



14

**THE MONK WHO SOLD HIS FERRARI: A JOURNEY FROM VISHADA
(DESPAIR) TO WISDOM**

Navya Sai Sirisha.T
PG Student,
Department of English,
Sri Sathya Sai University for Human Excellence,
Navanihal, Karnataka, India

Abstract:

The journey toward self-discovery and illumination has been a central theme of philosophical and literary canons in cultures around the world. At the heart of this journey is the guiding figure of a Guru or mentor-one who illuminates the path of the seeker, transforming pain into wisdom and ignorance into insight. This paper explores the roles of the guru by drawing comparisons between literary and philosophical texts, illustrating how adversity begins the seekers' quest, leading to an encounter with a spiritual guide and culminating in personal transformation. Through an analysis of spiritual mentorship, suffering as a transformative catalyst, and the integration of wisdom into daily life, this study highlights the universal quest for meaning and fulfilment, illustrating, how the dynamic relationship between the seeker and the guru transcends cultural and temporal boundaries.

Keywords: Spirituality, Self-Discovery, Spiritual Mentorship, Philosophy, etc.

The Problem of Suffering and The Quest for Meaning:

The problem of suffering is one of the most significant and recurring concepts in the lives of many of the great saints, spiritual seekers, masters, and prophets. The Christian believes that no suffering is ultimately meaningless. Why? Because we believe that a loving God is providentially orchestrating all things, in a way that upholds our freedom. Therefore, we believe that when God allows us to suffer, He is doing so to protect us from a greater evil, or to lift us to a far greater and outweighing good. "Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life." God always has a good purpose in allowing suffering, even when that purpose is inscrutable to us. (Cross)

This problem of suffering in the Indian context is termed as vishada or dukka. The term vishada in Sanskrit translates to despair or despondency. (www.wisdomlib.org) This term also is associated with the Bhagavad Gita in the first chapter, "Arjuna Vishada yoga" where Arjuna comes across a situation or moral dilemma of killing his own kith and kin for the sake of power and kingdom on the battlefield. Similarly, we observe the concept of vishada or despair in the fable of the monk who sold his Ferrari by Robin Sharma. In the book "The Monk Who Sold His



Ferrari” the protagonist Julian Mantle is a successful lawyer who seemingly has everything; wealth, status, and material success but was never contented in his life, he used to invest all his time and energy in amassing status, name, fame and wealth. He didn’t value his family and relationships rather always ran behind his work; dealing with the most difficult cases is the most exciting thing for him as a lawyer and this took much of his valuable time and energy. His workload brought him sickness and tiredness and slowly his health status started deteriorating. On one fine day, Julian collapsed right in the middle of a packed courtroom. The great Julian Mantle had been reduced to a mere victim and he fell on the ground like a helpless child, shaking and shivering and sweating like a maniac. Julian’s heart attack became instrumental in making him question the futility of these material pleasures and luxuries. Julian’s vishada much like Arjuna’s vishada takes Julian through the path of self-discovery. *In Journey to the East*, H.H. too experiences an existential crisis when he loses faith in his journey. (Marvelly) These narratives reflect the concept of vishada (despair) as presented in Bhagavad Gita, leading these people to their transformation by acting as a catalyst.

The problem of suffering or agony is the driving force towards growth or change. It is this vishada or despair which led them to undertake the journey towards the East. The journey towards the east where the response to suffering is not passive endurance but it is an active pursuit of wisdom. Traveling eastward symbolizes a quest for enlightenment, taken by those who wish to transcend their suffering. This journey is not just physical but deeply spiritual- a journey towards higher truth that dissolves illusions of the self.

East was first seen as a symbol of Christ, the “light of the world,” and the direction of his Second Coming. East is also connected to Paradise and Heaven, as God “planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed” (Genesis, 2:8). (“What Do Cardinal Directions Symbolize?”) In traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, the East is believed to be the direction from which divine knowledge and wisdom emerge. Eastern philosophies also view the East as a symbol of rebirth and transformation. Just as the sun rises in the East, bringing light and warmth to the world, it is believed that the East represents the dawning of new possibilities and the opportunity for personal growth and spiritual evolution. (Luke)

Driven by intuition Julian turns towards the East to seek wisdom and knowledge, venturing into the Himalayas and taking refuge of the sages Sivana. Travelling eastward symbolizes a quest for enlightenment, taken by those who wish to transcend their suffering. This journey is not just physical but deeply spiritual- a journey towards a higher truth that dissolves illusions of the self. The protagonist, Julian Mantle like many other seekers such as Bhikkhu Ananda Metteyya, Herman Hesse believes that the East holds the answers to the greatest mysteries. Julian’s path reflects the age-old traditions of seekers who travel towards the lands of wisdom, where sages and realized masters impart knowledge that liberates one from suffering. “For our goal was not only the East, or rather the East was not only a country and something geographical, but it was the home and youth of the soul, it was everywhere and nowhere, it was the union of all times” (Marvelly).

In Journey to the East, the main character H. H goes on a pilgrimage with a spiritual group known as League. The league’s mission is to discover the deeper truths and realities and



their members travel across actual and mythical worlds, meeting deep spiritual beings, philosophers, and symbols of wisdom. The pilgrimage is a mystical quest that bridges the physical and metaphysical worlds. As the journey progresses, he struggles with inner conflicts, particularly when Leo, a humble servant goes missing, leading to the disintegration of the group. It was later that he realized Leo was not just a servant but a spiritual guide, who taught him the lesson that wisdom often comes from humility and service (Marvelly).

Similarly, Julian takes on the journey towards the East after experiencing a crisis that shook his very foundation. A highly successful lawyer with a lack of inherent fulfilment, his life takes a turn in the courtroom in the form of a heart attack. This instance coerces him to undertake introspection, thereby recognizing the dearth of amassing wealth and material possessions. It fabricated a pursuit for deeper meaning in him, wherein, he discards all his worldly possessions including his Ferrari, and undertakes an escapade towards the East in search of spiritual enlightenment. His newfound journey hoists him from a life of luxury to the bosom of the Himalayas, where he strives to be endowed with ancient wisdom. In this context, his journey is an internal awakening where he sheds his old ways and walks into a ray of hope. In both narratives, the journey is filled with challenges, external or internal, which test the protagonist's resolve. *In Journey to the East*, H.H. struggles with doubts, fragmented memories, and a crisis of meaning. The loss of Leo leads to confusion and the collapse of the league, reflecting Herman Hesse's own spiritual disillusionment. It is only when he revisits the journey and understands the deeper essence of Leo's role, that he attains enlightenment. The realization that wisdom lies in humility, selfless service, and reignition of deeper truths becomes central to Hesse's transformation.

Similarly, Julian Mantel faces obstacles in his path to enlightenment. He abandoned his former identity as a successful and reputed lawyer and embraced a life of simplicity and discipline. the journey to the Himalayas is symbolic of his inner purification, requiring him to let go of his past and embrace a new spiritual journey. In conclusion, the journey toward the East in these works signifies the universal quest for meaning, truth, and spiritual fulfillment. It is not merely about travel but about the transformation which takes place along the way. Hesse and Julian's paths serve as reminders that the journey to wisdom is as significant as the wisdom itself, and that true enlightenment is not found in external destinations but within the self.

The concept of guru in Indian philosophy and the concept of mentor in Western philosophy share a fundamental purpose -guiding students towards, self-discovery, wisdom, and transformation. The true meaning of Guru is "one who dispels the darkness of ignorance". "Gu" means "darkness of ignorance" and "Ru" means "one who removes". ("Guru-Disciple Relationship") The usage of terms is different but the idea is the same in all philosophies. In Indian tradition, the guru is revered as a spiritual master who dispels ignorance and leads the disciple toward moksha (liberation).

Encounter with the Guru:

The problem of suffering leads to the journey towards the East and the journey enables them to encounter the guru and give the solution to the problem of suffering by the ancient wisdom and

Literary Cognizance
ISSN- 2395-7522 (Online) Imp. Fact.6.21 (IIJF)
An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
e-Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol.- V, Issue- 4, March 2025



teachings of gurus. The concept of guru/wisemen holds a significant importance in all spiritual and philosophical traditions.

Adi Shankara also called Adi Shankaracharya was an Indian Vedic scholar, philosopher, and teacher of Advaita Vedanta. He composed several sub-texts called Prakaranagranthas (philosophical treatises), to reach the message of Vedanta to common people. The Vivekachudamani is the crown jewel of such Prakarana texts.

śāntā mahānto nivasanti santo
vasantavallokaḥitaṃ carantaḥ |
tīrṇāḥ svayaṃ bhīmabhavārṇavaṃ janān
ahetunān yānapi tārayantaḥ || 37 ||

There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever. (“Vivekachudamani- Verses 32-40 - Vivekachudamani Verses 32-40 - By Adi Sankaracharya - In Sanskrit with English Meaning, Transliteration, Translation, Commentary, Lyrics, Audio”) Adi Shankaracharya also composed Guru Paduka Stotram which glorifies the significance of guru’s worship and reverence.

anantasamsāra samudratāra naukāyitābhyāṃ gurubhaktidābhyāṃ |
vairāgyasāmrājyadapūjanābhyāṃ namo namaḥ śrīgurupādukābhyāṃ || 1 ||

Salutations to the sandals of my Guru, Which is a boat, which helps me, cross the endless ocean of life, Which endows me, with a sense of devotion to my Guru, And by the worship of which, I attain the dominion of renunciation. (“Guru Paduka Stotram in Sanskrit, English with Meaning”).

The encounter with a guru is the start of real change. Julian meets yogi Raman, who imparts the seven virtues of enlightened learning, reshaping his understanding of success and fulfillment. Herman Hesse in his journey to the East eventually realizes that Leo, whom he perceived as a simple servant, was actually a spiritual master. Julian’s encounter with the guru mirrors the Indian tradition where disciples undergo training under a guru, such as Arjuna with Krishna. Western philosophical traditions also reflect the relationship between mentors like Socrates guiding Plato, and Aristotle guiding Alexander the Great. This reflects the significance of wisdom, underscoring that knowledge is not sufficient in the absence of experience and guidance. Herman Hesse’s and Julian’s paths serve as reminders that the pursuit of wisdom is as cardinal as the concept of wisdom as a whole and true enlightenment is found not in externalities but within the self. H.H. realizes that the journey itself is the destination. These narratives are in accord with the Bhagavad Gita which teaches karma yoga-the path of action through wisdom. Karma Yoga also labeled as Karma Marga, is one of the three classical spiritual paths mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita, wherein one of them is based on yoga of action, the others being Jnana Yoga (Path of Knowledge) and Bhakti Yoga (Path of Loving Devotion to a Personal God). In the Bhagavad Gita, according to Lord Krishna, Karma Yoga is the spiritual practice of selfless action



“performed for the benefit of others”. Karma yoga is a path to Moksha (spiritual liberation) through work. (“Karma Yoga”).

Jung’s archetypes, particularly the sage and the magician, manifest in Julian’s transformation from a seeker to a mentor. Similarly, in Western philosophy, Montaigne’s essays serve as a form of mentorship, guiding readers towards self-reflection and ethical living. The book, "A Summer with Montaigne," by Antoine Compagnon, is about the life of Michel de Montaigne. The importance of taking time in daily life to reflect on the day, on emotions, and on the lessons was second to none. He believed this reflection would enlighten the view of oneself and the world. (*Living Well with Montaigne*) Ultimately true wisdom is not only attained but also applied allowing the transformed individual to illuminate the path of others.

To conclude, the journey towards enlightenment, whether through suffering, seeking or mentorship- is a recurring theme in literature, philosophy, and spirituality. *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*, and *Herman Hesse’s Journey to the East* illustrate this timeless quest, reflecting Eastern traditions of wisdom, transformation, and the role of the guru. While the paths may differ, the essence remains the same: suffering initiates growth, a mentor provides guidance, and true wisdom is realized through the application. By embracing the guru’s teachings and applying them to life, the seeker fulfills the cycle of self-realization, living the universal principle that enlightenment is both individual and communal.

References

- “Guru Paduka Stotram in Sanskrit, English with Meaning.” *Shlokam*, <https://shlokam.org/gurupadukastotram/>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2025. Web.
- “Guru-Disciple Relationship.” *Yogoda Satsanga Society of India*, <https://yssofindia.org/about/guru-disciple-relationship>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2025. Web.
- “Karma Yoga.” *Wikipedia*, 22 Jan. 2025. *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Karma_yoga&oldid=1270967021. Web.
- “Vivekachudamani- Verses 32-40 - Vivekachudamani Verses 32-40 - By Adi Sankaracharya - In Sanskrit with English Meaning, Transliteration, Translation, Commentary, Lyrics, Audio.” *Shlokam*, <https://shlokam.org/texts/vivekachudamani-32-40/>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2025. Web.
- “What Do Cardinal Directions Symbolize?--Aleteia.” *Aleteia — Catholic Spirituality, Lifestyle, World News, and Culture*, <https://aleteia.org/2017/08/04/the-ancient-symbolism-of-north-south-east-and-west/>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2025. Web.
- Cross, Bryan. *A Catholic Reflection on the Meaning of Suffering | Called to Communion*. 9 Aug. 2009, <https://www.calledtocommunion.com/2009/08/a-catholic-reflection-on-the-meaning-of-suffering/> Web.
- *Living Well with Montaigne: A Guide to Self-Knowledge and - CliffsNotes*. <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-notes/598785>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2025. Web.
- Luke. “The Spiritual Meaning of East: Unveiling the Symbolism Behind Directions.” *Spirituality Shepherd*, 4 Aug. 2023, <https://spiritualityshepherd.com/spiritual-meaning-of->



east/ Web.

- Marvally, Paula. "Hermann Hesse: The Journey to the East - The Culturium -." *The Culturium*, 5 Mar. 2017, <https://www.theculturium.com/hermann-hesse-the-journey-to-the-east/> Web.
- www.wisdomlib.org. *Visada, Viṣāda, Visāda, Viśada, Vishada, Viṣada, Visha-Da: 28 Definitions*. 3 Aug. 2014, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/visada>. Web.



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

To Cite the Article: T., Navya. "The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari: A Journey From Vishada (Despair) to Wisdom." *Literary Cognizance*, V-4 (March, 2025): 98-103. Web.

