

Quest of 'I' with Special Reference to Richard Bach's Jonathan Livingston Sea gull

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Abstract

Richard Bach is one of the eminent authors of twenty first century. His works entail philosophy that takes us beyond physical limits and mortality. His work *Jonathan Livingston Sea gull* is a huge success. It is a story about a Sea Gull who pursued higher ambition of flying rather than catching food like other Sea gulls. The idea hidden in this work is that human beings have great potentialities and power. It is observed that, man in the present era is afraid to venture into new insights, adventures and ideas. Jonathan Seagull shows a new way to the society. The present paper deals with the quest of "I" that is the highest ideal of life. Life depends on three factors subject, object and the connection between subject and object. Richard Bach portrays Jonathan as a mentor, a guide whose mission is to lift the rest of the flock above ignorance and take them into sphere of excellence, intelligence and freedom. The present paper is an attempt to put forward the fact that when there is an intrusion of wisdom within an individual self, one comes above the ignorance and walks in the ladder of enlightenment breaking the shackles of illusions, going beyond material world, space and time and finds true meaning of life.

Keywords: Life, subject, object, ignorance, wisdom, illusions

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1. Introduction

Richard Bach is one of the eminent authors of twenty first century born on June 23, 1936 in the United States. His works include *A Gift of Wings* (1974), *There's no Such Place as Far Away* (1979), *Running From Safety: An Adventure of the Spirit* (1995). His works entail philosophy that takes us beyond physical limits and mortality. His two works *Jonathan Livingston Sea gull* and *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah* were a huge success. His most recent works are *Travels with Puff*, and *Illusions: The adventures of a Reluctant Student*. His work *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* was first published in 1970 that was applauded by millions across the globe. It is a story about a Sea Gull who pursued higher ambition of flying rather than catching food like other Sea gulls. The idea hidden in this work is that human beings have great potentialities and power. They can do anything and everything. *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah* was first published in the year 1977. It encompasses some profound truths of life which inspires millions across the globe. It is a story in which Richard Bach gives an insight into meaning of illusions, the quest of human life, the real and unreal world. It entails some enlightening truths, facts and unveils mystery about life. Richard Bach remains as one of the most prominent writers of the twenty first century who leaves a mark in this world with his thought provoking works.

2. Content

Man in the present era is afraid to venture into new insights, adventures and ideas. They pursue life with old pattern of thoughts and are afraid to take risks. They fail to discover their true individuality, potentiality and power. Higher dreams, excellence, achievements can be attained when one embraces innovative ideas which can give a giant leap to mankind.

Jonathan Livingston Seagull is reckoned as a master piece that notched the number one spot in *New York Times Best Seller* for successively two years. It is imbued with new ideas, new thoughts, new vision and new adventures that can guide men in the present scenario. Bach portrays the flight of a Seagull who stands unique from the rest of his members of the flock as he attains the highest speed in flying which no other Seagull had ever achieved. The author has portrayed it with human attributes; an embodiment of freedom who breaks shackles of old thoughts of his clan for their life is merely restricted to eating and searching food. The members of the clan do not approve his ambition of flying and drives him out of the society. With indomitable grit, courage and determination he discovers his true potentialities and power and becomes a mentor and a guide for other Seagulls and teaching them the traits of love, forgiveness and compassion.

The 21st century sees the world heading for a change yet it gets engulfed in the boundary of narrowness adhering to the old customs, ideas or tradition be it society or any religion. For human beings, it is indeed natural that they are drawn to follow the instincts that have been ingrained in them right from their birth. Human beings work on the set rules laid by the society.

This is the emerging age of Aquarian. "New age" refers to the "Aquarian age." Aquarians act as rebellions, who intuitively feel that all old customs are wrong, and the world and people must head for a change. The New

age movement is engaged in reviving all the old perception and philosophies of the old times. The Aquarian age leads to the evolution of consciousness. It leads to the development of new values, leaving aside outdated values. All it emerges or depends, is on one's choice. It is an age imbued with freedom, peace and enlightenment. It could be perceived as a phase that would lead one free from the shackles of the past.

Rebellion is fundamental to innovation. Richard Bach in *Jonathan Livingston Sea gull* portrays "Seagull" as the perpetrator of new thoughts, and ideas who breaks the age old traditions and customs of other Seagulls. He portrays him in different light from other Seagulls pursuing the higher aim to attain unsurpassed heights in the sky, set on making the world record of flying highest above the earth instead of leading a life of the ordinary. The author has depicted him in unique light different from other fellow beings bestowing upon him the attributes of human beings. He is quite fiery to fly off lands instead of leading an ordinary life of a Seagull. His ideas are never much-admired by his fellow members for the ambition he pursues and he is ostracized from the society. The Seagull is an embodiment of new age who discards the old customs and practices and is an outcast.

Jonathan Seagull shows the new way to the society. One can lead the best journey of life when one dwells into inner realms to discover new thoughts, new ideas, and new hopes. When one runs out of new, creative, innovative ideas it hinders progress. It is the slavery of human mind that binds man in shackles, oppresses and obstructs the generation of new thoughts. As Bach in *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* comments: "Who is more responsible than a gull who finds and follows a meaning, a higher purpose for life? For a thousand years we have scabbled after fish heads, but now we have a reason to live-to learn, to discover, to be free! Give me one chance, let me show you what I've found..." (25).

In the story, Richard Bach uses the metaphor of seagulls flying to demonstrate that if we follow our dreams and achieve our dream goals, we too can soar. The book gives us permission to step into our greatness.

The journey of life may include success or failure. Success of the people can be attributed to unveiling of true potentialities and power of the self. It depends on choice of goal one chooses. When the self remains hidden wrong choices or decisions are made which may lead to failure. Many people in the world end up choosing wrong careers, for them success is beyond reach. They fail to access to true potentialities and power of the self. Success is measured according to one's access to hidden power of the self. To know and understand the real self is called as "self-referral" which captures the center point of spirit. The opposite of self-referral is "object referral" where one is influenced by external factors outside the self which may include situations, circumstances, people and things. In object referral one's thinking is influenced and shaped by others where one always seek the consent of others in carrying out the task. In object referral one exclusively depends for external support or power which is based on fear. Hence this kind of power can never unveil pure potentiality. There is no force, no urge and no struggle for approval of external power. True self is one's spirit or soul where one is in communion with true self and does not turn around and pay any heed to any criticism around. They are not afraid to take upon challenges. It feels less than no one and superior to no one as it recognizes the same spirit or self in every one. In self-referral one experiences his true being. Self-power is therefore true power. As Deepak Chopra in *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* says: "Pure consciousness is pure potentiality; it is the field of all possibilities and infinite creativity. Pure consciousness is our spiritual essence. Being infinite and unbounded, it is also pure joy. Other attributes of consciousness are pure knowledge, infinite silence perfect balance, invincibility, simplicity, and bliss. This is our essential nature. Our essential nature is one of pure potentiality" (9).

As long as one is alive one can uncover the abilities and potentialities to surge ahead. True meaning of life embodies learning, rectifying mistakes and enriching experiences which can lead to greater contentment. One need not doubt the abilities. One must make a right choice that enhances personal well-being and growth. It is important to set a goal and works relentlessly to attain the goal. Through trial and error and mistakes one can do more and add qualities than what one thinks. Jonathan pursues his flight in the dark and again he hears the voice that sea gulls have limitations to fly in the dark but he continues his journey to surge ahead. It means that he needs to have been bestowed with the eye of an owl. His thoughts get altered and he thinks that if his wings were made shorter like a Falcon, he will be successful. This thought sets him on as he draws his wings in to body, he could fly to two thousand feet. He ignores all the possible consequences and takes a plunge in to a vertical dive. First, he gains the speed at a hundred and twenty, then a hundred and forty miles per hour. He puts all his thoughts aside and thinks that he could move much faster if he starts at five thousand feet rather than at two thousand. He carries no guilt of the thought he pursues. Those who have touched the highest are never bound by any limitations. Richard Bach in his work *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* says: "His vows of a moment before were forgotten, swept away in that great swift wind. Yet he felt guiltless, breaking the promises he had made himself. Such promises are only for the gulls that accept the ordinary. One who has touched excellence in his learning has no need of that kind of promise" (15).

The stages of life are flooded with silent suffering. It is imbued with all kinds of experiences. Yet in each daunting phase one manages to recover and bounces back. One intentionally or unintentionally withdraws from and disconnects from the world of outer happenings and propels hard to find something deeper and mysterious.

The mysterious and hidden power helps in raising above all the challenges and carries on with life to the best of abilities. This power is elemental to the universe. All species undergo evolution and adapt according to surroundings because of the mysterious force that dwells and reside within each one. This invisible force is the impulse of creation. This impulse is life force. Life force is soul. It sustains life and maintains balance in the cosmos. To realize this life force the mind has to fulfill the condition of purity. The mind with pure clarity, firm thoughts, beliefs and courage is able to face new situations, changes or challenges. It is capable of resilience and it surges to become a powerful source of imagination and creativity. To maintain and restore the resilience of mind, one takes a plunge in silence with complete faith and surrender which helps in generating the traits of patience, perseverance, tolerance and optimism. These traits are marked as powerful medium in developing inner strength, will and clarity to reach the goal.

Mental illness is a stain that world faces today. Many are caught in the miseries of the world. There may exist psychological problems among people. Most of them suffer from negative traits which are reflected in their behavior and also there is upsurge of anger, depression, and frustration and so on. The reasons behind such problems are unexplainable as to why life remains void without virtues like, kindness, love, humility, humane, compassion and forgiveness. The men of the world are caught in the small part of life and fail to view it as a whole. They get limited by concepts, ideas and beliefs. The vastness of the sky cannot be seen by limiting themselves. To take a giant leap one needs to have a broad perception about life, to look, to see and view life. The important thing that people in the modern world miss out is importance of life or soul growth. There are different levels of consciousness which soul has to pass through to reach the final destination that is to reach is the Infinite light. Many have called it a “fourth dimension” or ‘heaven” or “Nirvana.” The nirvana or super consciousness was attained by great saints like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and God incarnations like Mahavira, Buddha, Jesus, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and so on. If the content of the consciousness is low, life is low. If the content of consciousness is high life is high. To bring about any task there must be knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower. The object of knowledge corresponds to where one is going; the knower corresponds to one who takes upon the task. The object of knowledge refers to the five objects of knowledge: sound, colour, odour, savour and touch. One can attain the first stage of knowledge through the channels of five senses.

The knowledge of the first kind is the most confined. It resides in the lower level of consciousness where an individual identifies five sense objects such as food, sound, smell, taste and feel as reality. They cannot comprehend anything beyond the senses. Those who live in this plane of consciousness are simply like animals. They cannot move in the higher plane of consciousness to identify spirit, soul or body. They are entwined in mental and physical activities. The majority of people in every country have not yet gone beyond the first stage of knowledge; and it is for this reason they are so much narrow in their outlook and vision, satiating their senses without the thought of others. Many are still below the animals when there is a matter of faithfulness, devotion and care of their young.

Hence the first category of knowledge puts one embedded in ignorance away from reality and so one needs to strive hard to come out of darkness and moves to attaining the highest of enlightenment. One will be bestowed with the higher knowledge revealing the relation of the individual to the universe. Ordinary people have no knowledge of oneness or soul; they remain limited by the body consciousness. Body consciousness puts one in limitations with no component of higher knowledge in it; it is this ignorance of mind that grapples one in mistakes. Richard Bach in *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* says: “Your whole body, from wingtip to wingtip,” Jonathan would say, other times, “is nothing more than your thought itself, in a form you can see. Break the chains of your thought, and you break the chains of your body, too....” (74-75).

Raising the content of consciousness is an essential part of spiritual growth. For instance, all the negative traits like ego, fear, anger and jealousy pulls one down in lower hemisphere. When one forgets that one is the knower or the soul and identifies oneself with anger, passion or hatred then one falls down in the lower hemisphere. Richard Bach says: “What he had once hoped for the Flock, he now gained for himself alone; he learned to fly, and was not sorry for the price that he had paid. Jonathan Seagull discovered that boredom and fear and anger are the reasons that a gull’s life is so short, and with these gone from his thought, he lived a long fine life indeed”(26).

Life depends on three factors subject, object and the connection between subject and object. The objective world is God’s world and the subjective world encompasses emotions of hurts and upsets. One can reach the next dimension when one does not become restless or restful in the midst of daily activities of life. The calm and serene mind is central for soul’s growth. Jonathan overcomes the subjective world of hurts and upsets when he is out casted by the society. He flies above the earth to reach the higher dimension. He was imbued with new insights, new vision wading his journey beyond horizon flying higher and higher above the sea. Each flight of Jonathan is symbolic of higher dimension. Purity is indispensable to spiritual growth or reaching higher dimension. The highest dimension is objective world that is God’s world. To realize and know the real self, one has to shed off all the negative traits such as anger, lust, greed, ego and develop the highest virtues such as

compassion, kindness and love. To get closer to the light one must develop or nurture good values like forgiveness that can accelerate soul's growth. The value of forgiveness is taught that puts him in communion with the Divine. The self of one is no different from others. Those who hurt others hurt themselves the most. He tells him to forgive the gulls who out casted him out. Richard Bach says: "In casting you out, the other gulls have only hurt themselves, and one day they will know this, and one day they will see what you see. Forgive them, and help them to understand" (62).

One needs to know the absolute force of life that is the soul. Life can become low if the thoughts are low, life can become high if the thoughts are high. Thoughts are powerful as they can influence one's life or actions. They come from inner depth of one's being. They govern and influence many aspects of life and have an impact on the present and future. Thoughts are seeds that nurture the self which lead to the understanding of reality and the world. These are often misleading and delude one because they are formed on the basis of ignorance of the self. Hence, personal evolution can happen only when one starts working with thoughts by remaining in wakeful state. Thoughts can take one uphill or downhill. At its pinnacle, the thought is omnipotent. The thing is to dream big and focus on transcendent point which is the highest point that can put one above ignorance when one reckons there is no division between oneself and Divinity. As Richard Bach says: "*The gull sees farthest who flies highest*" (60). With the passage of time one realizes that the knower is the soul. When one lifts him above ignorance or realizes that body is the medium for the fulfillment of higher purpose of life. One realizes that to transcend mind and body is to reach to the soul. It is only through the grace of Infinite light that one gets closer towards light. Jonathan's quest is to realize the unlimited power of the supreme. He wants to attain the super conscious state of the self. He does not limit himself when it comes to flying higher and higher and above the unlimited space. He says: "Why, that's true! I *am* a perfect, unlimited gull!"(120). He reaches the state where he could fly faster and fastest at two hundred miles per hour than any other living sea gull on earth. He is an embodiment of transcendence who came above mind, body and ignorance to reach the highest level of spiritual dimension. Only spiritual illumination can help one in reaching the consciousness of soul. One's self has infinite potential of the Divine. Even if one realizes the spark of the Divine, it helps in reaching the infinite ocean of bliss. All beings are drops of consciousness. One needs to enter the ocean of bliss. When all the droplets enter the ocean they merge with the Divine.

Richard Bach portrays Jonathan as a mentor, a guide whose mission is to lift the rest of the flock above ignorance and takes them into sphere of excellence and intelligence and freedom. A gull who started his journey and successfully completed flying thousand miles away from heaven gracefully lands and rolls near the rest of the flock is just that makes them is just than the normal. He is an embodiment of unlimited freedom, enlightenment, transcendence, infinite bliss and happiness who comes down to lower dimensions to illumine earth with his teachings. The gulls have gathered to show their praise for the heights he had attained in flying. He is not filled with pride and ego with the acquired unique trait of flying and thus he takes upon the task to teach whatever he has learnt, the art of flying. He tells them that there is some higher purpose to serve, something loftier, grand for which one has to live. His only sorrow is that the others do not take part in jest of flying. He wants to kindle knowledge among the rest of the flock as he reveals that the self or soul is by its very nature pure. It is the same; the one existence of the universe, appearing to be various by name and its form. In reality there is only one existence, there is no difference between Lord and the self; he is in self and self is merged in him. There is no "I" or "You" it is all one. He dwells on the infinite power that resides in each one. One has to unlock the infinite power that resides in one as pure consciousness. Knowledge resides within each one of the individuals. No knowledge comes from outside, it is all inside what a man learns is really what he discovers by unveiling ignorance to discover knowledge of the soul taking which is a pool of infinite knowledge. Divinity resides in each one of them. Richard Bach says: "Look at Fletcher! Lowell! Charles-Roland! Judy Lee! Are they also special and gifted and divine? No more than you are, no more than I am. The only difference, the very only one, is that they have begun to understand what they really are and have begun to practice it" (81).

3. Conclusion

The quest of "I" or self-discovery should be the highest ideal of life. All enlightenment, achievements, happiness, glory, dreams, excellence and success rest on the power of mind. With discovering the power of the mind one can excel materially as well as spiritually. It opens a gateway to abundance in one's lives. Material abundance and spiritual abundance lead to betterment of life. Spiritually adapt individuals are able to adapt to any event or circumstance of life. When knowledge shines in an individual he comes above the ignorance and walks in the ladder of enlightenment breaking the shackles of illusions, going beyond material world, space and time and finds true meaning of life. When an individual's path is illumined, he illumines the path of everybody and serves the mankind. Coming above the self is the highest truth that shines in inner kingdom of men. One must have faith in Divine in pursuing life's journey.

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