

## “SIDDHARTHA” – A SEARCH FOR SELF – REALIZATION

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### ABSTRACT

Herman Hesse's novel Siddhartha is the magnum opus which seems to be inspired by the divinity. The spiritual gurus have highly complicated our lives by using the high sounding words, like 'Nirvana', 'Adwaitva' etc. They preach the people to renounce all the worldly pleasures and use the word love pejoratively. The writer teaches us that love is the foundation of the Nirvana and without it all other destinations are futile. As Coleridge conveys in *'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'*, the only mean of salvation is to spread the seeds of love for humanity. May all Govindas find their Siddharthas.

**Keywords:** Nirvana, Spiritual quest, love, Salvation

## INTRODUCTION:

Herman Hesse, in his unique literary work 'Siddhartha', presents before us some universal problems related to the relevance of human existence and individual efforts to seek freedom from the bondage of cycle of life. Each one of us is a Siddhartha- more or less, in the sense of his chosen path whether right or wrong to attain NIRVANA. Siddhartha - the hero of the novel, is privileged enough to be brought up in an academic, religious atmosphere under loving care of his Brahmin father and other equally competently elders. He is used to meditate and contemplate. His beauty, intelligence and grace have endeared him to all but he feels to be a restless soul. Very soon, he realizes his true goal and resolves to begin his search for the SELF, the innermost, the only important thing. He understands it clearly that mere acquisition of knowledge would lead him to nowhere. He yearns for the rewarding experience. Though his father is reluctant initially, he manages to get permission from him to become a Samana.

Siddhartha is fed up of worldly objects and pleasures. For him life means nothing but pain. He empties himself from everything – desires, dreams, thirst etc to experience peace and happiness of emptied heart. He looks himself transformed as an animal, carcass, stone, wood, water and each time he reawakens, feels the pangs of cruel life cycle.

*"Siddhartha had one single goal- to become empty, to become empty of thirst. desire, dreams, pleasure and sorrow- to let the self die. No longer to be self, to experience the peace of an emptied heart, to experience pure thought- that was his goal. When all the self was conquered and dead, when all passions and desires were silent, then the last must awaken, the innermost of being that is no longer self- the great secret" (p. 14)*

Temporary escape serves no purpose and does not help much to achieve new experiences before reaching the state of Nirvana or Salvation, the state of discerning 'Atman'. So far he seems to be groping in the dark; there comes a turning point in his life when he comes to know about the arrival of GOTAMA with his disciples. People have a lot to say about moral impact, wisdom and compassion of inwardly rich holy figure.

Along with his friend Govinda, Siddhartha goes to see Gotama the illustrious one. The Buddha impresses him to a great degree. Siddhartha has never seen such a man in his life, so worthy, so childlike, so mysterious, so candid as the Buddha. As Siddharth says,

*"I, also, would like to look and smile, sit and walk like that, so free, so worthy, so restrained, so candid, so childlike and mysterious. A man only looks and walks like that when he has conquered his Self. I also will conquer my Self...No other teachings will attract me, since this man's teachings have not done so." (p. 35)*

He further adds,

*"The illustrious one spoke in a soft but firm voice, taught the four points, taught the eight fold: patiently he covered the usual method of teaching with examples and repetition. Clearly and quietly his voice was carried to his listeners – like a light, like a star in the heavens" (p. 29)*

The Illustrious one teaches him eight folds path and explains that opinions do not matter much. In spite of his great reverence for the Buddha, Siddhartha takes a bold decision to leave his company and goes to his own way. He wants to learn about the self, gets rid of it and conquers it. He must rely on his own experience as every one is a potential Buddha. He says to Govinda,

*"You have renounced home and parents, you have renounced your own will, you have renounced friendship. That is what the teachings preach, that is the will of the illustrious one. That is what you wished for yourself. Tomorrow, Govinda, I will leave you." (p. 30)*

Siddhartha's return to material world opens a new chapter in his life. He meets the courtesan Kamala, an exceptional woman, from whom he learns true lessons of love. He requests her,

*"I have come to tell you this and to thank you because you are so beautiful. And if it does not displease you, Kamala, I would like to ask you to be my friend and teacher, for I do not know anything of the art of which you are mistress" (p. 53)*

She fills his life with joy and helps him settle well in his new avatar. She explains him that like knowledge, genuine affection too can not be gained by force. It has to be gained by realization. Gradually she develops great love for Siddhartha. Siddhartha and Kamala, have great resemblance. They can withdraw themselves from external, illusory world at will and retreat in a sanctuary within.

As recommended by Kamala, Siddhartha approaches Kamaswami, a businessman to learn about worldliness and when he being asked what he is good at, he explains the businessman clearly that his only property is his capacity to think, to wait and to fast. He begins to behave like other worldly people. He devotes himself

completely to the world of sensualism and materialism. He starts to envy people for the depth of their pleasures and sorrows, their infinite power to love, their property. He fulfills all the carnal desires he gambles, drinks wine and becomes greedy.

Being a man of moral values, Siddhartha realizes his faux pas and thinks how many years have been lost. He simply withdraws himself from Samsara, never to return to his riches or to Kamala who is left pregnant with his unborn son. Kamala is not even much surprised when she comes to know about his disappearance,

*"She was not surprised when she learned that Siddhartha had disappeared. Had she not always expected it? Was he not a samana, without a home, a pilgrimage?" (p. 85)*

Siddhartha feels ashamed of his indulgence in the wicked ways of worldliness. The complete metamorphosis is found in the character of Siddhartha when he is on the verge of committing suicide near a river but stops after seeing his reflection in the water. He ponders,

*"I know nothing, I possess nothing, I have learned nothing...when I am no longer young, when my hair is fast growing gray...now I am beginning again like a child." (p. 95)*

The latter half of the novel has, one may say, the river as its focal point. The silently flowing river conveys a very significant message to the looker-one, Water flows and yet it remains at the same place and is also everywhere. As the Ferryman says,

*"It is a very beautiful river. I love it above everything. I have often listened to it, gazed at it, and I have always learned something from it. One can learn much from a river." (p. 49)*

Siddhartha sleeps peacefully and deeply near the river. It is a wonderful and divine experience for him, when he gets up and finds a monk sitting by him. The holy man is none else but his friend Govinda. Siddhartha tells him that every thing is transitory. He himself changes now and then-the Brahmin, the Samana, the rich man. He thinks seriously about different stages of his previous life, his varied experience in order to experience grace. On being asked by Govinda whether he has lost the riches, he says the following words,

*"I have lost them, or they have lost me- I am not sure. The wheel of appearances revolves quickly, Govinda. Where is Siddhartha the Brahmin, where is Siddhartha, the samana, where is Siddhartha the rich man? The transitory soon changes, Govinda. You know that." (p. 94)*

He understands that too much knowledge proves to be an obstacle in his way. The novelist says,

*"Siddhartha now also realized why he had struggled in vain with this self when he was a Brahmin and an ascetic. Too much of knowledge had hindered him" (p. 99)*

Siddhartha's meeting with Vasudeva proves to be a turning point in his life. Vasudeva- the ferryman is a symbol of divinity and he becomes Siddhartha's friend, philosopher and guide who teaches him how to listen attentively to the voice of the river, without desire, without judgment, without opinion. The river teaches him that the present only exists itself, neither through the past-nor the reality. Siddhartha sees many associations with the river; its voice reminds him the voice of a king, of a warrior, of a bull, of a night-bird, of a sighing man etc. It is not just the water but the voice of life, the voice of being, of perpetual becoming.

Siddhartha, who has left kamala after enjoying her company for a short period, happens to meet her and their son in a strange circumstance, when she is bitten by a snake. All the efforts of the boatman Vasudeva and Siddhartha to save her life fail and once the queen of many hearts meets a tragic death. Siddhartha suffers the rude behavior of his motherless son patiently. His son says,

*"You want me to become like you, so pious, so gentle, so wise, but just to spite you, I would rather become a thief and a murderer and go to hell, than be like you. I hate you; you are not my father even if you have been my mother's lover a dozen times!" (p. 123)*

The poor fellow on the way to the realization of the self finds himself entangled into the bondage of human relationship. Vasudeva advises him to seek advice from the river. He beholds the face of his own father, his son, and Kamaswami etc in the river and realizes that like his son did he not detach himself from the persons – his father, Govinda, Kamala – who loved him most? Did he not leave them in a valley of sadness to lose him forever? Such is now his own destiny. He realizes that he should not force his own ideals on his son. He learns from the river to wait, to have patience, to listen. He whispers the word OM, fills himself with OM. Now he begins to look at people from a different angle, shares with them life's urges and finds them lovable and respectable. It dawns upon him that the men of the world are equal to thinkers in every other respect, except the consciousness of the unity of life. He opens his heart and confesses consciousness of the unity of life before vasudeva – who himself looks like river. For Siddhartha he is almost like god. They go to the river and listen to the thousand voices of the river – all interwoven which appear to them as the music of life.

*"Siddhartha tried to listen better. The picture of his father, his own picture, and the picture of his son all flowed into each other. Kamala's picture also appeared and flowed on, and the picture of Govinda and others emerged and passed on. They all*

*became part of the river. It was the goal of all of them, yearning, desiring, suffering:  
and the river's voice was full of longing, full of smarting woe, full of insatiable  
desire...then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word: Om-  
perfection" (pp. 134-136)*

As the time ripens, Vasudeva leaves the hut in order to go into the unity of all things. He bids farewell to the hut, Siddhartha and the river.

Govinda, the monk once again happens to meet his old friend Siddhartha and is stunned to see Siddhartha's transformation and thinks how he has achieved enlightenment though Siddhartha led a life of sin before coming to peace. During their conversation, Siddhartha explains the monk the difference between seeking and finding. A seeker keeps in his mind his goal only. It is a futile exercise. But finding means to be free, to be receptive, to have no goal. Wisdom can not be communicated. Knowledge can be passed on. He also teaches that in every truth the opposite is equally true. The world is perfect at every moment. There is a co-existence of the Buddha and the robber in every soul. At this stage it becomes clear to him that soft, colourful, delicious, sweet-smelling flowers, and birds, trees, rivers, stones are more preferable than dry words like 'Nirvana', Moksha. Words can't bring peace or happiness. Love only is the supreme force in life. It is somewhat difficult for Govinda to grasp and digest strange, contradictory ideas of his friend.

Siddhartha deems it necessary to love all human beings, to admire and respect them but Govinda argues that the Buddha preaches benevolence, sympathy, patience-but not love. The illustrious one forbids people to bind themselves to earthly love. For Siddhartha there is hardly any difference between the two and it is just a game of words which misleads the innocent mind. Govinda sees many faces of his friend- a long series of faces which changes and renews and which are yet all Siddhartha. He sees the face of a fish, of a newly born child, of a murderer, of love – making persons, of herds of animals, of Krishna and Agni. All these are differently related forms and faces of love. He is greatly influenced by the smile of Siddhartha which is as soothing, as heartening, as consoling as that of the Buddha himself. It reminds him of everything that is holy and valuable in life.

It is indeed a divine experience for the sincere reader to read 'Siddhartha' because it broadens the horizons of understanding and sympathy. Total identification of the writer himself with Siddhartha creates a miraculous effect on our minds. He makes us share pleasures, pains, and puzzles of his characters and interpret them in our own way. His prose has such a charm and beauty that it reaches at the level of poetry. The description of Brahmins performing rituals, of graceful enticing fairy-like Kamala, of monks discussing problems of life and death, and above all the river with a lot of messages to deliver, have the capacity to soothe the troubled souls and leave indelible impression on our mind. 'Siddhartha' is not a book but 'the Book' because like its hero, it too contains many faces. It seems God Himself must have inspired the writer to pen such a remarkable work. In our country, where every other person assumes himself to be a philosopher and there is a fashion to indulge in a spiritual debate, without any qualification. This book will help to solve many doubts of the path-finders. Let us find our own Gotama, Govinda, Vasudeva to guide us in our sojourn for self-realization.

#### REFERENCES:

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