



THE QUEST FOR TRUTH AND SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT IN HERMANN HESSE'S SIDDHARTHA

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ABSTRACT

It is the story of a young Brahmin, living in India at the time of the Buddha, and his spiritual journey in search of enlightenment. In the first part of the book, he leaves behind his father and family and formal religion, then his devoted friend and companion seeker, Govinda, and even eschews following the path of the Buddha. His reason for this choice is his realization that the Buddha teaches liberation from suffering, and that this supreme goal has been attained, not through following a teaching, but through his seeking truth on his own path, and that what he has attained cannot be taught, it can only found on one's own. So begins Siddhartha's journey proper. In short, Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha is an indicative of today's modern world which is steeped in materialism and consumerism.

Key Words: *wisdom , knowledge, salvation, spiritual enlightenment*

INTRODUCTION

Nobel Prize Winner Hermann Hesse published the novel Siddhartha in 1922. He was the son of a strict and uncompromising Lutheran missionary whose belief that humans are born evil and into sin was rejected by the young Hermann. Having been exposed very early in life to the religions of Asia, Hermann was deeply conflicted. He initially trained to join the church, but was expelled for his rebellious and disruptive behavior. He began to write Siddhartha around 1920, and the first English translation of it was published in 1951.

Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse remains even today a simple and fresh tale of a man's spiritual quest. Written by a deeply spiritual German author, Siddhartha explores multiple themes of enlightenment, thinking beyond set rules, love and humanity. It presents the healthy and colourful ideas about the search for knowledge. We also come to know that the hero has been

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thirst for knowledge, in other words it is a tale of spiritual quest. Here, the hero passes from the school of experiences, he leaves his house for salvation, meets different kind of lusts like love, sex, money, greed, attachment and moves on. But his desire for getting salvation is very keen. So he comes to a river, where he listen a nice sound and after lot of sufferings he attains wisdom. According to him, “the true profession of man is to find his way to himself”.

Siddhartha is a young contemporary of the spiritual master Gautam Buddha who lived in India at some time during the 4th century BC. The story has striking parallels to Buddha's own life story in which he abandons his wealth and status as the young prince of Kapilavastu, his wife and young son and his family to embark on a voyage of self discovery. Siddhartha in the book is the son of a respected Brahmin priest and gives up the comfort and security of his home to seek the meaning of life. His close friend, Govinda, joins him and the two wander as mendicants seeking alms and spiritual guidance. They meet Gautam Buddha and are drawn to his teachings, but whereas Govinda decides to dedicate his life to the spiritual order set up by Buddha, Siddhartha continues his search as he feels he must arrive at enlightenment in his own way.

The title of novel is after the name of the hero, Siddhartha, because here everything happens to him, around him and by him. In the very first chapter, we see that he is good looking, sound and a young prince among the Brahmins. He has supple limbed, lofty brow, king like eyes and slim figure. But he has,” the Seeds of discontent”. As he says,” Your soul is whole world”. He is not happy with the worthy pleasures. So he decides to leave his house to get true knowledge of life. He tells his father,” I wish to leave your house and I trust my father will not object. He is very firm and determined to fulfill his goal. His life becomes like a traveler now. His desires become more extreme on seeing certain miserable scenes in the world. He thinks, 'life is painful'. So he suffers hunger, thirst and fatigue, has a sharp desire to get 'Nirvana'. As he say,” I have always thirst for knowledge full of questions”.

The reason for this choice is his realisation that the Buddha teaches liberation from suffering, and that this supreme goal has been attained, not through following a teaching, but through his seeking truth on his own path, and that what he has attained cannot be taught, it can only found on one's own. So begins Siddhartha's journey proper. At this point in the story, Hesse found himself unable to continue, unable to write Siddhartha's quest for his goal of enlightenment, because he himself felt dissociated from his own being. He became depressed, and it was not until 1922, after immersing himself in the study of Eastern religion, in particular Buddhism, and extended psychoanalysis with Carl Jung, that he was able to complete the novel.

As Siddhartha proceeds on his way, his desire to get salvation becomes stronger. Gautama warns him for his too much cleverness intellectual questions and thirst for knowledge. He says,

“Be on your guard against too much cleverness”

He is of the view that life is nothing but game. In the last chapter of the first part we see that his vessel of lust is empty. He says, “I am no longer a prince, a Brahmin. All this is over for me.”

But in the second part of the novel, we see that he is not free from the bondage of life. e. g. He meets a beautiful woman Kamala and enjoys fruits of love. On her advice, he meets the merchant and gets money. He meets many people from whom he learns valuable lessons about life and death. A ferryman, Vasudeva, teaches him about the river and the flow of life. Kamla a beautiful courtesan teaches him about physical love and how it forms an important foundation of spirituality. Kamaswami, a shrewd businessman shares the secrets of materialism. Siddhartha absorbs important teachings from all these people.

However, suffering is not over for Siddhartha. This blissfully simple life is interrupted when his past returns, in the form of the courtesan Kamala, who had taught him the art of love and (unknown to him) borne him a son, after he left the city. She is travelling with her young son to pay homage to the dying Buddha. She is bitten by a snake, and dies, leaving the son in his care. Now, at last, Siddhartha learns his last and most painful lesson: love. For his son is spoiled and resentful, and hates the sacred life the two old men live. Eventually he runs away, and Siddhartha, broken-hearted, yields once again to the song of the river, OM, perfection, and ceases to struggle and suffer.

Siddhartha thus discovered his spirit through a series of events that refreshed and awakened him. "Then from a remote part of his soul, from the past of his tired life, he heard a sound" (72). At the moment Siddhartha attempted to sink himself into oblivion by drowning himself in the river, his soul was revived by the holy "Om." Hesse states that this sound came from his past, indicating that without his previous experiences, he could not be "conscious of Brahman, of the indestructibility of life" (72). When Siddhartha endured his revelation by the river he realized that his sins had ironically allowed him to begin anew. When he found Atman in himself by forgetting his power to think, it showed that his inner direction in truth guided him towards peace. While Siddhartha succeeded in recognizing his soul, he still did not know how it fit into the unity of all things.

He proclaimed, "I had to sink to the greatest mental depths, ...in order to experience grace, ...to sleep deeply and awaken refreshed again" (78).

When he stopped his religious pilgrimage for the pleasures of a senseless life his quest for inner direction seemed to be setback, but this was actually imperative in moving forward to find himself. He unknowingly achieved the second step in his journey and was left with just one more stage.

The most noteworthy point is that Siddhartha was thoroughly human being. He respects his parents, his friend Govinda and treats his son very passionately. As we go through the novel, we see that there is a conflict, struggle, repentance, suffering and hardships, but the hero wins everything sensibly.

The hero finally learns that, 'knowledge can be communicated but not wisdom. He makes us clear the philosophy of Buddha that 'Nirvana' and 'Samsara' are illusion and truth. No one in the world is perfect as he says, "sometimes the God exists in the sinner ". Everything that exist in good, death as well as holiness, wisdom as well as folly. Even in the stone, there is a world as it belong to the world of 'Maya'. His last bit not the least words are :

“ Love is the most powerful element in the world and one must love everything.”

The novel shows that sometimes the , material comfort proves curse against the spiritual peace. Here, we find that Siddhartha has enough material comforts, ardent love of parents and friend Govinda. He has enough sources of worldly pleasure like money, love, sex and other happiness. But his heart is longing for meta-physical peace. He has to pass from many bondage, burdens and hurdles of life, but his strong will- power and high spirit allows him to succeed in it.

In short, Siddhartha is the most spiritual, interesting and saint like figure. The study of his character makes one aware of his ways of the world. His life is like a tactful journey because he passes from the various aspects of life and attains his goal.

The secret that Siddhartha discovers is profound; that others can teach us knowledge, but not wisdom, and that we cannot shield our children from samsara, suffering, and that they, like us, must find their own way. Wisdom, he learns from the river's song, is a readiness of the soul to think the thought of unity, to breathe it. As he tells his friend Govinda, when they are reunited: "Seeking means having a goal, but finding means being free, open, having no goal."

Each of us has innate desire to understand the purpose of our existence. As Hermann Hesse illustrates in his novel Siddhartha, the journey to wisdom may be difficult. Organized religion helps many to find meaning in life but it does not substitute careful introspection. An important message of Siddhartha is that to achieve enlightenment one must unite the experiences of mind, body, and spirit.



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