

## **The Conflict between Worldliness and Spirituality in *Siddhartha: Man of Peace***

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The personality of Siddhartha or Bhagavan Buddha has attracted the attention of many artists and intellectuals all over the world. In India many novels and plays have been written in regional languages. In Kannada more than half a dozen plays and novels have been written. But strangely enough, not many works of art like novels and plays are available in Indian English Literature, perhaps because of some research required for the study of Indian history and the difficulty of the advanced non-theistic philosophy of Buddhism or even a sheer lack of interest in a serious subject of Buddha's life and message. It is an irony that the original German novel, *Siddhartha* should come from a German scholar like Herman Hesse and not from any Indian. Viewed against the paucity of drama in Indian English, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya's historical-religious play, *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* (2002) assumes a unique importance.

Chattopadhyaya's *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* may be described as a historical play as it easily fulfils the requirements of good historical drama in that it consists of not merely one but a good many historical figures like Siddhartha, King Suddhodana, King Dandapanti, Yashodara, Rahula, Deva Dutta, Asita Muni, Angulimala, Sujata and other royal officers and courtiers etc., and depicts their relationship with the society around them. King Suddhodana belonging to Sakya dynasty is a historical figure. Siddhartha may be described as a 'world-historical personage' in Hegelian terminology who effected a transition of society from Hinduism to Buddhism through his religious revolution not only in India, but also in the entire Asian world. In Carlylesque parlance Siddhartha is a saint who became a hero in the Indian history. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1898--) has to be complimented for the maintenance of historical authenticity and accuracy in his dramatized historiography and for the depiction of the spirit of history. Although he has not mentioned the dates of historical events, he has been quite authentic in creating the historical atmosphere of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. by recreating the experience of the age involving the ideological and emotional conflicts between and among the characters. Chattopadhyaya does not present the historical facts in a discursive style like a historian but like an artist, selects the important characters, events and aspects of Siddhartha's life and achievement in a logically connected, coherent and convincing manner in a configurational mode through the experimental technique. In the process of his emplotment of the historical story he tries to critique or re-evaluate it thereby enabling the modern spectator or reader to rethink about Indian history and enlighten himself through this re-thinking. He makes history come alive in his play.

Like all historical dramatists, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has chosen a historical personage from remote Indian history, i.e. Siddhartha, especially from the transitional period when Buddhism was to emerge as a strong rival to Hinduism. He foregrounds the life of Siddhartha which is marked by a conspicuous transformation from worldliness to spirituality. Siddhartha was not an ordinary man, but a hero as a saint *a la* Carlyle. He was a prince of a royal kingdom of Sakya dynasty, living in the midst of limitless wealth, pleasure, pomp and glory. But his transformation from worldliness to spirituality creates a great problem of heir-ship to his kingdom and to his parents, wife and children. It is this conflict directly between heir-ship and lack of heir-ship and indirectly between materialism and spirituality that is problematized by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya.

What is conspicuous about the play is that it is not written in a traditional manner of presenting the direct action on the stage. On the contrary it is written in a non-traditional and experimental manner. In other words, the play attracts our attention by its new and unusual, cinematic technique. For example he does not begin the play directly with the past, i.e., birth of Buddha, but begins it with the present showing the relevance of the past. In other words, he shows the present-ness of the past. For example, he begins the play with a Prologue in which a palm leaf screen is let down. On the screen is written 'Siddhartha: Man of Peace.' The word 'Peace' is represented by five Bhikkus. The extraordinary relevance of peace to the modern world is shown by the explosion of bombs. Suddenly there is a distant thud of bombs and with each thud the Bhikkus fall flat on their faces and the letters, p, e, a, c, e are scattered. Thus peace is destroyed by war.

Another trait of cinematic technique employed by the playwright is the use of still pictures on the stage, which provide a contrast to the main action of the play and show the relevance of the central theme to the modern world. For example, Picture One shows the crowds running helter- skelter. Along with it are heard the voices of men, women and children. These Voices alert the crowd of people about the siren and ask them to rush down into the pit to save their life. Obviously, the aim of the dramatist is to satirize the destructive effect of war on the modern world.

Then there is shown another picture – Picture Two – in which a coughing man is sitting on a rickety cot and his wife supports him. The Man pleads his helplessness and inability to move. He is very sad to observe that men should flee like rats and die like flies. He says that it is not God's will, but man's brain, which has made bombs and bomber planes. His wife consoles him by saying that if a bomb drops there he won't die alone, but she will also die with him. Then the Man says desperately that only the yawning grave will be their shelter. Their dialogues of despair are followed by the library shots of bombs dropping over towns and cities, bomber planes, rolling seas and battleships.

Then there is a Commentary, which expresses the playwright's views on the war. It describes the bloody war; how human life is bled and broken; how mothers' wombs are rendered a travesty and how millions are dying and dead in Europe, Russia and China:

CHORUS: Red-eyed war, vulture of hate, its giant pinions of steel unfurled  
Roams over clouds and challenges heaven vomiting gloom  
Like sulphurous lava over this deeply beautiful world,  
Vulture of lust, its ruthless claws keep clutching at life which groans for release,  
Keen claws dipped in the blood of man, the blood of life and blood of peace.  
Cannon roar from shore to shore, bomb-bursts echo, machine-gun-rattle,  
Crass destruction of human life by cowards is christened sacred battle,  
War's red lightning, war's dread thunder,  
Green earth trembles. What does it matter  
To the vulture of war that is out to plunder,  
Is out to crack up the earth and shatter  
The body of man in relentless slaughter?  
What does it matter  
If seas foam blood instead of water  
And the world like a floundering ship goes under?  
The dead who are more than the living deny even elbow-room  
To the new-born, time's interpreters of the funeral pyre and the tomb,  
The infant, unconceived as yet, refuses to enter the womb,  
Each day that dawns is dark as night since dawn is afraid to bloom  
While the diamond dome of all heaven grows dim and the earth grows dumb with  
doom (p.5).

The Commentary is followed by a Chorus, which describes the negative effect of the war. The war is described as a vulture of hate which vomits gloom like sulphurous lava over the beautiful world. Similarly the vulture of lust has clutched at life; the cannons roar from shore to shore; bombs burst, machine-guns rattle; war's red lightning and dread thunder clap and the green earth trembles and sinks like a floundering ship. The dead who outnumber the living deny even elbow room to the newborn; the infant refuses to enter the womb and the diamond dome of all heaven grows dim and the earth grows dumb with doom.

Again the Commentary states that when the earth and sky are filled with doom and human life goes speeding to its doom, when mercy and compassion are forgotten and love deserts the heart; the whole world is facing grim disaster, the world recalls the Golden Master with his message of compassion and peace and find release:

Today, when earth and sky are filled with gloom  
And human life goes speeding to its doom,  
When mercy and compassion are forgotten  
And love deserts the heart, leaving it rotten,  
When the whole world stands facing grim disaster,

Today, the world recalls the Golden Master,  
The memory of Him who shall again  
Establish beauty in a world of pain,  
Whose message of compassion and of peace  
Shall once again be heard and men shall find release....

*(Back stage, the voices of Bhikkus chant together)*

*buddham Saranam gachchhami,  
dhammam saranam gachchhami,  
sangham saranam gachchhami (p.5).*

After showing all these elaborate pictures of war and its horror, the playwright brings in the third and last picture which shows a European traveler conversing with a Bhikku. The traveller asks for the name of the Master and if he founded a religion. The Bhikku replies that the Master's name is Lord Gautam Buddha and that he did not found a new religion, but tried to liberate humanity from suffering, the cycle of birth and the shadow of death, the torture of wrong desire and therefore taught his Eightfold Path. The European Traveller is keen on learning the message of the Great Master. The Bhikku asks him to listen to the lesson of Eightfold Path:

TRAVELLER: Did he found a religion?

BHIKKU: No, our Lord did not set out to found a religion but to find for all humanity a way out of the shackles of human suffering, the cycle of birth, the shadow of death.

TRAVELLER: Pray, tell me more...

BHIKKU: He sought to free mankind from the torture of wrong desire, from the twisted cravings of unilluminated flesh which lead it to annihilation. For this he left us his Eightfold Path.

TRAVELLER: I cam from far away, brother! I come to learn the message of the Great Master whose name rings throughout the world. The moon and the sun sound like gongs proclaiming his name, announcing his glory. I am eager to learn from your lips the legend of the Lord who has shown the Path for men to follow, the Eightfold Path...

BHIKKU: Then, listen...(p.6).

All this preparatory part of the play shows the horrors of modern world wars and the urgent necessity of peace, especially to the Western world as represented by the European Traveller.

The first scene of the First Act begins with a Bhikku who narrates that "About two thousand five hundred years ago in the neighbourhood of Nepal, in Kapilavastu, reigned an illustrious King descended from the Sakyas, the strong race of warriors descended from the Sun and—the name of the King was Maharaja Suddhodana!" (p.7) In this scene and the forthcoming scenes a Jester cracks his jokes to entertain the king and

the courtiers. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has borrowed the character-type of a jester from Sanskrit Drama.

The second scene shows that a baby-god is born to Queen Mayadevi in the Lumbini Park. There is great excitement in the entire kingdom. Sage Asita Muni prophesies that the baby-god is born to put an end to the cycle of birth and death.

The playwright has tried to suggest the extraordinariness of the baby-god by showing (or by telling about) the miraculous happenings. For example, there is tremendous excitement among the unlucky people. A blind man has recovered his eyesight; a lame man can walk now; a deaf man can hear and a leper has recovered his wholeness. All of them are excited over these miraculous changes in them. A group of peasants are ecstatic about the grand harvest that they have this year. They thank their luck for the unexpected abundance of yield this time.

An Announcer beats his drum and announces in the lanes of Kapilavastu that a prince is born to the king. The royal family goes to the Lumbini Park and brings back Queen Mayadevi along with the newborn baby in a palanquin followed by all the animals described in the Jataka tales.

The Commentary shows that the golden birth of the prince has injected a new consciousness into Nature. Then women, young and old and the citizens offer the baby innumerable gifts and bless him. When Asita Muni visits the palace, Queen Mayadevi places the baby at the feet of the sage and prays for his blessings. Asita Muni expresses his admiration for the baby describing it as pure spirit and not born of flesh and that he is worthy of being placed on his head and not at his feet. He, then, lifts up the child and offers him a thousand salutations and describes him as an embodiment of illumination. He places the child down and prostrates at his feet:

ASITA MUNI: (*bending down, picks up the Prince who is sucking his thumb.*) What are you doing Queen Mayadevi! This is no infant born of flesh. He is pure spirit. He is worthy of being placed on the head and not at the feet.

(*Asita Muni lifts up the child to the forehead and with closed eye, addresses him.*)

A thousand thousand salutations to you, O heaven-born!  
Through centuries of penance have I won  
A glimpse of you, O Embodiment of Illumination!

(*Then, placing the child down, Asita Muni falls at his feet.*)

MAYADEVI: (*Not understanding*) O divine Master! What are you doing?

ASITA MUNI: Trust me, O queen! This is no earthly Prince,  
His kingdoms are not builded of the earth,  
He is the ruler of the firmament,

The stars encrust his crown. Not over men  
Shall he be loud, but over their sorrowful hearts  
Which, ruling, he shall conquer, flooding them  
With peace and high compassion. He has come  
To shatter humanbonds, to rid the world  
Of mournful shadows. Human history  
Shall yet record him  
Lord of the world, lord of humanity.

KING: My brain is in a fog, my senses swim....  
I cannot understand you, Master! No,  
I cannot understand you.

ASITA MUANI: You will, in time!  
Eternity has blossomed to a flower  
Which is your new-born, and the world shall smell  
The fragrance of his being which shall flood  
Each speck, each grain, whether of earth or heaven.  
He is the Buddha, Golden Lord of peace,  
Lord of Compassion.... (*Here he sheds tears.*)

KING: Wherefore do you weep?  
You have mastered wisdoms, you are weeping!

ASITA MUNI: I cannot help but weep when I consider  
I shall not live to hear his golden message. (I. viii. Pp.21-23)  
Queen Myadevi is surprised at Asita Muni's strange behaviour and asks him why  
he is behaving unusually like that. Asita Muni describes the child as an unearthly prince  
and a ruler of the firmament and prophesies that he shall bring peace and compassion to  
the world.

Like the Queen, King Suddhodana is also puzzled by the sage's description of the  
child and seeks clarification about it. Asita Muni, therefore, explains that Eternity has  
blossomed into a flower and that the world will smell the fragrance of his being and that  
he is the Buddha, the golden lord of peace and compassion. But he weeps because he  
will not be alive to hear the golden message of the Buddha. While taking his leave from  
the palace, Asita Muni prophesies that the child is going to put an end to the cycle of  
mortality. The king cannot understand the sage's riddle. Queen Mayadevi is ecstatic to  
have given birth to an eternal infant but sad at the same time to know that she will not be  
alive to hear her son speak.

The king tells his new queen (she is not named by the dramatist) how the earlier  
queen, Mayadevi died after giving birth to the child. The new queen is happy to be in  
charge of the child. The king feels that everything in and around the kingdom is growing  
riper and that he is now drawn more to a life of meditation. They christen the child as  
Siddhartha, the Ripe One. The king is happy and temporarily relieved that a legal heir is

born to him so that his line of family will continue even after his death. But the new queen sees something ethereal in the child. Her observation rather disturbs the king, who, therefore, sends for his minister and asks him to call in an astrologer. The astrologer predicts the child's future by suggesting the possibility of his leaving the palace and becoming an ascetic. Thus, from this point of time sets in the conflict between worldliness and spirituality. As a king of a prestigious kingdom he wants to have a legal heir to his throne to continue the dynastic rule. But the astrologer's prediction about the child's inclination towards spirituality disturbs him deeply as all his material wealth, pomp and glory are threatened by that oppositional path. That is why he is not really happy when the neighbouring kings send 200 elephants each as gifts to him to celebrate the birth of a prince to him. But he is inwardly worried about the possibility of his son's leaving the palace and going into the jungle in future.

The Commentary (II.ii) on the mike introduces Channa, who has brought a colt, which was born at the time when the prince Siddhartha himself was born. One may notice here that the playwright has violated the principle of historical accuracy in retaining the name, 'Channa' who is the son of the king's charioteer. The name is commonly found in regional, especially Kannada epics on the Buddha. But the real, i.e. historical name of the servant happens to be 'Chandaka' as mentioned in Aswaghosa's the *Buddha Carita*. The playwright has not bothered much about the historical accuracy of the name. But he has succeeded in bringing out the cordial relationship between Channa and Siddhartha later as the latter grows into a young prince.

The playwright has shown how Siddhartha, even as a small boy, was beyond the considerations of caste or status. For example when Siddhartha is playing alone a nurse brings her child and asks him to be an obedient servant of the prince in accordance with the royal requirements, thereby implying her complicity with the monarchical set-up of society. When the prince invites the Third Nurse's child to play with him, the Nurse prevents it on the grounds of difference in their socio-economic status. Similarly when the child asks for a red toy-horse the prince gives it away to him, but the Nurse advises the prince not to get into the bad habits like that. The prince gives away the chariot also to the child. This act of the prince provides ample evidence of his childlike innocence, absence of discrimination between class and caste, his philanthropy, non-possessiveness or renunciation hidden his soul.

The playwright offers a contrastive picture of Siddhartha and Deva Dutta, who happens to be his cousin. Deva Dutta represents the material values of life and a practical approach to life. Siddhartha's spiritual qualities are highlighted against the negative ones of Deva Dutta. For example, when the Nurse with her child is about to go away from there, Deva Dutta comes there and calls the child a thief for stealing the toys of the prince. But the Nurse tells him that the toys are given as gifts to her child by the prince. Then Deva Dutta scolds the prince for calling a low born child as his friend and giving away gifts to the latter, but the prince replies that both are little boys and therefore friends. After the exit of the Nurse and her child, Davadatta accuses the prince that the latter has become a laughing stock as he does not look or behave like a *ksatriya* or warrior. Deva Dutta explains how a warrior kills birds and animals and bleeds them. He

boasts of breaking the head of an elephant when he grows into a young man. For a sample, he smashes the toy-elephant of the prince and calls him a coward, who closes his eyes in fear and nervousness. Deva Dutta's way of thinking and Siddhartha's shows the sharp contrast between stark materialism and physical warrior-ship and pure spirituality and spiritual warrior-ship. This blatant philosophical contrast has been kept up by the dramatist all through the play. As far as boasting is concerned he easily reminds us of Sakara of Sudraka's *Mrichhakatika* (*Little Clay-Cart*).

In II.ii. Channa leads the horse, Kanthak to Siddhartha. It is a coincidence that both the horse and the prince are born on the same day and may like each other. By that time Prince Siddhartha comes there and appreciates the beauty of the white horse. He accepts Channa as his friend and asks him to address him by his personal name as Siddhartha and not 'sir' him honorifically. Channa tells the prince the name of the horse as 'Kanthak' which means... One may easily see some symbolism operative here. For example, horse is a symbol of power and 'white' colour is a symbol of purity, spirituality and divinity. Hence the 'white horse' symbolizes the spiritual power of the prince who is going to ride it.

In II.ii., the Queen in the chamber of the palace hears the parrot in the cage shouting, 'I am hungry, I am hungry.' When the Prince comes there he hears the same sound of the parrot. He asks a passing old maid if the parrot is fed. The maid replies that in fact, it is overfed and that she is tired of feeding it. Then Siddhartha interprets this strange phenomenon in his own philosophical way. He interprets the parrot's hunger for something more than food – a hunger for the wide blue spaces, in other words, unlimited spiritual liberty from the bondage to the worldly life. The parrot, obviously, turns out to be an objective correlative of the prince's hidden insatiable hunger for spiritual liberty. The Queen suspects fearfully that Asita Muni's prophesy is coming true.

The dramatist shows the gradual growth of the prince. As the scion of the warrior dynasty it is his duty to learn the martial arts for self-defence as well as conquest of enemies. Prince Siddhartha's philosophical interiority asserts itself at this stage also. For example, he thanks his Guru for teaching him the art of archery – of shooting at a lemon tied to the thread and splitting the thread itself and for slaying the man if he should become an enemy. But at the same time he complains that he has not taught him the art of slaying the worst enemy of man within, i.e. wrong desire. The Guru replies that desire is not wrong, but Siddhartha replies that wrong desire is not right.

The playwright has maintained a conspicuous contrast between Deva Dutta and Siddhartha throughout the play. Deva Dutta embodies the vices like alcoholism, vagabondage, gambling, boasting, frequenting brothels, and attraction for Ambapali, whereas Siddhartha is considered to be a veritable god. Deva Dutta looks at the world from his own pervert point of view. When King Suddhodana asks his opinion about the behaviour of Siddhartha, he replies negatively by saying that the prince's behaviour is rather strange and not of the earth and that he has only one friend i.e. Channa, his charioteer and that he sits alone like the very image of a god and dreams. The king feels

really disconcerted by the meditative nature of the prince. He does not allow him to become a sage or a god but wants to make him take interest in the passionate worldly life.

The best way to pull an ascetically oriented young man is to provide him the sensuous company of a young lady. As per the suggestion of the Minister the king arranges a gathering of brides from among whom the prince may choose his wife.

On the screen is shown (III.i.) the hustle-bustle of the City of Kapilavastu and the crowd of young brides rushing in their chariots to the city. Almost all the brides praise the beauty of the prince. But Yashodara, the beautiful daughter of King Dandapani does not discuss the prince with anybody. On the way the wheel of her chariot gets loosened and rolls away from the chariot, thereby causing a minor accident. Yashodara curses her fate, but the charioteer tries to console her. By that time Deva Dutta, accosts Yashodara. He boasts that he is more attractive than Prince Siddhartha and asks her to choose him as her husband. He tries to blackmail the prince by calling him a weakling and a coward. But Yashodara rebuffs him and goes ahead by neglecting him.

In Act III. iv. Prince Siddhartha offers gifts like jeweled fans and enameled caskets to the young brides. But he has nothing to offer to Yashodara who comes a little late to the function. Finally he takes out a pearl necklace from his neck and offers it to Yashodara and declares her as his chosen bride. All the while Deva Dutta is trying to compete with Siddhartha in an absurd manner. The Announcer declares that the wedding of the prince with Yashodara will be celebrated shortly. King Dandapani is very happy to learn about his daughter's matrimonial prospects and attributes the success to fortune. But by that time Deva Dutta meets King Dandapani and tries to poison his mind by making damaging remarks about the prince. He describes Prince Siddhartha as a nominal *ksatriya*, a weakling and a coward; that he is nervous of the arrow, trembles to hold a sword, cannot smell the blood but spends most of his time in meditation with his closed eyes as if he is a blind man. When King Dandapani refuses to retrace his steps, Deva Dutta suggests a clever plan of arranging a tournament or contest before the wedding and that only he who wins in the contest should marry Yashodara. King Dandapani helplessly agrees to this condition as it is according to the old custom.

In the tournament, contrary to Deva Dutta's expectation, Prince Siddhartha emerges as the victorious hero and accepts Yashodara as his wife. Their wedding is celebrated on the tenth day from the tournament. Prince Siddhartha gives a long lecture to Deva Dutta that mere killing, riding a horse or boasting are not the marks of a hero, but those of a coward. On the contrary, says he, tenderness and compassion are the marks of a warrior. But Deva Dutta comments in his typical manner that it is like an ass trying to teach a lion his business.

After the marriage Yashodara discovers to her chagrin that her husband is not of the normal kind. The parrot in the cage symbolizes his own condition of mortal bondage. He interprets that the parrot is hungry for something transcendental. Yashodara detects that he seems to be looking across space and time and asks him about what he is thinking or worrying about. He replies that he is worried about the chain of flowers offered by her

being transformed into a chain of fire and of fetters. His philosophical nature begins to assert itself when he thinks that people love his wealth and the pomp of his kingdom, but not him. But Yashodara declares that she loves him alone and nothing else in the world. In spite of her assurance of love, Siddhartha feels that he lives amidst a variety of falsehood and is himself a living lie, all the time. The tussle between worldliness and transcendentalism goes on growing more and more powerful as days go by. Yashodara grows rather apprehensive of losing his love, when a new life (baby) is growing in her womb. But he accuses her that their bond of love will never break, but that the bondage of ignorance will be broken.

Prince Siddhartha does not believe in the master-servant hierarchy but believes in the democratic equality of the humankind. That is why he orders the maidservant Mallika never to bow down or bend before anyone when she prostrates at his feet.

The whole palace is determined to make Siddhartha to take interest in worldly pleasures and get entangled into them. That is why they arrange a dance performance for his entertainment. Only beautiful young dancers are selected for the programme and a lady with even a single grey hair is eliminated from the list of performers. An Elderly Woman asks Malati to perform a serpent dance; Pushpavali to perform a dance of perfume and Vanamala, Chandrakala and Hematilaka to dance other kinds of dance. The whole intention behind the arrangement of this performance is to mesmerize Prince Siddhartha into the sensuous pleasures of life.

As this dance performance begins (IV.i.) Yashodara tries in vain to draw the attention of Siddhartha to the beauty of the dancer, but he seems to be rather absent-minded. He even dismisses the dancers away from there. Yashodara, naturally grows apprehensive and nervous.

King Suddhodana wants his son to be an expert in hunting the animals in accordance with the requirements of *ksatriya* caste. He, therefore, asks Deva Dutta to take Siddhartha to a nearby forest and sends him a bow. But Siddhartha replies to Deva Dutta that he prefers a rainbow to a bow and seems to be in a drowse. When Channa draws Siddhartha's attention to a wounded crane falling to the ground, he takes the bird in his palms and extricates the arrow from it and bandages its wound with a piece of cloth torn from his garment. By then Deva Dutta rushes in there and claims the bird to be his as he has shot the arrow. But Siddhartha claims it to be his as he has saved it. Deva Dutta contemptuously calls him a coward, but Siddhartha refuses to become a *ksatriya* if it involves killing. He says he hates hate and loves love. The bird revives in his palms miraculously and flies away. Siddhartha wants to fly away like that, someday.

King Suddhodana makes constant efforts to make Siddhartha to take interest in worldly life. That is why he has built three palaces for him for summer, winter and rainy seasons. But Channa tells him that the prince is not interested in palaces or women and that he is a born revolutionary. The king does not like Siddhartha's so-called abnormal attitude to life and could have exiled him if he were not his son. But Channa indicates that Siddhartha may exile himself soon. Hearing this news the king is perturbed and

thinks that he has lost him. He overhears Siddhartha telling Channa that he is longing to liberate himself. The king feels more perturbed.

Siddhartha agrees to meet the people of his kingdom when Channa tells him that people are eager to see him. When the news is announced in the city the common people like wrinkled old men, limbless men and dirtily clad women are happy to see the prince. But the Announcer declares that the dead, the maimed, afflicted, the blind, the sick and the aged are ordered by the king to be away from the path of the prince. So the crowd consisting of only such people is deeply disappointed.

As Siddhartha goes into the city, contrary to the expectation of Channa, he happens to see only ugly scenes. For example, an old man comes there and blesses him. The guards try to push the old man out of the path, but Deva Dutta wants the old man to be seen by the prince. Finally the prince sees the old man and grows sad. Deva Dutta opines that the prince should see the other side of life. Then the prince sees a diseased man, who is also blind and stinks horribly. At last he sees a dead man, but cannot understand the meaning of death. But Channa explains that to the prince.

SIDDHARTHA: They'll do nothing of the sort. Channa, let me see him.

OLD MAN: (*Coming forward.*) Long live our compassionate Prince Siddhartha!

DEVA DUTTA: (*To one of his friends*) The game starts now. What a fool the King was, wasn't he, to think that he could keep the Prince shut out from the hideous truths of life. (*Laughs*)

SIDDHARTHA: (*Scrutinizing the old man*) Channa! His skin is wrinkled like the bark we saw in the forest the other day. His eyes have no light left in them. Is he the only sorrowful being in the whole kingdom?

CHANNA: I don't know what to say, Prince.

SIDDHARTHA: Poor sad being?

OLD MAN: May you be blessed, generous Prince. I can die contented now. (*He goes out slowly.*)

DEVA DUTTA: Prince, my royal Cousin! Do not be misled by all this window-dressing your father, the King, is responsible for. He knows you are tender-hearted; he did not wish that you should see the other side of life.

SIDDHARTHA: The other side of life! Has life two sides to it?

DEVA DUTTA: (*Laughs*) You have the innocence of a ten-year-old babe! Channa, tell him.

CHANNA: Life has two sides, Prince. The bright and the dark. To the bright side belong the pleasures and the jeweled sights with which you are surrounded in the palace. To the other side, the dark side, belongs old age...such as you saw- and...

DISEASED MAN: (*Suddenly appearing*) Long live the great Prince Siddhartha.

SIDDHARTHA: What is that, Channa! Yet another sorrowful creature!

CHANNA: This, too, belongs to the other side of life, the dark, the very dark side.

DEVA DUTTA; That's the way the Prince will be educated. Go ahead. Destiny! You are stronger than all men put together. The Prince is receiving true education for the first time in his life. (*Laughs and looks on the spectacle.*)

SIDDHARTHA: Look at his fingers. They have dropped off. There are no fingers to look at. And his eyes are two large red wounds. He is blind.

DEVA DUTTA: Not blinder than you have been all these years.

DISEASED MAN: (*Approaching Siddhartha*) I cannot see the Prince but I can feel him glow like a great big lamp. O may he have long life.

SIDDHARTHA: And what a voice! It seems to be coming out of a bleeding hollow, the hollow of a grave which is one large wound. Channa! As he approaches me he seems to stink. He is all stink. What's happened to him?

*(Flowers are showered from a window.)*

Not all the flowers of the world can cover up the stink which fills this poor man's body.

CHANNA: Sire, he is what is called diseased.

SIDDHARTHA: Diseased.

CHANNA: He will not live long.

SIDDHARTHA: (*Like an echo*) He will not live long... In the midst of rejoicing and merriment, this awful sight! Is this the reception a Prince gets usually? By the way, Channa, did you say something about his life? He will not live long, he said. What did you mean?

*(A corpse is taken past to the chant of the Lord's name.)*

CHANNA: You see that, Prince?

SIDDHARTHA: A queer thing to become. A man asleep on a narrow bed, a narrow little wooden bed! Seems that he is performing a sort of balancing feat.

CHANNA: That is called a corpse, Prince. He is dead and will never rise again. That's what the diseased man will soon become; that's what everybody must sooner or later become.

SIDDHARTHA: Everybody!

CHANNA: Unfortunately, yes.

SIDDHARTHA: Dead. What a terrible thing it must be to die. Dead. What is death? I must know.

DEVA DUTTA: Before that, I suggest that you try and get to know as to what life is. There's time still for you to get to know what death is! Death is the other side of life. I told you life had two sides. (*Laughs and mocks at him.*)

SIDDHARTHA: Channa, let us go back.

DEVA DUTTA: Coward. Unable to face the reality of life. Chi! (*He goes out.*)

SIDDHARTHA: I want to go back and hide somewhere from the world. Let us go back.

## BLACKOUT

Deva Dutta as usual acts as a great commentator and calls the prince a coward. The next day (IV. viii) Siddhartha discusses with Channa the retrospective sights he has seen the previous day. He wants to know if all the human beings grow old and die or have diseases. Channa replies that it is inevitable. Siddhartha is shocked to know this

harsh reality and opines that the greatest disease is the human ignorance of the purpose and destiny of human birth:

CHANNA: Prince, why let gloomy thoughts disturb you?

SIDDHARTHA: I am not gloomy. I am only trying to face the truth. He is a coward who runs away from truth. That terrible thing with wounds for yes? Do all men get like that?

CHANNA: Not exactly like that. But most men get diseased sometime or other. There are many sorts of diseases in the world, Prince.

SIDDHARTHA: The greatest, it seems to me, is ignorance. I suppose disease is the penalty of life, prince of the human flesh.. Human birth is a sad thing so long as one doesn't understand why he was born. Funny! To think that I may get diseased some day, and that I shall grow old if I live long enough, and that, in the end, I shall ride not Kanthak, my horse, but a horse of wood or –gold... as if there is much difference between the two.

CHANNA: Prince, you will never die. You were born to be immortal. (IV. viii. P.133).

By that time a mendicant comes there and blesses him and prophesies that he would conquer life and death; live in the hearts of men and that ages upon ages will ring with his name. Siddhartha is so deeply influenced by the Mendicant that he instantly decides to follow in his footsteps in order to find peace for himself and humanity. But Deva Dutta dreams of becoming the ruler of the kingdom if Siddhartha becomes a sage:

*(Enter a Mendicant, calm and wonderful to look at.)*

SIDDHARTHA: What a wonderful being! Who is he?

MENDICANT: Peace be on you, my Son! You will find a cure for human ills. You will conquer life and death. You shall not die in history. You shall live forevermore in the hearts of men. Ages upon ages will ring with your name. *(He goes out slowly.)* (IV. viii. P.133).

Quite in line with his inner inclination, Prince Siddhartha asks his father to grant him permission to leave the palace and go in search of peace, the foundation of all life:

SIDDHARTHA: So, give me leave, my King, my father! Give me leave to leave and look for peace. Peace is the foundation of all life, of all true and great living; without it, the world must needs go to pieces. I beg leave to go away, somewhere, anywhere, to look for peace,,peace.

KING: *(Fuming with anger.)* It is only a word, my Son! You are mad, stark mad if you think you are going to find it. Peace is a lie.

SIDDHARTHA: Peace is the only truth. All else is a lie. I cannot suffer any more.

KING: What suffering can you have, my Son! What suffering that makes you decide to leave us and go away. Are you thinking of going to a forest? And do you think you can find peace there? If the forest could yield peace, then tigers and panthers would have found it long ago. You are mad, raving mad.... That's what I think you are.

SIDDHARTHA: You ask me what suffering I have? Father, the suffering of the whole world weighs on me, lives in me and will not let me rest.

KING: He who made the world knows how to look after it.

SIDDHARTHA: We have made the world, Father! You and I...

KING: Conceit!

SIDDHARTHA: To begin with, it is for us to see to it that the world on the surface, is made a fit place to live in, free of distinctions, affording equal opportunity to all men alike, exploding the myth of birth, driving away the last least form of tyranny; a world where there shall be no exploitation... yet – that would only be the start. I want the world to be freed of all suffering...

KING: You are just raving like a lunatic. You are a mad man, to think of taking such a responsibility on your shoulders which are still raw and young and inexperienced; shoulders which, instead, should be carrying a lovely infant while you run about, playing at horse with him. (IV. Ix. pp. 135-6)

He says that the suffering of the whole world weighs on him and he, therefore, wants to liberate mankind from that suffering. But the king grows very angry with him and tries to convince him that peace cannot be found in a forest and that otherwise tigers and panthers could have found it. He calls the prince a lunatic and accuses him of running away from life. But the prince replies philosophically that he is running towards life. He asks his father to assure him that he would never grow old or fall ill or die. But Siddhartha is firm in his decision to renounce the world and tells his father about it very clearly:

Well, then, your request that I should stay here is also impossible. I am unable to believe life worth living, as most men seem to do. All this gaudy enjoyment: these jewels, these colourful waterfalls, peacocks, dancers, musicians, acrobats, excitement and thrill, render relationship of father and son, wife and husband, brother and brother, son and mother... poses, mere silly poses, utterly foolish conventions! Who belongs to whom, anyway? How long shall we continue to live in a fool's paradise? I had rather die in a wise man's hell than live in a fool's paradise.

(IV. Ix. p. 138)

On the contrary the king asks him to be wise and enjoy the worldly pleasures and warns him that he cannot forsake the world especially when his wife Yashodara is expecting a baby.

Soon after, a baby is born to Prince Siddhartha. The king feels ecstatic about having a grandson and a legal heir to the Sakya kingdom. He wants to celebrate it by feeding a hundred thousand beggars and gifting away cloths to all of them. But Siddhartha, true to his philosophical self, considers the baby as one more link in the chain of suffering.

Siddhartha's spiritual inclination has grown so strong in him that no amount of worldly pleasures and security provided by wine, women, wife, child and parents can satisfy him. He feels restless. When he rests for a while after listening to the songs of the peasants he experiences dream vision in which the Mendicant (who had met him earlier) appears and reminds him that he will grow immortal and become master of the self and lord of peace and compassion. After the dream vision he returns to the worldly life which, by contrast, looks like a wild forest inhabited by the panthers of greed, tigers of hate and bisons of treachery. Although Channa reminds him of the attractions of worldly life like the three palaces built for him and the birth of a baby to him, he does not feel snared by them. He hears the neighing of his horse, Kanthak and experiences uncontrollable urge to move towards the transcendental world.

The playwright has brought in a bit of supernatural element in the play to facilitate the escape of the prince from the bondage of worldliness. He decides to leave the palace at night when all the inmates of the palace are sleeping. The situation is quite symbolic. Prince Siddhartha wakes up when the whole world is sleeping. The uncanny voices decide to put a magic spell on the palace and a death-like sleep on the inmates so that the prince may leave the palace without any noise; his horse without neighing and the hinges of doors without creaking. They wish to put magic powders on the whole atmosphere of the palace. Consequently the first sentry and the second one feel a strange blackish fog around them. They feel sick and drowsy and cannot understand why they are feeling like that. Prince Siddhartha soliloquizes about how the dancers look so ugly, loathsome and hideous in their sleep:

Do, this is the real nature of women as they are made by the world and society. How the dancers sleep in the hall. How they look when they relax. Their true selves. Sleep, cancels will. The limbs loosen; the hair gets disheveled, the mouth trickles with spittle. That's what I have just seen and come. Loathsome, impure... yet man, deceived by costume and ornament, succumbs to woman's lure. Woman. How hideous is the transformation of the body in sleep. All those women asleep in the hall resembled the corpse I saw the other day. How are they better, anyway? (V.iv.p.151)

They look almost like the corpses he saw the other day. His transcendental eye has seen the deeper ugliness behind the apparent beauty of the worldliness. But he considers Yashodara an angel and a spirit. He, therefore, kisses her feet and the infant's cheek and walks towards the door. One may imagine what an extraordinary ascetic courage he must have had in him to renounce the world. He gently wakes up Channa and asks him to fetch his horse, Kanthak. Though Channa is surprised by the request, he cannot disobey his master. Both of them ride the horse away from the city and into the forest; away from darkness into light. Prince Siddhartha wants to conquer not man but the enemy of man i.e. wrong desire. He wishes peace for everybody.

By way of experimentation with the dramatic technique, the playwright brings in a screen show here. On the screen Siddhartha describes time as only a myth. He thanks Channa and the horse, Kanthak profusely for serving him from his birth till now. He

offers the jewel and the crown to Channa and asks him to return them to his father, King Suddhodana and convey the message that he would not return home until he has solved the riddle of the inequality existing in his kingdom. Channa starts weeping, but Siddhartha asks him not to weep as the moment marks the victory of life over death:

SIDDHARTHA: Time is only a myth. How swiftly we have covered distance. Here we are: far, far away from the city of my birth, from the city of your birth, from the city of the birth of our horse, Kanthak. You have done me great kindness, both of you ... you, Channa and you, Kanthak, two of the noblest of human friends I have had all my life. This spot makes me feel a true warrior, and for the first time (*he unlocks his ornaments and hands them over to Channa.*) Here, Channa! Take this jewel (*removing the crown from his head*) and this crown, -- take them to my father, the earthly King, and with them give him a message, from me. With the jewel and the crown placed at his feet you must make repeated obeisance to him and give him this message:

I have entered the penance grove to put an end to birth and death. Not from lack of affection, nor from anger have I left the palace and the family and the kingdom.

You should not grieve for me, since I have left them all behind *with* a purpose and *for* a purpose. Tell him, Channa that I asked you to give him this message:

I shall not return until I have solved the riddle of the inequality which exists in this kingdom – until I find the secret which brings about harmony between man and man, thereby making all men equal.

*(Channa weeps and does not say a word. Quietly he bears the jewel and the crown. Makes obeisance before the prince. Kanthak neighs while Siddhartha strokes its mane gently.)*

SIDDHARTHA: You must not weep. This is hardly an occasion for weeping. It is the moment which marks the victory of life over death. Farewell....

*(The stage grows dim. Siddhartha goes out one way and Channa, leading Kanthak, the other.)*

(V.vii.pp.156-7)

The chorus comments upon the departure of Siddhartha.

When the news of the prince missing from the palace reaches the ears of the royal people and officers there is a great hullabaloo in the city and the palace. The citizens attribute it to the madness of the prince and the so-called treachery of Channa. A huge award of 10,000 *suvarnas* is announced to be given to anyone who traces out the prince and brings him back. The sentries curse Channa for his so-called treachery and call him a lunatic.

Channa prostrates at the feet of Yashodara and tells her the disconcerting news that Siddhartha is no more a prince now, but a mendicant. King Suddhodana becomes deeply disturbed and grows fatalistic and realizes the veracity of Sage Asita Muni's prophesy. Channa returns the jewel and the crown to the king and conveys the message sent by Siddhartha. Within a short while the horse, Kanthak also falls dead. Yashodara considers the horse to be luckier than herself. Obviously the prince's parents, wife and son are all deeply immersed in deep sorrow. The conflict between worldliness and transcendentalism has reached its climax at this juncture of time.

Now the second phase of Siddhartha's life begins. His life has transited from the worldly to the spiritual or ascetic. In this phase he has to realize his spiritual potentiality to the fullest extent. Though alone in the forest he begins to communicate with Nature and admires its beauty. He decides not to rest until he has found a cure for the sorrow and wretchedness of life. He thinks that the world is mad out of our thoughts and attitudes and hence we make the world. In other words, the world is not an objective but a subjective one, i.e., a mental construct. He sits on a rock in contemplation. The voices of Nature speak to him and tell him that he would find peace.

Then an Ascetic happens to meet him and advises him to blow out the fire of illusion and to emaciate the body through penance so that the soul may begin to grow like a lamp for the first time. Since Siddhartha is still in the experimental stage of evolving his own method of spiritual realization he listens to many contradictory suggestions offered by different sources. Contrary to the Ascetic's suggestion the voices of Nature ask him to give up the wrong way and follow the middle path. (Incidentally it may be remembered here that the use of supernatural characters like the Voices of Nature easily brings to our mind the similar use of characters like 'the Spirits of Trees, of Pachyderms etc in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*.)

Now that Siddhartha has chastised his body due to his deep meditation about life, he has grown emaciated and almost reduced to a bag of bones, but far from stinking, he is radiating the fragrance of flowers. This is quite in line with occult science of India. Obviously he has achieved the spiritual height and expertise. Here the playwright brings in the episode of Sujata, the young milkmaid. Siddhartha blesses her and accepts the milk offered by her, by considering her as a mother and himself as her child – an example of his ethical nobility and sublimity. But Sujata feels rather disappointed by his nullification of her romantic expectation of love from him. Her friends tease her about it. Nonetheless Sujata requests him to follow the middle path. Though the scene is not convincing on the realistic level, it is acceptable on a philosophical level.

The playwright brings the episode of five disciples who laugh at themselves for agreeing to serve their master who has renounced his wife only to fall in love with a milkmaid of the forest. They even consider him as a false ascetic and wish to leave him. These episodes are brought in only to show how the worldly people misunderstand Siddhartha in their own limited way.

Siddhartha is seated under a Bo Tree on a Full Moon Day. The playwright brings in a supernatural scene of mythical Demon of Love, i.e. Mara. This scene easily corresponds to those of *Morality Plays* and *Miracle Plays* of medieval England and the Hindu *Puranic* lore. The names of the children of this Demon of Love happen to be clearly allegorical. This demon has three daughters, namely Discontent, Thirst and Desire and three sons, namely Wantonness, Caprice and Gaiety. He and his six children boast of their efficiency in ensnaring the world and now wish to captivate Siddhartha.

Demon Mara laughs at Siddhartha for his fear of death, old age and disease and asks him to go back to the worldly life. He threatens to strike the prince with a dart of love. Here the conflict between sensuous attraction and spiritual inclination attains its climax on a philosophical and symbolic level. Now that Siddhartha has grown or ripened into Gautam, he sits silent and blooms into a smile of blended pity and compassion. He is not disturbed by the threat of the Demon of Love.

Mara orders his daughters to hurl the arrows of love at Siddhartha. They do it so obediently, but alas, the arrows return to them in the form of red-fanged serpents and bite them to death. Then the sons of Mara release their secret weapons in order to destroy the prince. In-between, the playwright introduces a Ballet of Dark Forces – like Kathakali dance – carrying their destructive weapons. Amidst the terrible sounds they mock at the prince and call him a contemptible fool and an unforgivable criminal. Having lost his daughters now, Mara angrily orders his sons to attack the prince, but ironically enough, they are struck dumb.

In this conflict between sensuousness and spirituality Siddhartha emerges victorious. He has become the Buddha, the enlightened one. Sensuousness is defeated by spirituality and the conflict is resolved. He is happy to have conquered his self and to see that Truth has triumphed; that the kingdom of heaven is on the earth and that man is the only god. Then the Angel of Earth appears suddenly and testifies to Buddha's triumph and asks him to go back to the world and preach the new doctrine and declares that Siddhartha has become the Buddha, the Enlightened One, Gautam Buddha.

Now the Buddha has achieved a new identity as a full-fledged ascetic now. Therefore his achievement of spiritual and even occult powers has to be tested. Hence the playwright brings in the episode of the notorious murderer, Angulimala, who wears a garland of fingers of those he has killed. When the Buddha is about to go in the lonely path of the forest some villagers and even herdsmen shout and alert him not to go there lest he should be a victim of the notorious robber. But the Buddha does not pay heed to these words of precaution.

Angulimala comes in boasting of his destructive capacity and wonders at the clean shaven fellow daring to come alone towards him and thinks that he must be tired of his mortal life:

*(Enter Angulimala, a fearful-looking fellow wearing a garland of fingers.)*

ANGULIMALA: This is some impudence! Hardly in all these years have I ever seen anybody daring to walk this road alone, or even in groups of twenty and forty at a time! This clean-shaven fellow dares to come alone. Possibly he does so deliberately, being tired of the world and not caring to live any more. Why, he puts on an air as though he had conquered the last robber on earth. He hasn't conquered me as yet! Suppose now I were to take his life; what's the good, anyway! Except, of course, that it would only add another ten fingers including two thumbs, to my garland which is already overloaded.

*(Gautam walks slowly, with deliberate steps, since he is in no haste, having no particular place to reach and no consciousness of time. Angulimala runs after him but finds that the moment he is near him, something throws him back by a few steps; something, which he cannot explain, tends to make him walk backwards.)*

What's this! Is he a magician? Looks like it. The moment I approach him I am sort of thrown back without knowing how; my limbs grow weak and I am forced to walk backwards. I can never reach him at this rate. I am unable to catch up with him, though he walks a snail's pace. I have in my time overtaken running antelopes – even shot an arrow and rushed to the point where it was about to drop, and caught it in my hands before it could drop! Lord, what a fantastic experience! Whoever dreamed even in a dream that a fellow of this kind could ever exist in the world? Hey, you, there, Monk! Stand still. Stand still.

BUDDHA: *(Stands still.)* I stand still, Angulimala. Do you also stand still?

ANGULIMALA: You seem the last word on truth and yet when you say: I stand still, you seem to be uttering the biggest lie that was ever invented. Hey, Monk! I don't understand you. Even as you walk you say: I stand still. And to me you say I stand not still. *(Counts this proposition on the tips of his fingers.)* How stand you still and I stand not still?

BUDDHA: I stand steadfast forevermore, Angulimala. For, I am merciful to all beings. Therefore, I stand still, and you stand not still.

*(Angulimala rushes round and round the stage like one demented, twirls his sword and flings it out of sight. He tears the garland of fingers and flings it on the ground.)*

VOICE ON THE MIKE: Darkness cannot resist light; cruelty cannot resist compassion. The lord Gautam Buddha is a fire which cleanses all evil.

ANGULIMALA: *(Sobbing wildly)* O Compassionate Lord! Forgive me my crimes.

GAUTAM: *(Raising him from the dust)* You are already one of my disciples. Arise. Sin repented changes to power. The tears of one who has erred become the pearls on the crown of truth.

*(A crowd of herdsmen, cowboys etc., appears on the stage cheering wildly.)*

A HERDSMAN: The Monk has conquered Angulimala.

BUDDHA: Angulimala has conquered himself. Nobody conquers anybody. The only conquest is the conquest of oneself over one's self.

*(Wild cheering)*

BLACKOUT

(VII. ii. Pp.189-91)

As Buddha walks slowly, Angulimala tries to catch up with him, but feels that some invisible power seems to throw him backwards. He begins to marvel at the miraculous powers of the monk. Yet he asks the monk to stand still. But the monk replies that he stands still though he has been walking. Hence Angulimala accuses him of uttering the biggest lie, because he cannot understand the philosophical and paradoxical statement made by Buddha. Buddha replies that he stands still because he is merciful to all beings and that the latter (Angulimala) does not stand still thereby implying that he is not merciful to anyone.

Angulimala seems to be deeply impressed by the Buddha's paradoxical statements and his invisible spiritual radiation of magnetic occult power. He grows as if demented, flings away his sword and the garland of fingers. He sobs wildly, apologizes for his crimes and seeks forgiveness of the Compassionate Lord. The Buddha accepts him as one of his true disciples as sin repented changes to power. The herdsman exclaims that the monk has conquered Angulimala, but the Buddha corrects him by saying that Angulimala has conquered his own self. One may easily see a similarity between the Buddha's and Jesus Christ's miraculous powers.) This is one of the powerful scenes in the play.

The playwright brings in four scenes of heretics to highlight the greatness of the Buddha. The heretics think that they have lost their gain and honour after the arrival of Gautam on the scene. Hence they appoint a beautiful young lady, Sundari (whose name itself suggests 'a beautiful lady') to destroy the reputation of the Buddha and then to cleverly get her murdered so that Buddha may be subjected to double incrimination of seduction and murder. They complain to King Jetavana against the Buddha and charge him with the murder of Sundari. But King Jetavana can see through their cunning and orders them to be paraded in the city and hanged on a tree after the monk's is proved. Again the Buddha's moral and spiritual height is proved beyond any doubt. The scenes and details are too many for a play like this. In fact, they are more suited to cinematographic presentation than for the stage.

Then the playwright introduces the famous historical episode to show Buddha's indirect teaching about the inevitability of death. For example, a woman comes with her dead child to the Buddha, cries and requests him to revive it. The Buddha replies that he would revive the child only if she brings a mustard seed from a house where nobody has died. The Commentary states that the woman goes from house to house and enquires, but is finally unable to get the mustard seed as there is no house without deaths in it. So she returns to the Buddha, confesses to her ignorance and wants to bury her child. She has realized the ephemerality of life as well as its sorrowfulness. Now she volunteers to join his Order of Nuns. The playwright has shown the Buddha's capacity to convert people by the charismatic power of his spiritual personality.

In the last Act, the playwright shows the last visit of the Buddha to his own city of Kapilavastu. He has returned to the city with his banner of peace and the lord of the world. The meeting between the father and the son reveals two opposite poles of worldliness and spirituality or asceticism. King Suddhodana recognizes the monk to be his own son. But the Buddha refuses to call him a father, as he now belongs to the whole world. The king wonders at the irony of a prince becoming a beggar and therefore does not allow him to beg in his kingdom. But the Buddha replies philosophically and paradoxically that an earthly king is also a beggar and that the real palace of man is his six-foot pyre or grave; and that he wants to beg for alms in line with the tradition of monks:

KING: I shan't let him beg. A mendicant! A beggar! No, not in my kingdom shall he beg.

GAUTAM: Who are you? A king? No, no. You are but a mere beggar in a kingdom of shadows seeking, seeking, seeking, without finding. That is why you are so miserable. With all your worldly wealth and comfort you are a miserable creature who spends sleepless nights and troubled days.

KING: He speaks with divine confidence. And yet, it hurts me to think that he has come in the garb of a beggar to the very kingdom of which he should be the rightful emperor. O Son, Son!

GAUTAM: Mark me. I have gone beyond relationships.

KING: Why do you mortify me thus? I am overwhelmed with shame to see you in this state. Know you not that it would be a disgrace for me if, in this very city of your royal birth, you should go from house to house begging and receiving alms? Come, we shall house you in our palace and you shall not need to beg.

GAUTAM: Palace? Poor King! The only true palace of men is the six-foot pyre or earth-hole. Why do you not see me as I am?

KING: Why do you put me to shame?

GAUTAM: O earthly king! I am not putting you to shame. I am merely keeping up the tradition of my lineage. (VIII.i.Pp.213-4)

These dialogues have the classic seriousness about them and hence are very interesting.

The reader of the play is very curious to know how the Buddha's wife and son react to him. When Rahul asks his mother to go and meet the monk, Yashodara refuses

to do so and expects her husband to come and meet her. On the contrary she asks Rahul to go and meet his father, as it is his duty. Rahul meets the Buddha, but does not address him as his father, but considers him a Beautiful Master. He tells the latter that his mother is waiting to salute him. But the Buddha corrects it as 'Our Mother'. The sudden acceptance of the father as a beautiful master by Rahul is rather simple and hence unconvincing.

Yashodara feels happy to see that the Buddha is coming towards her. She feels she has conquered him. But as he comes closer, she feels conquered and begins to wonder at his greatness. Her pride, insolence and anger have vanished and filled her with adoration for the Enlightened One. She invites him to her chamber so that she and Rahul may worship him:

YASHODARA: O he comes this way. I have conquered. I have conquered at last. I have conquered him, he after whom the whole kingdom has been running since his return, is now coming towards one.

*(As he approaches her)*

But what am I saying?

As he comes closer I feel I am being conquered. O what a wonderful monk! (*He has come closer to her now.*) Forgive me for my pride, my insolence, my anger. They have vanished at your approach leaving but a great big adoration in the heart. Enlightened One! Will you deign to enter our chamber but once? I would, along with my son Rahul, adore you, making you sit on a seat of flowers, offering incense to you and chants.

GAUTAM: I shall enter the chamber.

BLACKOUT  
(VIII.iii.p.217).

The sudden transformation of Yashodara into a devotee of the Buddha appears rather sudden and arbitrary and sounds unconvincing without any conflict between the two.

Mallika and other maidservants are excited at the arrival of their Master into the palace. They tell the Master that Channa has grown prematurely old and been leading the life of a hermit. When the Buddha enters the chamber along with Yashodara and Rahul the parrot in the cage cries, 'I am hungry, I am hungry'. The Buddha tells the parrot that it shall no longer be hungry and releases it instantly from the cage. The parrot, as already pointed out earlier, symbolizes the Buddha's own or even humanity's soul imprisoned into worldliness. His release of the parrot easily symbolizes the liberation of the human soul from the bondage of worldliness and its allied attractions, temptations and sensuous pleasures. According to Hindu philosophy, especially Vedanta, a parrot in the cage symbolizes the human soul imprisoned in the body. The playwright has borrowed this

symbol and successfully incorporated it into the play and adapted it to the requirements of the play.

By that time Channa rushes in and meets the Buddha, who blesses him wholeheartedly. The personality of the Buddha seems to have developed a deep spiritual magnetism and charisma. That is why, all those, who meet him, are affected by him unconsciously or avoid his company due to a sense of inferiority and embarrassment. When the Buddha asks Yashodara for alms, she replies that she has nothing to give as alms except her self and therefore requests him to accept her as his disciple: "I have naught to give as alms save my self... Pray, accept me as one of your disciples" (VIII.iv.P.219).

The king and the queen adore the Buddha. The women of the palace want to anoint him, but he refuses to be anointed and wants to walk the roadways preaching his message. By that time the villainous Deva Dutta rushes in with his usual comments that the life of a monk is the last refuge of a scoundrel. But the moment he sees the Buddha he suddenly becomes nervous and quits the place along with his followers: "I must not remain here any longer. There's something in his voice which makes me afraid. Come, my Followers! Let us quit" (VIII.iv.p.221). Thus the continuous conflict between worldliness and spirituality is finally resolved in the triumph of spirituality over the malady of worldliness. Prince Siddhartha has been transformed into an ascetic and an enlightened one called the Buddha. He asks his Bhikkus to preach the message of peace to the entire world:

Go ye, Bhikkus! Into the world and preach the message of the Buddha: the message of peace. Go ye into a world of broken men, exploited men, wounded men... and preach my message. Say to the world: Peace! And peace shall only come when it has attained enlightenment after conquering wrong desire, greed, hatred and lust; and then no man shall exploit another and equality shall reign in the world. Equality and Understanding and Peace. Peace! Peace! Peace!

(VIII.iv.p.221)

Virtually the story of the Buddha ends here. But the playwright wants to show the relevance of the past to the present and of the message of the Buddha to the modern world ridden with wars of religions, ideologies and fundamentalism. That is why he brings in an epilogue, which shows a modern Bhikku to a European about the relevance of peace to the modern world and how Gandhi also preached it and Nehru incorporated it in the banner of *Panchashila*:

*EPILOGUE: (The booming of cannon is heard in the distance. The scene of war is once more enacted, as at the start, on the 16 mm screen. The forestage is lit and we find the Bhikku and the European Traveller as we left them at the start of the play.)*

**BHIKKU:** And so, you have seen how the great Lord Gautam Buddha fought over the evil forces of the world and conquered them, not for his own sake, but for the sake

of humanity. His message which today is needed more than ever, when wars are being fought and enmities rampant everywhere; his message of peace is needed. But this message has been preached in our country throughout its history. From Buddha's time the message has been coming down right up to our own when Mahatma Gandhi preached it and even died for it. And today, Jawaharlal Nehru bears in his hand the banner of Panchashila. The world is looking up to him to show the way towards the solution of mutual hatred, suspicion and dissolution. Peace. Peace. Everybody looks back across two thousand five hundred years and recalls the Golden Lord.

(Epilogue. p.222).

In this play Harindranath Chattopadhyaya has treated the remote history of India by dramatizing it for the benefit of the modern man. By borrowing the external facts of Indian history, he has fleshed them out with authenticity and abundance of immediate experience. Hence he has given us an animated picture of history. He has selected a chunk of Indian history known for its transition from Hinduism to Buddhism – a fact of enormous importance for the country. While transforming the historical facts into art, especially drama, he has made interesting experiments with the dramatic technique. For example, the use of a Prologue and a Picture at the beginning of the play easily reminds us of a dumb show at the beginning of an Elizabethan tragedy. The use of pictures and Commentaries reminds us of the cinematographic technique. Similarly the employment of Chorus reminds us of the Greek tragedy. Likewise the employment of characters like the Jester reminds us of Sanskrit plays. Thus *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* contains an eclectic mixture of techniques of an Elizabethan Drama, the Greek Drama, the Sanskrit Drama and the modern cinematography. The playwright has to be congratulated for this bold experimentation with the dramatic technique in his attempt at the transformation of history into art.

But the play has its negative aspects also. For example, the assemblage of such diverse techniques in the play comes as a positive hindrance to a facile movement of dramatic action and adds to the loss of precision and unity and concentration. The play is better suited to a film than to a histrionic presentation. This must be the reason why there is no record of its stage performance or its history. Many of the repetitive scenes may be eliminated for creating a unity of impression on the stage according to the discretionary talents of an able drama director. In spite of all these limitations, the play happens to be a significant contribution to the poorest field of Indian English Historical Drama.

### Notes

- Siddhartha Gautama Buddha was a spiritual teacher from the Indian subcontinent on whose teaching Buddhism was founded. The word *Buddha* means 'an enlightened one'. The time of Gautama's birth and death are uncertain: most early 20<sup>th</sup> century historians dated his life-time as c. 563 BCE to 483 BCE, but more recent opinion dates his death to between 486 and 483 BCE.

The primary sources for the life of Siddhartha Gautama are in a variety of different and sometimes conflicting traditional biographies like the *Buddhacarita*, *Lalitavistara Sutra*, *Mahavastu*, and *the Nidanakatha*. Of these, the *Buddhacarita* is the earliest full biography, an epic poems written by the poet, Asvaghosa and dating around the beginning of the second century A.D.

The canonical sources, the Jataka tales, *Mahapadana Sutta* (DN 14) and the *Achayabhuta Sutta* (MN 123) include selective accounts that may be older, but are not full biographies. The Jataka tales retell the previous lives of Gautama as a bodhisattva, and the first collection of these can be dated among the earliest Buddhist texts.

Traditional biographies of Gautama generally include numerous miracles, omens and supernatural events. The character of the Buddha in these traditional biographies is often that of a fully transcendent (*lokottara*) and perfected being who is unencumbered by the mundane world.

The ancient Indians were generally not concerned with chronologies, being more focused on philosophy. Buddhist texts reflect this tendency. Karen Armstrong writes that although there is very little information that can be considered historically sound, we can be reasonably confident that Siddhartha Gautama did exist as a historical figure.

According to historical sources, Siddhartha was born in a royal Hindu family. His father was King Suddhodana of the Sakya clan and his mother was Queen Maha Maya (Mayadevi). He was born in Lumbini of the present Nepal. He was brought up by his mother's younger sister, Maha Pajapati. By tradition he is said to have been destined by birth to the life of a prince and had three palaces (for seasonal occupation) built for him. When he reached the age of 16 he married a cousin of the same age named Yasodhara, who in course of time gave birth of a son named Rahula. Siddhartha spent 29 years as a prince in Kapilavastu. At the age of 29 he left his palace to see the world and was depressed by the sight of an old man, a sick man and a dead man and was deeply disillusioned by the ephemerality of the world. Consequently he left his palace, wife and child and became a monk. He meditated deeply about life and understood the secret of happiness, which he shared with his disciples and wanted to teach the same to the entire humanity. He, therefore, built a Sangha of Buddhist Bhikkus and inspired them to disseminate the tenets of his newly acquired philosophy known as Buddhism.

Some of the fundamentals of his teaching are as follows:

**The Four Noble Truths:** that suffering is an ingrained part of existence; that the origin of suffering is craving for sensuality, acquisition of identity, and annihilation; that suffering can be ended; and that following the Noble Eightfold Path is the means to accomplish this.

**The Noble Eightfold Path:** right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

**Dependent Origination:** the mind creates suffering as a natural product of a complex process.

**Rejection of the infallibility of accepted scripture:** Teachings should not be accepted unless they are borne out by our experience and are praised by the wise.

**Anicca (Anitya):** That all things that come to be have an end.

**Dukkha:** That nothing which comes to be is ultimately satisfying.

**Anatta (Anatman):** That nothing in the realm of experience can really be said to be 'I' or 'mine'.

**Nibbana (Nirvana):** It is possible for sentient beings to realize a dimension of awareness which is totally unconstructed and peaceful, and end the suffering due to the mind's interaction with the conditioned world.

#### **Works Cited:**

1. Chattopadhyaya, Harindranath, *Siddhartha: The Man of Peace*, Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 2002. (All the page references are to this edition.)