
A Transcendentalist Critique of Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*

¹ Saira Bibi ² Muhammad Ramzan ³ Naseer Muhammad ⁴Dr. Nijat Ullah Khan

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to find out the ways of achieving eternal peace, perfection, and recognizing self and God in Herman Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* (2003) from the prospective of Transcendentalism. The main issue of the paper is to explore how far the elements of Transcendentalism flow through the text of the selected novel and how characters achieve their goal by recognizing self and individuality. Herman Hesse and Transcendentalists are well known for spiritual themes relating God, self, nature, and perfection. This qualitative study finds out that the novel is abundant in themes borrowed from Transcendentalism. The research in this way opens further avenues for analyzing the text through the perspectives of Transcendentalism.

Key Words: Transcendentalism, peace, perfection, self and, God, *Siddhartha*

Introduction

Transcendentalism is a way of looking at the realities of universe, Divine and man in relation to each other. Many religions and philosophies presented their own outlook at the relationship between universe, man and God, place of man in this universe, salvation, high ideals and medium, through which these ideals have been achieved. According to transcendentalism, man is very sacred and divine as he possesses divine image. Every human being is important and special as he has his own genius, which connects him to divine and occupies a high position in the universe. These characteristics are also found in the novel *Siddhartha*, an Indian tale by Hesse. *Siddhartha*, published in 1922, deals with the spiritual expedition of *Siddhartha*. The '*Siddhartha*' is a person who has gained his goals and is triumphant. This novel is also known as "Indic Poetic Work," it has a lot to do with Indian religions. Though the novel, there are a lot of allusions of Buddha in the novel.

Moreover, Transcendentalism was the first American intellectual movement that showed true interests in Eastern philosophy. Emerson started to read about Indian philosophy and mythology in *The Edinburgh Review* between 1820 and 1825. His interest in Indian thought grew when he was a young Harvard graduate, and it continued until the end of his writing career. We see its evidence in many of his essays, poems, letters, and journal entries. For example, the concept of Brahma plays a central role in his works and ideas. He is also very much interested in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Some of his essays such as "Self-Reliance" deal with a theme that is very much similar to the concept of karma. *Siddhartha* (2003) is also written under the influence of Indian religious philosophies. So there are many similarities between the two.

Statement of the Problem

This age is full of cares and confusion. Man is confused that what religion or method he should adopt to solve his problems and acquire a high spiritual state. He is therefore in constant struggle to achieve peace of mind. In view of this context, the aim of the study is to analyze how transcendentalist elements run Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* by evaluating the characters of the novel how they search for inner satisfaction using transcendental ideas.

Literature Review

The novel, *Siddhartha* (2003) also attracted many researchers. It is also critically analyzed by the critics. A lot of studies have been under taken by the critics. Here a short account of criticism of the novel *Siddhartha* has been given. Bhambar (2010) is of the opinion that *Siddhartha*'s self-examination causes his spiritual emancipation. The deep ocean of Sansara has to be crossed by a spiritual seeker. Ocean as a deep symbol is common in Indian literature. River as a deep mystical metaphor is there which serves as an agent to spiritual speculation. Laura Anderson (2009) asserts that self-reliance *Siddhartha* derives wisdom through his own source. He gains spirituality and enlightenment by his own experiences. Both love and friendship as experiment shape his inner-journey. Karsono examines the voices of characters turning into dialogue structure. According to him voices are not meant to make obvious their own control, rather they allow other voices to display their features thus these voices remain present throughout the story (512). Imran and Iftekhhar (2014) argued the idea of dialogicality proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin does seem helping us better to resolve the issues which cannot be tackled by both structuralism and deconstruction. The idea of dialogicality gives birth to intersexuality which, as a suggestion, should be adopted for literary and critical practices. The review reflects that the novel has hardly received any extensive from the angle of transcendentalism.

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature and it applies the theory of transcendentalism for analysis of the novel "*Siddhartha*" by Herman Hesse. This paper used almost all available sources both primary and secondary as data for the study. This study is based mainly on the transcendental ideas of Ralf Waldo Emerson who in his book *Nature* (1936) asserts that man becomes a slave to his urges and is away from spirituality. Moreover he condemns the oppressing powers of society and the exploitation of humanity. He believes that human being is scared created in the image of Divine. Emerson questioned the nature of existence. The ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson are explored in the novel '*Siddhartha*' by Hesse relating to intuition, self-reliance, presence of Over being or God in the universe, individuality and its awareness, recognition of self as a Devine notion, Nature as a Devine object and connection between Nature and soul used as a tool for analyzing the main aspects of the novel '*Siddhartha*' (2003). So the study is underpinned by the theoretical and methodological framework of transcendentalism.

Analysis and Discussion

This section critically analyzes the similarities between transcendental ideas and the ideas of Herman Hesse presented in *Siddhartha* (2003).

Spirituality

Both Emerson and Hesse were greatly impressed by the spirituality. *Siddhartha* (2003), set in India, clearly owes much too Indian religions. Transcendentalists strongly believe in the power of the individual and divine message that deals with the solace and salvation of a person in the world without conformity to any specific religion. This novel is a quest of a man who wants to get salvation rejecting conformity with religion. *Siddhartha* also lets his self-free. He achieves enlightenment by meditation an living close to it. *Siddhartha* says to Govinda:

“Govinda, my dear, come with me under the Banyan tree, let’s practice meditation.” (Hesse, 12)

Here meditation means to cut off from everyone and being close to nature. the banyan tree means the object of nature. Through meditation *Siddhartha* wants to have divine knowledge. For him his goal is to get closer to God or Om, and amalgamation of soul and ‘om’ is his destination as he mummurs:

Om is the bow, the arrow is soul,
The Brahman is the arrow’s target,
That one should incessantly hit. (Hesse, 12)

Siddhartha’s search for spiritual quest blesses him with self-reliance. He does not let himself to be depended upon even on exalted one i.e. Buddha. He is dogged to search out his own ways for his target. For this purpose he refuses all the teachers and teachings. He travels for self-sought, as he claims for he knows there are none but to depart from all teaching and all teachers to reach my goal by myself. (Hesse, 38)

Awareness of Individuality Leading to the Recognition of Self

When an individual learns about his role in the universe he becomes aware of his self. This idea is shared by *Siddhartha* (2003) and transcendentalists. Hesse discusses the Buddhist conception of Nirvana, and observes that whereas he previously accepted the doctrine, he now inclines toward the belief that God respects individuality. Becoming aware of his individuality, and importance of his individual recognition, man becomes familiar to his self and soul. Self or soul is connected with recognition of individuality. Every individual has a soul and a role in the design of the universe and discovers his real joy by realizing his self as saying that joy of life and meaning of life is increased through self-realization (14). Moreover, like Buddha, he accepts this challenge that he should learn from himself, to be his student, to get to know himself, and the secret of *Siddhartha* (42). Moreover, the dialogue between *Siddhartha* and his lifelong friend Govinda at the end of this book is an item-by-item refutation of every principle of religion, morality and spiritual life ever handed down by the great Teachers of Mankind”[4].

Value of Self to and Being

Self or individuality is the paramount for understanding Brahma according to Hinduism and Over Being are in accordance with transcendentalism. When a person is connected to nature, knows his self and aware of his individuality he can also be connected to God or Over Being as stated by Hesse that it is not he who lives but Christ that lives in him (110). With regard to this conception, Emerson says that Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets (134). Emerson further contemplates that “the Maker of all things and all persons stands behind us and casts his dread omniscience through us over things” (217).

This concept is closely linked with the concept of Hesse presented in the novel ‘Siddhartha’. The hero of the novel ‘Siddhartha’ also understands God only through understanding his self or soul. He searches all his life for enlightenment but is unable to find that as he was ignoring the voice of his own soul and was unaware of the fact that what he was searching outside resided in his inner world. However, when he realizes this fact, he achieves his destination and recognizes God. He thinks ‘It was the self, the purpose and essence of which I sought to learn’ (Hesse, 42). Gradually, Siddhartha realizes that the knowledge or wisdom, which was the goal of his long search, was nothing but willingness of the soul, ability (Hesse, 135).

Role of Nature in Understanding God

All the theory of transcendentalism revolves around nature. Transcendentalists found the solution of social problems in the relation to nature as nature is the direct link to Divine. Emerson says that nature is the most effective way to the Divine (3). Nature is very important in understand God as every creature reflects the presence of Divine in it.

The hero of the novel also understands nature to understand God. It is nature, which brings him near to God. He beholds birds, butterflies, skies, sun, stars, moon, flowers, days, night, mountains, seasons all this was very enchanting to him. He always find them there but was not aware or them. He now considers himself a part of them and everything belongs to him. He thinks that he is part of it. Light and shadow ran through his eyes, stars and moon ran through his heart (Hesse, 50)

Experience and Suffering in Understanding Nature and God

Experience and suffering are very important in the way to divine. Although transcendentalists believe that knowledge gained only through experience cannot be reliable but they also advocate the experience and its combination with intuition or divine sense is a key to success so experience in this way is very necessary. Emerson says that there is a concrete experience with nature characterized by a deep sense of wholeness and unity, makes man whole self-contained and self-sufficient (422).

"Siddhartha" is one of the names of the historical Gautama, and the life of Hesse's character 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. The basic teaching of Buddha is formulated in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Preceding from the premise that suffering exists and that a release from it

must be found, Buddha constructed his system. The First Noble Truth is the fact of suffering. The Second Truth is that suffering arises from human desire for something, and that this desire can never be satisfied. The Third Truth is that there is a way to achieve a release from suffering. And the Fourth Truth prescribes the manner of overcoming suffering and attaining true knowledge or experience. Siddhartha firmly believes that teaching in this regard is of no help. So he decides to experience himself. He says to Buddha,

“O Illustrious One, nobody finds salvation through teachings. To nobody, O’ Illustrious One, can you communicate in words and teachings what happened to you in the hour of your enlightenment” [Hesse, 27]. He, time and again, asks a question to himself if he has his father not also suffered the same pain for him, which he now suffered for his son again. He tells Govinda that he has experienced everything on his body and soul and thus has a great control. He confesses that he needs sins, lust, desires, vanity and despair to shake them all on everything. He hopes to get perfection and salvation. (148) . This makes clear that suffering is very important in finding one’s self and God too. Experience also is important as through experience he realizes that how he had hurt his father and he becomes very sad with this realization and tells ferryman about his sufferings and thus realizes that he was a was a enlightened man who leads him towards his goal.

Transcendentalist, *Siddhartha* and Achievement of Perfection

According to Indian philosophies and Hinduism, a man gets spiritual perfection and success in the world when he becomes one with God calling the state Nirvana. This union is also common with transcendentalist. Emerson detained overriding sense of a regal unity to reality. His works are manifestation of unity with many names like God, Over-Soul, Spirit, the One, Mind. Emerson finds, ‘in human beings, indeed all nature lays the Divine which unites the entire world’. (248)

Siddhartha gets perfection and goal in the unity of everything i.e. God, nature and soul. Siddhartha searches for his destination. Perfection is achieved when a person gets mixed with nature and human beings and takes their sorrows and sufferings as his own as in The Bhagavad Gita it is stated: “When a person responds to the joys and sorrows of others as if they were his own, he has attained the highest state of spiritual union.”(132). He looked at Vasudeva as people looked at deities but this was not everlasting and mentally he had departed from Vasudeva’ (*Siddhartha*, 137).

This shows that nature and human beings are the same but there is need to have a profound look at it. By meditation, ordinary natural objects appear to be special and finally can lead to higher realities. Like in Siddhartha, an ordinary seeming ferryman leads the hero towards the goal he was searching throughout his life. He takes him to the river and brings him face to face with reality leading to perfection.

Conclusion

This study showed that Emerson’s philosophy of Transcendentalism and Herman Hesse’s ideas are almost similar. This paper shows that novel ‘Siddhartha’ by Herman Hesse is a great work showing journey of an individual on the passage of enlightenment. Similarly, transcendentalism is also a movement, which shows the path of enlightenment through

journeying into nature and one's own self. Main ideas of transcendentalism are compared with those found in the novel. The study also found that Emerson seems to be greatly impressed by Indian philosophies of spiritual findings. Besides, the hero of the novel passes through body torture to ignore his self and wants to kill and destroy it. Living with his friend Govinda, he learns to control his self but it remains for a short time experience after a few minutes, realizing his journey with Samanas. The novel 'Siddhartha' is a journey of an individual who goes at the path of his destination all alone by meditating over his self and nature. Siddhartha first of all frees himself from worldly affairs, family and every possession and begins to live the life of self-denial. This novel can also be interpreted through the textual analysis according to modern theories of viewing text. Meanings of the text can also be taken out through structuralism and post structuralism.

Works cited

- Anwaruddin, Sardar M. "Emerson's Passion for Indian Thought". *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 2013, pp. 1-6. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20130101.11
- Baumann, Gunter. *Hermann Hesse and India*. Gunter Baumann and HHP (2002)
- Bhagavad Gita. Eknath Easwaran, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 2000
- Bhambar, S.B. *Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha A Dualist Priritual Journey* 10-3 (2010) ISSN. 1930-2940
- Boyles, Mrs.Christina. "SIDDHARTHA. A Study Guide for the novel by Hermann Hesse", *Advance Placement Literature and Composition* (2010): (<http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/>)
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 'The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field' Stanford University Press.1992
- Butler, Colin. *Hermann Hesse's "Siddhartha": Some Critical Objections: Monatshefte* 63.2(1971):117-124 Jstor (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/301565437>)
- Dahlstrom, Daniel. *Heidegger's Transcendentalism*. Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands. 2005
- Das, Rayarama. *Book-review of Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha*. 1968.
- Dillard, Daniel. "The American Transcendentalists: A Religious Historiography." (2012): 36.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Mass: James Munroe & Co. 1849. Retrieved from: The Project Gutenberg. (2009). 29 Jul. 2009 <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29433/29433-h/29433-h.htm> Emerson, December 19, 1833, *Journal*, vol. 3
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The Oversoul," *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971
- Herman, A. L. 'An Introduction to Indian Thought'. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Press, 1976.
- Hesse, Hermann, *Siddhartha*, New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2003
- Hume, D. (1961).*Enquiries*.Oxford, University of Oxford Press.
- Hutchison, William R. *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- Journal of Education and Practice*. ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online) Vol 3, No 14, 2012 www.iiste.org

- Journals of Ralf Waldo Emerson. 10 vols. E. W. Emerson and W. E. Forbes, ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1909-1914
- The Letters of Ralf Waldo Emerson. Vol. 1. R. L. Rusk, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939
- Lewis, Jone Johnson, Rev. What is Transcendentalism? (2002). 31 Jul. 2009 <<http://www.transcendentalists.com/what.htm>>
- Lewis, R.W.B. The American Adam. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1959.
- Mileck, Joseph, 'Das Glasperslenspiel' genesis, Manuscripts and Publications,' German quarterly 43 (1970); 299-310.
- Myerson, Joel, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, and Laura Dassow Walls, eds. The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010
- Nature, the Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. B. Atkinson, ed. Toronto: Random House, 2000.
- Plotka, Witold. Therapeutic Potential Of Transcendental Inquiry In The Husserlian Philosophy. Santalka . Filozofija. 2010
- Richardson, Robert .D Emerson, the mind on fire. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986
- Ringer, Robert. Restoring the American Dream. Hoboken: Wiley Publishing, 2010
- Steele, Jeffrey. Editor. The Essential Margret Fuller. New Brunswick. NJ Rutger university press, 1992
- Tauber, Alfred I. Henry David Thorn and the Moral Agency of knowing. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- The Essential Writings of Ralf Waldo Emerson. B. Atkinson, ed. Toronto: Random House, 2000.
- The Jotrmah and Mheehneotrs Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson. W. H. ilman, et. al., eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- The World of Concrete Contents." Inquiry 28 (1985): 417-428.
- The Varieties of Religious Experiences. (1902.) Toronto: Random House, 20

