

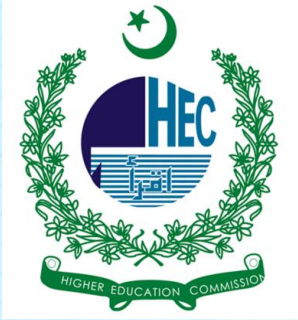
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**Meaninglessness and Individual Quest in Siddhartha by
Herman Hesse**



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Abstract

This study examines the theme of existential meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity in *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse. The research problem is grounded in the philosophical concern that modern individuals often experience inner emptiness despite material success, religious practice, or social recognition; however, existing studies have not sufficiently explored how this meaninglessness functions as a driving force in *Siddhartha*'s spiritual development. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze how existential dissatisfaction shapes *Siddhartha*'s journey toward self-realization and enlightenment. The study is framed within an interpretivist research philosophy supported by existential theory, which emphasizes subjective meaning-making and lived experience. Moreover, a qualitative textual analysis method is employed to interpret the selected novel, focusing on thematic reading and close textual interpretation. The findings reveal that *Siddhartha* experiences meaninglessness at every major stage of his life; first, in his privileged Brahmin background, he feels inner dissatisfaction, and subsequently, he fails to find fulfillment through asceticism, Buddhist teachings, and material pleasures. Furthermore, his encounter with the river becomes a symbolic turning point where he begins to understand the unity of existence. In addition, suffering and lived experiences, particularly his relationship with his son and the ferryman Vasudeva, deepen his spiritual awareness. Consequently, the study shows that enlightenment is achieved not through external teachings but through personal experience and acceptance of life's contradictions. Ultimately, it is concluded that existential meaninglessness is not a weakness but a necessary condition for *Siddhartha*'s spiritual growth and identity formation. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies explore comparative existential readings of Eastern and Western philosophical novels to further understand the role of meaninglessness in human development.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Existential Meaninglessness, Identity Quest, Spiritual Journey, Textual Analysis, Transformative Experience

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Introduction

A profound philosophical question has troubled humanity for centuries: *Why does life sometimes feel meaningless even when one appears to possess everything?* This question has become increasingly relevant in modern societies where individuals frequently struggle with identity, purpose, and spiritual fulfillment. The renowned German writer Hermann Hesse explores this existential concern in his famous novel *Siddhartha*. The novel presents the story of a young Brahmin named Siddhartha who abandons social comfort and traditional expectations in order to search for deeper meaning in life. Through this journey, the narrative illustrates the tension between material existence and spiritual enlightenment. Consequently, the text raises a central philosophical issue regarding the human struggle to discover meaning within a seemingly meaningless world.

Meaninglessness and the search for identity have become key themes in philosophical and literary studies. In many modern contexts, individuals experience alienation, existential anxiety, and confusion about their purpose in life. Therefore, literature that explores the inner journey of self-discovery remains particularly important today. *Siddhartha* addresses this issue by portraying how personal experience, suffering, and reflection gradually lead an individual toward self-realization. Thus, the novel not only reflects spiritual philosophy but also represents a universal human condition.

However, despite extensive discussion about the spiritual elements of the novel, the deeper relationship between existential meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity still requires further exploration. Many studies emphasize Buddhist philosophy or Eastern mysticism in the text, yet fewer scholars analyze how feelings of emptiness and dissatisfaction motivate Siddhartha's search for meaning. Therefore, a research gap exists in examining how Hesse uses existential struggle as a pathway toward enlightenment.

In response to this gap, the present study investigates the theme of meaninglessness and the individual quest for purpose in *Siddhartha*. The research focuses on how the protagonist's experiences—from asceticism and material wealth to spiritual awakening—represent different stages in the search for meaning. Ultimately, the study aims to demonstrate that Hesse portrays meaning not as something that can

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be taught by others but as something that must be discovered through personal experience.

Background of the Study

Hermann Hesse was a German-Swiss author and painter whose literary works primarily explore the psychological and spiritual development of individuals. His contributions to literature were internationally recognized when he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Hesse's writings often examine themes such as self-discovery, existential crisis, and the search for spiritual truth. Among his many works, *Siddhartha* remains one of the most influential philosophical novels of the twentieth century.

Published in 1922, *Siddhartha* narrates the life journey of a young Brahmin who abandons his comfortable life to pursue spiritual enlightenment. The title itself has symbolic meaning. The word *Siddhartha* originates from Sanskrit, where *siddha* means *achieved* and *artha* refers to *purpose* or *goal*. Thus, the name suggests the attainment of life's purpose. Furthermore, the novel draws inspiration from Eastern philosophical traditions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, and reflects aspects of the life of Gautama Buddha, whose birth name was Siddhartha Gautama.

In the narrative, Siddhartha initially follows the path of asceticism with the Samana monks in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment. Later, he encounters the Buddha and listens to his teachings. Although Siddhartha respects the Buddha, he refuses to become his follower because he believes that true wisdom cannot simply be taught. Instead, it must be personally experienced. This decision marks the beginning of Siddhartha's independent spiritual journey.

Subsequently, Siddhartha experiences different phases of life. He meets Kamala, a courtesan who introduces him to love and worldly pleasures, and he works with the merchant Kamaswami, who teaches him business and material success. However, despite achieving wealth and comfort, Siddhartha eventually realizes that material life does not provide lasting fulfillment. This realization leads him into a deep existential crisis, which ultimately pushes him toward spiritual awakening near the river under the guidance of the ferryman Vasudeva.

Scholars emphasize that Siddhartha's journey represents a universal search for meaning and enlightenment. For example, Dave argues that Siddhartha and his friend

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Govinda seek a universal understanding of life through spiritual enlightenment and the attainment of Nirvana (Dave, 2013). Similarly, Ziolkowski states that Hesse's novels frequently depict the inner conflict between worldly existence and spiritual truth (Ziolkowski, 1965). Therefore, the novel presents life as a continuous journey in which individuals gain wisdom through experience, suffering, and reflection.

Research Objectives

The present study is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how the theme of meaninglessness is represented in the life experiences of Siddhartha in *Siddhartha*.
2. To analyze how Siddhartha's individual quest for identity and spiritual enlightenment develops through his personal experiences and reflections.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does *Siddhartha* portray the theme of existential meaninglessness in the protagonist's life?
2. How does Siddhartha's personal journey contribute to his quest for identity and spiritual enlightenment?

Research Problem

The philosophical problem of meaninglessness has long been a central concern in literary and existential studies. In modern literature, many protagonists struggle with feelings of emptiness, identity crises, and spiritual dissatisfaction despite living within socially structured systems. Similarly, in *Siddhartha*, the protagonist abandons his privileged Brahmin life and undertakes a personal journey in search of truth and spiritual enlightenment. However, throughout the narrative, Siddhartha repeatedly experiences dissatisfaction with both ascetic spirituality and material pleasures.

Nevertheless, although the novel has been widely discussed from religious, philosophical, and psychological perspectives, the relationship between existential meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity has not been fully explored in a systematic way. In other words, many studies emphasize Buddhist philosophy or spiritual enlightenment, while fewer studies analyze how the experience of meaninglessness becomes the driving force behind Siddhartha's journey toward self-

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realization. Therefore, the central research problem of this study is to examine how the experience of existential emptiness motivates Siddhartha's individual quest for meaning and spiritual fulfillment.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to literary scholarship by providing a deeper understanding of the existential dimensions of *Siddhartha*. While many critics have examined the novel from religious or philosophical perspectives, this research specifically focuses on the relationship between meaninglessness and the individual search for purpose. Consequently, the study expands existing interpretations of Hesse's work.

Second, the research is relevant to contemporary readers because issues of identity, existential anxiety, and spiritual dissatisfaction remain important in modern society. Many individuals today experience similar struggles while attempting to find meaning in their personal and professional lives. Therefore, analyzing Siddhartha's journey helps readers better understand the universal human search for purpose.

Finally, the study is also important in academic contexts, particularly in literature and cultural studies programs. It provides students and researchers with a framework for examining existential themes in literary texts and encourages interdisciplinary dialogue between literature, philosophy, and psychology.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the present research has several limitations. First, the study focuses exclusively on the thematic analysis of meaninglessness and individual quest in *Siddhartha*. As a result, other important aspects of the novel—such as narrative style, symbolism, and comparative philosophical analysis—are not examined in detail. Second, the analysis is limited to textual interpretation of the selected novel by Hermann Hesse. Therefore, it does not include comparative analysis with other works by Hesse or with other existentialist writers.

Finally, the study relies primarily on qualitative literary analysis rather than empirical research methods. Consequently, the findings are interpretive in nature and depend on textual evidence and scholarly interpretation.

Originality and Novelty of the Study

The originality of this research lies in its focused examination of the relationship

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between existential meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity in *Siddhartha*. Although the novel has been widely analyzed within the context of Eastern spirituality and philosophical enlightenment, relatively few studies have explored how experiences of dissatisfaction and existential emptiness function as catalysts for personal transformation.

Furthermore, this study approaches the novel by integrating existential philosophical concepts with literary interpretation. By doing so, it highlights how Siddhartha's encounters with asceticism, material wealth, love, suffering, and reflection gradually lead him toward self-realization. In this way, the research provides a fresh perspective on the psychological and philosophical dimensions of the protagonist's journey.

Therefore, the study offers a novel contribution to literary scholarship by emphasizing that Siddhartha's enlightenment is not achieved through external teachings but through the experiential understanding of life's contradictions. This perspective deepens the understanding of how Hesse presents the search for meaning as an essential aspect of human existence.

Literature Review

The themes of existential meaning, spiritual awakening, and the search for identity continue to attract significant scholarly attention in literary studies. In particular, critics frequently examine the philosophical depth of *Siddhartha* because the narrative explores the universal human struggle to discover meaning in life. Indeed, scholars widely argue that the novel presents a profound reflection on the inner development of an individual who seeks truth beyond social conventions and religious doctrines. Furthermore, recent literary discussions emphasize that the journey of Siddhartha represents a broader human experience in which individuals question traditional values and search for personal enlightenment. Thus, the existing body of literature provides an important intellectual context for understanding how the theme of meaninglessness contributes to the protagonist's quest for identity.

A substantial portion of scholarship has focused on the spiritual and philosophical aspects of Siddhartha's journey. As Dave (2013) argues that Siddhartha and his companion Govinda pursue Nirvana as a universal form of spiritual understanding that reflects humanity's desire for enlightenment. Similarly, Freedman

(1978) observes that the works of Hermann Hesse frequently depict individuals experiencing psychological and spiritual crises before achieving self-realization. According to Freedman, Siddhartha's encounters with asceticism, wealth, love, and suffering represent stages in the protagonist's gradual transformation. Moreover, Ziolkowski (1965) has argued that Hesse's novels consistently explore the tension between worldly attachments and spiritual truth. From this perspective, Siddhartha's rejection of both extreme asceticism and material luxury demonstrates the limitations of rigid philosophical systems. Consequently, many scholars agree that the novel portrays enlightenment as a process that emerges from personal experience rather than institutional teachings. Nevertheless, although these interpretations provide valuable insight into the spiritual journey of the protagonist, they tend to focus primarily on religious philosophy and less on the psychological experience of existential emptiness that initiates Siddhartha's quest.

In addition, another important strand of scholarship examines is the existential dimension of the novel. Literary critics frequently argue that modern narratives portray characters who experience alienation and dissatisfaction before discovering authentic identity. For instance, philosophical studies of existentialism emphasize that individuals often confront feelings of meaninglessness when traditional belief systems fail to provide lasting satisfaction (Crowell, 2012). Similarly, Solomon (2005) explains that existential philosophy views meaning not as something inherited from external authorities but as something constructed through personal experience and conscious choice. In this context, Siddhartha's dissatisfaction with both spiritual asceticism and worldly pleasure can be interpreted as an existential crisis that pushes him toward deeper self-reflection. Furthermore, recent interpretations of Hesse's work suggest that the protagonist's repeated disappointments represent an essential stage in the process of self-discovery. Thus, Siddhartha's experiences illustrate how existential uncertainty gradually transforms into wisdom and spiritual awareness.

However, despite recognizing existential themes in the novel, many scholars discuss these ideas in general philosophical terms rather than examining how meaninglessness specifically shapes Siddhartha's personal journey. In contrast, a closer literary analysis reveals that the protagonist repeatedly confronts dissatisfaction at different stages of life. For instance, Siddhartha initially becomes disillusioned with

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the spiritual practices of the Samanas, then he becomes dissatisfied with the teachings of the Buddha, and later he experiences emptiness while living a life of wealth and pleasure. Consequently, these experiences collectively highlight the persistent presence of existential meaninglessness throughout the narrative. Yet, previous studies often emphasize Siddhartha's final enlightenment while paying limited attention to the earlier psychological conflicts that motivate his search for truth.

Moreover, scholars have adopted different methodological approaches in their analysis of the novel. Earlier literary studies largely relied on philosophical interpretation and comparative religious analysis, emphasizing the influence of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. For example, early critics explored symbolic elements of the narrative in order to explain the spiritual transformation of the protagonist. However, more recent scholarship has increasingly employed interdisciplinary approaches that combine literary criticism, philosophy, and psychology. Indeed, contemporary research has highlighted the importance of qualitative textual interpretation in analyzing how literary characters reflect broader human concerns about identity and spirituality. Nevertheless, methodological limitations remain evident in several studies. Some analyses focus heavily on religious symbolism without examining the psychological processes underlying Siddhartha's transformation. Conversely, certain philosophical interpretations discuss existential concepts abstractly while providing limited textual evidence from the novel itself. Therefore, although the existing literature has significantly contributed to understanding the philosophical richness of *Siddhartha*, it has not fully connected existential meaninglessness with the protagonist's experiential journey.

Research Gap

Given this context, a clear research gap becomes apparent. Although scholars have extensively examined the themes of enlightenment, Eastern philosophy, and spiritual awakening in *Siddhartha*, the relationship between existential meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity remains relatively underexplored. More specifically, many studies highlight the final stage of enlightenment but do not sufficiently analyze the earlier stages of dissatisfaction and existential crisis that lead Siddhartha toward self-realization. Consequently, the dynamic process through which meaninglessness evolves into spiritual wisdom has not been fully examined within a focused literary

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framework. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by analyzing how Siddhartha's experiences of existential emptiness function as the driving force behind his personal transformation. Ultimately, by focusing on the interplay between meaninglessness and the search for identity, this research contributes a deeper understanding of how Hesse portrays enlightenment as the result of confronting existential uncertainty rather than escaping from it.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodological framework that is used to investigate the theme of meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity in *Siddhartha* written by Hermann Hesse. In literary studies, research methods are employed in order to systematically interpret texts and to examine how themes and meanings are constructed within literary narratives. Therefore, a qualitative literary approach is adopted in this study so that the philosophical and existential dimensions of the novel can be interpreted in depth. The methodological procedures are described in the following sections. Moreover, the research philosophy, research design, population and sampling, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, reliability and trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations are discussed. Consequently, this chapter provides a clear explanation of how the study is conducted and how the findings are generated.

Research Philosophy and Research Approach

In this study, an interpretivist research philosophy is adopted because literary texts are interpreted through subjective meanings and contextual understanding. Under this philosophical perspective, reality is viewed as socially and culturally constructed rather than objectively measurable (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, meanings embedded in literary narratives are interpreted through close reading and theoretical reflection.

A qualitative research approach is used because qualitative methods allow deeper exploration of themes, symbols, and philosophical ideas present in literary texts. Furthermore, qualitative literary analysis is widely applied in literary criticism in order to interpret narrative structures, character development, and thematic patterns (Silverman, 2016). Consequently, the novel *Siddhartha* is examined through interpretive analysis in order to understand how the protagonist's experiences represent existential meaninglessness and the search for spiritual enlightenment.

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Research Design

The present study employs a qualitative textual research design. In literary research, textual analysis is frequently used to explore thematic meanings, narrative structures, and symbolic elements in literary works. In this design, passages, dialogues, and narrative events within the text are systematically examined in order to identify patterns related to the themes of meaninglessness and individual quest.

Moreover, thematic analysis is applied to categorize recurring ideas and experiences that appear in the narrative. These themes include spiritual dissatisfaction, existential crisis, self-discovery, and enlightenment. Furthermore, theoretical insights from existential philosophy are used to interpret the protagonist's journey toward self-realization. Thus, the research design enables a structured and interpretive examination of the selected literary text.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consists of literary texts that explore existential themes and spiritual transformation. However, for the purpose of this research, the focus is limited to a single primary text, namely *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse. Therefore, purposive sampling is employed because the novel is selected intentionally due to its strong thematic emphasis on existential meaninglessness and personal enlightenment. Furthermore, specific passages, dialogues, and narrative episodes that reflect the protagonist's experiences of dissatisfaction, reflection, and spiritual growth are selected as textual samples for analysis. In literary research, purposive sampling is commonly applied because researchers focus on particular texts that best represent the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014). Consequently, the selected text provides sufficient material for examining the research objectives.

Data Collection Methods

In the present study, data are collected primarily from textual sources. The primary data consist of narrative passages, character dialogues, and thematic descriptions from the novel *Siddhartha*. These textual elements are carefully examined in order to identify representations of existential meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity.

Secondary data are also collected from scholarly books, journal articles, and academic studies related to existential philosophy, literary criticism, and Hermann Hesse's

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works. These sources are consulted in order to support the interpretation of the text and to provide theoretical context for the analysis. Moreover, academic databases and peer-reviewed publications are used to ensure that reliable and relevant sources are included in the research. Thus, both primary and secondary sources contribute to the overall analytical framework of the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected textual data are analyzed using thematic analysis and interpretive literary analysis. In thematic analysis, patterns and recurring themes within the narrative are identified and categorized systematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For instance, episodes reflecting Siddhartha's dissatisfaction with ascetic life, material wealth, and spiritual teachings are analyzed in order to understand how meaninglessness emerges in different stages of his life.

Furthermore, interpretive analysis is applied to explore the philosophical implications of these experiences. Existential concepts such as alienation, self-discovery, and personal freedom are examined in relation to the protagonist's journey. Moreover, textual evidence is interpreted in light of existential philosophical discussions presented in literary criticism. Consequently, the analysis reveals how the narrative structure of the novel reflects the transformation from existential emptiness to spiritual enlightenment.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative literary research, reliability and validity are often addressed through the concept of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is ensured through careful textual interpretation, consistent analytical procedures, and the use of credible academic sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, multiple scholarly interpretations are consulted in order to support the analysis and to avoid subjective bias. Close reading of the text is also conducted so that interpretations are grounded in textual evidence. Moreover, theoretical frameworks and previous scholarly studies are used to strengthen the analytical validity of the research. Therefore, the credibility and dependability of the findings are maintained throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards are maintained throughout the research process. Since this study is

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based on literary analysis, no human participants are involved. However, academic integrity is ensured by properly acknowledging all sources and providing accurate citations according to APA style guidelines.

Furthermore, all quotations and ideas derived from previous research are appropriately referenced in order to avoid plagiarism. Academic honesty is also maintained by presenting interpretations objectively and by respecting the intellectual contributions of previous scholars. Consequently, ethical academic practices are observed in all stages of the research.

Limitations of the Methodology

Despite the strengths of the chosen methodology, certain limitations are acknowledged. First, the study focuses on a single literary text, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the depth of textual analysis provides valuable insight into the thematic structure of the novel.

Second, qualitative literary analysis is inherently interpretive; therefore, interpretations may vary among researchers. Nevertheless, the analysis is supported with textual evidence and scholarly references in order to maintain credibility. Furthermore, the research emphasizes thematic interpretation rather than empirical measurement. Consequently, the findings contribute primarily to literary and philosophical understanding rather than statistical generalization.

This chapter has presented the methodological framework used in the study. An interpretivist research philosophy and qualitative research approach are adopted in order to analyze the existential themes present in *Siddhartha*. Moreover, a textual research design is employed, and purposive sampling is used to select relevant passages from the novel. Data are collected from primary and secondary sources, and thematic analysis is applied to interpret the textual evidence. Reliability and trustworthiness are ensured through scholarly references and systematic analysis. Ethical standards are also maintained throughout the research process. Consequently, the methodology provides a clear and structured approach for examining the themes of meaninglessness and the individual quest for identity in the selected literary text.

Discussion and Analysis

The present chapter analyzes how the theme of existential meaninglessness functions as the driving force behind Siddhartha's journey toward self-realization in *Siddhartha*

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by Hermann Hesse. The analysis addresses the research questions by examining how experiences of dissatisfaction and existential emptiness motivate the protagonist's search for identity and spiritual enlightenment. Furthermore, the discussion demonstrates how meaninglessness gradually transforms into wisdom through lived experience. Thus, the chapter explores the central argument of the study: that Siddhartha's enlightenment emerges not from external teachings but from confronting existential uncertainty.

To begin with, the theme of existential dissatisfaction is introduced at the very beginning of the novel when Siddhartha lives a privileged life as the son of a Brahmin. Although he is admired by his family and respected by society, he feels an inner emptiness that prevents him from achieving true fulfillment. This dissatisfaction is evident when the narrator states that Siddhartha *began to feel that the love of his father and the love of his mother and the love of his friend Govinda would not bring him eternal happiness* (Hesse, 1951). This early moment reveals the presence of existential questioning in Siddhartha's life. Moreover, the protagonist's spiritual restlessness demonstrates that social recognition and religious rituals cannot provide him with lasting meaning. Consequently, Siddhartha begins his quest for enlightenment by leaving his home and joining the Samanas, hoping that ascetic practices will help him overcome his existential dissatisfaction.

However, Siddhartha's experience with the Samanas eventually deepens rather than resolves his sense of meaninglessness. Initially, he believes that extreme self-denial and meditation will lead him to enlightenment. Nevertheless, he soon realizes that these practices only provide temporary escape from the self rather than genuine understanding. Siddhartha therefore reflects critically on his spiritual training and concludes that ascetic practices cannot reveal ultimate truth. This realization is expressed when he observes, *I could think, I could wait, I could fast; but these were no longer of any use to me* (Hesse, 1951). The statement highlights Siddhartha's growing awareness that traditional spiritual methods fail to answer his deeper existential questions. Furthermore, this moment demonstrates how dissatisfaction becomes a catalyst for further searching rather than a final conclusion.

Similarly, Siddhartha's encounter with the Buddha represents another stage in his search for meaning. When Siddhartha meets Gautama Buddha, he deeply respects the

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wisdom and serenity of the enlightened teacher. Nevertheless, Siddhartha refuses to become his disciple because he believes that enlightenment cannot simply be transmitted through teachings. He explains this idea by stating that *wisdom cannot be passed on; wisdom that a wise man tries to pass on always sounds like foolishness* (Hesse, 1951). This moment is significant because it reveals Siddhartha's commitment to discovering truth through personal experience. In other words, he recognizes that the search for meaning must be individual rather than doctrinal. Thus, Siddhartha continues his journey independently, believing that genuine understanding can only emerge from lived experience.

Following this decision, Siddhartha enters the world of material pleasures, which introduces another dimension of existential meaninglessness. After meeting Kamala and the merchant Kamaswami, Siddhartha becomes involved in wealth, business, and sensual enjoyment. At first, these experiences appear to provide satisfaction and excitement. However, over time Siddhartha realizes that material success does not fulfill his deeper spiritual needs. The narrator observes that Siddhartha gradually becomes *weary of pleasure and tired of himself* (Hesse, 1951). This statement reflects the profound emptiness that emerges from a life devoted to worldly desires. Furthermore, Siddhartha recognizes that he has become spiritually lost in the pursuit of pleasure and wealth. Consequently, his experience of meaninglessness intensifies, leading him to abandon his luxurious lifestyle and seek a deeper understanding of life.

The turning point in Siddhartha's journey occurs when he reaches the river and contemplates suicide. At this moment, he feels completely exhausted by the contradictions of his life and believes that his search for meaning has failed. However, as he stands near the river, he suddenly hears the sacred word *Om* which reminds him of the unity of existence. This experience marks the beginning of Siddhartha's transformation because it reconnects him with the spiritual awareness that he had once sought as a young ascetic. Significantly, the river becomes a symbol of wisdom and continuity throughout the narrative. Siddhartha later learns from the ferryman Vasudeva that the river represents the interconnectedness of all life. As Vasudeva explains, the river contains *all voices, all goals, all yearning, all suffering, all pleasure* (Hesse, 1951). Therefore, Siddhartha gradually realizes that meaning is not

found by rejecting the world but by understanding the unity of existence.

Furthermore, Siddhartha's life with the ferryman allows him to develop a deeper understanding of time, suffering, and spiritual harmony. Through patient listening to the river, he learns that life consists of interconnected experiences rather than isolated events. This insight becomes particularly important when Siddhartha confronts the emotional pain caused by his son's rejection. Although the experience initially brings suffering, it ultimately deepens Siddhartha's compassion and empathy. Consequently, Siddhartha begins to recognize that suffering itself is an essential component of spiritual growth. As the narrative suggests, enlightenment emerges through acceptance of life's contradictions rather than through escape from them.

Ultimately, Siddhartha achieves spiritual realization by embracing the unity of all experiences. At the end of the novel, Govinda encounters Siddhartha and asks him to share his wisdom. Siddhartha responds by explaining that truth cannot be fully expressed through words because language divides reality into opposites. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of love and acceptance, stating that *love is the most important thing in the world* (Hesse, 1951). This statement represents the culmination of Siddhartha's spiritual journey. Through years of searching, suffering, and reflection, he discovers that meaning emerges from understanding the interconnected nature of life.

In relation to the research objectives and research questions, the analysis demonstrates that existential meaninglessness plays a crucial role in Siddhartha's development. First, the study reveals that the protagonist repeatedly experiences dissatisfaction with different forms of life, including religious rituals, ascetic practices, and material wealth. These experiences illustrate how meaninglessness is portrayed throughout the narrative. Second, the analysis shows that Siddhartha's individual quest for identity evolves through a process of experimentation, reflection, and personal transformation. Therefore, the findings confirm that existential emptiness functions as the driving force behind Siddhartha's spiritual enlightenment.

Furthermore, the discussion addresses the research gap identified in the literature review. While many previous studies focus primarily on Siddhartha's final enlightenment, this analysis highlights the earlier stages of existential dissatisfaction that motivate his search for meaning. By examining these stages in detail, the study

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demonstrates how meaninglessness gradually evolves into wisdom through lived experience. Consequently, the research provides a deeper understanding of how the novel portrays enlightenment as the outcome of confronting existential uncertainty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that Siddhartha presents existential meaninglessness as a crucial stage in the protagonist's journey toward spiritual enlightenment. Throughout the narrative, Siddhartha experiences dissatisfaction with religious rituals, ascetic practices, and material pleasures; however, these experiences ultimately guide him toward deeper self-awareness. Furthermore, the analysis confirms that enlightenment in the novel is achieved not through external teachings but through personal experience, reflection, and acceptance of life's contradictions. Thus, the study contributes to existing literary scholarship by highlighting how existential emptiness functions as the foundation of Siddhartha's individual quest for meaning and identity.

Findings / Results

- Siddhartha feels empty at the start of the novel even though he is rich and respected, showing that status and religion do not give true happiness.
- His life with the Samanas shows that strict meditation and self-denial cannot remove his inner emptiness.
- He respects the Buddha but does not follow him because he believes truth must be found personally, not taught.
- Wealth and pleasure also fail to satisfy him and instead increase his feeling of emptiness.
- At the river, he begins to understand that all life is connected, which starts his transformation.
- His suffering, especially with his son and the ferryman, helps him grow spiritually.
- He learns that accepting life's contradictions is the way to enlightenment.
- Overall, meaninglessness pushes Siddhartha to search for identity and spiritual truth.

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