

# Study of an Uncommon Journey of a Common Men in Search of True Purpose of Life in Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*

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## ABSTRACT

Human soul is immortal and flow of life is unending. In this unending journey of life, very few people might have tried to understand and realize the meaning of life and achieved the peace of soul or self-enlightenment. In, today's arena people are very busy with living their materialistic life to fulfill their unending desire and ambitions in the life. In this mad race of money and fame, people forget the real essence of life that is inner peace and introspection to achieve Nirvana. *Siddhartha* (1922), the novel of *Hermann Hesse* truly explains the journey of soul from exterior pleasure to interior peace. This novel is all about mankind's journey of life learning and realizing the true meaning of life. This paper is an attempt to understand *Hermann Hesse's* perspective of life and *Siddhartha's* soul searching journey.

## 1. Introduction

Hermann Hesse is a German writer, his writings can be matched with principles of Vedas and Upnishdas. Many of his works are also taken from ancient literature of Buddhism and other Hinduism literature. His novels are so gripping and thought provoking that force the reader to rethink and understand his purpose and journey of life. His landmark novel *Siddhartha* (1922) is one such work, which compels the reader to move from all the materialistic pleasure of life to inner peace and finding reason behind existence of life on the earth. *Siddhartha* is a real assessment of life and it evaluates the inherent journey to achieve State of Nirvana. In the novel, an unstoppable voyage for truth is shown for developing strong bond with the world.

## 2. The Major Objectives of the Study

- To understand author's perspective towards the journey of Birth and Death.
- To study the Life Learning Lessons from the novel *Siddhartha*.
- To evaluate author's view point about difference between Teachings and Preaching of life in the Journey of Soul.
- To study the different Characters and Plots of the novel to fulfill the Objective behind writing this novel.
- To understand true Meaning of Wisdom of life as portrayed in the novel.

The entire novel moves around Siddhartha, who is very decent Brahmin boy. This novel is actually about a pilgrimage that turns into a spiritual journey. Siddhartha is on a journey for his search for achieving enlightenment. He got wisdom from his Brahmin traditions and also becomes master in reciting Mantras and Ruchas of Vedas. After knowing so many things about Vedas and other Hinduism teachings, he was not satisfied as these learnings do not fulfill his thirst for Nirvana. He also denies various teachings of religions because he was not happy with these concepts and principles, as he felt that such things do not help us to achieve self-enlightenment. Siddhartha and his friend Govinda were searching for true

meaning of life present on universe. They have such unending desire to spent their life in spirituality and achieve 'Nirvana'. As per the novel *Siddhartha*, Nirvana takes us to achieve suitable relationship with the universe and so, it is an ultimate objective of mankind.

As per Buddhism 'Nirvana' means achieving highest and ultimate level of emptiness of life and soul. It states that Nirvana is empty state of soul, which does not have any desires to achieve in life. It refers to a place (metaphorically), state or condition which does not have any scope of death, as there is no birth, no coming into existence, nothing made by conditioning, and therefore no time. It is indeed moving away from all the attachments and relationships of life. According to Collins:

At enlightenment, constructive consciousness within the sequence ceases. At final Nirvana constructed-consciousness is succeeded by timeless nirvana (which can be seen as a temporal event only from the conditioned, temporal point of view). That which replaces the constructed-consciousness of the sequence, temporally extended and variegated according to different lives, and that which supervenes on the destruction of "the conceit (that) 'I am'". (*Imagery and Thought in Theravida Buddhism* 100-3)

It can be said that it is not nonexistence, and it is a timeless bliss.

## 3. Voyage for Wisdom

Siddhartha has an incredible level of patience and tolerance in life. Siddhartha possesses an implausible measure of patience. His pursue to achieve enlightenment in life takes him to different places and makes him learn different wisdom from people around the world. His experience made him disappointed at many times but he continues to learn the hidden gems of life. Actually, Siddhartha is a Sanskrit name of Lord Buddha. Siddhartha means the one who achieves his objective in life. This word Siddhartha is derived from two different words i.e. 'Siddha', which means accomplished and 'Artha' that means Objective. Therefore, combining these two

words make it 'Siddhartha' (Accomplishment of Objective). According to the novelist, Siddhartha was always in search of accomplishment of his goal to achieve 'Nirvana' in life.

With the help of this novel, Hermann Hesse has tried to describe Siddhartha's journey towards enlightenment. Siddhartha could find enlightenment but he could not achieve it with the help of teachings from different people of wisdom in his voyage. Siddhartha feels that such teachings cannot help us to achieve enlightenment but it should come from within. Siddhartha has met and understood teachings from Buddhists, Brahmins, Samanas etc. but he cannot achieve his ultimate goal of Nirvana from any of these. His ultimate victory to understand 'Nirvana' does not come from anyone who is providing the insight but in its place through an internal union to the river, which stands for the unending flow of the cosmos. The novelist utters:

Siddhartha learned a lot when he was with the Samanas, many ways leading away from the self he learned to go. He went the way of self-denial by means of pain, through voluntary suffering and overcoming pain, hunger, thirst, tiredness. He went the way of self-denial by means of meditation, through imagining the mind to be void of all conceptions. These and other ways he learned to go, a thousand times he left his self, for hours and days he remained in the non-self. But though the ways led away from the self, their end nevertheless always led back to the self". (38)

#### 4. Preaching of Siddhartha

Life dwells in divisions i.e. in any kind of relationship to its opposite or polar energy and level of connection that we get in our relations. The very important division is between confrontations to our inner selves and our unending desire of materialistic greed of human being in life. 'Are we the body or the dweller within the body?' This obvious detachment with our inner selves is very dangerous and can be harmful to our journey to Nirvana. The soul of living being on the universe does not have any boundary and has complete liberty that can be seen in human capability. The relation with the divine source is the real substance of life. Siddhartha is conscious of this divisionality.

In the novel, the author has discarded that pleasure from the material world. Even the author has also shown that teachings from Brahmins, Buddhists and Samanas are just words of wisdom but it is not enough to achieve Nirvana. To the extreme, the author has said that all these teachings are just illusion to overcome the pleasure from material world. It is the major problem to all those who seek to achieve the spiritual well being of one's self. Siddhartha has accepted this philosophy and also denies that such teachings are just not enough to achieve his ultimate goal of life. Interestingly, the second part of the novel *Siddhartha*, takes the protagonist to the pleasure of the exterior world. Here Siddhartha, unpredictably moves away from spiritual world and involves in the material pleasure and greed of money and love. Siddhartha slowly get strapped in the cob web of such materialistic life and bodily love. After enjoying all these material pleasures and other exterior elements of life, suddenly on one day Siddhartha realized his mistake of attachment with the material world and left the city with guilt and heavy heart.

In the last phase of the novel, Siddhartha meets Vasudeva. Vasudeva is a simple ferryman who is shown in the novel as an ultimate guide who takes Siddhartha towards his ultimate goal of Nirvana in life. Vasudeva's presence seems to go beyond the material world; he provides a divine energy always with the help of sharing his experiences and knowledge that he has achieved through flowing river. The interesting part of the story is that Vasudeva has never taught any difficult and complex teachings or any highly philosophical preaching of life. He has always tries to fulfill Siddhartha's curiosity by sharing his experiences from river and makes Siddhartha understand the essence of it. Vasudeva has shown Siddhartha the way to understand the deep attachment between himself and the flowing river by listening to river and introspecting. No teaching or preaching is provided by Vasudeva, he even does not express as what the river will share but when Siddhartha opens up his feeling of confluence with the unending flow of the river, Vasudeva accepts the wisdom and understanding of Siddhartha.

#### 5. Philosophy of Life and Death

In the novel, one of the question that Siddhartha has always tried to seek the answer for is; Dose love exist or inevitable in life of a person who has left every material pleasure of life? Hermann Hesse tries to prove authentically in the novel the place of love in the growth of a saintly soul. Love takes place in the life of Siddhartha in different phases of life in form of friend, mother, father and a prostitute but he could get rid of all these in search of his journey of Nirvana. Love limits Siddhartha's capability to understand divine wisdom and he abandons it. Siddhartha finds love in the form of compassion in Buddha but he rejects this love again because he realizes it as a part of teachings only that do not guide him to enlightenment. He learns the physical aspects of love through the closeness with Kamala; he understands the weight of love itself too but he is useless of giving and receiving true love at this stage. So, he stops himself as he is not convinced and profited by the offerings of the world. Siddhartha feels love and is attached deeply with his son, but since love is an attachment to the world, it warns him. He is frightened that the love he feels for his son turns out to be a hurdle to get wisdom but he feels the intense pain of separation when his son leaves him behind. The novelist narrates:

..... his face resembled another face, which he used to know and love and also fear. It resembled his father's face, the Brahmin. And he remembered how he, a long time ago, as a young man, had forced his father to let him go to the penitents, and never come back. Had his father not also suffered the same pain for him, which he now suffered for his son?(174)

Journey of life is never ending. There is no birth or no death really exists in voyage of a soul. In the eventful and aspiring life, sometimes silence is essential to understand self and the purpose of drama in which the role is played. S.B. Bhambar's remark is striking:

Each individual has to experience the truth, the reality. Hesse is of the view that if you want to experience the truth, then the truth must be within the framework of your body. Govinda, Siddhartha's friend, remains stagnate in spite of following the Buddha for

many years because the truth was not within the framework of his body. (*ADualist Spiritual Journey* 150-151)

Siddhartha has concluded with the realization that the wise Brahmins has already opened to him the most and best of their wisdom, that they have already filled his weighty vessel with their richness, and the vessel is not full, the spirit is not content, the soul is not calm so the heart is not satisfied. Henry David Thoreau's observation is that "The unconsciousness of man is the consciousness of God" (*The Writing of Henry David Thoreau* 371).

## 6. Conclusion

Life is actually a journey of the soul from different form of birth and deaths. The ultimate goal of any living being in the

life to get rid of this cycle of death and birth is to achieve Nirvana or enlightenment. What makes Siddhartha to reach at complete tranquility and happiness in his life by means very laborious and lengthy path? The secret of all these questions is there in *The Gita* as development of each character is divided into three distinct stages: innocence, followed by knowledge ('sin'), which, collectively, leads to an elevated state of innocence conveyed by augmented awareness and consciousness. According to *The Gita*, the flow is from action to knowledge to wisdom. So, the journey of Siddhartha was started with lot dilemmas and confusions about rituals and customs followed by Brahmins in life. His thirst for Nirvana did not even quench even after meeting Buddha. He realized that there may be different ways for different people to reach the God but the spiritual journey is primarily individual.

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