

Role of kamala in hermann hesse's siddhartha

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The novel Siddhartha written by Hermann Hesse is a philosophical novel that explores the journey of life and to enlightenment. This is done through the narration of the life of a young boy - the eponymous Siddhartha by a third-person omniscient narrator. My goal in this essay is to explore the role of the most important female character in Siddhartha, Kamala. Siddhartha is set in India, the story concurs with the life of Gotama the Buddha and therefore is estimated to take place around the 5th-6th century B. C. Many female characters play a part in Siddhartha's journey.

Siddhartha's mother, the nameless young woman in the forest that attempts to seduce him and Vasudeva's deceased wife. However the only female character that plays a significant role in the plot is Kamala, a courtesan who meets Siddhartha outside the city and becomes an influential character. The root word of the name Kamala - "Kama" is the Hindu god of love and desire; this represents her profession and character. Kamala first appeared in the eponymous chapter. Siddhartha meets Kamala outside the city when she was being escorted by her servants. Immediately, Siddhartha is struck by her beauty and decides to find her in the city.

He saw beneath high-piled black hair a very fair, very soft, very clever face, bright-red lips like a newly opened fig, eyebrows well tended and painted in the form of high arches, dark eyes clever and alert. " The immediate circumstances in which we meet Kamala give us the impression of her being a very beautiful and rich, yet mysterious and untouchable given Siddhartha's social and financial situation. He then enters the city and asks for her name, Siddhartha learns that she is the renowned courtesan Kamala, who is wealthy and owns a house in the city.

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His decision to visit Kamala brings about a turning point in the plot where Kamala becomes an object of desire for Siddhartha, and also he views her as someone capable of tutoring him in the ways of love. However Kamala initially rejects Siddhartha as he has no possessions and wears ragged clothing. She does however; give Siddhartha a kiss for a poem he performs. " He lowered his face to hers, and placed his lips on those lips that were like a newly opened fig. " She introduces Siddhartha to Kamaswami, who is a merchant and a regular client of Kamala's.

She tells Siddhartha to work with Kamaswami and learn the way of the merchant in order to earn money for himself. This becomes important as Siddhartha does become a successful merchant like Kamaswami changing him into a respected wealthy man. Eventually Kamala accepts him and shows him the world of physical love and sex. "[Siddhartha] learned the art of love; he practiced the cult of pleasure, in which more than anywhere else giving and taking become one and the same; he chatted with her, learned from her, gave her advice, received advice.

This persists for many years as Kamala continues her relationship with Siddhartha, but comes to an end when the latter becomes disillusioned with the material world and runs away from the city. Only after Siddhartha leaves the city does Kamala find that she is pregnant with his child and decides to accept no other lovers, the story then leaves Kamala. Kamala returns later when she and her son are on their way to see the dying Buddha Gotama. By this time Siddhartha has returned to his old ascetic lifestyle living with the ferryman Vasudeva.

Whilst resting by the river Kamala is bitten by a poisonous snake, Vasudeva hears her son calling for help and immediately goes to assist. Vasudeva brings Kamala back to the hut where Siddhartha recognizes her, and realizes that the boy is his son. Kamala lives only long enough to have one last conversation with Siddhartha before she dies in his arms (The Ferryman chapter). We see Kamala as a temptress who seduces Siddhartha and draws him away from his journey to enlightenment.

She does however indirectly lead Siddhartha to his enlightenment first by teaching him the values and limitations of the material world, and also by bearing his son who gives Siddhartha the most difficult test on his path. Kamala is the master tutor of the material world, this makes her the opposite of Gotama who is the master tutor of the spiritual world. Whilst Gotama teaches his followers the virtues of patience and inner peace, Kamala focuses on a lifestyle of "living in the moment". She also contrasts the Samanas whom Siddhartha has become when he first meets Kamala.

The Samanas live without personal property but Kamala demands items such as clothing and jewelry from clients for her courtship. While we see Kamala's relationship with Siddhartha as mutual love, the two never truly love each other. Siddhartha only sees Kamala as a teacher of love and an object of desire, Kamala sees Siddhartha as a skilled lover, a client and a source of income (she does however show preference and affection for Siddhartha, as we see in the initial chapters when she gives Siddhartha the opportunity to earn a living in the city).

For a long while she sported with Siddhartha, luring him on, repulsing him, forcing his will, encircling him, enjoying his mastery, until he was vanquished and lay exhausted at her side. " She treats her relationship with Siddhartha as a part of her profession. However, after Siddhartha leaves and Kamala becomes aware of her pregnancy, she refuses to take another lover. This tells us that she still had a very intimate relationship with Siddhartha.

An interesting fact is that despite Siddhartha's dislike for teachers (as shown in his conversations with Gotama the Buddha and later with Govinda), he shows a preference towards Kamala's teachings. Towards the very end of her life, Kamala seems to have also found an inner peace. Kamala is described as physically very beautiful and alluring, whilst at the same time being very clever (although we do learn that she cannot read nor write). " Her body was as lithe as a jaguar's or as a hunter's bow. " Kamala's most important role in Siddhartha is being Siddhartha's mentor in the world of love and as the mother of Siddhartha's child.

She plays a major role in Siddhartha's life as a long-time companion and a lover of sorts. Initially we see her as an obstacle to Siddhartha's journey to find enlightenment as she seduces Siddhartha and keeps him from his continuing on his trek, but soon we see that while Siddhartha has experienced much of the spiritual world, he lacks any experience in the material world and is naive to the concepts of love. Here is where we begin to see her as an instructor, a companion and a guide to Siddhartha's other side of life (the original being a life of ascetics).

Reference

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