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## Siddhartha, A Saga of Enlightenment By Hermann Hesse

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“It Is Better To Conquer Yourself  
Than To Win A Thousand Battles.  
Then The Victory Is Yours.  
It Cannot Be Taken From You.”

-Buddha

**Abstract:** *Siddhartha* (1922) is a novel by German born Swiss poet, novelist, painter and Nobel laureate Hermann Hesse. His notable works include *The Glass Bead Game*, *Siddhartha*, *Steppen Wolf*, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, *Demian*. Hesse is having many short stories to his credit. He is the recipient of Nobel Prize in 1946. Hermann Hesse's works are autobiographical and concerns with the questions of 'Weltanschauung' (world view) philosophy of life, which is a psychological set up that provides consolidate technique towards the problems of existence. The theory of Weltanschauung has played a significant role in the evolution of psychoanalysis, critical theory, in nineteenth and twentieth century humanities. Freud defined the term "A Weltanschauung is an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis which, accordingly leaves no question unanswered and in everything that interests us finds its fixed place."(1933a[1932]p.158) The character's name recalls the Hindu Gods, Vedas and Upanishads. Siddhartha is the original name of Gautama Buddha, Vasudeva name of Krishna, Govinda name of Vishnu, Kamala is similar to goddess Lakshmi and Om refers to Vedas and Upanishad. Misra suggests "Siddhartha is one of the names of the historical Gotama the life of Hesse's character; Siddhartha resembles that of his historical counterpart to some extent. Siddhartha is by no means a fictional life of Buddha, but it does contain numerous references to Buddha and his teachings.



**Keywords:** Faith, spirituality, ideology, philosophy, enlightenment.

*Siddhartha* (1922) is a novel by German born Swiss poet, novelist, painter and Nobel laureate Hermann Hesse. His notable works include *The Glass Bead Game*, *Siddhartha*, *Steppen Wolf*, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, *Demian*. Hesse is having many short stories to his credit. He is the recipient of Nobel Prize in 1946. Hermann Hesse's works are autobiographical and concerns with the questions of 'Weltanschauung' (world view) philosophy of life, which is a psychological set up that provides consolidate technique towards the problems of existence. The theory of Weltanschauung has played a significant role in the evolution of psychoanalysis, critical theory, in nineteenth and twentieth century humanities. Freud defined the term "A Weltanschauung is an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis which, accordingly leaves no question unanswered and in everything that interests us finds its fixed place."(1933a[1932]p.158) The character's name recalls the Hindu Gods, Vedas and Upanishads. Siddhartha is the original name of Gautama Buddha, Vasudeva name of Krishna, Govinda name of Vishnu, Kamala is similar to goddess Lakshmi and Om refers to Vedas and Upanishad. Misra suggests "Siddhartha is one of the names of the historical Gotama the life of Hesse's character; Siddhartha resembles that of his historical counterpart to some extent. Siddhartha is by no means a fictional life of Buddha, but it does contain numerous references to Buddha and his teachings. (Misra14)

*Siddhartha* is Hermann Hesse's ninth novel written in German. It was translated into English in 1951. The first part of it is dedicated to Romain Rolland, and the second part is dedicated to his cousin Wilhelm Gundert. Siddhartha meaning in Sanskrit is one who has attained his goals. Siddhartha in the novel grew up as a handsome son, a great wise man and a prince among the Brahmins. His father was proud of his son who was quick in learning and his thirst for knowledge. He had learnt to speak 'Om' silently into himself while inhaling and exhaling with all the concentration of his soul. His well-built physic attracted many ladies towards him. Govinda was more than a friend a disciple of Siddhartha. He wanted to follow his friend everywhere and was waiting when he would become God. Siddhartha was loved and seen in awe by everybody but he



was not a source of joy for himself. He knew that all the relationships he is surrounded by could not comfort him and satisfy. Even his teachers had already filled his expecting vessel with their richness but his spirit was not content, his soul was not calm and his heart was not satisfied.

Siddhartha wanted answers to wash off the sin, to heal the spirit's thirst and to relieve the fear in his heart. Most importantly he was eager to know about the 'self' and to reach the place of self, myself the Atman. He wanted to become a Samana, a wandering ascetic, one of whom was Gautama Buddha but his father was not ready to give him permission to be Samana but his determination made his father to concur. Govinda accompanied Siddhartha. According to the new Samana rules Siddhartha practiced self-denial and meditation, but he felt nothing special as he could have learnt it anywhere else. According to Siddhartha "What is Meditation? What is leaving one's body? What is fasting? What is holding one's breath? It is fleeing from the self, it is a short escape of the agony of being a self, it is a brief numbing of the senses against the pain and pointlessness of life." (23) He feels even a drinker briefly escapes and rests for time being. He was sure that nobody among them would attain nirvana and find the path of paths. Siddhartha spent his three years among Samanas. Then he learnt about a wise and knowledgeable man Gotama, the exalted one, the Buddha. He had overcome the suffering of the world in himself and had halted the cycle of rebirths. Siddhartha wanted to leave the Samanas and meet Buddha. When he seek his permission he spoke loudly and used crude words. Siddhartha cast a spell on the old man which he had learnt from him only. Then the old man made gestures of blessing and stammered a wish for a good journey.

Siddhartha along with Gotama reached the grove of Jetavana, and then in Savathi they received food from a lady even before asking for it. From that lady they learnt much about Buddha, the enlightened one. When Siddhartha met Buddha for the first time he recognized him instantly. "A simple man in a yellow robe, bearing the alms-dish in his hand, walking silently.(33) After witnessing the teaching of Buddha Govinda got mesmerized and joined as a disciple. Gotama taught the teaching of suffering, of the origin of suffering, of the way to relieve suffering. "Suffering was life. Full of suffering was the world but salvation from suffering had been found. Salvation could be obtained by him who walked the path of the Buddha. He taught the four main





doctrines, taught the eightfold path.” (35) Siddhartha gets a chance to speak his mind to Gotama. First he praises him that everything in his teaching is perfectly clear and proven. Siddhartha questions Gotama that the unity and necessary sequence of all things is broken in one place. “Through a small gap, this world of unity is invaded by something alien, something new, something which had not been there before, and which cannot be demonstrated and cannot be proven.” (38) Gotama’s answer for Siddhartha’s objection is that his teachings are not his opinion and their goal is not to explain the world to those who seek knowledge. Siddhartha was sure that Gotama’s teaching are perfect but it does not reveal the mystery of what the exalted one had experience for himself. Now Siddhartha wanted to encounter it by himself. He knew that Gotama had found salvation from death not by his teachings but by his own search, his own path, by his own thoughts, through meditation, through realizations, through enlightenment. When Gotama asks Siddhartha what he thinks about his disciples that they should leave him and surrender to the world of desires then Siddhartha says “It is not my place to judge another person’s life. Only for myself, for myself alone, I must decide, I must choose, I must refuse.” (41)

Siddhartha starts his journey by his own after departing from Gotama he has become an awakened man on his own mission. Now there is no need of a teacher or any teachings. Siddhartha had tried so far to free himself but he had failed in that. In the process of searching Atman and Brahman he had lost himself. Now he was determined to find himself, the secret of Siddhartha by becoming his own student. After this arousing he realizes that so far in his deep meditation he was the son of his father and had been a high caste Brahman but now he was neither but Siddhartha. He was just Siddhartha without any belonging to anything. With a new mindset he finds the world beautiful. Now Siddhartha has understood that he has to experience his self not capturing it in his thoughts. The knowledge has come that nothing could be achieved by killing the random self of the senses. Now he should be a patient listener of his self and listen to his inner voice for further instruction. Siddhartha walked and reached the straw hut of a ferryman by the river. After spending the night the next day Siddhartha wanted to cross the river. He had nothing to give the ferryman but the ferryman said that he had learned from the river that everything comes back even



the Samana would come back and expected Siddhartha's friendship as his reward. On the way he met a voluptuous woman whose charms made Siddhartha to touch a woman for the first time and he was even sexually tempted. But his inner voice disagreed and he controlled himself. He then kept walking and reached the large city and felt better among the people. Before the city there was a beautifully fenced grove and he learnt that it belongs to Kamala, the famous courtesan and she owned a house at the side of the grove. Siddhartha meets Kamala and asks her to be his teacher. He wanted to learn the art of love making from a courtesan. His first lesson from her was that love can be obtained by begging, buying, receiving it as a gift, finding it in the street but it cannot be stolen. The second lesson she taught him was to kiss. She wanted him to come in good clothes, shoes and money. Siddhartha for the first time wanted to earn not for his living but for a woman teacher of love. Kamala directed Siddhartha to get job from Kamaswami, the richest merchant of the city. But she warned him not to become his servant but to become his equal or else she won't be satisfied with him. Siddhartha had no experience of work except to think, wait and fast. Siddhartha learnt his landlord's business to trade, merchandise, storage rooms, and calculations. He learnt business but remained untouched by his heart. His main motto was to please beautiful Kamala as she liked he wore pretty clothes, fine shoes and even brought gifts. Siddhartha learnt love lessons from Kamala. "Wonderful hours he spent with the beautiful and smart artist, become her student, her lover, her friend." (70)

Siddhartha was accepted as partner by his landlord. But he had remained the same in the profit and in the loss. Kamaswami was much concerned about the profit. Once when Siddhartha was sent for a business trip he had spent money on children, farmers in the village. It was an amusement for him to meet people and know places. He was happy that he was received with kindness and trust, made friendship. Being a Samana Siddhartha was detached to the pain and sufferings of them. Business was nothing to him but Kamala was everything who understood him better than Govinda. She was more similar to Siddhartha. Both of them don't love each other but still can play the game of love. Kamala after she gets old wants to bear his child who is stronger than anybody else. Siddhartha had said to Kamala, "You are like me, you are different from most people. You are



Kamala, nothing else, and inside of you, there is a peace and refuge, to which you can go at every hour of the day and be at home at yourself.” (75) Siddhartha’s soul had kept on turning the wheel of asceticism, the wheel of thinking, the wheel of differentiation for a long time, still turning, but it turned slowly and hesitantly and was close to coming to a standstill. Siddhartha who was a Samana developed inclination towards the worldly pleasures. He enjoyed himself with woman, wore beautiful clothes, to give orders to servants, to bathe in perfumed waters. “He had learned to eat tenderly and carefully prepared food, even fish, even meat and poultry, spices and sweets and to drink wine which causes sloth and forgetfulness.” (79) Siddhartha did not learn attachment from the worldly people. Gradually it occurred that he suffered from the disease of the soul. The new life had silenced his inner voice. He was no more a Samana from his heart. It had grown old and it was losing its colour, and splendor as the years rolled on. Siddhartha got immersed in the worldly pleasures for such an extent that he loved gambling, losing and earning. He lost his calmness, lost his kindness towards beggars, lost his disposition for giving away and loaning money to who petitioned him. Eventually he dreamt about money. In a way he was lost in money making, sex, wine and gambling. In this pointless cycle he ran growing tired old and ill. Thus transformed Siddhartha was alarmed by a dream. It was a dream about Kamala’s singing bird in a golden cage. The bird had become mute and dead. Siddhartha took that dead bird in his hand and threw it away. This dream had awakened his dead soul away and it realized him how he had thrown away his good values for the sake of small lustful pleasures. For many years he had remained detached from the heart but without knowing he had embraced the entire world of Kamaswami and his people. He had started playing “the game of sansara, a game for children, a game which was perhaps enjoyable to play once, twice, ten times – but forever and ever over again?” (86) Then Siddhartha after realizing his true self left all pleasures of the world and moved away from the city. Kamala had freed the bird which she had captivated in her golden cage. The disappearance of Siddhartha was not much surprising for her. She knew he was a pilgrim, a Samana who would leave her sometime. But after he had gone she had no more visitors and locked her house. Then she had become pregnant to Siddhartha’s child.



Siddhartha after leading a miserable and shameful life walks in the forest and reaches the same river where he had met the ferryman. He had felt so bad about himself and his body that he wanted to get drowned in the river. Freud expresses about common man: “Truth seems to him no more capable of comparative degrees than death.”(172) It was the word ‘Om’ which woke him up and saved him from doing this foolish action. “When Om entered his consciousness. He became aware of himself in his misery and in his error.” (90) After a good and long sleep he was rejuvenated. When he woke up from the sleep he had a surprise of the presence of Govinda, the monk. He meets his childhood friend when Siddhartha’s journey from Brahman to Samana and then to the rich man is back to the pilgrimage. Too much knowledge had held him back and he has to start a new journey again. In the eager of reaching goal he had strived unnecessarily in many ways. He was always the smartest, hardest one step ahead of everyone. In the search of the self, killing it with fasting and penance realized that no teacher would bring salvation. He went out to learn himself, lose himself to lust, power, women, money and had become a merchant, gambler, drinker and greedy person until the priest and Samana in him was dead. But now Siddhartha is reborn and like a child with full of joy. He wanted to meet the ferryman by the river and to learn about the secret of the river. Siddhartha was welcomed by the ferryman, Vasudeva. They stayed together in his hut. Vasudeva recognized that the river has spoken to him also. So he accepted him as his friend. Siddhartha becomes a ferryman, loves the river and was eager to acquire knowledge from it. Siddhartha learnt the secret from the river that there is no time. The river which flows at the mouth, at the waterfall, at the ferry in the sea, in the mountains everywhere it flows at once and it is present in the same way so it has only present time for it not the shadow of the past and the future. Siddhartha had enlightenment by the river when he looked at the river got reminded of his life. “I looked at my life, and it was also a river, and the boy Siddhartha was only separated from the man Siddhartha and from the old man Siddhartha by a shadow, not by something real.” (108) Siddhartha had heard many voices such as the voice of a king, warrior, bull, bird, and of a woman giving birth, and of a sighing man, and a thousand other voices. Both Siddhartha and Vasudeva have heard the





voice 'Om'. They had become the best friends with same thoughts and experiences. They become famous as wise men, sorcerers or holy men living by that Ferry.

The fate as it was destined Kamala was one of the visitors on a pilgrimage to the dying Buddha. Kamala had given her garden to the monks of Gotama as a gift and had taken refuge in his teachings. Kamala along with her son had come close to the Vasudeva's ferry. When they were taking rest she is bitten by a snake. When they screamed for help Vasudeva came to rescue but Kamala lost her life giving Siddhartha his son Siddhartha. By hearing to the river Siddhartha had healing thought with the thought of oneness. Now the free willed Siddhartha had got bounded to human love which was Sansara. He waited patiently for his son to accept him but in vain. He had thought his son has brought him happiness and peace but he had brought suffering and worry. He never scolded his son or asked him to behave properly but waited patiently to learn by himself. His son's behavior tormented him day by day. Vasudeva had asked him to leave him to his mother's home but Siddhartha's paternal love did not allow him to take such a decision. He never wanted his son to get lost in sansara as he was lost. Siddhartha had remained strong but paternal love weakened him. Siddhartha had also become completely a childlike person, suffering for the sake of another person, loving another person, lost to a love, having become a fool on account of love."(123) He suffered silently and miserably. Freud opines "It is simply a fact that the truth cannot be tolerant, that it admits of no compromises or limitations, that research regards every sphere of human activity as belonging to it and that it must be relentlessly critical if any other power tries to take over any part of it."(160) The young Siddhartha was getting bored with the company of two old men. He was very stubborn and disobedient. One day he ran away from the hut taking money and boat. But Siddhartha was worried and wanted to follow him. So a new raft was built. Siddhartha ran in vain in search of his son in the forest and reached the city where he had led the life of Samsara with Kamala and the injury of the lost son was worse for him. Vasudeva had followed him and the later followed him back to their hut. Siddhartha's wound was not allowed to heal as he witnessed many fathers with their sons and daughters. He had envied their love and was sad for his deprivation. The craving for his son and that attachment had caused him to suffer. He



confessed everything to Vasudeva how the river had laughed at him. He had pained his father by leaving him and not going back to him. It was the same pain he was going through. Vasudeva just appeared him like a God who patiently listened to him motionless. Later he took him to the river to listen carefully and both of them finally hear 'Om'. Om was flying in the air and floating over the river. The river taught them to relinquish. The sacred Om provides peace to mind, body and soul. This was the moment when his wound was healed and his self-had flown into the oneness. Vasudeva was waiting for this hour and bid farewell to Siddhartha saying, "I am going into the forests, I am going into the Oneness." (138)

The final chapter Govinda is very important as it answers many questions on spirituality. Govinda after many years with the disciples of Gotama was restless and still searching his path being among the monks. Siddhartha says "Searching means: having a goal. But finding means: being free, being open, having no goal." (140) The foremost knowledge Siddhartha poured to Govinda is that he was a searcher so he was not able to see which are directly in front of his eyes. The second knowledge is to learn from everybody. Siddhartha had many teachers including a beautiful courtesan, rich merchant, gamblers and the greatest teacher of all was a simple thinker Vasudeva. Thirdly Siddhartha says knowledge can be conveyed, but not wisdom and it has to be gained by oneself. One has to strive hard to achieve that. The most important understanding of Siddhartha is "The opposite of every truth is just as true! It's like this: any truth can only be expressed and put into words when it is one-sided. Everything is one-sided which can be thought with thoughts and said with words, it's all, all just one half, all lacks completeness, roundness, oneness. (143)

Gotama had divided his teachings as Samsara and Nirvana, into deception and truth, into suffering and salvation. But according to Siddhartha the world is not one sided and the person is not entirely holy or entirely sinful. Man is subjected to deception as if time was something real but it is not real. He concludes that if time is not real, then the gap which seems to be between the world and the eternity, between suffering and blissfulness, between evil and good is also a deception. The world is not imperfect it is already perfect. He says all sins carries the divine forgiveness in itself,



small children carry the old person in themselves, all infants already have death and all dying people the eternal life. There is good in bad and bad in good as Buddha in the Brahman and robber in Brahman. It is only through deep meditation one can put time out of existence and see all life in perfection. And the key for perfection is acceptance and willingness to be good. Siddhartha, the enlightened self, the modern Buddha says he is “Only interested in being able to love the world, not to despise it, not to hate it and me, to be able to look upon it and me, and all beings with love and admiration and great respect.” (147) Thus Hermann Hesse has taken Buddhism to Human Buddhism which leads to a universal humanism. The departing knowledge of Govinda by Siddhartha was the concept of universal love that is to love the world and accept everything as it is. When Govinda kissed his friend Siddhartha’s forehead he could see many thousand faces. He was like Buddha smiling and he knew “the perfected ones are smiling.”(151) Siddhartha got tainted with sin and then learnt to relearn everything. His journey from Brahman to enlightened human is noteworthy. Freud conclusion on Weltanschauung, “A Weltanschauung erected upon science has, apart from its emphasis on the real external world mainly negative traits such as submission to the truth and rejection of illusions. Any of our fellow men who are dissatisfied with this state of things, who calls for more than this for his momentary consolation, may look for it where he can find it. We shall not grudge it him, we cannot help him, but nor can we on his account think differently”. (182)

Hermann Hesse has intense depth in his writing and it is very thought provoking. Siddhartha who is in the quest of 'self' achieves self-realization after facing the realities of life and understanding himself. Siddhartha is the enlightened self when he is ceased from the sufferings and achieves bliss. The River which is the integral part of nature plays an important role in his self-discovery. Being among Samanas he wanted to get rid of religious rituals and instructions. He moves away from spiritual life to material life. The river is an epitome of eternity and it guides Siddhartha and it quenches his thirst of self-knowledge. Siddhartha rejects Brahmanical life and Hindu religion but embraces Buddhism as the best religion but with a flaw. “I believe that among all the Samanas, probably not even one will attain Nirvana. We find consolations; we learn tricks



with which we deceive ourselves, but the essential thing- the way-we do not find.”(20) Hermann’s *Siddhartha* acts as psychotherapy and shows the path of self-reliance. We should walk alone to the path of enlightenment and become one with oneself. To rise above human weakness Siddhartha stained his mind and body with weaknesses. Then through the call of his inner self he rescued himself. He saved himself from drowning in the worldly life and cultivated his mind towards divinity and light. Just like Buddha he smiles and treads the path of humanity and helps his friend Govinda to exit from the darkness of his life. Finally through the awakening and perfection of his mind Siddhartha becomes an enlightened person. Thus it is proved by Hermann Hesse that there is need of open mindedness and endurance to achieve perfection of self. In the words of Buddha, “Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.”

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