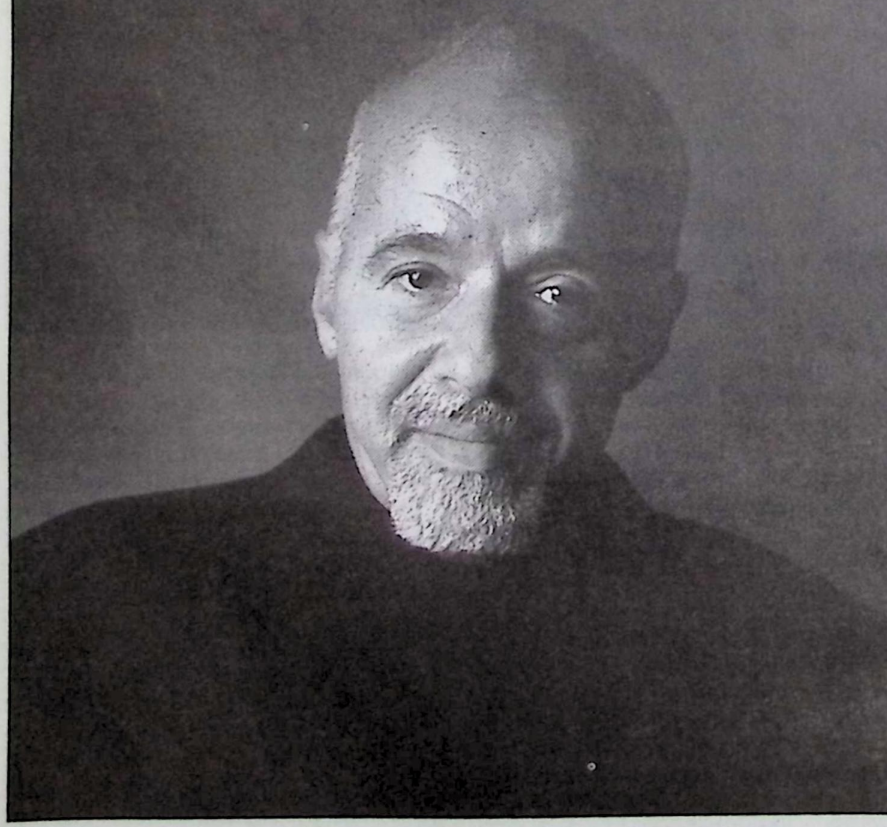
Paulo Coelho's struggle to success

By Tamara Zaman

KNOWN for bestsellers *The Alchemist* and *The Zahir*, Paulo Coelho was labeled as being "not only one of the most widely read, but also one of the most influential authors writing today" by the jury of the BAMBI Awards in 2001.

Born on 21st August 1947 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Coelho began his career in literature after a significant period of work in theatre as both a director and an actor, a lyricist and as a journalist. He attended law school, but left it to travel to Latin America, Europe and North America where he gathered knowledge on oriental religions and secret societies. On returning to Brazil, he worked with renowned musicians Elis Regina, Rita Lee and Raul Seixas and together, they wrote over 60 popular songs.

In 1982, Coelho attempted his first novel, *Hell Archives*, which did not turn out to be a success at all. 3 years later, he contributed to the *Practical Manual of Vampirism*, which he later tried to take of shelves, claiming it was "of bad quality". The following year, Coelho went on pilgrimage to Saint James of Compostella, an experience he documented in *The Pilgrimage*. 1988 saw the publication of *The Alchemist*, and despite the slow sales initially, it became one of the bestselling Brazilian books of all time, considered one of the most important literary phenomena of the 20th century. It reaches the first place in bestselling lists in 18 countries, and so far has sold 30 million copies. He went on to author a number of successful novels.



The Alchemist has been praised by different personalities ranging from the Nobel Prize winner Kenzaburo Oe to singer Madonna, who considers it one of her favorite books. Many projects have also been inspired by the book; a musical in Japan, theatre plays in France, Belgium, USA, Turkey, Italy, Switzerland. 2 symphonies in Italy and the United States of America have used the book as their theme and have had its text illustrated by the famous French artist Moebius.

According to Publishing Trends, *The Alchemist* was found in 2003 to be in the 6th place of world sales. His book *Eleven Minutes* topped all world lists, except in England, where it was in second place even before it had been released in Japan and the USA. *The Zahir*, published in 2005, was in third place of bestsellers right behind *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels & Demons* by Dan Brown.

Coelho has sold a total of 85 million copies and his work has been translated into 65 languages and edited in more than 150 countries. However, despite all his fame and successes around the world, his work has not unanimously been appreciated in his home country.

Coelho resides in Rio de Janeiro with his wife Christina.