
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

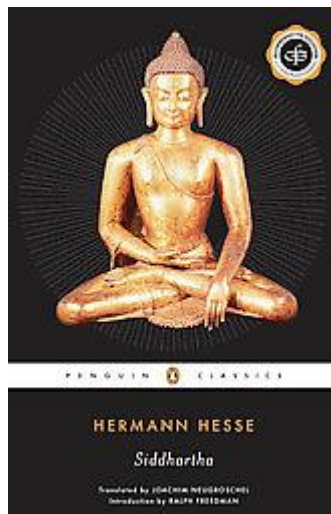
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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Siddhartha

Selvi Bunce



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Siddhartha

Growing to be a Wise Ferry Man

The novel *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse follows the life of Siddhartha, who starts out as a very smart yet restless Brahmin and grows to be a wise old ferry man. The life of Siddhartha takes place in two major places, the town where he becomes rich, and at the river where he learns the meaning of life. Each of these places represents something in Siddhartha's life and the story would not be the same if either of these places were removed.

Chooses to Live an Ascetic Life

Siddhartha grows up as a clever Brahmin in a small town where he is expected to become a priest like his father. Siddhartha decides to leave and live an ascetic life as a wandering Samana. After hearing the Buddha speak he has an enlightenment of his own and goes to live among ordinary people in a town. This is where Siddhartha's life really starts.

Growing Loss of Superiority – Acquisition of Characteristics of Ordinary People

At first he lived well, enjoying his riches, not actually caring about money, giving it to the poor. He saw himself as superior to everyone else. But eventually he lost this superiority that made life so easy for him, for example Hesse says “Gradually, along with his growing riches, Siddhartha himself acquired some of the characteristics of the ordinary people, some of their childishness and some of their anxiety” (77).

All Just a Game - Realization

The more he became like the people, the more he envied them. This made him bitter and angry. Siddhartha eventually reached despair and realized this life he was living was all just a game. The town represents this game, *Samsara*, and the point in Siddhartha's life when he

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succumbed to all the vices of the world. He was rich but miserable, always full yet indescribably empty. The town was full of people and Siddhartha had power, yet there was no deeper or intellectual meaning, it was all superficial.

Had Siddhartha not been in the town for such a great portion of his life he would have not felt how ordinary people lived. This experience impacted the way he thought for the rest of his life and how he viewed others. Without the town he also would have never gone to the river, which is the other significant place in the story of Siddhartha.

Refuge in the River

After Siddhartha is fed up with life in town he goes to find refuge at the river he initially crossed to get to the town. At the river lives an old ferryman who welcomes Siddhartha into his home, where Siddhartha lives for the rest of his life. The river teaches Siddhartha to listen, and shows him the meaning of life. The river speaks to the ferryman and Siddhartha and gives them both eternal peace.

River as opposed to the Town

Where the town represents deceit, wealth, and guilt, the river represents peace, oneness with the world, and understanding. Where the town represents Samsara, the river represents Nirvana. At the river Siddhartha contemplates his life and discovers many underlying thoughts and emotions. He discovers that the point of life is to love all things and everyone. Without the river Siddhartha never would have discovered this.

The town and the river, though they are very different from each other, equally affect the story of Siddhartha. At the river, while looking back on his life, Siddhartha sees the town as one

of the biggest, yet most valuable mistakes he ever made. *Siddhartha* would not be the same without either of these settings.

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