

Siddhartha and Govinda: A Study to Externalize a Disquiet and Content of the Individual in Decoding the Enigma of Introspection in Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha

SupriyoChakraborty¹, M.A. (English) (UGC-NET)

Arindam Patra², Assistant Professor, Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Chhattisgarh

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Abstract

Who am I? How can I experience the true meaning of enlightenment? – These questions drag Siddhartha to the world of reality and ascertainment. In his novel *Siddhartha*, Hermann Hesse depicts two types of entities through different endeavours of Siddhartha and his confidant, Govinda. Govinda accepts a temporary belief of ritualistic life without any question, and he entangles himself into the 'Samana' where as Siddhartha does not circumscribe himself within the periphery of temporary faith; instead, he takes part in an unprecedented journey to experience the actual entity of self. It is not wholly accurate that Siddhartha is dissatisfied with the spiritual activities and his ascetic life. Still, he remains insatiate because he does not find the appropriate answers to his indecisive questions. Siddhartha perambulates through an anfractuous path and encounters the ups and downs of his life to accomplish the ultimate realization of 'self.' The answer to his journey is not essential, but the questions himself are complex, which transform him into an icon for humankind. Through the journey of two characters, this paper will take the initiative to illustrate the essence of questions and introspection to assist Siddhartha in bringing into the world of 'Nirvana.'

Keywords: Self-realization, entity, nirvana, question, journey, experience,

"You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you; none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your soul."

-Swami Vivekananda

Indian philosophy and spiritual ideologies have always been the center of attraction for the West. Many western writers and philosophers were fascinated with the root of Indian philosophical scriptures and thoughts. They had endeavored to cultivate the field during the colonial era, which continues even in modern times. A German, whose grandparents were associated with the Basel Mission in India, father was a missionary in India, the mother was born in an Indian missionary family and was devoted to missionary work in India for a few

years, and spent some months in India, was Hermann Hesse, a most acclaimed litterateur in the firmament of German Literature. He has attained far-reaching veneration through his great novels and is a specimen of theological contemplation of his ancestry. He had amassed a collection of theological and philosophical books when working in the bookstore in Tubingen; even he came into contact with the spiritual environment when he stayed with the spiritual families of Basel. As a result, his writings had been pursued the root of his erudition on the spiritual adherence and ontological panorama. Especially his magnum opus *Siddhartha* (1922) substantiates Hesse's endowment on the Indian Vedic philosophy, and Buddhist philosophy as Catherine Benton (1997) writes; "From Hesse's diaries, we get a glimpse of the impressions of India which Hesse brought back with him to Germany and which helped shape his thought for *Siddhartha*." (10)

Hermann Hesse, in his novel *Siddhartha* (1922), elucidates a conspicuous journey of self-searching and introspection of a man named Siddhartha during the hour of Gautama Buddha. Ostensibly the book emphasizes the journey of Siddhartha, but profoundly it also delimitates the journey of his crony, Govinda. But very interestingly, the trips of two persons are different. Govinda concedes the spiritual life without interrogation. He does not search for his entity, or he never peeps into his own heart. Instead, he is devoted to Siddhartha without his percipience. His spiritual growth relies on the religious teachings of Samana, and he ends his journey with an empty hand. Siddhartha strains every nerve and muscle to engage himself in arguments and logical questioning. He has encountered several obstructions in his life to experiencing true enlightenment. "In the novel, the main character Siddhartha is classified as a mystic who sought the truth by debating, meditating, and spreading through spiritual experience. It means Siddhartha also had mystical experiences, understanding spiritual teachings by practicing" (Linh 16)

Siddharth's arguments, questions, and logic are the main ideas of Vedic and Buddhist culture. He is in search of unsolved questions - who is he? What is the purpose of his life? How is it possible to gain wisdom? Can the teachings of spiritualism help him to attain the actual realization? In his book *Argumentative India* (2005), Dr. Amartya Sen discusses the argumentative tradition, public debate, and the intellectual pluralism of Indian culture. The first section of the book emphasizes the Indian culture of pluralistic discussion. In his book, he writes;

The Vedas may be full of hymns and religious invocations. Still, they also tell stories, speculate about the world, and - true to the argumentative propensity already in view - ask difficult questions. An essential doubt concerns the very creation of the world: did someone make it, was it a spontaneous emergence, and is there a God who knows what happened? As discussed in Essay I, the Rigveda expresses radical doubts on these issues: 'Who knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? ... perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not - the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows - or perhaps he does not know.' These

doubts from the second millennium BCE would recur again and again in India's long argumentative history, along with many other questions about epistemology and ethics.

(Sen, xi)

The ideas of argument and questioning are present in Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*. This point becomes more authentic when we will explain the etymology of the word 'Siddhartha.' It has been derived from two Sanskrit words, *Siddha* (achieved) and *artha* (what was searched for), which means 'he who has found the meaning of existence' or 'he who has attained his goal'. The context of the text brings us to the ancient kingdom of Kapilavastu, where Gautama Buddha was born (Today, Kapilavastu is referred to as a district of Nepal, but it is also directed that it is situated as the village and archaeological site of Piprahwa in Uttar Pradesh, India). The childhood name of Gautama Buddha was Siddhartha, who had surpassed the illusions of his life by exploring his existence in the cosmos. He left his home for his spiritual journey embracing monastic life. Siddhartha also takes part in an abstruse journey from his early childhood. Saravanan and Radah (2020), in their article "The Journey of Self-Realization in Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha," highlight a strong connection between the extraordinary life of Buddha and the fictitious character Siddhartha. Buddha renounces his temptations and attachments to accomplish his enlightenment. Siddhartha also pursues 'Nirvana' by abandoning his 'Samsara'. He is the son of a Brahman and grows up with his companion, Govinda. Siddhartha is not gratified with his wisdom. Instead, he is restless. What is the reason behind his dissatisfaction? As a son of a Brahman, he takes part in all the ceremonial practices (ethical training, self-restraint, and meditative practices) and mindfulness by following the teachings of his father and his teachers, but some questions become the reason for his anguish. Siddhartha often feels that neither the wise men can quench his thirst for knowledge nor they can help him to attain the highest spirituality. On the contrary, his friend, Govinda, always endorses Siddhartha's way of erudition.

Siddhartha asks Govinda to prepare for leaving home as he decides to join the Samanas (the followers who repudiate the married and domestic life and adopt the ascetic life), and he wishes that Govinda would go along with him. Govinda is a blind follower of Siddhartha. Hearing the decision, he becomes motionless for a moment and is 'turned pale like a dry banana skin.' Govinda wants to express his feelings but cannot ask anything; instead, he waits for his father's permission. This incident makes clear the difference in thought processes between Siddhartha and Govinda. Siddhartha knows that his father would resist his path, yet he decides to cross off all the obstructions on his journey. He takes a farewell from his parents to discover the life of Samana. Now the question is whether this life in Samanas would satisfy Siddhartha or he would take an endeavour to commence another journey.

Siddhartha is determined to lead the life of Bramhachariya and begins to practice the ceremonial acts. He realizes that all great temptations are elusive, and though they superficially appear as beautiful, they are in reality. He wants to follow an ascetic life only to gain experience. On the other hand, Govinda, the shadow of Siddhartha, undertakes the same efforts

to fulfill his purpose. Sometimes Siddhartha suffers from a dilemma. He does not grasp the consequences of ascetic life. Even Siddhartha expresses his thought that he can learn many more things from the life and teachings of ordinary men in a more straightforward way. Govinda knows that Siddhartha is a man of devotion and he would be a 'holy man' in the future, but, unfortunately, Govinda never raises an argument or question about his own life; instead, he accepts the practices (ethical training, self-restraint, and meditative practices, etc.) of Samana and believes them as the ultimate path that can lead them towards the 'nirvana'. Siddhartha is confused about the way of Samana, and even he frankly expresses his doubt that maybe they are in a circle that seems to be closer to enlightenment, but it is a circle that can't take them to salvation. Nitya Raj Bhattarai (2021), in his scholarly article, raises some questions – "why did he leave teachers?/ Can education be possible without teachers?" (64) and concludes by the depiction of Siddhartha's journey that learning through self-conversation is much more essential than the guidance of any teacher.

Fortunately, Siddhartha and Govinda are privileged to meet Gotama. Initially, he thinks that the contact with Gotama would give him satisfaction, but later, he finds that there is nothing new in the teaching of Gotama. He decides to leave the place. "Siddhartha realizes Buddhism will not give him the answers he needs. Sadly, he leaves Govinda behind and begins a search for the meaning of life, the achievement of which he feels will not be dependent on religious instruction". (Kumari 65). Siddhartha thinks that Govinda would follow him as he has before, but Govinda wants to stay there with his belief in the theology of Buddha. The road of two friends becomes diverges. One begins his pilgrimage again in search of self-actualization, and the other stays there. Siddhartha, for the last time, meets Buddha and admires his wisdom. On his way out, he promises to discover the gap he has noticed in his teaching. Through his new journey, Siddhartha realizes that he has been transformed into a man who starts a journey to discover the answer to the question – 'Who am I'?

Now I would not let Siddhartha escape from me again! No longer do I want to begin my thoughts and my life with Atman and with the suffering of the world. I no longer want to kill and dissect myself to find a secret behind the ruins. Neither Yoga Veda shall teach me anymore, nor Atharva Veda, the ascetic, nor any teachings. I want to learn from myself, be my student, and get to know myself, the secret of Siddhartha. (*Siddhartha*, Part I, 44)

In the formation stage, he does not realize the hard-heartedness of the world. Gradually, he comes across the harsh experience of reality. In the initial phase of his life, he is determined to overcome the world of 'Maya,' but on the spur of the moment, he is entrapped by the enticement. For the first time, he has failed to question himself and is enchanted by his desires and lust. The seeker of 'Nirvana,' who never wants to lead a luxurious life or never appeals for sexual attachment, yearns for love, passion, greed, or even covetousness. He hesitates for a moment but does not able to control his mind. Kamala's acquaintance makes him forget about

his goal. It becomes his prime focus to satisfy Kamala instead of quenching his thirst for wisdom. Accepting all the stipulations of Kamala, he admits to putting on 'pretty clothes and pretty shoes' and agrees to join the trade service to earn lots of money for Kamala. By the by, he enters the life of 'Sansara' and turns a deaf ear to his journey. But later, he realizes that his experience of life in 'Sansara' is a total failure. He decides to leave the place, leave the city, and promises never to come back. Again, he walks forward with his question of self-actualization.

Siddhartha realizes that his life has become 'miserable' and 'shameful' and wants to eliminate this distress. He comes to the river over which he returns from Goutama. No longer does he eagers to live, he wants to finish his life, but suddenly he is stirred by the word 'Om' and gives up the negative thoughts. On the bank of the river, Siddhartha meets his companion, Govinda, but he is no more a companion of Siddhartha. Siddhartha recognizes Govinda, but Govinda can not. Siddhartha's life is the testimony which indicates a man's journey with his thirst for experience, knowledge, self-realization, and the transformation of Siddhartha is the proof of his trip. But Govinda is a flat character who is very opposite of Siddhartha as he 'lives according to the rules of the teachings passed on to them and they 'accept alms' and 'move on. But Siddhartha is an adaptable personality who is travelling without any prediction of the next day. Siddhartha's life is like a river that is not stagnant but indisputably runs through the anfractuous path. He also perambulates through the unconventional route and encounters his life's ups and downs (inner and outer struggle) to accomplish the ultimate realization. He claims that the variability's (he has gone out into the world, loses himself into the pleonexia and salacity, becomes a gambler, a drinker from a very consecrate youth) are necessary to realize the self and accepts the vicissitudes of his life. He hears an inner voice that advises Siddhartha to 'Learn from it. He decides to stay by the river and learn the lesson of his life. When he reaches the ferry, he finds a boat is ready, and the same ferryman is there who carried him the last time. The ferryman is also surprised to see such an immaculate person in this condition. After an indispensable conversation, the ferryman recognizes Siddhartha. Siddhartha expresses his deep anguish and requests the ferryman to keep him as his (ferryman's) assistant or his disciple. This setting drags us to the eve of Kurukshetra of *The Mahabharata*, where Arjuna asks Lord Krishna to guide him and asks him to expound on the answers to his questions. Arjuna becomes the disciple of Krishna, and here, the ferryman Vasudeva becomes the pioneer who leads Siddhartha towards the eve of self-actualization.

Siddhartha stays with Vasudeva and learns to handle the boat; he works at the rice field with Vasudeva he gathers wood. Gradually learning to build a skull, he acquires the skill to repair the ship. He is pleased because he begins to learn from the river and reality and is now learning everything with his hand. He again involves into an argument with himself; "Was not all suffering time, were not all forms of tormenting oneself and being afraid time, was not very hard, everything hostile in the world gone and overcome as soon as one had overcome time, as soon as time would have been put out of existence by one's thought?" (Hesse 109). By the

way, time passes, and Siddhartha and Vasudeva spend their time discussing many things. Siddhartha, the curious man, asks many questions and learns many ideas from the poor ferryman. But still, his learning is not complete.

Consequently, Siddhartha again meets Kamala, but Kamala is not alone at that time. She is along with her son. After losing Kamala, he greets his son and is attached to him. Siddhartha does not want to see his son in the same miserable condition he crosses over. But this son dislikes the life of Siddhartha, and he says that he neither wants to follow the religious path of his father nor he wants to be 'wise' like Siddhartha. He disappears, leaving Siddhartha and Vasudeva. Siddhartha goes to find his son, and at that moment, he hears one strange voice, the voice of his father. The river laughs at him, and he whispers, everything comes back. Siddhartha tries hard to find him, but he is unsuccessful. He returns to Vasudeva with an empty hand. Like every human being, Siddhartha falls into the ditch of worldly pleasure, but in every case, he surpasses the hurdles and allows himself to overcome them.

Siddhartha looks into the water to know the answers to his questions. He finds that the images of his father, the idea of his son, and his image are merged. Kamala's image appears, but it disappears in a moment. Everything is clear to him in the image of Govinda and the other pictures. The river mirrors his goal, longing, desire, and suffering. He learns the lessons from the river, which he was already taught in the Samanas, but the vision of life is more precise than ever before. The significance of the river has been interpreted in the Gita. This continuous flow of the river indicates a flow of action to knowledge and from knowledge to wisdom. Through his life efforts, Siddhartha attained the pick of learning. After completing his task of teaching Siddhartha, Vasudeva leaves the place. Siddhartha has attended that wisdom for which he has been craving since adolescence. He learns from people, from incidents, and every object of Nature. The novel concludes with the reunion of Siddhartha and Govinda, the friends who grow up with different considerations. Many years later, they meet on the boat where Siddhartha is the ferryman. Siddhartha and Govinda spend the night with a discussion about their life journey to attain enlightenment. Siddhartha exchanges the journey of life where he attends the ups and downs of his life. He gained this wisdom through his sufferings and later analyzed the causes behind his grief with his argumentative methodology. He believes that 'nirvana' is not an accessible destination; it takes too much effort to attain it. He says;

I have experienced on my body and on my soul that I needed sin very much, I needed lust, the desire for possession, vanity, and needed the most shameful despair to learn how to give up all resistance, to learn how to love the world, to stop comparing it to some world I wished, I imagined, some perfection I had made up, but no leave as it is and to love it and to enjoy being a part of it these, O Govinda, are some of the thoughts which have come into my mind.

(Siddhartha, Part II, 144-145)

Govinda silently listens to Siddhartha. His journey contains questions, answers, arguments, logic, and experience. Siddhartha says that 'Nirvana' is not a word but 'it is a thought.' In his life, he does not focus on thoughts but things. He realizes that a man can learn from the tiny things of life as the old ferryman learns the lesson of his life from the river. He does not read scriptures or join the Samana, yet he is a self-actualized person. But Govinda never crosses the red line of temporary life even though he does not come across the pangs of life. "There's no development of rounded characters and no dramatic tension in its consciously sparse and focused depiction of a quest for 'the essential thing' beyond the physical world. Siddhartha searches for a truth that can only be attained by an 'inward journey of self-discovery, one that can be experienced but not taught". (Kumari 259)

Hermann Hess limns the reality of life through the characterization of Siddhartha. None can achieve a goal without suffering; none can attain wisdom without growing through ups and downs in life. None can transform until he deals with reality. Siddhartha is a self-made man who encounters good and evil, love and lust, purity and sin. But Govinda, from the very beginning, avoids arguments and fails to confront the varieties of life. At first, he accepts the path of Siddhartha, and later, he believes that the teaching of Gotama can take him towards 'Nirvana'. As a result, the journey of Siddhartha ends up with self-realization, and the trip of Govinda continues with an unresolved query. "The author seems to conclude that no amount of second-hand knowledge and learning can give you the real sense of peace or happiness unless it is enlivened by real first-hand experience" (Joshi, 2011). Siddhartha and Govinda show two different paths that are open for rhyme and reason.

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