

# Quest for Identity in Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*

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## Abstract :

*Siddhartha* is one of the most influential and Nobel prize-winning, German author Hermann Hesse. In this novel, Hesse explores the influence of Indian Philosophy. The novel was set in India, Hesse interest in the conflict between mind, body and spirit are projected in it. Though the novel *Siddhartha*, Hesse has searched for truth, for self- liberation and self-actualization. The title *Siddhartha* has its origin in Sanskrit language, which is *siddha* and *artha*. The word *siddha* means achieved and *artha* means what was searched for. Put together it means how the person has found meaning or he has attained his goals. Siddhartha Gautama was an old name of the Buddha, before his renunciation the Buddha was referred to as Gotama. Hesse explains the quest for identity through the character of Siddhartha in the novel *Siddhartha*.

**Keywords:** indulgence, Mortification, enlightenment, intransigent, camaraderie.

*Siddhartha* is a novel by Hermann Hesse which dealt with the spiritual journey of self-identity of a man who named Siddhartha during the time of the Gotama Buddha. This book, Hesse's Ninth novel. It was written in German. It was in a simple, lyrical style. It was became influential during the twentieth century and it was published in united states in 1951. The novel *Siddhartha* was fictitious biography. In this novel, Hesse explained about the Hinduism and Buddhism. *Siddhartha* is an intellectual biographical sketch that explores the source of self permeating the self. The major characters of the novel *Siddhartha*, Govinda, Siddhartha father, the Samanas, Gotama, Kamala, Kamaswami, Vasudeva, and young Siddhartha. Siddhartha is the protagonist's of the novel.

The novel begins with the introduction of his village. The village is full of shade of the house, in the sunshine on the river bank by the boats, in the shade of the willow wood and the fig tree. The character Siddhartha, the handsome Brahmin's son, who has grown up with his friend Govinda. Everyone in their village loved Siddhartha. He has grown up learning the ways of Brahmin, singing and how to behave to their village people. There was happiness in his father's heart because of his son who was intelligent and thirsty for knowledge, he saw him growing up to be a great learned man, a priest, a prince among Brahmins.

There was a pride in his mother's breast when she saw him walking, sitting down and rising; Siddhartha was strong, handsome, supple, limbed, greeting her with grace. Love stirred in the heart of the young Brahmins daughter when Siddhartha walked through the streets of the town, with the lofty brow, his king-like eyes and his slim behavior. His friend, Govinda also loved him more than anybody else. He loved his friend's walking and complete grace of movement and loved his intelligent and ardent thoughts, his strong will, and his high vocation. He was suffered a restless dream. As Hesse says, "That was how everybody loved Siddhartha, he delighted and made everybody happy" (Hesse 5).

Siddhartha and his friend Govinda often went near the banyan tree for meditation. In, Siddhartha's mind reflected the Upanishads of Sama-veda spoke of this innermost feeling. It is written; your soul is the whole world. Siddhartha called his friend Govinda, and they are going under the banyan tree for the practice of meditation. They went to the banyan tree and sat down twenty paces apart. As they sat down were ready to pronounce the word *Om*. Siddhartha softly recited the verse, "Om is the bow, the arrow is the soul, Brahman is the Arrow's goal, At which one aims unflinchingly" (8).

Siddhartha and Govinda practised meditation till the day ended. After three days, Siddhartha told Govinda that he will join the Samanas. Govinda also decided to join the samanans. When Siddhartha announces his intention to join the Samanas, his father became upset and forbids Siddhartha's departure. Siddhartha's father accepted his son's intention but his mind was full of frustration. Night passed. Siddhartha's father returned to his intransigent son and he realised that while Siddhartha's body remains in present, his mind had already passed. Siddhartha's father decided and allowed him to leave, and also he realised that his son will be the wandering as a Samana in his future. Govinda also joined with Siddhartha as they went to the forest in search of Samanas.

As Samanas, Siddhartha and Govinda decided all their possessions and dedicated to give up themselves to meditation, fasting and other methods of mortification. When Siddhartha turned as a Samana, he gave his cloth to poor Brahmin on the road. He ate only once a day and never cooked food. He fasted fourteen days continuously and his fastings continued till twenty eight days. His body flesh disappeared from legs and cheeks. He appeared as a wildly beast with long nail and fully grown beard and become lean and his lips became curled. With the Samanas, he had one goal, "Siddhartha had one single goal-to become empty, to become empty of thirst, desire, dreams, pleasure and sorrow, to let the self die" (14).

At night Govinda and Siddhartha were talking about the teachings of illustrious one. Siddhartha placed his hand on Govinda's shoulder. At that moment Govinda realized that his friend was leaving him and he began to weep. Suddenly Govinda cried and Siddhartha spoke kindly to him. He advised his friend Govinda, who belonged to Buddha's holy men. He renounced home and parents, renounced origin and property, and also renounced his friendship. On the way Siddhartha remembered all that he had experienced in the garden of Jetavana. Having left Govinda and the Buddha, Siddhartha spends the night in a ferryman's hut. In the ferryman hut, he had a dream. He dreamt that Govinda stood before him, in the yellow robe of the ascetic. Govinda looked sad and asked him about his leaving. Suddenly Govinda

changed as a young woman, she is beautiful and lovable woman and he tasted a pleasure of life. In the river side, they are talking about their past life. Both have introduced themselves.

The ferryman helped him across the river. Siddhartha greeted the ferryman because he had no money to give him, but ferryman says that friendship is payment enough. Then Siddhartha came the village where he met a woman who was kneeling and washing clothes. He greets her, she raised her head and looked at him with a smile. He asked the woman how far the road still was to the large town. She stood up and came towards him. Both are attracted. In the garden, they are having sex. Both long for the pleasure of life. At night he lived with the woman. After leaving this place he decided to meet Kamaswami, the merchant who shows him into a rich house. In the house of Kamaswami he waited for a long time. After few minutes, Kamaswami came in, “supple, lively man, with graying hair, with clever, prudent eyes and a sensual mouth. Master and visitor greeted each other in a friendly manner” (63).

Kamaswami and Siddhartha talked about the business and everyone remarked has possessed their own profession. Kamaswami decided that to give a job to Siddhartha. He gave a sales agreement to Siddhartha and he began to read the contents. Then he gave a pen and paper. Siddhartha wrote something. Kamaswami read the paper. In the paper, “Writing is good, thinking is better. Clever is good and patience is better” (65).

Kamaswami was in many troubles because of Siddhartha’s involvement in his business. Often Siddhartha discussed about the Buddha and the nature of enlightenment. After Siddhartha left the town, he returned to the river where he met the ferryman. He stopped at this river and stood hesitatingly on the bank near a coconut tree. A chilly emptiness in the water reflected the terrible emptiness in his soul. Under the tree, he heard the chant *Om*. It was one word and one syllable, the hold *Om*, which had meaning of the perfect one or the perfection. Siddhartha laid his head on the tree roots and sank into a deep sleep. His sleep was deep and dreamless. He had not slept like that for a long time. What a wonderful sleep it had been! He was remarkably awake and happy and curious.

Siddhartha sits by the river for a while and considers his life, concluding that although his recent existence has almost pressed him to suicide; it was good for him to have lived it. As Siddhartha says, “I had to experience despair, I had to sink to the greatest mental depths, to thoughts of suicide in order to experience grace, to hear *Om* again, to sleep deeply again and to awaken refreshed again” (97). He had to let the Brahmin, the Samana, the pleasure-monger, and the man of property all die in order to find the self that lurked beneath these identities. Now he is happy and free like a child, possessed of a great capacity to love. He is now ready to complete his life’s journey. Gotama Buddha and Siddhartha were parallel in their beginning as both felt to give up the mundane existence and join those who renounce indulgence in the sense. Succeedingly, Siddhartha decides to adopt the life of worldly enjoyment by joining with the child people, he had sex with Kamala; he made friendship with Kamaswami for social and economical affluence.

To sum up, Siddhartha was in the state of vacillation, neither outright indulgence in the ascetic life nor adopting a full-fledged conjugal life. By coming in contact and camaraderie of the ferryman Vasudeva, he worked as sentinel of connecting link between the worldly life and asceticism. The novel *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse contains numerous

Buddhist elements, from the title to the search for truth and details that resemble the life of Buddha. Hesse like his hero Siddhartha, he must, as a European individualist, find his own way and walk on his own path without having understood the meaning of the path of one's own in the Buddhist sense that: Enlightenment is seen as an individualist event that others cannot share.

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