

HARMONIOUS INTERPLAY OF THE SPIRITUAL AND SENSUAL IN HESSE'S *SIDDHARTHA*

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ABSTRACT

The conflict of opposites gives suffering and trails to a human being that can be transcended. This makes us consider that freedom exists beyond the constant dichotomies. We may get something good out of evil. Therefore, we have to be receptive to whatever comes to us: good or bad, negative or positive, spiritual or sensual sides of nature. Such kind of attitude cultivates a higher level of consciousness in us. This awareness requires strength to risk life in order to expose ourselves to reality. This shows that the conflict of opposites we have to endure patiently as a part and parcel of human nature. We have to endure this conflict until the reconciliation takes place at the innermost centre of the psyche: the organizing centre. This organizing centre is called as Self. We find the reflection and impact of such thoughts Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha. The interplay of the opposites is an integral part of Hesse's writings. In the novel, the protagonist Siddhartha experiences the clash of opposites and harmony in them in order to attain enlightenment.

Keywords : Quest For Self, Conflict In Opposites, Unity In Duality, Enlightenment...

This article is an attempt to explore the harmonious interplay of the spiritual and sensual which prevails in the text of Hermann Hesse entitled *Siddhartha*. Hermann Hesse is a renowned German poet and novelist. He is the most widely translated German/Swiss author. Today, Hesse is acclaimed as one of the most influential German authors of the twentieth century. In his works, he paints the protagonist's journey into the inner self. But while exploring the inner journey, his protagonists find conflicts between individual and society, between good and evil and between the physical and spiritual elements of life. Hesse has explored the duality of mind in *Siddhartha*. Siddhartha, the protagonist of the novel realizes the significance of facing the self and life by embracing both to live fully.

In the novel *Siddhartha*, Siddhartha is a respected son of a Brahmin, lives in ancient India. He adopts all religious teachings from his father but he is dissatisfied with them. He practices all the rituals of the religion. Nonetheless, he feels something missing and finds a contradiction between his comfortable life and harsh reality around him. He decides to follow a new path to attain enlightenment. He undertakes the life of a wanderer with his friend Govinda who also wants to find a path towards enlightenment. But Siddhartha comes to

know that the path of the self-denial does not provide a permanent solution. At this time, Siddhartha and other Samanas begin to hear about an enlightened man named Gotama, the Buddha. Then Siddhartha and Govinda leave behind the group of Samanas in order to follow the Buddha. After learning Eightfold Path, the four main points and other aspects of Buddhism, he notices a contradiction in Gotama's teaching. Disappointed with his condition, he goes to the riverbank to lead a free life. But Govinda decides to remain in the shelter of the great master, Gotama, the Buddha. When Siddhartha crosses the river, he comes to city-life where he meets a beautiful courtesan named Kamala. In the course of time, he caught himself in the midst of materialistic pleasures such as gambling, drinking, and sex. Later on, he understands that the material world is a slow poison which has been killing his quest for enlightenment slowly. Feeling sick at heart, he wanders until he finds a river. He decides to hear the river and his inner self in the silence. At the end of novel, he grasps the wholeness of life and experiences the sense of fulfilment and wisdom

The novel is set in ancient India at the time of Buddha (563BCE-483BCE). We can divide the novel into three parts. The first four chapters are devoted to the upbringing of Siddhartha's mind. They are set on one side of the river. The next four chapters depict the materialistic pursuit of Siddhartha. They are located on the other side of the river. In this phase, he experiences the glory of the physical world which represents another extreme side of the spiritual life. It seems that "Siddhartha's goal is life in all its temporal agony and bliss" (Mileck 164). The last four chapters shade focus on the experience of the soul. They are set on the river itself which divides and unites the spiritual and physical worlds. It signifies harmonious interplay between life's two extremes. In the first phase, Siddhartha practices rituals, leads ascetic life as a Samana and even he listens to Buddha, but is not satisfied with any, hence, leaves behind this world by questioning all. He also leaves behind his friend Govinda who wants to stay as a follower of Buddha. This shows that "Siddhartha and Govinda represent the opposed characteristics of devotion and rebellion" (Serrano 17). Siddhartha once dedicated to rituals and asceticism deserts the realm of the mind and enters into the physical world. He decides to undertake a life free from meditation and spiritual quest.

Yes, he thought, breathing deeply, I will no longer try to escape from Siddhartha. I will no longer devote my thoughts to Atman and the sorrows of the world. I will no longer mutilate and destroy myself in order to find a secret behind the ruins. I will no longer study Yoga-Veda, Atharva-Veda, or Asceticism, or any other teachings. I will learn from myself, be my own pupil; I will learn from myself the secret of Siddhartha. (Hesse 32)

The departure of Siddhartha from Buddha, the great master to find out "Self" is the path which paradoxically enough Buddha wants to show to the whole world. According to Buddha, the spiritual Teachers, Guides, Gurus can help but in a limited way. They cannot direct a pupil to find his/her ultimate "Self". So, their teachings should not be taken as a doctrine which will entangle the pupil. Once Buddha says to his disciple Ananda:

I have often said that the teaching should be considered as a raft used to cross to the other shore or a finger pointing to the moon. We should not become caught in the teaching. (Hanh 465)

The feeling of detachment from the spiritual path drives Siddhartha to cross the river. The river's opposing bank represents another polarity of the life which is full of earthly pleasures. As soon as, he enters into a materialistic world, he develops an affair with Kamala, the courtesan who teaches him the art of playing the game of love. He thinks that she would be the best teacher in the realm of senses.

She taught him that lovers should not separate from each other after making love without admiring each other, without being conquered as well as conquering, so that no feeling of satiation or desolation arises or the horrid feeling of misusing or having been misused. (Hesse 56)

Kamala also insists Siddhartha to take up the path of trade to earn fine clothes, fine shoes and plenty of money. Accordingly, he joins to Kamaswami, the rich merchant in his business and learns business affairs. In a very short period, he understands how to exercise power over people and how to amuse himself with women. He learns to eat fish and meat, and drink wine which makes him lazy. He starts commanding servants. In fact, he indulges in wealth, power and indolence. As the years passed, vices such as lust, greed and envy overtake him.

The world had caught him; pleasure, covetousness, idleness, and finally also the vice that had always despised and scorned as the most foolish-acquisitiveness. Property, possessions and riches had also finally trapped him. (65)

In the course of time, he feels self-disgusted with such life. He realizes the futility and folly of the worldly life. He thinks that it is useless to possess a garden, house and other materialistic things. He understands that the material world has killed his inner wish to attain ultimate truth. His dream regarding the death of songbird reveals the death of his quest. Once again, he is awakened and he leaves the realm of the body behind him.

Awakening from this dream, he was overwhelmed by a feeling of great sadness. It seemed to him that he had spent his life in a worthless and senseless manner; he retained nothing vital, nothing in any way precious or worthwhile. He stood alone, like a shipwrecked man on the shore.

Sadly, Siddhartha went to a pleasure garden that belonged to him, closed the gates, sat under a mango tree, and felt horror and death in his heart. (68)

It clearly shows that Siddhartha exhausts both the possibilities; the world of the mind and thought, and the world of the body and physical action. He accepts life's dualities and goes through them. After satisfying the needs of the mind and the thirst of the senses, Siddhartha is at a loss about what to do next. Consequently, he attempts suicide. Feeling dissatisfied with the experiences of both, he returns to the river and Vasudeva, the ferryman whom he met earlier. The river is a symbolic union of both the worlds. In this phase, he encounters with anxious love and fearful concern. He longs to live with his son but his son runs away from him. His son is a by-product of the materialistic world. Siddhartha pursues him but his search is useless. Then he starts sharing the life's urges and desires. All these desires and passionate urges of ordinary people no longer seem trivial to him. As a sage and thinker, he develops consciousness regarding the unity of all life.

Within Siddhartha there slowly grew and ripened the knowledge of what wisdom really was and the goal of his long seeking. It was nothing but a preparation of the soul, a capacity, a secret art of thinking, feeling and breathing thoughts of unity at every moment of life. This thought matured in him slowly, and it was reflected in Vasudeva's old childlike face: harmony, knowledge of the eternal perfection of the world, and unity.(105)

The river is Siddhartha's third realm which can be called the realm of the soul where he can live in complete accord with himself and with life. The wisdom which he gets on the river through the experience of simple living assists to achieve perfection. While paying attention to the river it is realized to him that enlightenment can be attained when there is unity of polarities.

He could no longer distinguish the different voices- the merry voice from the weeping voice, the childish voice from the manly voice. They all belonged to each other: the lament of those who yearn the laughter of the wise, the cry of indignation and groan of the dying. They were all interwoven and interlocked, entwined in a thousand ways. And all the voices, all the goals, all the yearnings, all the sorrows, all the pleasures, all the good and evil, all of them together was the world.(109)

Siddhartha hears the river attentively and hears the voices of his father, son, Kamala, Govinda and of everyone he has ever heard or seen. He finds these voices merging into oneness, the whole, the unity. He finds "*harmony with the stream of events, with the stream of life, full of sympathy and compassion, surrendering himself to the stream, belonging to the unity of all things*".(110)

Thus, Siddhartha comes to know that enlightenment cannot be achieved by mastering either the material or spiritual world. The midway between these two polarities of existence is important to get the ultimate goal of life. Initially, he rejects the spiritual world and embraces the material world. But he understands that carnal desire cannot offer wisdom either. Therefore, "*Siddhartha accepts both his incidental I of the senses and his incidental I of thought, gives primacy to neither, and leaves both to exhaustion*" (Mileck 185). Siddhartha realizes that all things contain the potential to attain perfection. A person who has been indulged in the pleasures of worldly things can become a saint, may it a sinner or gambler or anyone. He experiences the so-called dark side of the world represented by the world of gambling, being a womaniser and rude in business. This assists him to bring development in him on the path to enlightenment. It is aptly said that "*Siddhartha depicts two ideals, two exemplary approaches to life based upon two diametrically opposed philosophies of life*" (164). He goes beyond the polar opposites in order to attain enlightenment.

To conclude, this work explores Siddhartha's philosophy that life in all its involvements with the physical world that plays a crucial role to realize oneself and finds out the path towards perfection. His philosophy goes close to Solomon's argument "*Being spiritual doesn't mean being held up as a recluse, spending hours in meditation and contemplation. It demands involvement and emotional engagement with others in the struggle to find meaning in our*

lives.” (45) In the novel *Siddhartha*, Siddhartha strives to reconcile the physical and spiritual elements to transcend the individual spirit in the universal spirit.

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