia, throughout his journey to Egypt, meets numerous individuals like Melchizedek (the King of Salem), a Gypsy fortune teller, a Moroccan crystal merchant in Tangier, an Englishman, Fatima (an Arabian tribeswoman in the *Al-Fayoum*) and two hundred years old alchemist. Thus, in the novel, Santiago, a Christian boy from Andalusia seeking for his personal legend encounters the elements of diverse culture like that of Islam and acquires his personal legend ultimately leading to self-enlightenment. Despite being a Christian and a student of Christian theology, Santiago believes in the language of Allah:

“Allah created the armies, and he also created the hawks. Allah taught me the language of the birds. Everything has been written by the same hand, the boy said.” (*Alchemist* 106)

The Zahir (2005) focuses on how the unnamed narrator and his wife Esther from France meet a Kazakh man named Mikhail and are drawn to Kazakhstan where they both encounter the elements of Kazakh culture, which ignite their self-enlightenment and they achieve their personal legends. For instance, Mikhail informs to the unnamed narrator that Esther was charmed by Tengri culture:

“...she was fascinated by Tengri culture, and by a nomad she had met and whom she believed held the key to everything.”
(*Zahir* 144)

Similarly, Mikhail also travels all the way from Kazakhstan to France, learns many things by interacting with individuals from diverse cultures and achieves his personal legend. In *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), the narrative of Athena’s life is portrayed by multiple characters through their nostalgic anecdotes. Through the narratives provided by other characters, it is obvious that through her knowledge attained from the multicultural elements, Athena

attains self-enlightenment and thus, achieves her personal legend. For instance, she accumulated motivation to be a courageous woman from the cultural beliefs of the Ancient Greeks and had preferred a Greek name, Athena, over her real name, Sherine Khalil. In the novel, Athena told her husband Lukas that she was inspired by the ancient Greek people :

“From Ancient Greece on, the people who returned from battle were either dead on their shields or stronger, despite or because of their scars. It’s better that way: I’ve lived on a battlefield since I was born, but I’m still alive and I don’t need anyone to protect me.” (*Witch of Portobello* 33)

Aleph (2010) follows the journey of the narrator who is a Brazilian. He comes across his mentor named J., Samil (a Tunisian man), a Turkish woman named Hilal and a Chinese man named Yao, and absorbs so many multicultural perspectives regarding his already deep-rooted knowledge about numerous concepts. From them, he also acquires some knowledge on new perceptions as well, which assist him to achieve his personal legend through self-enlightenment. For instance, the narrator enquired from Samil about the portrayal of reincarnation in Quran in order to comprehend the concept of *aleph* properly. The narrator asks Samil about the belief of reincarnation in the Quran:

““What does Islam have to say about reincarnation?’ I ask.”

(*Aleph* 39)

4.3. Global Trend and Cultural Hybridity

The phenomenon of cultural hybridity is inevitable and it has become a global trend. It is seen everywhere, “from curry and chips – recently voted the favourite dish in Britain- to Thai saunas, Zen Catholicism or Judaism, Nigerian Kung Fu, or ‘Bollywood’ films, made in Bombay-Mumbai and mixing Indian traditions of song and dance with the conventions of Hollywood” (Burke 2-3). This global trend is portrayed in Coelho’s novels vibrantly. In *The Alchemist*

(1988) when Santiago finally reached Tangier port in Morocco, it surprises him when a young man is in Western dress and converses with him in Spanish:

“Who are you?” he heard a voice ask him in Spanish....

The new arrival was a young man in Western dress, but the color of his skin suggested he was from this city.”

(*Alchemist* 33)

He believed that “only Arabic was spoken in this country” (*Alchemist* 32). To which the young man replied:

“Almost everyone here speaks Spanish. We’re only two hours from Spain.” (*Alchemist* 34)

An Islamic Berber population in Morocco, the Moors crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and captured the Iberian Peninsula in the eight-century. For many centuries, the Moors conquered most of Spain, which carried Islamic influences into Spain and in return carried numerous Spanish influences into Morocco. Santiago meets a desert tribeswoman in *Al-Fayoum* oasis whose name is Fatima. Her name reminds him that some women in his country are also called by the same name. It reminds him of the fact that the Moor invaders “carried the name everywhere” in Andalusia (*Alchemist* 90). Santiago also states that “in Andalusia at the highest point in Tarifa there is an old fort, built by the Moors” (*Alchemist* 31). The presence of Spanish influence is one of the defining traits of Moroccan architecture. And this particular fort manifests the complex Hispano-Moorish features of Moroccan architecture that reflect the fusion of two cultures. Santiago also meets a two hundred years old alchemist in the *Al-Fayoum* oasis. The two of them decided to drink wine even though the alchemist is a Muslim and alcohol is prohibited in Islam:

“The alchemist opened a bottle and poured a red liquid into the boy’s cup...“Isn’t wine prohibited here?” the boy asked...“Drink and enjoy yourself”, said the alchemist.” (*Alchemist* 110)

In *The Zahir* (2005), when the unnamed narrator was walking through Champs-Elysses, an avenue in Paris, everyone around him seemed to be answering in English to the questions he was asking in French. He is quite surprised when the French chemist converses twice in English language with him:

“I go into bar and buy some cigarettes; the person answers me in English. I go into a chemist’s to buy a mint I particularly like, and the assistant speaks to me in English (both times I asked for the products in French).” (*Zahir* 12)

Esther went to the French embassy and arranged a visa for Mikhail as an interpreter of the Kazakh language even though people in Kazakhstan basically speaks Russian:

“Esther went to the French embassy and arranged a visa for me as an interpreter of the Kazakh language, even though no one in my country speaks anything but Russian.” (*Zahir* 144)

A pizza, which is an Italian dish is served to the narrator and Mikhail in a French restaurant in Paris. Thus, the unnamed narrator indicates about the global phenom which is shaping the food trends:

“Roberto arrived with the pizzas.” (*Aleph* 112)

Aleph (2010) consists an episode in the chapter “Chinese Bamboo” in which the narrator despite being from a Brazil, have Indian and Lebanese dishes, which are served in the restaurants in London:

“This time I will only be staying in London three days. There will be a signing session, meals in Indian and Lebanese restaurants...”

(*Aleph* 19)

Moreover, in this chapter, he travels from Paris to London to visit a Book Fair where he has a signing session and while waiting for his Russian publishers, he skim-reads an article about Chinese bamboo in an English magazine:

“While I’m waiting to join my publishers for supper...I skim-read an article about Chinese bamboo.” (*Aleph* 19-22)

In a Russian city Irkutsk, the narrator and his translator Yao are “served a mixture of Mongolian and Siberian vodka” (*Aleph* 215). Also, “two cups of Turkish coffee” is served in a restaurant in Russia (*Aleph* 103). In the chapter “Tea Leaves”, the narrator and Yao drink Japanese tea in Russia. The narrator expresses that his translator despite being a Chinese, enjoys drinking Japanese tea:

“He fills each mug with tea.” (*Aleph* 176)

Novosibirsk is the largest city in Novosibirsk Oblast in Russia and it is located in the southwestern part of Siberia. Due to its rapid growth and industrialization “some people call it the Chicago of Siberia” (*Aleph* 132).

4.4. Creolization, Love and Cultural Hybridity

As mentioned earlier in chapter 2, the process of creolization is defined as the method of cross-pollination, interbreeding or miscegenation of human beings between diverse racial groups, indigenous groups procreating mongrels, hybrids, cross-breeds, inter-racial or inter-ethnic individuals. Creolization emphasizes that “the mestizo factor, the mixed, and the in-between” open “a different window on the global *mélange*” (Pieterse 77). The canvas of Coelho’s fictions are painted with biologically procreated creole characters. Another significant theme to be noted in Coelho’s novels is the tale of the experience of love beyond one’s own culture. The protagonists along with some of the other characters in Coelho’s fictional world are seen to be in intercultural relationships highlighting cultural hybridity. In *The Alchemist* (1988), Santiago is a learned shepherd by profession. He had studied Latin, Spanish and Christian theology. He has to often travel within Andalusian peninsula to earn for living. On one of such occasions, he meets a typical Moorish looking daughter of an Andalusian merchant, who reminds him of the Moorish conquest in Spain that procreated inter-racials. He indicates that “the girl was typical of the region of Andalusia, with following black hair, and eyes that vaguely recalled the Moorish conquerors” (*Alchemist* 5). Santiago, an

Andalusian boy is in love with an Egyptian desert tribal woman from *Al-Fayoum* oasis, whose name is Fatima. He loves her and knows that “the entire universe conspired” to assist him find her (*Alchemist* 117). “Fatima is a woman of the desert” and she has a sound knowledge of the fact that men of the desert had to be gone for days and returned (*Alchemist* 113). Therefore, when Santiago had to travel further away from *Al-Fayoum* in search of his treasure, Fatima decided to wait for him, and the “desert would represent only one thing to her: the hope for his return” (*Alchemist* 118). Santiago to her, is the *zahir*.

In *The Zahir* (2005), Mikhail from Kazakhstan, “between twenty-three and twenty-five years old, with dark, Mongolian features” is of mixed race (*Zahir* 3). Mikhail informs the unnamed narrator that he “was born in Kazakhstan steppes” and his “country is in Central Asia” (*Zahir* 77-78). He further discloses to the narrator that his father was a Russian and his mother a Kazakh while narrating the tale of his birth to him:

“I’m born in a small village... They met only recently when he was selling carpets; he had travelled all the way from Russia... they get married according to the Muslim tradition. Two months later, she is pregnant with me.” (*Zahir* 183-186)

Mikhail, a Kazakh man is in love and in a relationship with an Italian woman named Lucrecia. He articulates to the narrator that he has an Italian girlfriend:

“I have a girlfriend, the blonde girl who was on stage with me last night. Her name’s Lucrecia; she’s Italian.” (*Zahir* 111)

In the *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), the protagonist Athena was inter-racial. She was Romani by birth; born out of wedlock, “the daughter of a gipsy” mother and a *gadje*, a foreigner father (*Witch of Portobello* 21). Athena was a mongrel and it was her mother, Liliana, her biological mother, who confirmed that her father was not a Romanian gipsy:

“The one tribal custom I did not follow was that of having my man by my side when Athena was born. The midwives came to me even

though they knew I had slept with a *gadje*, a foreigner.”

(*Witch of Portobello* 133)

She had the physical features of a Caucasian, an English with “white skin, straight hair, eyes that were sometimes green, sometimes grey” (*Witch of Portobello* 29). Athena was in love with a Scandinavian man, Lukas Jessen Petersen while she was studying in the university. They got married and had a son named Viorel.

4.5. Creolization and Transculturation

It can be considered creole cultures “‘move towards a degree of coherence’ and ‘can put things together in new ways’, creating a ‘new culture’” from the union of two or more diverse cultures (Hannerz qtd. in Burke 62). Thus, the phenomenon of creolization challenges the idea that culture and identity are static or finished products and instead emphasizes the idea that culture and identity are always in progression occupying the in-betweens, the ambivalent spaces dissolving the boundaries and disintegrating the stratified categories merging them together. It challenges conventional and monolithic concepts of centre and periphery. Therefore, the cultural and critical lens of creolization is not just connected primarily with hybrids of restricted fluidity, but also with the construction of new cultures. And it connotes that identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’”, it “belongs to the future as much as to the past” and it is “not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture” (Hall 225). And the process of creating a new culture as a result of mixing of two or more different cultures is then related to the phenomenon of transculturation. Transculturation is the process of one culture interacting with another or encounter between different cultures, as a result of which cultural aspects are transferred, absorbed, or transformed to create new culture. Coelho’s fictions include creole characters who are transformed through cultural fusions absorbing numerous ambivalent identities. The selected novels of Coelho consist of postmodern subjects experiencing existential crisis and embarking on a journey in order to seek their personal legends. And on their voyages they come across diverse

cultures, become transcultural and achieve their personal legends eventually attaining self-enlightenment. Thus, the characters created by Coelho “rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure” representing “a love-songs” to their “mongrel selves” (Rushdie 394).

In *The Alchemist* (1988), after working and staying for eleven months and nine days with the Moroccan crystal merchant in Tangier, Santiago learns and adapts the Arabian culture and becomes transcultural. The omniscient narrator narrates that ultimately Santiago despite being an Andalusian dresses like an Arabian man:

“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.” (*Alchemist* 57)

In *The Zahir* (2005), at a certain point in his life, Mikhail goes through an existential crisis. and changes his name from Oleg to Mikhail after being inspired by Michael, the archangel in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He chooses the name, Mikhail when he decides to resurrect and reestablish his life. He tells the narrator about this particular fact. He discloses his original name as well as the circumstances which made him choose the name Mikhail to the narrator:

“‘Mikhail isn’t my real name. My real name is Oleg’... ‘Mikhail is the name I chose when I decided to be reborn to life. Like the warrior archangel, with his fiery sword, open up a path so that...the ‘warriors of light’ can find each other. That is my mission.’”
(*Zahir* 114)

Mikhail assimilates knowledge from diverse cultures. He learns about French culture and French language from Esther. He also learns about the return of the worship of the Mother Goddess. Despite being “brought up in the Islamic religion”, Mikhail on the basis of his understanding of the concept of Mother

Goddess begins a new cult with some followers (*Zahir* 100). And in order to lead the cult, the ‘new tradition’, he draws inspiration from “Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when geniuses like Erasmus, Leonardo and Michelangelo” renounced the repressive conventions of their period and “turned instead to the past” and conformed to “a magical language, to alchemy and the idea of the Mother Goddess” retrieving the liberty to adhere in “what they believe in and not what the Church or the Government demand to them” (*Zahir* 141). The unnamed narrator who is a Christian and lives in France is inspired by the Islamic concept of the *zahir*. He, thus, begins the search for his *zahir*, his wife Esther with the help of a Kazakh man, Mikhail; who is being brought up in the Islamic religion and is familiar with the concept of the *zahir*:

“My heart is still in pieces: have you ever heard of the *Zahir*?’ ... ‘I was brought up in the Islamic religion, so, yes, I’m familiar with the idea.’” (*Zahir* 100)

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator in order to achieve his self-enlightenment and meet Esther in Kazakhstan had to follow certain Tengri rituals to set his foot on the steppes. Even though he is a Christian, he agrees to obey and readily choose a new name for the rituals:

“Yes, I would choose a name, I would do exactly as he suggested; I would continue to discard my personal history and, instead embark on my personal legend...” (*Zahir* 320)

Thus, he decides to proceed with the dedication ceremony of the Tengri culture:

““In the name of the Lady...I dedicate you to the earth... You have chosen your name and will speak it now for the first time.’ ‘In the name of the infinite steppes, I choose a name’, I replied...”
(*Zahir* 320)

After the dedication ceremony, he becomes a nomad and travels the steppes. He is welcomed by the native nomads to their land:

“Welcome, nomad who crosses the steppes... Welcome to the land of the Tengri.” (*Zahir* 322).

In *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), Athena’s life was a vast canvas painted with the experiences she had acquired from individuals of diverse cultures, like her biological mother, Liliana who was a Romani gipsy; her Lebanese foster parents, the Khalils; her Polish landowner and a friend, Pavel Podbielski; Natil Alaihi, a Bedouin in the Middle East; and a Scottish doctor and her mentor, Diedre O’ Neill aka Edda. When Athena met Edda, she told her that there were people who had been very significant in her life:

“‘Certain people have been very important in my life’, she went on. ‘My landlord, for example, or the calligrapher I met in the desert near Dubai. Who knows, you might have things to say to me that I can share them, and repay them for all they taught me.’”

(*Witch of Portobello* 122)

Athena, a Romani gipsy by birth was raised in a Lebanese culture by her foster parents, the Khalils. When Samira Khalil who was from Beirut visited an adoption centre of Sibiu in Transylvania, she was warned that the child she had wished to adopt was the daughter of a gipsy. Nevertheless, Samira had “retorted that culture isn’t something that’s transmitted through the genes” and that the child would be brought up according to their Lebanese culture (*Witch of Portobello* 21). And thus, Athena grew up in a Lebanese culture. In Lebanon, she followed Maronite Christianity which is “*a branch of the Catholic Church, which, although it comes under the authority of the Vatican, does not require priests to be celibate and uses both Middle Eastern and Orthodox rituals*” (*Witch of Portobello* 31). She had also attained education in an American school. It was revealed during Samira Khalil’s interview that Athena’s real name was Sherine Khalil:

“Her real name is Sherine. Sherine Khalil, our much-loved daughter, whom both my husband and I wish had engendered.”

(Witch of Portobello 9)

However, in the later phase of her life, Sherine was influenced by Greek culture and consequently, she renamed herself as Athena, “the name of the Greek goddess of wisdom, intelligence and war” (*Witch of Portobello 22*). She also endured an existential crisis, which led her to embark on a journey in an effort to reconnect with her roots. And throughout her voyage, she acquired knowledge from Liliana (a Romani gipsy), Edda (a Scottish woman), Alaihi (a man from the Middle East) and Podbielski (a Polish man) regarding the importance of the “blank spaces” (*Witch of Portobello 99*). She became aware of the fact that just as the blank spaces in calligraphy and music give meaning to the sentences and rhythm, respectively, they also assist individuals to grow spiritually and increase the significance of their own lives. Eventually, she mastered the blank spaces in her life and achieved the Vertex, “the culminating point, the goal of those who, like everyone else, make mistakes, but who, even in their darkest moments, never lose sight of the light enamating from their heart” through trance dance and calligraphy (*Witch of Portobello 62*). She had understood her own personal legend as a result of transculturation. As a result, she became transcultural and attained self-enlightenment by incorporating elements from diverse cultures. Then, in London she formed a group known as “Pilgrims of the Vertex” and thus, she commenced a new cult (*Witch of Portobello 69*). And through the splendour and wisdom of her self-enlightenment, she eventually began preaching and reviving people.

In *Aleph* (2010), Hilal and Yao are the transcultural characters. Hilal was born and raised in Turkey. She had moved to Ekaterinburg in order to pursue her study and learn the art of playing violin. She tells the narrator, Paulo that she was born in Turkey and “came to study violin in Ekaterinburg” when she was twelve” (*Aleph 54*). While in Russia, Hilal learns about the local way of life. She has been so ingrained in Russian culture that she is more familiar

with Novosibirsk city than a Russian woman named Titiana. And for that, Titiana respects Hilal and acknowledges it to Hilal:

“Even when you said you knew this city better than I do, the city where I was born and where I’ve lived all my life, I didn’t feel belittled or insulted.” (*Aleph* 138)

Even the narrator regards Hilal as a Russian because of how effectively she has assimilated into Russian society. The narrator mentions a legend about Novosibirsk women, claiming that Hilal is one of them and that she is the most charming woman in all of Russia. The narrator Paulo articulates to Hilal the fact that legend “has it that the women in Novosibirsk are the prettiest in all of Russia” and Hilal looks like “one of the local goddesses” (*Aleph* 132). Yao is a Russian language translator who is seventy years old and he serves as the narrator's interpreter when he travels to Russia. Yao is Chinese by birth who emigrated to “Brazil as a refugee during the time of civil war in his country, he then “studied in Japan” and at present he is a “retired language teacher from the Univerisy of Moscow” in Russia (*Aleph* 67). He cultivated a variety of cultural fusions as a result of having lived his entire life in several nations, making him a transcultural gentleman. Yao is a skilled aikido artist, which is a modern Japanese martial art. And when in Russia, the narrator learns aikido from him. In the novel, in one occasion the narrator, Paulo leaves a note asking Yao to teach him the Japanese martial art of aikido:

“Tomorrow, I’ll leave note for Yao, suggesting we practice a little aikido.” (*Aleph* 135)

In the chapter “Tea Leaves”, during the aikido session, Yao tells the narrator about the tea ceremony, which is practiced by the samurai in Japan. Yao had acquired this particular knowledge while living in Japan. While drinking tea, the samurai left their swords outside and forgot all about the war and made peace with each other. Therefore, he also wanted them to practice the tea ceremony in their aikido session to achieve tranquility. Yao further goes on to narrate his life in Japan to the narrator, Paulo:

“When I lived in Japan, I learned...the simplest and most sophisticated thing I experienced was drinking tea...The samurai used to leave their swords outside before ...taking part in elaborate tea ceremony. During that time, they could forget all about war and devote themselves to worshipping beauty...We respectfully drink the tea that Yao has poured for us.” (*Aleph* 176)

4.6. Multiculturalism, Cross-culturalism and Cultural Hybridity

Multiculturalism, in simple terms is defined as the co-existence of distinct cultures and cross-culturalism is the phenomenon of the interaction amidst diverse cultures where differences of those cultures are accepted and acknowledged. As mentioned earlier the phenomenon of multiculturalism is the constructive interaction of three significant insights, “namely the cultural embeddedness of humans beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue”, and the intrinsic multiplicity of each culture (Parekh 338). Cross-culturalism describes the blending, relating to, or comparison of two or more cultures or cultural groups as well as the ongoing construction of boundaries that results in cultural hybridity that is based on impermeable periphery. Innumerable situations like cultural, economic, social and historical features act as a stimuli for understanding of one’s identity. Therefore, it can be denoted that single identity of an individual is not a fixed indicator of her/his self-knowledge. Identity of an individual does not conform to a steady essence, instead it is related to a set of diverse traits accumulated in the consciousness of an individual. In the select novels, many characters imitate hybrid cultural identities, which result from the synthesis of two or more forms of identities.

In *The Alchemist* (1988), Santiago is represented as multicultural and cross-cultural. He has accumulated the believes and traditions of diverse culture and assumes an ambivalent hybrid identity. He despite being an

Andalusian believes in the gipsy tradition of fortune-telling and therefore, decides to visit a gipsy fortune-teller in Tarifa. On the basis of her interpretation of his dream, Santiago then decides to visit the Pyramids in Egypt:

“It’s the dream in the language of the world...And this is my interpretation: you must go to the Pyramids in Egypt.”

(*Alchemist* 15-16)

In Tarifa, he meets an old man who looks like an Arab. He introduces himself as Melchizedek, King of Salem (the present day Jerusalem). He is a Hebrew in a foreign land who advises a foreigner, Santiago to follow his dream. Melchizedek guides Santiago to achieve his fortune on the basis of his knowledge of the universe constructed on his cultural beliefs:

“To realize one’s destiny is a person’s only obligation...

And when you want something, all the universe conspires

in helping you to achieve it.” (*Alchemist* 21)

Then he gives Santiago the stones *Urim* and *Thummin*, which are black and white, respectively. Santiago is required to make decisions using the stones in case that he is unable to interpret the omens. The black signifies ‘yes’ and the white, ‘no’. He not only accepts the stones from Melchizedek but also has faith in them and employs them when needed. And in pursuit of his dream, he goes from one continent, Europe, to another, Africa, while carrying the stones. Although he attended a seminary, he decided to listen to and learn from the Moroccan crystal merchant when he taught him about the prophet, the Koran, and its five commandments. And in order to achieve his dream, he decides to make the journey to the Pyramids, similar to how the fifth obligation, the pilgrimage to Mecca by all Muslims, is carried out. After working for the Moroccan crystal merchant in Tarifa for few months, Santiago also learns Arabic language and he believes that “he would be able to do business with the Arabs, because he was now able to speak their strange language” (*Alchemist*

53). In the caravan in which Santiago was traveling to the Al-Fayoum oasis, he was mistaken for an Arabian since he was speaking Arabic fluently and wearing an Arabian attire. This particular fact is reflected in the novel through the thoughts of an Englishman who is an alchemist:

“A young Arab, also loaded down with baggage entered, and greeted the Englishman...and began to read. The book was written in Spanish. He spoke Spanish better than Arabic...” (*Alchemist* 64)

Santiago learns the Arabic word “*maktub*” from the crystal merchant, which means “it is written”, and realises that “intuition is really a sudden immersion of the soul into the universal current of life”, in which “the histories of all people are connected”, and individuals are capable of comprehending everything (*Alchemist* 71). Santiago also learns to read the omens like the Arabian desert men despite being an Andalusian. When Santiago tells the chieftains of the desert about his omen in which he saw that the oasis had been invaded, at first they do not trust him since it is against their custom:

“Why would the desert reveal such thing to a stranger, when it knows that we have been here for generations? Said another of the chieftains.” (*Alchemist* 101)

However, the eldest man among the chieftains compares him to Joseph and he believes in Santiago’s omen:

“His name was Joseph. He, too, was a stranger in a strange land, like you, and was probably your age ...we should believe the messages of the desert.” (*Alchemist* 102)

The alchemist, despite being an Egyptian narrates a story about an ancient Roman Emperor Tiberius’ period in order to inspire Santiago to achieve his dreams:

“In an ancient Rome, at the time of Emperor Tiberius, there

lived a good man who had two sons.” (*Alchemist* 149)

In the novel, the Englishman at the urge to find one true language of the world learns “Esperanto, the world’s religions” and then he studies alchemy (*Alchemist* 63). The Englishman’s interest in alchemy is sparked by the work of Iranian alchemist Geber, French alchemist Fulcanelli, and German alchemist Helvetius. He studies the biographies of numerous persons who have mastered alchemy: “Elias, Fulcanelli, Geber and Helvetius” (*Alchemist* 78).

In *The Zahir* (2005), Mikhail is multicultural, cross-cultural and acquires hybridized cultural identity. Mikhail, a Kazakh man who is fluent in English shifts to France from Kazakhstan with the help of a French woman, Esther. He narrates the same to the unnamed narrator:

“She was the one who brought me here, a poor 21-year-old with no future...the long and the short of it is that I knew English and started working as her interpreter.” (*Zahir* 143)

Mikhail is a Kazakh, but he “organizes meetings at the Armenian restaurant” on every Thursday to preach his followers of the new tradition that he commences on the basis of the idea given to him by Esther (*Zahir* 77). The members of the cult belong to different cultural backgrounds. Most of the time they share folktales from diverse cultures and through that they experience a collective cathartic moment and ultimately spiritual bliss. Esther, a Christian woman from France “was fascinated by Tengri culture, and by a nomad she had met and whom she believed held the key to everything” (*Zahir* 144). She was so spellbound by Tengri culture that she started living in the steppes, “in a small village in Central Asia; more precisely, in a village in Kazakhstan.” (*Zahir* 235). There, in the village she was involved in cultural exchange practice. She was learning the art of making traditional carpets from Tengri people and was in return giving French lessons to them. This particular information was given to the unnamed narrator by Mikhail:

“As I told you before, she’s learning to make carpets and, in exchange, she teaches French.” (*Zahir* 329)

When he was younger, Mikhail saw a vision of a white young girl that, in the narrator's opinion, is comparable to both a Marian apparition and Joan of Arc's visions. Mikhail believes in the Marian apparition despite being a Muslim. Mikhail shares his experience of encountering the apparition to the unnamed narrator in details. He had momentarily lost consciousness at that point, and when he regained it, he discovered a white child wearing a white dress floating above him:

“When I come to, I am sitting on the ground, and a very white little girl, wearing a white dress with a blue belt, is floating in the air above me. She smiles but says nothing, then disappears.” (*Zahir* 189)

And the voice had been speaking to him ever since after he “first saw the Lady” when he was a child (*Zahir* 147). When Esther visited Kazakhstan, she was fascinated by the Tengri culture and therefore, Mikhail had helped her to meet few tribes that continued to practice the Tengri tradition and local shamans. Mikhail informs about this episode to the unnamed narrator:

“I help put her in touch with the few tribes who still travel, with the Tengri tradition, and with local shamans. I am now fluent in French, and over supper she gives me various forms from the consulate to fill in, gets me a visa, buys me a ticket, and I come to Paris.” (*Zahir* 210)

In the novel, it is mentioned that there are similarities between the Central Asian steppe nomads and the Mexican shamans that stem from the idea of *acomodador*. The *acomodador* is a giving up point and one must “first free himself from that giving-up point and, to do so, he must review his whole life and find out where it occurred” (*Zahir* 238). The narrator met a vagabond Dutchman Jan from Holland in Almaty. And he enlightens the narrator about the Silk Road, by informing him that it was “the old commercial route that connected Europe with the countries of the East” (*Zahir* 308). The route began

in Beirut and it was spread to Yangtse in China. The most expensive and rarest item like silk travelled alongside other items like political ideals, cultures, traditions, religious beliefs, refugees from civil wars, gold, etc. through the Silk route.

In *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), the protagonist Athena was multicultural and cross-cultural. And therefore, she had a hybridized form of cultural identity. She was a Romanian by birth and raised by a Lebanese couple, the Khalils in Beirut. She had come to London fleeing a civil war that had broken out in Lebanon (*Witch of Portobello* 31). They arrived in London as refugees. The fact that the Lebanese community is scattered all over the world signify multiculturalism. Athena, twice displaced from her homeland (first from the Gipsy tribe of Romania and then, later from the Maronite Christian society of Lebanon) had a interwoven ambiguous identity in the beginning of the novel that inspired her to seek for her personal legend. In Lebanon, she had attained education from American school and was nurtured as a Maronite Christian. Later, her identity was built through the accumulation of several cultures like Greek, Middle East, Gipsy to name a few. She was captivated by the concept of “ecstasy” which means “to stand outside yourself” in Greek culture. In the novel, Athena was seen explaining the same to Pavel:

“Do you know what the word “ecstasy” means? It comes from the Greek and means, “to stand outside yourself”. Spending the whole day outside yourself is asking too much of body and soul.’

‘I’d like to try anyway.’” (*Witch of Portobello* 67)

She was fluent in three languages, Arabic, French and British English. Athena being a Lebanese identified herself with the Middle East culture. Thus, Athena had a tussle with a fellow student in the University of London cafeteria “because the fellow student assuming Athena to be English” had made “some insulting remark about the Middle East” (*Witch of Portobello* 29). Athena’s husband narrated this particular incident to the interviewer indicating that she was deeply hurt and infuriated by the racial insult:

“But Athena got up grabbed the other girl by collar and started screaming: ‘Racist!’” (*Witch of Portobello* 29)

She was offended by the comment of her classmate even if she was well aware of the fact that she was a Romani Gipsy by birth. Athena learnt the tradition of trance dance that had originated in Siberia from Pavel Podbielski, a Polish man who had inherited the same from his grandfather settled in a small village called Diedov in Siberia during later phase of his life. The fact that “all the men and women in that village in Siberia” must be happy and grateful to Pavel’s grandfather for preserving a tradition that was almost lost and as it had been for him that their work was being “reborn in this world” symbolizes cross-culturalism (*Witch of Portobello* 68). From Natil Alaihi, a Bedouin in the Middle East, she learnt not only the art of calligraphy, which is the search for perfect meaning of each word through writing but also “the philosophy of the calligraphers” (*Witch of Portobello* 94). According to Alaihi, calligraphy is one of the gateways to seek Allah:

“Calligraphy is just one of the ways which Allah – blessed be His Name – places before us. It teaches objectivity and patience, respect and elegance.” (*Witch of Portobello* 98)

She also identified herself with the Gipsy culture. When Athena and her mentor, Deidre O’ Neill aka Edda met each other for the first time, the later thought that she was an English woman. Athena then introduced herself as a Romanian:

“She took a deep breath: ‘And I’m ... Romanian’
(*Witch of Portobello* 122)

She also insisted on having her “son baptised with a name she herself had decided on – Viorel, a Romanian name” (*Witch of Portobello* 46). She travelled to Romania to trace her roots and to learn more about the Gipsy culture. There, she met her biological mother Liliana and a Scottish doctor, Edda. Through them, she had discovered about the Great Mother, the Goddess of Creation, also known as the Virgin of the Gipsies, Kali Sarah or the Black Sarah and

thus, she was reconnected to her roots. She realized that just like in calligraphy and music there exist blank spaces in everyone's life.

Deidre O' Neill aka Edda, a Scottish doctor was a follower of a Romanian historian of religion and philosopher, Mircea Eliade:

“Well from your card I see that you're Scottish.”

(*Witch of Portobello* 122)

She wanted “to see where a writer called Mircea Eliade lived” (*Witch of Portobello* 115). He, who had also “spent most of his life in France, was a world authority in myths” (*Witch of Portobello* 115). Mircea Eliade wrote books with strange titles: *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions*, for example or *The Sacred and the Profane* (*Witch of Portobello* 116). Being a transnational author, Eliade “only lived in Romania until he graduated from university” and then resided in Paris, London and Chicago, where he died.

The narrative in the novel *Aleph* (2010) starts with the chapter “King of my Kingdom” where Coelho's interaction with his master J. in France leads him to the realization of the fact that even if he has everything whatever he wanted in his life, the blank space still exists in his life. Thus, his journey for the quest of the answer for the blank space begins. The narrator skim-reads an article in an English magazine about the Chinese bamboo. There in the article it is explained that once the seed of the Chinese bamboo has been sown nothing is seen for five years apart from a tiny shoot, all the growth takes place underground, where complex root system reaching upwards and outwards is being established. Then, at the end of the fifth year, it suddenly shoots up to the height of twenty-five metres. This knowledge about the Chinese bamboo leads him to the self-realization. He realises that just like the Chinese bamboo his fifth year has arrived:

“I think I'm like the Chinese bamboo plant and my fifth year has come....My roots are ready, but I'll manage to grow with the help

of others. Not just you or J. or my wife, but people I've never met."

(Aleph 29)

The narrator, despite being a Brazilian is convinced by the Moroccan clairvoyant's vision of his encounter with a Turkish spirit:

"The soul of Turkey will give your husband all the love she

possesses, but she will spill his blood before she reveals

what it is she is seeking." *(Aleph 18)*

The narrator is a Brazilian but he is a famous author in Tunisia as well:

"Samil wants to be a writer and is fighting to gain recognition

in his own country, whereas I, a Brazilian author, am already

known here." *(Aleph 42)*

The narrator who is from Brazil reads a book written by Chinese author, "Tao Te Ching" *(Aleph 82)*. In the novel *Yao*, the narrator's Russian language translator is a multicultural and cross-cultural individual. Yao is a man "with great experience of life, honed by adversity, a man who has survived despite having to change worlds many times in this incarnation" *(Aleph 148)*. He is Chinese by birth, he studied in Japan and retired as a language teacher from the university of Moscow in Russia. And after that he became a language translator in Russia. Hilal, is a Turkish violinist who has been living in Russia since her teenage. She is in love with the Russian culture. Culturally, she seems more Russian than a native Russian. In the novel, it is seen that through the music of multicultural musicians, the narrator sink in the circle of *aleph*:

"I let Chopin, Beethoven and Wagner lead me into that past which

is also the present, for their music is far more powerful than any

golden ring." *(Aleph 257)*

It is seen that in his select novels, Coelho emphasizes that in the era of postmodernism, the phenomenon of globalization and glocalization cultivate

the complex formation of cultures and identities and that “culture isn’t something that’s transmitted through the genes” (*Witch of Portobello* 21).

4.7. Religion and Cultural Hybridity

Paulo Coelho espouses multiculturalism and promotes philosophies of diverse cultures and religions like that of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and others are apparent in his select novels. The narratives of the Coelho’s select novels also illustrate the cultural fusion of religious doctrines and practices. There are interactions between one or more religious practices, suggesting that a cultural hybridity is a significant element for the evolution of a certain religion. In his select novels, it is seen that some of the main characters often accumulate the knowledge of diverse religious practices and on the basis of their knowledge commence a new tradition or cult. Coelho also includes narratives in which a certain ideology of religion is understood on the basis of ideology from another religion.

In *The Zahir* (2005), a Kazakh Muslim man, named Mikhail is a member of a cult which is guided by himself. The members of this cult practice sessions of spiritual healing through story-telling and trance dance media, which is organized on every Thursday in an Armenian restaurant in France. Mikhail was inspired to start a new cult by a French Christian woman, Esther. Thus, summing up her and the tradition that he was raised, he begins the cult where individuals from different cultural backgrounds share folktales from numerous cultures. And he chose Thursdays because that is “how it is in the tradition in which he was brought up” (*Zahir* 144-145). They experienced a collective cathartic moment of spiritual bliss as a result of the rituals related to this new cult. For instances, Mikhail’s Italian girlfriend, an attractive lady with blue eyes and Alma who “spoke with the accent of someone who has lived in the East” were the members of the cult (*Zahir* 98). Therefore, through the fusion of the elements of diverse cultures, a new cult is formed. The sessions of the cult’s clandestine meetings are introduced by Mikhail. He appears to be in a trance and begins with a Mongolian folktale:

“In the words of the Mongolian creation myth: “There came

a wild dog who was blue and grey and whose destiny was imposed on him by the heavens. His mate was a roe deer.”

... ‘In the steppes where I come from, the wild dog is seen as a feminine creature.’ (*Zahir* 90)

In the meetings, they perform trance dance and share the legends and folktales from numerous cultures:

“‘We tell stories and we dance in order to feel the energy of love.’” (*Zahir* 107)

The rhythm of the trance dance develops their capacity to accept love that activates their intelligence and creativity. They are purified and liberated. The practice includes a dance that resembles the Sufi whirling, “the white-clothed figures start to spin, and in that packed space, the audience makes room so that the wide skirts can trace movements in the air” (*Zahir* 96-97). Even the attire of the performers is similar to the one worn in Sufi whirling. The unnamed narrator explains about the attire in the chapter, “Like Tears in the Rain”:

“At nine o’clock on the dot, the six ‘performers’ – the two musicians in oriental dress and the four young people in their white shirts and full skirts – walked onto the stage.” (*Zahir* 129)

While the musical instruments used in the performance are “– the cymbal and drum –” which “strike up a rhythm familiar” to the “religious ceremonies originating in Africa” (*Zahir* 96). He learned about the return of the worship of the Mother Goddess from Esther despite being a Muslim. And through the trance dance the members of the cult imbibe the same Energy which rises up to the Mother Goddess and then, returns to them infused with all her strength, just as the water in river evaporates and transformed into clouds which then returns in the form of rain to the earth. The word Tengri means “‘sky worship’”; it’s a kind of religion without religion’ (*Zahir* 323). In the narrative it is highlighted that several religions “– Buddhists, Hindus, Catholics, Muslims, different sects with their beliefs and superstitions” have passed through the Tengri steppes (*Zahir* 323).

And the nomads of the Tengri steppes became converts to avoid being killed while continuing to profess the idea that the Divinity is everywhere all the time. The Dutchman whom the narrator meets coincidentally in Almaty informs him that it was one of the branches of the Silk Road through which “Buddhism travelled from India to Sri Lanka and Tibet” (*Zahir* 308). Mikhail informs the narrator that “after years of religious repression in Kazakhstan, mysticism and the esoteric are now very fashionable in Almaty” and also that “books are published about people with so-called higher powers, about gurus and teaches from India and China” (*Zahir* 200).

In *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), Athena nurtured a strong religious inclination at a young age and spent her whole childhood attending church and memorising all the gospels. Suddenly, she began to see angels and holy figures. But despite having had confidence in the Church since she was a little girl and she was forbidden by Father Fontana from obtaining sacraments after she became a divorcee. After this particular incident, she abandoned the Church and made a promise never to enter a church ever again. Athena had the bravery to decide to follow the teachings on which the religious organization was founded rather than the institution itself. And this illustrates Athena’s resistance to the essentialist view of culture. In the later phase of her life, she accumulates knowledge from diverse cultures namely Greek, gipsy, middle eastern, Polish to name a few and attained self-enlightenment. And through her self-enlightenment she commenced a new cult with a group known as “Pilgrims of the Vertex” in London. While performing the esoteric trance dance, in the state of ecstasy she transformed into the spirit of omniscient goddess, her alter ego, Hagia Sofia and sermonized the people around her. The Portobello Road in London became the abode of devotion for her disciples. The new cult guided by Athena ignited a protest by the Protestants and ultimately she gained the title “the witch of Portobello”. They were not ready to acknowledge the omniscient deity, Hagia Sofia who “was a woman of twenty-second century living in the twenty-first, and making no secret of the fact either” (*Witch of Portobello* 14).

In *Aleph* (2010), the narrator believes in reincarnation and wanted to learn more about it from Islam religion. Therefore, he asks about it to Samil, a reader in Tunisia:

““What does Islam have to say about reincarnation?’ I ask.”

(*Aleph* 39)

Samil then told him the Islamic version of reincarnation to the narrator, Paulo:

“*Allah will cause you to die, and then he will bring you back to life again, and you will return to Him once more.*” ... “*Do not say those who died in the name of Allah: They are dead. For they are alive, even though you cannot see them.*” (*Aleph* 41)

The *aleph* is the first letter of the alphabet in Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic and “the Chinese have a word for it too: *qi*” (*Aleph* 224). The shamans in Russia “doubtless have their own word” for *aleph* (*Aleph* 237). And the shaman in Siberia “where the term originated – is following the same rituals as the *paje* in the Amazonian jungle, as *hechiceros* in Mexico, *candomble* priests from Africa, spiritualists in France, *curanderos* in indigenous American tribes, Aborigines in Australia, charismatics in the Catholic Church, Mormons in Utah, etc. etc” (*Aleph* 243).

Thus, through the analysis of Paulo Coelho’s select novels *The Alchemist* (1988), *The Zahir* (2005), *The Witch of Portobello* (2006) and *Aleph* (2010), it has been observed that Coelho celebrates the unpredictable and innovative fusion of individuals, cultures, ideas, and politics that result in cultural hybridity. In his works, Coelho uses the narrative technique of magic realism to challenge essentialism and subvert the established fundamental structures of reality, truth, and history. And in doing so he portrays numerous phenomena like creolization, transculturation, multi-culturalism, cross-culturalism, in-betweenness and syncretism to highlight the process of cultural hybridization. He views the world with his cosmopolitan eyes and therefore sees it as fragments where diverse cultures mingle and overlap one another, rather than as a single, encompassing monofocal vision. His art

of characterization technique includes the portrayal of postmodern subjects who experience existential crisis and then embark on a journey to pursue their personal legends transcending cultural and national boundaries. Thus, all the four novels of Coelho, which are taken up for study, include “transcultural encounters in contact zones *dialogically* yield self-realization and the betterment or re-definition of the self” (Murta 93). In his select novels the basic ideas of culture and identity as being pure and homogeneous are challenged, and their shifting and heterogeneous characteristics are emphasized. As a cosmopolitan writer he highlights that in the era of globalization, the cultural landscape is a fusion of intercultural interactions that overlap and as a result, the identity in the postmodern world is decentered, deconstructed, and continually fluctuating. Therefore, in his novels, the identities of the main characters are fragmented and made up of various, occasionally ambiguous or uncertain identities instead of single and consistent kind of identity indicating the process of cultural hybridization explored by cultural theorists like Canclini (1989), Hall (1992/1996), Gilroy (1993) and Pieterse (1996) in their works. His characters as the postmodern subjects occupy multiple spaces expressing themselves freely through interaction, transmission, and exchange ultimately leading to the process of cultural hybridization. His select novels also emphasize a transnational framework that recognizes that the identities are much more accurately centred on affinities rather than on international boundaries.

The spiritualism elements in his select novels are the result of the intermingling of diverse theological ideologies, emphasizing the notion of cultural hybridity. His works illustrate that spirituality is indeed a personal and individual approach and thus, he rejects the established religion providing an alternative to the inadequateness of atheistic existentialism through offering meaning, value, and purpose. Thus, Paulo Coelho is often described as a “Post-modern Aesop”, an extraordinary storyteller who inspires people all over the world to transcend beyond the ordinary and into the fantastic (Mousume 7). And his select novels as the narratives of postmodern parables, introduces unique, new traditions that arise from the fusion of two or more different

cultures. Coelho also highlights the fact that globalization has increased the rate of cultural hybridity and forced many conformist hegemonic beliefs to be reexamined. The narratives of Coelho's novels centre on the personal experiences of international readers whose perception of themselves are significantly altered by cultural hybridization. He is a Brazilian author with cosmopolitan outlook and therefore, a transnational writer reflecting the mechanism of cultural hybridity through numerous phenomena associated to it. And as a transnational author from Brazil with a cosmopolitan outlook, his novels reflect the process of cultural hybridity through a variety of phenomena related to it. In the context of cultural hybridity, he also addresses that the phenomenon of creolization contributes to the process of cultural reconstruction occurring among diaspora populations. The diaspora communities demonstrate the characteristics of creolization, emphasizing that members of these populations possess double consciousness, the spaces where cultural boundaries overlap and dissolve, the enigmatic in-betweens leading to the process of cultural hybridity. This particular theme, which involves the phenomenon of creolization among the diaspora population has been represented precisely in his novel, *The Witch of Portobello* (2006). Thus, in the next chapter on the basis of the study of the theories proposed by the cultural theorists like Paul Gilroy (1993) and Stuart Hall (1996) on diaspora population and cultural hybridity, Coelho's novel *The Witch of Portobello* (2006) is analyzed.

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