

Transcendentalism and Self-Realization in *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge*

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Submitted by

Ishwar Prasad Dhungana

T.U. Reg. No.6-2-242-121-2000

Exam Symbol No. 2015092

Central Department of English

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Tribhuvan University

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Nepal

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Letter of Recommendation

Ishwar Prasad Dhungana has completed his dissertation entitled “Transcendentalism and Self-Realization in *Siddhartha* and *The Razor’s Edge*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 29 March 2023 to 26 April 2025. I hereby recommend his dissertation to be submitted for viva voce.

Date: April 10, 2025

.....

Prof. Dr. Ramchandra Paudel

Supervisor

Letter of Approval

This research work entitled “Transcendentalism and Self-Realization in *Siddhartha* and *The Razor’s Edge*” submitted to the Central Department of English in Tribhuvan University by Ishwar Prasad Dhungana has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

.....  
Prof. Dr. Ramchandra Paudel  
Supervisor

.....  
Dr. Shiva Raj Rijal  
External Examiner

.....  
Prof. Dr. Dhruva Karki  
Head

Central Department of English

Date:

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Transcendentalism and Self-Realization in *Siddhartha* and *The Razor’s Edge* submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, is an entirely original work, and I have made due acknowledgements to all ideas and information borrowed from various sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The results presented in this dissertation have not been presented anywhere else for the award of any degree or any other reasons, except where due acknowledgement is made in this dissertation. No part of the content of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

Date: April 10, 2025

Ishwar Prasad Dhungana

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## Abstract

This research examines the spiritual journeys portrayed in Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*, focusing on how both protagonists reject conventional paths to enlightenment in favor of self-determined quests for meaning. Both novels present striking parallels in their critique of materialism and religious dogma. Siddhartha abandons traditional Buddhist teachings to forge his path through worldly experience and ascetic transformation, while Larry Darrell rejects post-war American materialism to pursue spiritual awakening across cultural boundaries. Again, two different cultural and religious aspects have fusion for the similar purpose which becomes a unique and worth mentioning finding in the spiritual and transcendental arena. This kind of phenomenon is quite interesting and fruitful for the sake of humankind irrespective of dissimilar background like consciousness, education, culture and thoughts. The researcher interprets their journey through 'liminality' and 'transcendentalism' in order to explore the deep psychological plight and innovation these two protagonists - Siddhartha and Larry from *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* go through respectively. This comparative analysis explores how both works navigate the tension between societal expectations and individual spiritual authenticity. Through close textual examination, I demonstrate how both protagonists undergo transformative cycles of immersion in and withdrawal from society, suggesting that genuine enlightenment emerges from integrating rather than escaping worldly experience.

Beyond their individual literary merits, these novels collectively illuminate universal aspects of the human search for transcendence and meaning. This research contributes to scholarly discourse on comparative spirituality in literature by

examining how these narratives, despite their distinct cultural origins, converge in their representation of spiritual awakening as a personally determined journey that transcends cultural and religious boundaries while still being shaped by them.

## Table of Contents

Letter of Recommendation	ii
Approval Sheet	iii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgement	v
Abstract	vi
Chapter I. Introduction and Background of the Texts	1-6
Chapter II. Thirst of Knowledge and Transcendentalism	7-40
Chapter III. Beyond the Buddha: Hesse's Spiritual Enlightenment in <i>Siddhartha</i>	41-47
Chapter IV. Existential Quest and Eastern Wisdom in <i>The Razor's Edge</i>	48-57
Chapter V. Conclusion	58-60
Works Cited	61-62

## Chapter I

### Introduction and Background of the Texts

This comparative study examines the quest for spiritualism that the protagonists in two significant 20th-century novels Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922) and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* (1944) go through. Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), a German-Swiss novelist and poet, gained prominence for his introspective works exploring the individual's search for authenticity and spirituality. Influenced by Eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, Hesse's writing often features protagonists undergoing psychological and spiritual transformations. *Siddhartha*, published during the aftermath of World War I when European intellectual circles were increasingly drawn to Eastern thought, represents Hesse's artistic response to the spiritual crisis of modern Western civilization. The novel received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946. It established Hesse's position as a significant literary voice.

W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965), an English playwright and novelist, was renowned for his precise observational skills and psychological insight. Having traveled extensively throughout Asia, Maugham incorporated diverse cultural perspectives into his work. *The Razor's Edge*, written during World War II, reflects the existential questioning that characterized the era. Maugham's approach combines skeptical Western rationalism with openness to Eastern spiritual traditions, creating a narrative that challenges the materialistic values of post-war American society. The novel's publication coincided with growing Western interest in Eastern spirituality, foreshadowing the more widespread cultural exchange that would develop in subsequent decades.

The protagonists of these novels—Siddhartha and Larry Darrell—share a profound dissatisfaction with conventional wisdom and prescribed social paths. Despite their different cultural backgrounds, both characters experience an awakening that propels them toward spiritual exploration. Siddhartha, born into a Brahmin family in ancient India, rejects traditional religious teachings in favor of direct experience. Larry, an American aviator traumatized by World War I, abandons promising career prospects and social expectations to pursue philosophical and spiritual understanding. Both characters represent exceptional individuals who perceive limitations in their inherited cultural frameworks and seek transcendence through alternative paths to knowledge.

#### Statement of Problem

Contemporary literary scholarship has extensively analyzed these novels individually, but comparative studies examining their parallel approaches to spiritual awakening remain underdeveloped. This research addresses this gap by investigating how these narratives, despite emerging from different cultural traditions, converge in their representation of the spiritual journey as a personally determined path that often requires rejection of social conventions. Furthermore, popular misconceptions often portray spiritual enlightenment and self-realization as either entirely accessible through established religious systems or as purely subjective experiences without structure. This study examines how both novels navigate the tension between institutional knowledge and personal experience, suggesting more nuanced approaches to spiritual development.

The research specifically investigates how these exceptional protagonists develop alternative epistemologies—ways of knowing and understanding—that integrate rather than simply reject conventional wisdom. By analyzing their journeys

through the lens of liminality and transcendentalism, this study aims to elucidate the complex processes through which individuals navigate cultural boundaries in pursuit of deeper understanding and spiritual fulfillment.

#### Research Questions

This study addresses the following specific research questions:

1. How does Siddhartha's rejection of traditional spiritual authorities in favor of self-guidance reflect broader tensions between institutional knowledge and experiential wisdom? What challenges and insights emerge from his alternative epistemological approach?
2. In what ways does Larry Darrell's spiritual quest in *The Razor's Edge* represent a critique of post-war Western materialism? How does his journey across cultural boundaries illustrate the possibilities and limitations of transcultural spiritual seeking?
3. What commonalities and differences emerge when comparing these protagonists' liminal positions between cultural frameworks? How do their respective journeys illuminate universal aspects of spiritual transformation?
4. How do both novels represent the relationship between worldly experience and spiritual enlightenment? Do they suggest that engagement with rather than escape from worldly life is necessary for authentic spiritual development?

#### Objectives

This research pursues the following objectives:

1. To analyze how both novels, represent the dialectical relationship between established religious traditions and personal spiritual experience, exploring the limitations and values of each approach.

2. To examine how the protagonists' liminal positions—their existence between cultural frameworks—enables unique insights unavailable to those fully embedded within single traditions.
3. To investigate how both narratives represent the integration of sensual/material experience and spiritual development, challenging dualistic conceptions that separate these domains.
4. To develop a cross-cultural understanding of transcendentalism that acknowledges both universal human aspirations and culturally specific expressions of spiritual seeking.
5. To contribute to contemporary literary discourse on comparative spirituality by demonstrating how these narratives, despite their distinct cultural origins, offer complementary insights into human spiritual development.

#### Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research employs a comparative methodological approach to analyze the primary texts, examining parallels and divergences in their representation of spiritual journeys. Close textual analysis is the primary analytical tool, focusing on characterization, narrative structure, symbolism, and philosophical content within both novels.

The theoretical framework integrates two complementary approaches:

1. Liminality Theory: Anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of liminality provides a theoretical lens for understanding both protagonists' journeys. Liminality refers to the transitional state experienced during rites of passage, characterized by ambiguity, disorientation, and potential for transformation. Turner's framework is particularly valuable for analyzing how Siddhartha and Larry navigate threshold experiences between cultural frameworks, existing

"betwixt and between" established social categories. This theory illuminates how their liminal positions facilitate their spiritual transformations and unique insights.

2. Transcendentalism: Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalist philosophy, which emphasizes individual intuition, the spiritual potential inherent in nature, and the limitations of materialistic rationality, provides a framework for understanding both protagonists' spiritual aspirations. While Emerson's transcendentalism emerged from a specifically American context, this research examines how its core principles—particularly the emphasis on direct spiritual experience and the divinity of nature—resonate with aspects of Eastern philosophy represented in both novels. This framework helps analyze how both texts navigate the relationship between individual spiritual intuition and established religious traditions.

This integrated theoretical approach allows for examination of both the psychological-anthropological dimensions of the protagonists' transformations (through liminality) and the philosophical-spiritual content of their realizations (through transcendentalism).

#### Delimitation

This study focuses specifically on Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* as primary texts. While acknowledging the broader literary output of both authors, the analysis is limited to these works due to their thematic focus on spiritual seeking and self-transformation.

It is important to note that while *Siddhartha* incorporates elements of Buddhist philosophy, it is not a historically accurate representation of either the historical Buddha's life or orthodox Buddhist teachings. Rather than evaluating the novels'

fidelity to specific religious traditions, this research examines how they creatively engage with and transform religious concepts within literary frameworks. The analysis acknowledges that *Siddhartha* was translated from German to English, with attention to key concepts that might carry different connotations across languages. Similarly, while *The Razor's Edge* encompasses multiple themes including post-war social change, romantic relationships, and cultural critique, this study concentrates specifically on Larry Darrell's spiritual journey and its implications for understanding cross-cultural spiritual seeking.

This research does not claim to develop entirely new theoretical constructs but rather applies established theoretical frameworks (liminality and transcendentalism) to generate fresh insights into these texts and their representation of spiritual development in literature.

## Chapter II

### Thirst of Knowledge and Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism was the nineteenth-century American movement that advocates a person's inherent potentiality, which is directly related to the energy of a supernatural aspect beyond this worldly pleasure. This movement is greatly influenced by Hindu philosophy and Upanishads. Transcendentalism is rooted in the belief that individuals can gain profound insights through intuition rather than empirical observation. This philosophy posits that there exists an Over soul, a universal spirit that connects all living things. In this context, Emerson writes:

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, — and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato, and Milton is, that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men but what they thought.

(7)

While exploring the themes of self-realization and transcendentalism in *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge*, one can find the profound journey of individual enlightenment that both protagonists Siddhartha and Larry respectively, feel and realize in their mission. They find their own inherent goodness and thoughts as well in their different ups and downs of life.

Both novels illustrate that self-realization is not merely an intellectual exercise but a transformative journey that requires introspection, experience, and often, a departure from societal norms. In *Siddhartha*, Hesse portrays the protagonist's

evolution from a life of privilege to one of asceticism, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of existence through direct experience rather than through teachings or doctrines. Similarly, Maugham's Larry seeks truth beyond conventional success, exploring Eastern philosophies and spiritual practices that resonate with transcendentalist ideals.

Transcendentalism serves as a critical framework for understanding the journeys of both characters. This philosophical movement emphasizes the importance of intuition and personal insight over empirical evidence and societal expectations. The idea that individuals can connect with a universal spirit resonates throughout both narratives, suggesting that true knowledge comes from within a person.

Nature plays a pivotal role in both texts as a source of inspiration and revelation. Emerson says, "The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face, we –through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?" (p. 28). In *Siddhartha*, the river symbolizes the flow of life and the interconnectedness of all beings, serving as a catalyst for Siddhartha's enlightenment. The narrative often highlights Siddhartha's deep connection to nature, resonating with Transcendentalist views that nature is a source of inspiration and spiritual insight. Siddhartha's quest emphasizes the importance of understanding oneself, a core principle of Transcendentalism. He learns that true wisdom comes from within rather than from external teachings or societal expectations. The novel depicts various paths Siddhartha takes—asceticism, sensuality, and ultimately a return to simplicity—demonstrating the belief that enlightenment is a personal journey shaped by individual experiences.

In contrast, Maugham uses various settings—from Parisian cafes to Indian landscapes—to illustrate Larry's search for meaning. These natural elements reinforce

the transcendentalist belief that nature is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in human development. Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* also embodies Transcendentalist themes through its protagonist, Larry Darrell, who seeks deeper meaning in life following his traumatic experiences in World War I. Larry's journey reflects a conscious decision to reject conventional societal values in favor of spiritual exploration. His travels to India symbolize a search for higher truths beyond material success. The novel engages with existential questions about the nature of evil and the purpose of life, echoing Transcendentalist beliefs that individuals must seek their own answers through introspection and experience. Larry's studies under a guru illustrate the blending of Western and Eastern philosophies, suggesting that wisdom can be found outside traditional Western frameworks. This aligns with Transcendentalism's openness to diverse spiritual insights

Both novels serve as explorations of the human spirit in its quest for truth and fulfillment. They underscore the significance of individual experience in shaping one's understanding of existence, reflecting the enduring legacy of Transcendentalist thought in modern literature.

At last, both *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* present a universal quest for enlightenment that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. The characters' journeys reflect the transcendentalist conviction that self-discovery is an essential aspect of human existence. Through their experiences, readers are invited to reflect on their paths toward self-realization and the potential for achieving a deeper understanding of life beyond societal constraints. As we conclude this exploration, it becomes evident that Hesse and Maugham not only depict individual journeys but also challenge us to consider our own beliefs about knowledge, existence, and personal fulfillment. Their works serve as timeless reminders that the pursuit of truth

is an ongoing process—one that requires courage, introspection, and an unwavering commitment to self-discovery. In embracing these ideals, we may find our own paths illuminated by the wisdom of transcendentalism, guiding us toward a more profound understanding of ourselves and our place within the cosmos.

Both Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* explore themes of transcendentalism and self-realization through their protagonists' quests for enlightenment and understanding of the self. These narratives illustrate the journey of personal growth, emphasizing the rejection of societal norms in favor of individual spiritual exploration. *Siddhartha* follows the titular character's quest for enlightenment, reflecting the principles of transcendentalism. Siddhartha initially seeks wisdom through external teachings, including those from the Buddha, but ultimately realizes that true understanding must come from within. This journey aligns with Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology, which posits that self-actualization is achieved through personal experience rather than external validation.

Siddhartha discards wealth and societal expectations to pursue a deeper understanding of existence. He learns that material possessions do not lead to lasting happiness. He realizes that wisdom differs from knowledge is pivotal. Wisdom cannot be taught but must be experienced personally which reflects the transcendental belief in individual intuition as a source of truth. The novel also vividly represents the flexible and mysterious life its continuity and enlightenment. In *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell embarks on a similar quest for self-realization following his experiences in World War I. His journey is marked by a rejection of conventional life in pursuit of spiritual truth, paralleling Siddhartha's path. Larry seeks to understand the essence of the self beyond physical existence. His experiences lead him to conclude that true fulfillment comes from understanding one's eternal nature rather than adhering to

societal expectation. Larry's spiritual awakening is influenced by Eastern philosophies, particularly those related to self-realization and immortality. He engages deeply with concepts such as Brahman and the eternal self, mirroring Siddhartha's exploration of Buddhist teachings. Larry chooses a life that prioritizes spiritual growth over material success, emphasizing transcendental ideals that advocate for personal integrity and authenticity over societal approval.

In this way, both *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* present profound explorations of transcendentalism and self-realization. Through their journeys, Siddhartha and Larry emphasize the importance of inner wisdom over external teachings and material success. Their stories resonate with the universal quest for meaning, highlighting that true enlightenment comes from within, shaped by personal experiences and reflections on existence.

By nature, human kind wants to explore new and new ideas and discoveries in his/her whole lifetime. Siddhartha, the protagonist also has deep thirst of knowledge and he is not satisfied with his usual Brahman rituals around his family members and societies. He wants to explore the reality of this world and decides to become a 'sadhu' with the accompany of 'Samanas'. The Samanas are the Buddhist disciples who are wandering in some peaceful areas, away from the crowded materialistic world. Siddhartha wants to leave his home and he has strong desire to get knowledge. There is the conversation between he and his father:

"Siddhartha", he spoke, "What are you waiting for?"

"You know what."

"Will you always stand that way and wait, until it becomes morning, noon and evening?"

"I will stand and wait"

“You will become tired.”

“You will fall asleep, Siddhartha”

“I will not fall asleep”

“You will die, Siddhartha.”

“I will die.”

“And would you rather die than obey your father?” (Hesse 14)

Siddhartha is always loyal and obedient towards his family and rituals. He greatly respects his father and other family members but his mind has already occupied with the unfulfilled hidden desire of getting knowledge beyond this worldly illusion or ‘Maya’. He wants to get permission from his father to leave his house and other familial bondages but the father is not ready to send his only son to the life of ascetic world. Siddhartha is insistent in his demand waiting the permission of his father. Here is the symbolic meaning of waiting and getting the desired goal. In this context, Deepakbhai Desai in his book *Self Realization* says:

Life has actually become entirely ‘fractured’. People do not even have awareness of what they are living for. There is no point to this life without a goal. You earn money, eat, drink, and enjoy, and yet you keep worrying all day long, how can that be considered the goal of life? This human life that you have received, what is the point of letting it go to waste? So, after attaining a human life, what should you do to accomplish your goal? (p. 9)

Likewise, the protagonist Larry has also deep hidden meaning of an inner desire in his heart that leads him towards the eastern Hindu philosophy. He comes to India and studies Hindu philosophy. Many people including his relatives and family members as well do not like the different thoughts of Larry’s desire but he is quite strong in his goal. Both Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's*

*Edge* explore the profound themes of knowledge and the quest for deeper understanding, reflecting the human condition's thirst for meaning and creativity.

#### Siddhartha: The Journey of Self-Discovery

In *Siddhartha*, the protagonist begins a spiritual journey that emphasizes self-exploration and the pursuit of enlightenment. Hesse illustrates Siddhartha's evolution through various life stages, including his time as a Samana, where he rejects material wealth, and later as a successful merchant. Each phase represents a different approach to knowledge—intellectual, experiential, and ultimately spiritual. Siddhartha learns that true knowledge comes from within, transcending traditional teachings. “Silently, Siddhartha exposes himself to the burning rays of the sun, glowing with pain, glowing with thirst, and stood there, until he neither felt any pain or thirst”(19).

His connection to nature symbolizes a deeper understanding of life and existence. He realizes that experiences shape wisdom to his journey. This narrative reflects the universal quest for meaning, resonating with Joseph Campbell's concept of the hero's journey, where the hero must confront challenges and return transformed with newfound wisdom. Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* says, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men" (p. 23).

#### *The Razor's Edge*: The Search for Authenticity and Truth

In *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell seeks a more authentic and truthful life beyond societal expectations. Unlike Siddhartha, Larry's quest is marked by existential questioning rather than spiritual enlightenment. His travels across Europe and India which symbolizes a broader search for truth amid the distractions of modern

life. Larry's disdain for conventional success highlights a deeper critique of societal values. His interactions with various characters reflect diverse perspectives on life, love, and fulfillment. And his journey leads him to a form of enlightenment that emphasizes personal authenticity over societal validation. Maugham's portrayal of Larry's quest mirrors Siddhartha's in its exploration of self-discovery but diverges in its focus on the philosophical rather than purely spiritual dimensions of existence. Siddhartha is interested towards spiritual enlightenment, the open nature and the inner peace of human kind. He wants to explore every detail of knowledge and supreme truth through his own experiment. Again, Larry is interested in diverse cultural truths and realities. He has different philosophical insights to the materialistic illusion and spiritual reality.

Buddha was the prophet of Buddhism. He directed human kinds towards the path of peace and fraternity in his own doctrines. But in the course of time, the traditional Buddha's disciples followed only the showy types of rituals instead of realizing themselves in their own life. Some of them do not apply Buddha's doctrines in their own practical life. Therefore, the novel *Siddhartha* suggests us towards the practical utility of our religions. Again, in the novel *The Razor's Edge*, Larry has just realized the value of humanity and this mortal life through the study of Kathopanishad of Hindu religion.

Both Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* explore the quest for spiritual enlightenment and the implications of religious understanding on personal fulfillment. Through their protagonists, Siddhartha and Larry Darrell, the novels delve into themes of self-discovery, the contrast between materialism and spirituality, and the search for meaning in life.

### Siddhartha: The Journey to Enlightenment

In *Siddhartha*, the titular character embarks on a quest for enlightenment, rejecting the conventional path laid out by his father as a Brahmin. His journey is marked by several key phases. Siddhartha initially follows the life of a Brahmin but soon realizes that intellectual knowledge does not equate to spiritual fulfillment. This realization prompts him to join the Samanas, a group that practices severe asceticism in pursuit of enlightenment. Throughout his journey, Siddhartha experiments with various lifestyles, including wealth and sensual pleasure with Kamala, and later renounces these in search of deeper truths. His experiences highlight the idea that both extremes—asceticism and indulgence—fail to provide lasting satisfaction. Ultimately, it is through his connection with nature, particularly a river that symbolizes the flow of life, that Siddhartha attains enlightenment. This signifies a profound understanding that true wisdom comes from within and is interconnected with all existence.

### The Razor's Edge: The Search for Meaning

In *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell's spiritual journey mirrors Siddhartha's in its depth but contrasts sharply with Western materialism. After World War I, Larry rejects a comfortable life in Chicago society to seek spiritual truth in India. His quest is motivated by existential questions about evil and suffering, which he believes can only be answered through direct experience rather than societal norms. Larry's time in India leads him to study under a guru, where he learns about Vedanta and the cyclical nature of existence. His insights emphasize that understanding one's relationship with good and evil is crucial for personal growth. Maugham contrasts Larry's spiritual pursuits with those of his friends who remain entrenched in material success. This juxtaposition serves to highlight the emptiness of a life focused solely on social status.

and wealth, suggesting that true fulfillment lies in spiritual awakening rather than societal approval.

Both novels illustrate that true understanding of religion transcends dogma and ritual; it is about personal experience and inner transformation. The implications for life can be summarized as follows:

**Self-Discovery:** Both Siddhartha and Larry demonstrate that self-discovery often requires abandoning societal expectations and embarking on a personal journey toward understanding one's true nature.

**Spiritual Fulfillment vs. Material Success:** The narratives suggest that while society often values material success, genuine happiness stems from spiritual fulfillment and alignment with one's inner self.

**Interconnectedness of Existence:** Both characters ultimately arrive at an understanding that life is interconnected. This realization fosters compassion towards others and an acceptance of life's complexities. In this way, *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* provide profound insights into the nature of spirituality and its implications for human existence. Through their journeys, both authors convey that real understanding of religion lies not just in belief but in lived experience, self-awareness, and an ongoing quest for truth.

Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* reveals profound insights into the human condition, spirituality, and the quest for meaning. Both novels delve into the tension between material desires and spiritual fulfillment, presenting characters who navigate their paths through experimentation with life's pleasures.

In *Siddhartha*, the protagonist embarks on a quest for enlightenment during the time of the Buddha. Siddhartha, dissatisfied with his life as a Brahmin, seeks

deeper understanding beyond traditional teachings. His journey takes him through various phases Siddhartha initially embraces extreme self-denial, believing that renouncing worldly pleasures will lead to enlightenment. In the novel Siddhartha says, "...I see whatever exists as good death is to me like life, sin like holiness, wisdom like foolishness ,everything has to be as it is, everything only requires my consent ,only my willingness ,my loving agreement ,to be good for me ,to do nothing but work for my benefit ,to be unable to ever harm me" (Hesse 184).

He was curious and somewhat different than other common people around his social circle. He actually realized the new kind of knowledge and thoughts himself. He has an unparalleled courage and vigor to go against the usual social Hindu culture and rituals. In spite of his own well-to-do familial background and happiness; he decides to evaluate his own Brahmanism way of thoughts and traditional values and its usefulness.

He had started to suspect that his venerable father and his other teachers, that the wiser Brahmans had already revealed to him the most and the best of their wisdom, that they had already filled his expecting vessel with their richness, and the vessel was not full, the spirit was not content, the soul was not calm, the heart was not satisfied. (Hesse 7)

Siddhartha's life is one kind of laboratory within him, there is a complete circle of different activities and thoughts which starts from new dynamic spiritual feelings - then ascetic life-experiment in worldly life and declination - again towards the path of enlightenment and transcendentalism. In this way, the veering of thoughts keeps on changing in Siddhartha's mind and teaches the great lesson that transcendental knowledge cannot be taught but it should be directly realized in our mind because

after realizing that asceticism does not provide the answers he seeks, he indulges in a life of luxury and sensual pleasures in the city, experiencing love, wealth, and success. Ultimately, he discovers that true wisdom comes from within and through experience rather than strict adherence to doctrines or indulgence in pleasures. His experiences illustrate the transient nature of worldly pleasures. His indulgence leads to disillusionment, prompting him to seek a more profound truth. The novel emphasizes personal experience as essential for spiritual growth. Siddhartha has a unique passion of getting something new in his life. In spite of the burning youth age, he decides to leave his all kinds of practical and luxurious life styles and comfortable situation. We know the inner light from his heart which was covering all kinds of physical and transient pleasures of this modern society. He has already got the self-realization of the meaning of human life and more searches on it.

On the other hand, the protagonist Larry in the *Razor's Edge* is from Christian originality but he is not satisfied with his own religious and social background. Therefore, he decides to abandon his own religious beliefs and wants to study the Hindu culture and is devoted to Shree Ganesh to find the actual meaning of life. He is also so curious to find out the value of human life and its transient dramatic existence. He has seen many short lived lives during the war. He has a traumatic impact from the war and he could realize the value of human life more seriously unlike the other materialistic people around him. Only the death can teach us about the dignity and usefulness of life and Larry has very closely watched the incidents of the war but other people with him are quite blind due to the illusion of these worldly activities. In this way the two characters have different psychological and emotionally uniqueness by birth and other people even cannot go near to them. His journey is marked by his discontent with materialism and his search for deeper meaning in life away from a

lucrative career and societal norms to explore spirituality and philosophy. He is not interested in his narrowly bounded western materialistic pleasure. He wants to disclose the reality of human life and its meaning. He had understood the value of life more clearly than other people around his social and familial background. But other people had misunderstanding about his perception of life because he was not in accumulating wealth and money. His travels take him across Europe and India, where he engages with various philosophies and lifestyles, seeking answers to existential questions. Ultimately, Larry finds peace through personal experiences that lead him to a more profound understanding of exist. The novel critiques the emptiness of material success and highlights the importance of inner fulfillment. Larry's path underscores the significance of personal exploration in finding one's purpose beyond societal expectations.

Siddhartha's journey is from asceticism to material world to self-discovery while Larry's is from materialism to spiritual exploration. Siddhartha's enlightenment is through personal experience but Larry finds peace in his own philosophical inquiry. Both these protagonists have changed themselves from the 'ideal self' to the 'real self'. They venture to transform themselves to the state of 'successful personality'. They have openness to experience these both 'seen' world and 'unseen' spiritual sphere. They are living in the real moment of their own life. They can trust their own feelings and thoughts without any biasness. They have creative and innovative path to the self –actualization in their mind. Therefore, they are in the state of 'successful personality' with full functions. In this regard, Carl Rogers says:

It should be evident that the term "the fully functioning person" is synonymous with optimal psychological adjustment, optimal psychological maturity, complete congruence, complete openness to experience, complete

extensionality.... Since some of these terms sound somewhat static, as though such a person “had arrived,” it should be pointed out that all the characteristics of such a person are process characteristics. The fully functioning person would be a person-in process, a person continually changing. (p. 235)

In this way, both *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* present rich narratives that explore the complexities of human existence through the lens of worldly pleasure and spiritual pursuit. While Siddhartha ultimately finds enlightenment through a synthesis of experiences, Larry Darrell’s journey emphasizes the rejection of societal norms in favor of personal truth. Together, these novels offer profound reflections on the nature of happiness and fulfillment in a world often dominated by transient pleasures. Siddhartha, the protagonist has changed his mind and he wants to experiment the real nature of love in this world. The reality of Buddhist thoughts is necessary to be applied in real life. Siddhartha has a long experience of being ascetic life. Then, he directly goes to the human settlement and meets a beautiful courtesan- she was Kamala.

Siddhartha knows many kinds of practical knowledge and real problems of practical life in our society. Then, Siddhartha meets rich merchant-Kamaswami. Though Kamaswami was a rich person, he couldn't read and write. So, he appointed Siddhartha as his business partner. Siddhartha was cleverer in business activities than Kamasami. He had the power of thoughts, action and patience unlike Kamaswami. The spiritual consciousness and openness helped Siddhartha to get rapid success in his business. But, in the course of time, the thoughts and minds of Siddhartha has changed in the dramatic ways. There is a circular path in his life starting from the ascetic thought to materialistic pleasure to the spiritual path. Similarly, Larry also has

that kind of circular way of life in which he has decided to leave the materialistic world and he is interested towards spiritualism.

Siddhartha, the young man has many ups and downs in his life. Now, he is mature enough to understand the permanent and real pleasure of life. He realizes that only the materialistic life is not the permanent source of pleasure. Therefore, he abandons all his property, business and even Kamala and goes to a jungle where he meets a wise ferryman Basudeva. They live in the same hut for some years and Siddhartha helped Basudeva's work.

Neither the too much wealthy and tycoons are always happy nor the poor are unhappy in their own life. It depends on the mentality and thoughts of a person whether to become happy or sad in his/her life. Therefore, the protagonist Larry, in the novel *The Razor's edge* desires a new and revolutionary social system in his society. The long practiced traditional materialistic thoughts have made people blinded towards getting the spiritual knowledge. The exploration of the transformation of the 'self' from worldly pleasure to ascetic life is a profound theme in both Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*. Both novels depict characters that embark on spiritual quests, seeking deeper meaning and fulfillment beyond material existence.

In *Siddhartha*, Siddhartha begins his journey as a Brahmin's son, surrounded by privilege yet deeply dissatisfied. He feels that the conventional path laid out for him does not lead to true enlightenment. This dissatisfaction drives him to join the Samanas, a group of ascetics who renounce worldly pleasures in pursuit of spiritual wisdom. Siddhartha's transformation involves a series of trials where he attempts to 'kill' his senses and desires. He engages in extreme self-denial, fasting, and meditation, striving to escape his 'self' entirely. This journey reflects a fundamental

aspect of existential thought, where true freedom is found in self-actualization and the rejection of societal norms. However, he ultimately realizes that this path does not lead to enlightenment; instead, it only brings him back to himself. A pivotal moment occurs by the river, where Siddhartha contemplates suicide but instead experiences an awakening. The river symbolizes life's continuity and interconnectedness, leading him to understand that all experiences—joys and sorrows—is part of existence. This realization culminates in his achievement of Nirvana, marking the completion of his quest for self-discovery and acceptance of life's dualities. In this regard, Eckhart Tolle writes:

Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence.

This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. (18)

In *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell, a World War I veteran, similarly rejects societal expectations for a more profound spiritual quest. Unlike Siddhartha, who seeks enlightenment through ascetic practices, Larry's journey is characterized by a quest for personal meaning and understanding of existence beyond material success. Maugham contrasts Larry's path with those of his acquaintances who remains entrenched in materialism. Through these characters, Maugham illustrates the emptiness that often accompanies conventional lifestyles devoid of spiritual inquiry. Larry's refusal to conform highlights the struggle between societal expectations and personal fulfillment.

Larry's transformation is gradual; he travels to India seeking answers but does not adhere strictly to ascetic practices. Instead, he learns from various experiences and

relationships, ultimately arriving at a personal understanding of peace and fulfillment. His journey emphasizes that true enlightenment may not require complete renunciation but rather an integration of experiences into a coherent sense of self.

Both novels ultimately convey that the journey toward understanding the 'self' involves navigating between worldly desires and spiritual aspirations. While Siddhartha achieves enlightenment through rigorous ascetic practices and self-discovery, Larry finds peace through personal growth and exploration beyond societal confines. Each narrative offers unique insights into the nature of existence and the quest for authenticity in life. Although the journey of spiritual life in different phases is really challenging and difficult for the protagonists, they have accepted the unique paths from their bottom of hearts.

The actual knowledge and experience of a person which he / she acquires in his/her life is different than others. Therefore, the protagonist Siddhartha has modified and changed his direction of getting knowledge in his life. He wants to become his own 'guru' to teach himself in his 'class of life'. He has directly experienced many ups and downs in his life. He has encircled himself from the practical/worldly life to the spiritual life. Similarly, the protagonist Larry has also that kind of self-realized knowledge in which he completely sees the permanent pleasure and goal. To make it more clear the minute analysis has been given below:-

Siddhartha's Journey:

In *Siddhartha*, the protagonist begins a quest for self-realization that transcends traditional teachings. Initially raised in privileged family background, Siddhartha feels unfulfilled despite adhering to the expectations of Brahmin life. His journey leads him through various stages, including asceticism with the Samanas, indulgence in materialism, and ultimately a return to simplicity by the river, where he

experiences a moment of enlightenment. This moment symbolizes his realization that true wisdom comes from personal experience rather than external teachings. Swami Vivekananda defines the experience of enlightenment and several ways to attain it according to individual interest in one of his books *The Yoga of Knowledge*. He advocates oneness that pervades entire universe and says: “In this world of many he who sees the one, in this ever changing world he who sees him who never changes, as the soul of his own soul, as his own self, he is free, he is blessed, he has reached the goal. Therefore, know that thou art thee; thou art the God of this universe, ‘*Tat TvamAsi*’ (That thou art)” (265). The river serves as a powerful metaphor for life’s continuity and interconnectedness, culminating in Siddhartha's achievement of Nirvana through self-actualization, "Thus he praised himself, found joy in him, and listened curiously to his stomach, which was rumbling with hunger. He had now, so he felt, in these recent times and days, completely tasted and spat out, devoured up to the point of desperation and death, a piece of suffering, a piece of misery" (126).]

#### Larry Darrell's Quest

Conversely, in *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell’s journey begins after World War I, where he is disillusioned by the materialism surrounding him. Unlike Siddhartha, Larry’s exploration takes him across various cultures and philosophies, including a significant period spent in India studying with a guru. His path reflects a rejection of societal norms in favor of spiritual fulfillment, highlighting the contrast between his values and those of his peers who remain entrenched in material success. He starts his journey from European countries to India. Diwakar Singh and Richa Awasthy says: “Spirituality and materialism are thought to be mutually exclusive in Western thought; however, this is not the case in Indian thought. Indians believe one can pursue spirituality while living a materialistic life” (p. 47).

Both novels illustrate that the path to self-realization is deeply personal and often full of challenges. While Siddhartha ultimately finds enlightenment through introspection and acceptance of life's cyclical nature, Larry Darrell's journey emphasizes the importance of questioning societal values in pursuit of spiritual truth. Together, they offer rich narratives that encourage readers to reflect on their own paths toward self-discovery and fulfillment.

The exploration of death in Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* reveals profound insights into the human condition, spirituality, and the quest for meaning. Both novels address death not merely as an end but as a transformative process, shaping the characters' journeys toward enlightenment and self-discovery.

In *Siddhartha*, death is portrayed as a cyclical experience, integral to the journey of self-realization. Siddhartha's early experiences with asceticism lead him to confront the impermanence of life. He engages in practices that symbolize a death of the self, seeking to transcend worldly desires. This is evident when he states, "He killed his senses, he killed his memory, he slipped out of his Self in a thousand different forms" (p. 110).<sup>1</sup>

Here, death becomes a means of liberation from the ego and worldly attachments. The river serves as a metaphor for life and death, illustrating the continuity of existence. Siddhartha learns that true enlightenment involves embracing life's dualities, including death. The moment he recognizes that "the soul returns, dies, decayed," he begins to understand that death is not an end but part of a larger cycle. This realization leads him to attain a deeper spiritual awakening, where he learns to accept both life and death as essential components of existence.

In *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell's journey is significantly influenced by his experiences with death, particularly the loss of his friend during World War I. This event propels Larry into a quest for meaning beyond societal expectations. His search for spiritual truth leads him to India, where he confronts the nature of existence and mortality. The narrative suggests that facing death can catalyze profound personal transformation.

Maugham contrasts Larry's spiritual pursuits with the materialistic values of his peers. Characters like Isabel and Elliott are depicted as being preoccupied with social status and wealth, often ignoring the deeper implications of mortality. In contrast, Larry's acceptance of death allows him to find peace in simplicity and authenticity. He asserts that "money to you means freedom; to me it means bondage," highlighting his rejection of materialism in favor of spiritual fulfillment.

Both *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* present death as a pivotal element in the characters' quests for meaning and understanding. Hesse illustrates how embracing the cyclical nature of life can lead to spiritual enlightenment, while Maugham critiques societal values that often overlook the significance of mortality. Ultimately, both novels suggest that confronting death can lead to profound personal transformation and deeper insights into the essence of existence.

Both *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse and *The Razor's Edge* by W. Somerset Maugham critique traditional education systems by emphasizing the limitations of formal education in fostering true understanding and personal growth. Here are the key ways each novel addresses this theme:

In *Siddhartha*, we can find following themes:-

#### Rejection of Conventional Learning

Siddhartha, the protagonist, initially follows the path laid out by his father and the Brahmins, who represent traditional educational values focused on intellectual knowledge and societal roles. However, Siddhartha soon realizes that this form of education fails to provide him with the spiritual enlightenment he seeks. Hesse suggests that traditional education is too rigid and does not accommodate individual exploration or personal experience. Throughout his journey, Siddhartha learns that wisdom comes from lived experiences rather than theoretical teachings. His time with the Samaras and later with the Buddha illustrates that true knowledge is gained through direct engagement with life. This experiential learning model stands in stark contrast to rote memorization and passive learning typical of conventional education. Hesse advocates for a more holistic approach to education that nurtures emotional and spiritual growth alongside intellectual development. Siddhartha's journey underscores the importance of self-discovery, indicating that an effective education system should foster individuality and creativity rather than conformity.

Again, in *The Razor's Edge* we can find following themes:-

#### Critique of Materialism

In *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell's rejection of societal expectations highlights the shortcomings of an education system that prioritizes material success over personal fulfillment. Maugham illustrates how conventional education prepares individuals for careers and social status but often neglects deeper existential questions about purpose and meaning in life.

### Search for Meaning

Larry's quest for spiritual enlightenment takes him away from traditional paths, showcasing the inadequacy of an education that does not address the complexities of human existence. Maugham contrasts Larry's journey with those of his friends who remain entrenched in materialistic pursuits, suggesting that a lack of introspection leads to unfulfilled lives.

### Emphasis on Personal Growth

Maugham advocates for an educational framework that encourages critical thinking and self-reflection. Through Larry's experiences across different cultures, Maugham emphasizes the value of diverse perspectives and personal exploration as essential components of a meaningful education: "Spirituality is an integral part of human life, and achieving a balance between spiritual and material aspirations is one of the essential aspirations for living the ideal householder's life in the Indian worldview" (30).

Both novels advocate for a transformative educational approach that prioritizes experiential learning, personal growth, and *holistic development* over traditional methods focused solely on academic achievement and conformity. They critique systems that fail to nurture individuality and self-discovery, calling for an educational paradigm that prepares individuals not just for careers but for a fulfilling life.

In John Spargo's *Common Sense of Socialism* he advocates:

Socialism is not a wild dream of a happy future, but a practical and scientific system of social organization that aims to secure for all the people the benefits of modern industrial civilization. It is based on the recognition that the means

of production must be owned and controlled by the community as a whole, rather than by individual capitalists. (45)

This passage emphasizes that socialism is grounded in practicality and science, aiming for a collective ownership model to ensure equitable access to resources and benefits. Education isn't only limited to formal and traditional way of thoughts. Therefore, we should encourage self-creative, dynamic and innovative people in our society. The narrow-minded and dogmatic education system should be omitted. We should rather have self-motivating educational environment from where spiritual, physical and metaphysical knowledge and facts would be found.

Siddhartha and Larry are the two self-motivated learners and researchers who have diverted their thoughts towards the creative activities of spiritual aspects. They are the main spokesperson of the respective novels.

*Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* have great messages about the exploration of educational value, religious tolerance and 'broad thoughts' which are important in our life. In this regard, we find the following aspects in these texts :-

a. Rejection of traditional learning approach :- Siddhartha takes the education and knowledge from his Bramhanic society, then after Samanas of Buddhist ascetics and at last, from the God Buddha. Then, Siddhartha only realized that there is the just process of transforming knowledge from one person to another but the learner is not getting the true wisdom and self-realization. Therefore, he tries to find out the real value of education and spiritual sense through his own exploration having the different kinds of experiences throughout his life. Likewise, Larry from *The Razor's Edge* also tries to find out the true value and dignity of life through his own efforts like Siddhartha. He is from the modern 'Western Society' but he transcends from his social bondages and seeks different ways for the creative and true learning. He used to

visit his Sunday school during his childhood. But, when he grew up and became a mature person he did not find the answer of "Is there existence of God?". And he ventures to find out the answer of this question in his own exploration.

b. Open minded thoughts and enlightenment:- Both the young men Siddhartha and Larry have innovative and noble kind of searching for their goal. They have tolerance and broad thinking regarding the motto of any kinds of religions of this world.

Siddhartha was from Hindu religion ,after some time he became the Buddhist Samana, then after some years he again returned to the Hinduism where he heard the sound of ' Om' in the peaceful environment of jungle. Likewise, Larry was from Christian origin and after some years he changed his mind towards Hinduism and came to India .He tried to find out his answer from the Ashram of Shree Ganesh.

c. Integration of experience and achievement:- Siddhartha undergoes many kinds of experiences in his life. His circular path of curiosity, love, loss a and realization leads him towards the enlightenment of his goal. He meets different kinds of 'gurus' (teachers) in the course of life who actually gets him to analyze the reality of this world. Likewise, the veteran of WW I – Larry sees deaths and 'transience of life' in front of his eyes. Therefore, he also attempts to find out the reality of human life and its meaning. At last, he rejects all his worldly pleasures ,relationships and possessions for the sake of his depth spiritual desire. He is one kind of undeclared ascetic in the modern society. Actually, the path of razor's edge is really a challenging task to be achieved within the heart of every humankind for the real understanding of our life.

*Siddhartha* serves as a powerful critique of traditional educational models while advocating for a more holistic approach to learning that values personal experience and self-discovery. As we reflect on our education system today, Hesse's insights challenge us to consider how we can create environments that foster true

enlightenment and individual growth, moving beyond mere academic achievement to nurture well-rounded individuals capable of profound understanding.

Vivekananda in his book *In Search of God and Other Poems* says:

“No One to Blame”:

I am my own embodied past;

Therein the plan was made;

The will, the thought, to that conform,

To that the outer frame;

No one but me to blame. (154)

In *The Razor's Edge* by W. Somerset Maugham, the need for a creative and dynamic education system is underscored through the protagonist Larry Darrell's journey of self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. The narrative contrasts Larry's pursuit of deeper meaning against the backdrop of conventional societal values, highlighting the limitations of traditional education focused solely on material success.

The novel advocates for an education system that fosters creativity and adaptability. A dynamic approach would allow learners to pursue their interests and passions, much like Larry does when he immerses himself in literature and philosophy. This kind of environment encourages learners to question societal norms and seek personal truths rather than conforming to predetermined path which Maugham's portrayal of Larry suggests that education should be holistic, addressing not just cognitive skills but also emotional intelligence and spiritual awareness. By promoting a curriculum that includes diverse perspectives—like those found in Eastern thought—educators can cultivate well-rounded individuals capable of critical thinking and empathy.

Both Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* explore the profound journeys of young men searching for meaning and fulfillment in life. The protagonists, Siddhartha and Larry Darrell, embody the struggles of youth as they navigate societal expectations and personal aspirations.

*Liminality in Siddhartha and The Razor's Edge:*

Liminality is just a void and discomfort circumstance while shifting from one situation to new one. It is a transitional period where different kinds of psychological, social and personal phenomenon are appeared before assimilating in the destined purpose or situation. Victor Turner says:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial.

As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transition. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (p. 90)

Here, Siddhartha and Larry have their own destination and goal to achieve. They are unique and different from the view point of their familial, social and religious scenario. Siddhartha, the son of a Brahmin, is initially revered in his community but feels a deep sense of dissatisfaction despite his privilege. He believes that traditional teachings have not provided him with true knowledge or inner peace, leading him to leave his comfortable life in search of enlightenment. His journey begins when he joins the Samanas, a group of ascetics who renounce worldly pleasures to seek spiritual fulfillment. Throughout his travels, Siddhartha encounters various teachers and philosophies, including Buddhism, yet he remains restless. His relationship with

his friend Govinda highlights the theme of companionship as they both seek deeper truths. Siddhartha's eventual realization comes through personal experience rather than external teachings, emphasizing the importance of individual exploration in achieving self-actualization.

Likewise, In *The Razor's Edge*, Larry Darrell returns from World War I disillusioned and questioning societal norms. Unlike his peers who pursue conventional success, Larry embarks on a quest for spiritual understanding and inner peace. This decision alienates him from friends and family who cannot comprehend his rejection of materialism.

Larry's journey takes him to India, where he seeks wisdom from various spiritual leaders. His experiences reflect a profound engagement with existential questions about happiness, purpose, and the nature of evil in the world. Ultimately, Larry concludes that true fulfillment comes not from societal approval but from personal integrity and understanding.

Both characters reflect the youthful enthusiasm for self-discovery and the desire to transcend societal limitations. Their stories resonate with readers who grapple with similar questions about purpose and identity in a complex world. Ultimately, both *Siddhartha* and *The Razor's Edge* advocate for personal journeys as pathways to genuine understanding and fulfillment.

In *Siddhartha*, Hermann Hesse presents spiritualism as a transformative force that impacts not only personal growth but also practical activities such as business operations and ethical conduct. The novel advocates for a balanced approach that integrates spirituality into everyday life, suggesting that such integration can lead to greater fulfillment, enhanced productivity, and a more ethical framework within

which businesses operate. By embracing these principles, individuals can navigate their professional lives with greater insight and purpose.]

The protagonist explores the profound journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening during the time of Gautama Buddha. The narrative illustrates how spiritualism not only shapes personal identity but also influences practical activities, including business and interpersonal relationships. Siddhartha's journey embodies the quest for self-realization, which is central to spiritualism. He moves through various life stages—asceticism, material wealth, and finally, spiritual enlightenment—demonstrating that true understanding comes from personal experience rather than mere adherence to doctrine. This principle can be applied in business contexts where self-awareness and personal growth enhance leadership effectiveness and decision-making.

Diwakar Singh and Richa Awasthy further bring the analysis of scholars on this matter in their research articles follows:

Spirituality and materialism are thought to be mutually exclusive in Western thought; however, this is not the case in Indian thought. Indians believe one can pursue spirituality while living a materialistic life (Bhawuk, 2019; Sinha, 2016). Spirituality is an integral part of human life, and achieving a balance between spiritual and material aspirations is one of the essential aspirations for living the ideal householder's life in the Indian worldview. (110)

The novel emphasizes that understanding is attained through lived experiences rather than theoretical knowledge. Siddhartha learns that each phase of his life contributes to his overall wisdom, suggesting that businesses can benefit from encouraging experiential learning among employees. Engaging in diverse roles fosters adaptability and innovation.

Siddhartha's realization that all experiences—joyful or painful—are interconnected fosters a holistic view of life. This perspective encourages individuals in business to appreciate the value of every interaction and experience, promoting empathy and collaboration among team members. The act of listening to the river symbolizes mindfulness, a practice that enhances focus and clarity. In a business setting, mindfulness can lead to improved concentration, reduced stress, and better interpersonal relations, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious work environment.

Siddhartha's journey teaches him to embrace his emotions rather than suppress them. This emotional intelligence is crucial in business for effective leadership and team dynamics, fostering an environment where employees feel valued and understood.

Spiritual principles encourage individuals to act with integrity and compassion. Siddhartha's experiences highlight the importance of aligning one's actions with deeper values, which can guide ethical decision-making in business practices. By understanding the cyclical nature of life through his connection with the river, Siddhartha embraces a long-term perspective. Businesses that adopt similar philosophies are likely to prioritize sustainable practices over short-term gains, contributing positively to society and the environment.

Thus, Hermann Hesse's 'Siddhartha' serves as a great work of philosophical and spiritual exploration that encapsulates the themes of self-discovery, enlightenment, and the relentless pursuit of life's deeper meanings. In academia, 'Siddhartha' is often studied for its exploration of Eastern philosophies, its examination of the human condition, and its literary craftsmanship. Scholars and readers alike continue to find inspiration and wisdom in the novel's timeless themes

and Hesse's masterful storytelling. The character of Siddhartha embodies the universal quest for meaning and enlightenment that makes the novel relatable to a broad audience. In the words of Kher, "Siddhartha is a journey beyond these and yet into man's own abyss where alone can he discover his real self, the nucleus of all things" (Kher 18). Siddhartha's pilgrimage stands as a timeless parable that resonates with those embarked on a quest for penetrating insight and imperturbable inner peace.

William Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* explores the profound dichotomy between materialism and spirituality, particularly through the character of Larry Darrell. This conflict reflects broader societal issues and offers insights into the advantages of spiritualism in both business and practical life. He critiques the materialistic pursuits of society, particularly the upper classes, who prioritize wealth over spiritual fulfillment. "There's never been such a chance for a young man. I should have thought you'd be proud to take part in the work that lies before us. It's such a wonderful adventure." ... "I daresay you're right. The Amours and the Swifts will pack more and better meat, the Mc Cormicks will make more and better harvesters, and Henry Ford will turn out more and better cars. And everyone'll get richer and richer" (Maugham 45).

The characters exhibit spiritual materialization, where their lives become dominated by material desires, leading to existential alienation and a shallow existence devoid of deeper meaning. In "God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita," Paramahansa Yogananda explores themes of transcendentalism and self-realized knowledge "The eternal, transcendental nature of the soul is beyond birth and death; it is the unchanging witness of all that happens in the material world" (73). This imbalance highlights the detrimental effects of a purely materialistic approach, suggesting that a focus on spiritual growth can lead to more meaningful and fulfilling

lives. Larry Darrell's journey represents a conscious rejection of societal norms in favor of spiritual exploration. His quest for meaning involves significant personal sacrifice, as he chooses a path that prioritizes inner peace over financial success. This choice illustrates how spiritualism can lead to greater personal satisfaction and authenticity

in one's life choices. Larry's assertion that "money just doesn't happen to interest me" emphasizes his belief that true freedom lies in spiritual rather than material wealth.

Characters that prioritize spiritual values often experience deeper connections with others, contrasting sharply with those who are solely focused on material gain. This highlights the importance of empathy and understanding in business relationships. Spiritualism encourages a focus on ethical practices and sustainability, which can lead to long-term success rather than short-term profits. Larry's journey underscores the idea that true success is not measured by wealth but by personal growth and fulfillment. A spiritually grounded approach can foster resilience. Characters like Larry demonstrate that inner strength derived from spiritual beliefs can help individuals navigate life's challenges more effectively.

In *The Razor's Edge*, Maugham illustrates the profound impact of spiritualism on personal fulfillment and societal well-being. By contrasting the emptiness of material pursuits with the richness of spiritual exploration, he advocates for a balanced approach that integrates both aspects. The advantages of adopting a spiritual perspective in business and practical activities are clear: enhanced relationships, sustainable success, and resilience against life's adversities. Ultimately, Maugham's narrative serves as a reminder that while material wealth may provide comfort, it is the pursuit of spiritual depth that leads to true contentment.

Radhakrishnan in his book *An Idealist View of Life* says, "Happiness is not to be confused with pleasure. It consists in harmony, in unity with oneself, in the consciousness of an affirmative attitude of life, in the peace resident in the soul" (39). This saying criticizes the 'westerners-ruined' happiness in this modern society. He further says, "The country wants today not so much salvation from sin as social betterment which will transform the masses of people who are ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed into a free community of well-regulated families, living not in luxury, but in moderate comfort with no fierce competition" (47).

The unseen enemy is within us in our thoughts. Only the materialistic pleasure has nothing in the life because it is transient and does not help to understand the meaning of true human life. And we can find some spiritual symbolic meanings in these two novels which are as follows-

Symbols in *Siddhartha*

The River

The river is a central symbol in *Siddhartha*, representing the flow of life and the interconnectedness of all experiences. Siddhartha learns that just as the river flows continuously, life is a series of moments that are both transient and eternal. The river ultimately teaches him about unity and the importance of embracing all aspects of life, including suffering and joy.

The Ferryman

Vasudeva, the ferryman, symbolizes wisdom and guidance. He embodies the idea of living in harmony with nature and understanding life's deeper truths. Through his relationship with Siddhartha, he illustrates how true knowledge comes not from teachings but from personal experience and reflection.

## Enlightenment

Siddhartha's journey towards enlightenment symbolizes the quest for self-realization. His experiences with different lifestyles—wealth, love, asceticism—highlight that enlightenment is not found in external pursuits but through inner understanding and acceptance of oneself.

## Symbols in *The Razor's Edge*

The title itself is a powerful symbol, derived from a passage in the Upanishads that suggests the spiritual path is fraught with difficulty and requires balance between opposing forces—materialism and spirituality. Larry Darrell's journey reflects this struggle as he seeks a meaningful existence beyond societal expectations.

## Money

In *The Razor's Edge*, money symbolizes societal success and materialism, which many characters pursue at the expense of deeper fulfillment. Larry rejects this notion, emphasizing that true wealth lies in knowledge and spiritual growth rather than financial gain.

## Knowledge

Larry's pursuit of knowledge serves as a motif throughout the novel. His self-education and travels symbolize a quest for truth that transcends conventional learning. This pursuit illustrates the idea that enlightenment comes from personal exploration rather than societal approval or academic accolades.

## Comparative Analysis

Both novels utilize symbols to convey their themes of spiritual exploration: Journey vs. Destination: In both texts, characters embark on journeys that emphasize personal growth over material success.

Nature as a Teacher: The river in *Siddhartha* and Vasudeva's role as ferryman parallel Larry's experiences in India, where nature serves as a backdrop for profound realizations.

Materialism vs. Spirituality: Both novels critique societal values that prioritize wealth over wisdom, encouraging readers to reflect on what constitutes a meaningful life. As articulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the key figures in transcendental thought, "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds" (120) encapsulates the essence of both Siddhartha's and Larry's quests for authenticity and spiritual fulfillment.

In this way, Hesse's *Siddhartha* and Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* use rich symbolism to explore complex themes related to self-discovery, spirituality, and the quest for meaning amidst life's challenges. These symbols not only enhance the narrative but also invite readers to engage with their own philosophical inquiries about existence.

## Chapter III

### Beyond the Buddha: Hesse's Spiritual Enlightenment in *Siddhartha*

Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* offers a re-imagined exploration of spiritual enlightenment that extends beyond the teachings of the historical Buddha. While drawing inspiration from Buddhist and Hindu philosophies, the novel emphasizes individuality and experiential understanding over dogmatic adherence to religious systems.

Unlike the historical Buddha, who attained enlightenment through meditation under the Bodhi tree and shared his teachings widely, Siddhartha's path is deeply personal. He rejects organized religious doctrines, including those of Gautama (the Buddha in the novel), in favor of self-discovery through lived experiences. Siddhartha learns that wisdom cannot be taught but must be experienced. This idea challenges traditional notions of spiritual instruction and highlights the importance of personal exploration. Hesse redefines enlightenment as a realization of life's interconnectedness. Siddhartha's ultimate understanding comes from observing the river, which symbolizes the eternal flow and unity of existence. This contrasts with the Buddha's focus on escaping the cycle of rebirth. The novel emphasizes timelessness and the illusion of linear time, portraying enlightenment as a state where past, present, and future coexist.

Hesse incorporates themes of love and compassion, which are less emphasized in traditional Buddhist teachings. Siddhartha's relationships, including his experiences with Kamala and his son, play a crucial role in his spiritual growth. These human connections teach him empathy and acceptance.

Siddhartha's journey critiques reliance on religious texts or ascetic practices alone for attaining enlightenment. His path involves embracing both material

pleasures and spiritual austerity before transcending them to find inner peace. Hesse wrote *Siddhartha* during a period of personal spiritual crisis and was influenced by Eastern philosophies, psychoanalysis like Carl Jung and Western existentialism. The novel reflects his belief that spiritual enlightenment is not confined to any single tradition but is an eclectic process involving introspection, human experience, and an embrace of life's dualities. In this way Hesse's *Siddhartha* reimagines spiritual enlightenment as a deeply personal and experiential journey that transcends traditional religious frameworks. By emphasizing individuality, interconnectedness, and love, Hesse challenges readers to reconsider what it means to lead a spiritually fulfilling life.

Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* (1922) deliberately creates a parallel narrative distinct from the traditional accounts of Gautama Buddha's life when both narratives center on the quest for spiritual enlightenment. Hesse's literary creation diverges significantly from Buddhist canonical texts and historical records. These differences reflect Hesse's own spiritual explorations, his Western perspective on Eastern philosophy, and his literary aims in creating a universalized spiritual journey resonant with post-World War I European readers. As scholar Joseph Mileck observes, "Hesse's *Siddhartha* represents not so much an attempt to recreate the historical Buddha's life as an effort to reimagining the spiritual journey in terms accessible to modern Western consciousness" (134).

The historical Gautama Buddha, born as Siddhartha Gautama around 563 BCE in Lumbini (present-day Nepal), was a prince of the Shakya clan whose traditional biography centers on his sheltered upbringing, his shocking encounter with human suffering (the "four sights" of old age, sickness, death, and an ascetic), and his subsequent renunciation of royal privilege. After leaving his palace, wife, and infant

son, the historical Buddha practiced extreme asceticism for six years before adopting the "Middle Way," achieving enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and spending the remaining forty-five years of his life teaching the dharma and establishing a monastic community (Armstrong 87). In contrast, Hesse's protagonist begins as the son of a Brahmin rather than a prince, leaves home with his friend Govinda to join wandering ascetics, and ultimately finds enlightenment through worldly experience and communion with nature rather than through meditation alone.

The most significant structural difference between the two narratives lies in Hesse's decision to have his protagonist encounter the historical Buddha (called "Gotama" in the novel) as a character, creating a metaliterary moment that deliberately separates the two figures. In this pivotal scene, Siddhartha expresses admiration for Gotama but rejects becoming his disciple, declaring, "No one will achieve enlightenment through teachings!" (Hesse 34). This narrative choice serves multiple purposes: it acknowledges the historical Buddha while asserting the novel's independence, it underscores Hesse's philosophical belief in the necessity of personal experience over doctrine, and it establishes what scholar Theodore Ziolkowski calls "the novel's central tension between spiritual authority and individual seeking" (89). Through this fictional meeting, Hesse explicitly signals that his Siddhartha represents an alternative path to enlightenment—one that paradoxically incorporates elements of individuality that might seem at odds with Buddhism's emphasis on non-self (anatta).

Hesse incorporates distinctly non-Buddhist elements into his protagonist's spiritual journey, particularly in Siddhartha's immersion in sensuality and materialism during his time with the courtesan Kamala and the merchant Kamaswami. While the historical Buddha practiced asceticism before his enlightenment and thereafter lived a moderate but disciplined monastic life, Hesse's protagonist follows a more Hegelian

dialectical pattern: from spiritual discipline (thesis), to sensual indulgence (antithesis), to an integrated understanding (synthesis). This structure reflects Hesse's engagement with Western philosophical traditions and what scholar Adrian Hsia identifies as "Hesse's syncretism approach, blending elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christian mysticism with European Romanticism and modern psychology" (212). The novel's emphasis on embracing rather than transcending worldly experience represents a significant departure from traditional Buddhist teachings on detachment.

The role of romantic and sexual relationships differs dramatically between the two narratives. The historical Buddha left his wife Yasodhara and later established a celibate monastic order, though he eventually permitted women to become nuns with greater restrictions than their male counterparts (Harvey 293). Hesse, conversely, makes Siddhartha's relationships with women—particularly Kamala—central to his development, presenting sexuality as an important domain of self-knowledge rather than an attachment to be overcome. When Siddhartha later encounters his son (a character with no parallel in the Buddha's life), this relationship becomes another crucial aspect of his spiritual education through its lessons in love, attachment, and letting go. As feminist scholar Ursula King notes, "Hesse's inclusion of feminine figures as spiritual catalysts represents both his more inclusive vision and his distinctly Western romantic conception of spiritual development as necessarily engaging with rather than withdrawing from intimate relationships" (156).

The philosophical content of enlightenment also differs substantially between the two narratives. The historical Buddha's enlightenment centered on insights into dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the Four Noble Truths concerning suffering and its cessation, and the Eightfold Path as a practical method for liberation (Lopez 45). Hesse's protagonist, however, achieves an enlightenment more

characterized by unity with nature, reconciliation of opposites, and the transcendence of time—concepts that draw more from Hindu Vedanta philosophy, Western Romanticism, and Jungian psychology than from classical Buddhism. Siddhartha's climactic insight while watching the river with the ferryman Vasudeva emphasizes the river as a symbol of timelessness and unity, reflecting what religious scholar Mircea Eliade identifies as "Hesse's fundamentally Romantic vision of enlightenment as a harmonious reunification with nature rather than the Buddha's more analytical insight into the structured nature of reality and suffering" (278).

The literary style and structure of Hesse's novel further distinguish it from traditional Buddhist narratives. While the Buddha's life is presented in the Pali Canon through a mixture of straightforward biography, mythological elements, and discourses (suttas), Hesse employs a carefully crafted, poetic prose that scholar Theodore Ziolkowski describes as "deliberately archaic and ritualized, evoking ancient texts while maintaining a distinctly modern psychological awareness" (102). The novel's division into two parts—"The Way to Enlightenment" and "On the Way to Enlightenment"—creates a symmetrical structure that contrasts with the more linear progression of the Buddha's traditional biography. Hesse's stylistic choices, including the use of leitmotifs, symbolic imagery, and repetition, reflect both his Western literary heritage and his effort to create what he called "a symphonic structure" that would communicate Eastern wisdom in a form accessible to European readers (Hesse, *Letters* 78).

The historical and cultural contexts that produced these two narratives explain many of their differences. The Buddha's life story developed within an ancient Indian context already rich with spiritual traditions, specifically responding to Vedic ritualism and philosophical questions of his era. Hesse's novel, by contrast, emerged

from post-World War I Europe's spiritual crisis and disillusionment with Western rationalism and materialism. As cultural historian Colin Wilson notes, "Hesse's turn toward Eastern spirituality paralleled a broader European intellectual movement seeking alternatives to a Western tradition that seemed to have culminated in unprecedented mechanized slaughter" (189). *Siddhartha* thus reflects both Hesse's personal spiritual quest—including his psychoanalytic work with J.B. Lang, a student of Jung—and the broader cultural moment of European engagement with Eastern thought during the early twentieth century.

Despite these significant differences, both narratives share a fundamental concern with human suffering and the possibility of transcendence. Both present spiritual awakening not as supernatural intervention but as the result of human effort and insight. Both critique existing religious institutions while affirming core spiritual truths. As religious scholar Huston Smith observes, "Hesse captures the essential spirit of the Buddha's insight—that liberation comes through understanding rather than divine grace—while reconfiguring the path to that understanding for a modern Western audience" (234). This shared core perhaps explains the novel's enduring appeal to both Western seekers and many Buddhist practitioners, despite its departures from orthodox Buddhist teachings.

Ultimately, Hesse's *Siddhartha* should be understood not as an attempt to retell the Buddha's life but as a creative dialogue between East and West, ancient wisdom and modern psychology, tradition and individuality. Its departures from the historical Buddha's life story reflect Hesse's conviction, expressed in a 1920 letter that "wisdom cannot be passed on. Wisdom which a wise man tries to pass on always sounds like foolishness" (Letters 65). In creating a protagonist who meets but does not follow the Buddha, Hesse paradoxically honors what he perceived as the Buddha's

essential teaching: that each person must find their own path to truth. The novel thus stands as what comparative religion scholar Robert Ellwood calls "not a Western appropriation of Buddhism but a creative cross-cultural hybrid, illuminating both traditions by placing them in conversation with each other" (312).

## Chapter IV

### Existential Quest and Eastern Wisdom in *The Razor's Edge*

W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* is a profound exploration of existential questions and spiritual wisdom, blending Western post-war disillusionment with Eastern philosophical insights. The novel follows Larry Darrell, a World War I veteran, as he embarks on a quest for meaning that contrasts sharply with the materialistic pursuits of those around him. Once, he comes to India to find the real meaning of this mortal world. Then, he says, "If in those moments of ecstasy had indeed been one with the Absolute, then if what they said was true, nothing could touch me and when I had worked out the karma of my present life. I should return no more. The thought filled me with dismay. I wanted to live again and again" (Maugham 302).

Larry's journey begins with his rejection of conventional societal values after witnessing the horrors of war. Haunted by existential questions such as the existence of God, the nature of evil, and the immortality of the soul, Larry seeks answers beyond material wealth and societal norms. The novel draws heavily from Eastern philosophies, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. The title itself is inspired by the *Katha Upanishad*, which describes the spiritual path as "the sharp edge of a razor," symbolizing its difficulty and precision. Larry's transformative journey takes him to India, where he learns from a Hindu sage about detachment, self-realization, and the unity of existence. These teachings help Larry transcend Western materialism and find inner peace, positioning Indian spirituality as a remedy to modern life's chaos and emptiness. The metaphor of "the razor's edge" encapsulates Larry's struggle to balance spiritual enlightenment with worldly temptations. It underscores the sacrifices required for self-realization and invites readers to reflect on their own life choices.

Through Larry Darrell's journey, Maugham bridges Western existential dilemmas with Eastern spiritual wisdom, offering a timeless commentary on humanity's quest for meaning. The novel challenges readers to reconsider their definitions of success and fulfillment, emphasizing that true enlightenment lies in introspection and detachment rather than external achievements.

Carl Rogers' humanistic concepts also provide a valuable lens to analyze the psychological journey of the protagonist, Larry Darrell, in W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*. Rogers' theories on self-actualization, congruence, and the person-centered approach can enrich the understanding of Larry's spiritual quest and existential transformation.

Carl Rogers emphasized self-actualization as the innate drive of individuals to achieve their full potential provided they have a supportive environment. Larry's decision to abandon conventional success and wealth to seek spiritual fulfillment aligns with this concept. His journey reflects the process of self-actualization, where he prioritizes personal growth and inner peace over societal expectations. Larry's rejection of materialism and pursuit of enlightenment mirrors Rogers' idea that self-actualization involves transcending external validation and embracing one's true self.

Rogers described congruence as the alignment between one's real self and ideal self, while incongruence arises from discrepancies between these selves, often leading to psychological distress. At the start of *The Razor's Edge*, Larry experiences incongruence; his wartime trauma creates a dissonance between his perceived self and his aspirations for meaning. His spiritual quest can be seen as an effort to resolve this incongruence by aligning his experiences with his ideal of a fulfilled life. Achieving congruence allows Larry to live authentically, free from societal pressures.

Rogers' concept of an increasingly existential lifestyle—living in the moment and not letting past experiences dictate future choices—resonates with Larry's approach to life. Despite societal expectations and personal losses, Larry embraces an existential perspective by seeking spiritual growth through travel, meditation, and philosophical inquiry. His ability to relish each moment reflects Rogers' principle that individuals grow by focusing on their immediate experiences rather than being constrained by past traumas or future anxieties.

Rogers believed that unconditional positive regard—a nonjudgmental acceptance from others—was essential for psychological growth. While Larry receives limited understanding from characters like Isabel and Elliott, his interactions with more empathetic figures (such as Sophie) suggest moments where he finds acceptance. These relationships may serve as catalysts for his growth, echoing Rogers' assertion that being valued fosters freedom to explore one's inner self.

Through Carl Rogers' humanistic lens, Larry Darrell emerges as a “fully functioning person” who achieves congruence by reconciling his inner aspirations with external realities. His transformative journey exemplifies Rogers' belief in the potential for personal growth when individuals embrace openness, authenticity, and self-trust. Integrating Rogers' concepts into an analysis of *The Razor's Edge* enriches the psychological dimension of Larry's quest for meaning and fulfillment.

Now, let's turn our attention towards the concept of liminality in W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* which can be interpreted through the characters' transitional states and existential quests, particularly Larry Darrell's rejection of societal norms for spiritual transcendence. While the novel does not explicitly frame its narrative using liminal theory, its themes align with Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's ideas of transitional phases and threshold states.

Larry exists in a prolonged state of betwixt and between, rejecting material success (symbolized by his refusal to marry Isabel or pursue conventional careers) to seek spiritual fulfillment. His travels across Europe and Asia represent a literal and metaphorical rite of passage, where he discards societal expectations to inhabit a liminal space of self-discovery. As Maugham notes, Larry achieves happiness by embracing a life “no more than just himself,” free from the “bondage” of wealth. This aligns with Turner’s notion of liminality as a space for shedding social roles and accessing transformative potential.

The novel *The Razor's Edge*, serves as a profound exploration of literary transformation against the backdrop of historical reality. The narrative follows Larry Darrell, a World War I veteran who embarks on a quest for spiritual meaning, contrasting sharply with the materialistic pursuits of his contemporaries. Maugham employs a unique narrative technique by positioning himself as both the author and a character within the story. This meta-narrative approach allows him to provide a personal lens through which the characters’ lives are examined, thereby breaking the fourth wall and emphasizing the subjective nature of truth. Maugham notes, “The fact that a great many people believe something is no guarantee of its truth” (Maugham 42) highlighting his critical stance towards societal norms and beliefs.

The novel's structure is non-linear, spanning from 1919 to 1943 across various locations, including Chicago, Paris, and India. This temporal fluidity mirrors Larry's internal journey as he seeks answers to existential questions about life and morality. Maugham's use of flashbacks and character dialogues enriches the narrative, allowing for a deeper exploration of themes such as self-discovery and the human condition. Each character in *The Razor's Edge* embodies different approaches to life's meaning.

Larry’s pursuit of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment stands in stark

contrast to characters like Elliot Templeton, who seeks validation through social status, and Isabel Bradley, who desires financial security. This thematic dichotomy reflects Maugham's critique of post-war American society's materialism. The novel also delves into the theme of trauma and its transformative potential. Larry's wartime experiences lead him to seek spiritual truths, while other characters like Sophie face self-destruction following personal tragedies. This juxtaposition illustrates how different responses to trauma can lead to divergent paths in life.

Set against the backdrop of the early 20th century, *The Razor's Edge* captures the societal shifts following World War I. The disillusionment felt by many veterans is embodied in Larry's character as he rejects conventional success in favor of a more profound existential inquiry. Maugham's portrayal of this search for meaning resonates with broader cultural movements that emerged in subsequent decades, including those seen in Beat literature and the counterculture of the 1960s. Maugham's narrative not only reflects individual struggles but also critiques societal values that prioritize material gain over spiritual fulfillment. His exploration of Eastern philosophies through Larry's journey to India signifies a growing interest in alternative spiritual paths during a time when Western society was grappling with the consequences of war and modernity. *The Razor's Edge* stands as a significant literary work that intricately weaves personal transformation with historical realities. Through its innovative narrative style and rich character development, Maugham invites readers to reflect on their own values and the often challenging pursuit of meaning in an increasingly complex world. Larry Darrell's encounter with Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi in *The Razor's Edge* serves as a pivotal moment in his spiritual awakening, significantly influencing his understanding of self and the nature of existence.

Maugham's portrayal of Larry's experience at the ashram, where he meets a guru resembling Ramana Maharshi, symbolizes a turning point in Larry's quest for meaning. This character embodies the teachings of Ramana, particularly the emphasis on self-inquiry and the quest for the true self. Maugham draws from his own brief contact with Maharshi to create a figure that represents profound spiritual wisdom, guiding Larry towards deeper introspection and understanding. Central to Ramana Maharshi's teachings is the practice of self-inquiry, encapsulated in the question "Who am I?" This method encourages individuals to look beyond their ego and transient identities to discover their true essence. In the novel, Larry adopts this practice, which leads him to profound realizations about his identity and purpose. The process of turning inward allows him to transcend societal expectations and material concerns, aligning with Maharshi's belief that liberation comes from within rather than through external achievements.

Larry's time with the guru also emphasizes the importance of surrendering the ego and letting go of attachments. Ramana Maharshi taught that true spiritual growth involves relinquishing desires and embracing selflessness. This concept resonates deeply with Larry as he learns to prioritize spiritual fulfillment over societal norms. Maugham illustrates this transformation by depicting Larry's eventual contentment and commitment to living a life akin to that of a *sadhu*, or wandering ascetic, upon returning to America.

The presence of Ramana Maharshi is described as a source of profound peace and spiritual energy. Many seekers reported transformative experiences in his presence, which Maugham captures through Larry's interactions at the ashram. This experience reinforces the idea that genuine spiritual awakening often occurs through direct experience rather than intellectual understanding. Larry's connection with the

guru catalyzes his inner transformation, allowing him to access deeper states of meditation and awareness.

Through self-inquiry, surrendering the ego, and experiencing the guru's presence, Larry moves towards a more authentic existence, illustrating Maugham's exploration of spiritual seeking amidst a materialistic society. This relationship not only highlights the transformative power of mentorship in spiritual growth but also serves as a critique of conventional values that prioritize external success over inner peace. Maugham uses Larry Darrell's spiritual journey in *The Razor's Edge* to comment on the human condition by contrasting the pursuit of material success with the search for deeper meaning and fulfillment. Through Larry's experiences, Maugham explores themes of existentialism, the nature of happiness, and the consequences of societal norms.

Larry's journey begins with his rejection of conventional life after World War I. Disillusioned by the trauma of war and the superficiality of society, he seeks a path that diverges from the expectations of his peers. Maugham illustrates this rejection through Larry's decision to abandon a promising career and a comfortable life in Chicago for a quest that prioritizes spiritual exploration over material gain. This choice serves as a critique of a society that equates success with wealth and status, highlighting the emptiness that often accompanies such pursuits.

Larry's quest leads him to various spiritual traditions, ultimately culminating in his encounter with Eastern philosophies in India. His journey reflects a broader human desire for authenticity and self-discovery. Maugham uses Larry's experiences to suggest that true fulfillment comes from understanding oneself and one's place in the universe rather than conforming to societal expectations. This search for

authenticity resonates with readers who grapple with their own identities within a consumer-driven culture.

Maugham juxtaposes Larry's spiritual seeking with the lives of other characters that embody different responses to life's challenges. For instance, Isabel Bradley represents materialistic aspirations and societal norms, while Sophie MacDonald illustrates the destructive consequences of losing one's sense of purpose. Through these contrasts, Maugham emphasizes that choices significantly impact one's happiness and fulfillment. Larry's path leads him to peace and enlightenment, while Isabel and Sophie suffer due to their adherence to superficial values.

Larry's journey is marked by moments of existential reflection that prompt readers to reconsider their definitions of happiness and success. Maugham presents Larry as someone who understands that a god that can be understood is no God, suggesting that true spiritual insight transcends rational comprehension. This perspective encourages readers to embrace uncertainty and the complexity of existence rather than seeking absolute answers.

In summary, Maugham employs Larry Darrell's spiritual journey in *The Razor's Edge* as a profound commentary on the human condition. By contrasting materialism with spiritual seeking, he invites readers to reflect on their values, choices, and the pursuit of authenticity in an often superficial world. Larry's transformation serves as a reminder that true fulfillment lies not in external achievements but in an inward exploration of self and connection to something greater than oneself. Maugham employs the theme of existentialism in *The Razor's Edge* to explore Larry Darrell's journey as a profound quest for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. Through Larry's experiences, Maugham delves into fundamental existential questions regarding identity, purpose, and the nature of happiness.

Larry's journey begins with a decisive break from societal expectations. After World War I, he becomes disillusioned with the materialistic values that dominate his peers' lives, represented by characters like Isabel and Elliott. Maugham illustrates Larry's existential crisis as he grapples with questions about the meaning of life and the existence of evil, leading him to prioritize spiritual enlightenment over conventional success. This rejection of materialism is a central tenet of existential philosophy, emphasizing the individual's right to define their own purpose.

Larry's decision to leave his engagement with Isabel to embark on a quest for self-discovery exemplifies existential choice. He seeks to understand his place in the world and confronts the absurdity of existence head-on. Maugham highlights this through Larry's travels, where he explores various philosophies and spiritual practices. Each choice Larry makes reflects his commitment to seeking authenticity rather than conforming to societal norms. In this regard, Carl Rogers in his book *On Becoming a Person* says:

If the line of reasoning I have been presenting is valid, then it opens new doors to us. If we frankly face the fact that science takes off from a subjectively chosen set of values, then we are free to select the values we wish to pursue.

We are not limited to such stultifying goals as producing a controlled state of happiness, productivity, and the like. I would like to suggest a radically different alternative. (p. 395)

Larry's journey takes him to India, where he immerses himself in Eastern philosophies and ultimately achieves a state of enlightenment. This experience aligns with existentialist ideas about finding meaning through personal experience rather than through external validation. Maugham captures this transformation as Larry discovers that true fulfillment comes from within, stating that “only my overwhelming sense of

its reality” (Maugham 45) validates his experience of illumination. This realization underscores the existential belief that individuals must carve their own paths to meaning. His existential quest is also marked by his confrontation with suffering and evil in the world. His wartime experiences catalyze his search for understanding why such suffering exists. Maugham uses this backdrop to explore deeper philosophical questions about existence and morality. Through conversations with other characters, including monks who offer unsatisfactory explanations for evil, Larry grapples with the complexities of human existence and the nature of divinity.

## Chapter V

### Conclusion

This study presents a compelling comparative analysis of Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* through the lens of transcendentalism and self-realization. It establishes the philosophical foundation of transcendentalism, noting its nineteenth-century American origins and significant influences from Hindu philosophy and the Upanishads.

Both narratives illustrate rejection of societal norms and material wealth, distinction between knowledge and wisdom, importance of direct experience over doctrine, role of nature as catalyst for enlightenment, and integration of Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. The analysis demonstrates how Siddhartha and Larry Darrell each undertake similar quests for meaning while following different paths, both embodying the transcendentalist ideal of seeking truth through personal experience rather than external validation or societal expectations.

This thesis examines of nature's role in both texts is particularly insightful. In *Siddhartha*, the river functions as a powerful symbol of life's flow and the interconnectedness of all beings, serving as a catalyst for the protagonist's enlightenment. This analysis resonates with transcendentalist views of nature as a source of spiritual insight rather than merely a backdrop for human activity. Similarly, this study analyzes how Maugham uses various settings—from Parisian cafes to Indian landscapes—to illustrate Larry's search for meaning, reinforcing the transcendentalist belief that nature actively participates in human development.

Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology offers an intriguing connection that deserves further development. Rogers' theory of self-actualization provides a valuable framework for understanding the developmental trajectories of both protagonists.

Rogers posited that individuals possess an inherent drive toward growth and fulfillment of potential, which he termed the "actualizing tendency." This concept aligns perfectly with the transcendentalist belief in the innate capacity for spiritual development and self-realization. Both Siddhartha and Larry demonstrate this actualizing tendency as they reject external definitions of success and pursue authentic self-understanding.

Rogers' emphasis on "unconditional positive regard" and authenticity finds particular resonance in Siddhartha's journey. When Siddhartha abandons asceticism and later material pursuits, he is essentially rejecting "conditions of worth" imposed by society—a key concept in Rogerian psychology. Siddhartha's ultimate enlightenment by the river represents what Rogers would describe as achieving congruence between his self-concept and his actual experience, allowing him to fully accept himself without external validation. This psychological framework enhances our understanding of why Siddhartha must ultimately discover that "wisdom cannot be taught but must be experienced personally." Larry Darrell's post-war disillusionment in *The Razor's Edge* exemplifies Rogers' concept of incongruence—a disconnect between one's lived experience and socially prescribed roles. Larry's rejection of Isabel and conventional success represents his refusal to live by external conditions of worth. His travels through Europe and India can be understood as a search for what Rogers called a "fully functioning person"—someone who lives experientially, trusting in their own organism rather than abstract principles or social expectations. Larry's eventual spiritual awakening represents the achievement of psychological freedom that Rogers identified as essential to self-actualization; supporting this study's assertion that Larry "seeks to understand the essence of the self beyond physical existence."

Both protagonists experience what Rogers would term "peak experiences"—moments of profound clarity and integration. For Siddhartha, this occurs during his revelation at the river; for Larry, during his meditation in India. These moments exemplify Rogers' belief that self-actualization involves openness to experience and trust in one's perceptions rather than dogmatic adherence to external teachings. These psychological dimensions that both novels demonstrate "the importance of inner wisdom over external teachings and material success."

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