

Self-Awakening and Spiritual Salvation: Buddhist Thought in *the Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*

*Rajan Kumar B.C.

Email : rajanbc20231@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examines how Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* highlights 'inner transformation' as a source of happiness which is obtained through the principle of detachment that falls under the rubrics of Buddhism. The core concepts like self-awakening and spiritual salvation, inner mindfulness, and self-discipline insights of Buddhist teachings which are integrated in the life of Julian Mantle who undergoes a massive transformation from material-oriented man to spiritual one. His metamorphosis from material success toward a life of simple calm life mirroring Buddhist thoughts shows how *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* integrates Buddhist inner thinking to life a blessed life detached from greed and bodily pleasure. The central issue of this research seeks to understand the real source of happiness and find the actual difference between material success and spiritual dimension of life leading to self-awakening. The implication behind figuring out spiritual happiness is foreground the idea that source of happiness does not lie in the unstable material objects but rather in transcending them.

Key words: Awakening, Buddhism, inner calling, mindfulness, spirituality

Introduction

Spiritual awakening is related to inner calling that is to follow what the heart says without practicing reasoning skills that valorizes material success as seen in *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* by the Canadian writer Robin Sharma. Despite Julian Mantle's remarkable success and material wealth, he finally gives up his material greedy life and luxurious life to live a life of a sage. In this regards, questioning his life with material success paves the ways for Buddhist philosophy. His withdrawal from material life and prosperity indicates his transformation towards self-awakening. To analyze this transformation, the study employs the spiritual and Bhuddist trends as observed by Gethin and Dalai Lama as its theoretical framework.

The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari is a self-motivational narrative that traces the life of Julian Mantle, a highly accomplished lawyer. His life takes a dramatic turn when he suffers a sudden heart attack, which becomes the pivotal moment of the story. This painful experience compels him to reassess his values and way of living. Then, he sells his expensive possessions, including his Ferrari, and embarks on a journey to India in pursuit of inner peace and a more meaningful existence. In this context, the paper seeks to answer why and how Julian Mantle from mundane world reaches to the level of spiritual happiness and mindfulness.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

After the publication of the book *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*, it has received critical observations by scholars. For example, Binoj Mathew (2020) briefly talks about transformation in the life of lawyer named Julian Mantle: "The book is a fable about Julian Mantle who is a powerful and successful lawyer and lives a luxurious life. He had a crazy schedule and a set of priorities that were centered around money, power and prestige and he is typical representative of our society but a radical paradigm shift occurs in his life, after he gets a severe heart attack" (p. 10). Julian Mantle is a powerful and successful lawyer and lives a luxurious life but leaves it due to his awareness of the limitations of material life.

Mathew further writes, “Self-awareness leads an individual to self-acceptance. One is able accept oneself with all its strength and weakness and this will help one for positive imagination” (p. 12). Self-awareness leads an individual to self-acceptance.

Similarly, Kamal Sharma (2021) talks about how spirituality is an individual experience. He writes, “After going to the Sivana, where he learnt how one can live a happy life. He is a changed man now. Talking about the inner journey” (p. 62), which involves an inner discipline, a gradual process of rooting out destructive mental states and replacing them with positive, constructive states of mind, such as kindness, tolerance and forgiveness: “Julian learns to live happily in the land of Sivana. This is the place where found his true self. Spirituality for Julian is something related to joyous life guided by spiritual journey within” (p. 63). Buddhism is a complex religious and philosophical tradition that gives emphasis to non-violence, peace, and calm state of mind. It advocates for the mindfulness and tranquility of mind to gain a source of happiness. In this regards, Rupert Gethin in his book entitled *The Foundations of Buddhism* provides detailed framework and conceptual clarity for the evolution and development of Buddhism. While this paper does not use these concepts in substantial level, the ideas of renouncement, experience of happiness, diseases of suffering along with cures, mediation and wisdom are used linking them with the textual lines of the novel under scrutiny. The methods employed in the research are textual analysis which is done bringing relevant quotes from primary text and secondary texts.

Gethin (1998) focuses on the tradition of abandoning social role along with family responsibility which he calls renouncer tradition: “The tradition is sometimes called the 'renouncer (*samnyasin*) tradition'. What we are concerned with here is the phenomenon of individuals' renouncing their normal role in society as a member of an extended 'household' in order to devote themselves to some form of religious or spiritual life” (p. 10). The path leading towards some form of religious and spiritual life is obtained through recognizing the ‘self’ to identify it in mindfulness and spiritual calmness. He further mentions: “The 'renouncer' abandons conventional means of livelihood, such as farming or trade, and adopts instead the religious life as a means of livelihood” (p. 10). The farming or trade along with conventional means of livelihood brings obstacles to the path of happiness.

The trajectory of pain or anguish is often called *dukkha* is a series of unsatisfactoriness or unease causes problem in happy world: “Rich in meaning and nuance, the word *dukkha* is one of the basic terms of Buddhist and other Indian religious discourse. Literally 'pain' or 'anguish', in its religious and philosophical contexts *dukkha* is, however, suggestive of an underlying sense of 'unsatisfactoriness' or 'unease' that must ultimately mar even our experience of happiness” (Gethin, 1998, p.61). The suffering is a result of a series of desires that can never be achieved in totality as the world itself is constantly changing. Thus Gethin considers pain three terms: “Thus *dukkha* can be analysed in Buddhist thought by way of three kinds: suffering as pain, as change, and as conditions” (p. 61). The suffering then is pain inflicted upon body and mind due to the changes in desire and conditions.

The disease of suffering is so deep that it requires hard mental labor to get rid from it. Buddha's teachings represent medicine for the suffering: “The Buddha's teaching thus represents the medicine for the disease of suffering. Or, according to the metaphor of the fourth truth, it is the 'path' (*marga/magga*) or 'way' (*pratipad/patipada*) that one follows in order to reach the destination that is the cessation of suffering. Or, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is a system of training in conduct, meditation, and wisdom” (Gethin, 1998, p. 64). Through meditation, wisdom is achieved as a system of training in conduct. The right conduct and wisdom-based activities lead one towards spiritual serenity. Thus, the mediation is the path for spiritual growth: “We come now to the subject of meditation and its role in the Buddhist spiritual path.

Curiously it is difficult to find a precise equivalent of the term 'meditation' in Buddhist technical terminology" (Gethin, 1998, p. 174). For Buddhist spiritual path, 'meditation' is a way to get salvation. The spiritual calmness comes after meditating in peaceful environment. The cultivation of deep state of mind gears wisdom leading to happiness: "Buddhist tradition comes to consider meditation by way of two different but complementary aspects, namely calm (samatha/ samatha) and insight (vipasyana/ vipassana), which are geared to the cultivation of deep states of concentration (samadhi) and wisdom (prajna /panna) respectively" (Gethin, 1998, p. 174/175). Buddhist culture of calmness comes to consider meditation as a way for spiritual growth.

The obstacles for spiritual calmness are sensual desire, ill-will, tiredness and sleepiness, excitement and depression, and doubt which are to be removed from mind: "The way of Buddhist meditation is, then, to look deep into ourselves to see the very nature of our minds. The principal immediate mental defilements that constitute the obstacles to the path are known as the five 'hindrances' (nivarana): sensual desire, ill-will, tiredness and sleepiness, excitement and depression, and doubt" (Gethin, 1998, p. 175). The principal mental defilements constitute the obstacles to the path of calmness.

For spiritual calmness, stilling of mind is necessary: "Stilling the mind the techniques of calm meditation involve counteracting the tendency of the mind to restlessly seek out new and different objects of the senses" (Gethin, 1998, p.176). Stilling of the mind is a calmness of mind that must transcend the senses and desires. Carter (1977) focuses on self-consciousness that orients one towards "the community of men and women who discovered through the life of Buddha" (265). Suffering comes from being in existence which is itself is problematic: "For Buddhist thought suffering is simply a fact of existence, and in its general approach to the problem, Buddhist thought suggests that it is beings themselves who must take ultimate responsibility for their suffering" (Gethin, 1998, p. 69). The existence of human is the ultimate responsibility for their suffering.

The Miraculous Transformation of Julian Mantle

The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari is about a lawyer named Julian Mantle who suffered heart-attack before he transformed into a spiritual leader: "Julian Mantle suffered a severe heart attack in court yesterday while he was arguing the Air Atlantic case" (p. 8). He was actively participating in court to make his client win. This is a part of greed or mundane avarice. His dissatisfaction seen in his attempt to actively participate is a source of unhappiness. His inability to be satisfied with what he had, was a root cause of unhappiness as the Dalai Lama asserts that the art of happiness lies not in what one desires but in "to want and appreciate what we have" (p. 29). Appreciating what one has is a surest way to achieve happiness. In this regards, Rupert Gethin while talking about Buddhism observes, "Buddhism . . . constitute a path leading to the cessation of suffering" (p. 65). The cessation of pain is obtained when people begin to satisfy with what he or she has.

The narrator of the novel is Julian Mantle's friend who was shocked to see falling of Julian who always seemed busy and happy. He writes, "I simply stood there, paralyzed by the shock of what I had just witnessed. The great Julian Mantle had been reduced to a victim and was now squirming on the ground like a helpless infant, shaking and shivering and sweating like a maniac" (p. 1). He was paralyzed to see unconsciously lying of Julian who was a professional renowned lawyer. Julian Mantle was reduced to a victim and behaving like a helpless infant. This was a heart-attack: "Julian Mantle suffered a severe heart attack in court yesterday while he was arguing the Air Atlantic case" (p. 8). His falling off into the ground of

court indicated his physical unfit amidst his physical luxurious life. At that moment any kind of friendship based on “wealth, power, and position” (Lama 99) does not work rather it needs “a sharing and connectedness” (Lama 99) which Julian finds in the intimacy with the sages in Sivana.

His attachment to bodily pleasure and material gain are greedy nature. The greed and desire are sources of unhappiness: “The suggestion is that deep in the minds of beings there is a greed or desire that manifests as an unquenchable thirst which is the principal condition for the arising of suffering” (Gethin, 1998, p. 70). The unquenchable thirst which is the principal condition for the suffering is to be avoided. It is difficult to find happiness in the constantly moving world hinting instability: “Yet in a world where everything is always changing, in a world of shifting and unstable conditions, craving of whatever kind will never be able to hold on to the things it craves. This is the origin of suffering” (Gethin, 1998, p. 70). In the world, everything is always changing, and finding stability is difficult: “Thus we can state the three fundamental defilements of the mind according to Buddhist thought: greed (raga, lobha), aversion (des/dosa), and delusion (moha, aidya/aijja)” (p. 74).

The narrator contemplates on the success story of Julian Mantle who succeeded as a lawyer earning his amount of money, bungalow and car. However, this success proves to be worthless as he encounters a deadly event of heart-attack. The narrator narrates his success story as: “As expected, Julian became enormously successful. He achieved everything most people could ever want: a stellar professional reputation with an income in seven figures, a spectacular mansion in a neighborhood favored by celebrities, a private jet, a summer home on a tropical island and his prized possession — a shiny red Ferrari parked in the center of his driveway” (p. 4). He owned a stellar professional reputation with a good income, a mansion, a private jet, and a summer home along with shiny red Ferrari. However, this material gain did not improve his health issues. According to Buddhism, the sources of suffering lies in material gain like owning a private jet, Ferrari, a summer home among many other.

Realizing the futility of life in relation to material gain, Julian began to transform into the path of spiritual growth following Buddhism as guiding principle of life. This massive deadly event brought him down to the earth, as the narrator narrates, “And then it happened. This massive heart attack that brought the brilliant Julian Mantle back down to earth and reconnected him to his mortality. Right in the middle of courtroom numbers seven on a Monday morning, the same courtroom where we had won the Mother of All Murder Trials” (p. 7). This heart attack brought the brilliant Julian Mantle back down to earth and reconnected him to his mortality that he has to die once. His awareness of mortality hinted a theme in Buddhism that life and death are two coins of same coin.

The narrator’s second shock appeared as he saw transformation in Julian: “I was astonished by the new and improved Julian Mantle” (p. 12). The improved Julian is now a sparkle of Buddhist trend. This transformation was also based on compassion and sympathy: “Compassion can be defined in terms of non-violent, non-harming, and non-aggressive” (Lama 114). With this, Julian could defeat the obstacles. Being dissatisfied with this mundane avarice, Julian began to give up his material possessions and he went to India for spiritual blessing. The ancient culture and mystical traditions of the area attracted him:

Julian grew visibly excited as he recounted how he sold all his material possessions and headed for India, a land whose ancient culture and mystical traditions had always fascinated him. He travelled from tiny village to tiny village, sometimes by foot, sometimes by train, learning new customs, seeing the timeless sights and growing to love the Indian people who radiated warmth, kindness and a refreshing perspective on the true meaning of life. (p.13)

Julian was excited to sell all his material possessions to go to India. He experienced warmth, kindness and a refreshing perspective on the true meaning of life. He began to understand meaning of life. He never experienced this bliss before. His journey to Himalayas is a way to move to Nirvana which is a cessation of suffering. According to Gethin, the problems lie in the act of finding stability in the things which themselves are unstable and changing: “As long as there is attachment to the things that are unstable. . . we must always fail”(p. 74). Julian’s decision to maintain detachment to material worth is significant thing to explore his spiritual journey accompanied by his attachment to nirvana, truth and awakening.

This journey proved to be blessing one. This blessing bliss is like a command from inward or within his heart telling him to continue the spiritual journey: “I don’t mean to sound too off-the-wall, John, but it was like I had received a command from within, an inner instruction telling me that I was to begin a spiritual voyage to rekindle the spark that I had lost, It was a tremendously liberating time for me” (p. 13). The inner calling experienced by Julian Mantle is his extension of inner desire to live a simple and peaceful life. The inner calling is what Gethin thinks of the noble truth of the way of leading to the cessation of pain: “the noble eightfold path, namely right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration” (p. 60). Gethin’s eightfold paths to happiness are seen in the behavior of Julian Mantle as he practices meditation, spiritual action, and rightfulness along with calm concentration.

The right concentration makes him realize that his earlier life was full of unhappiness. He remembered his Ferrari not as friend but an enemy: “He also thought about his prized Ferrari and how his heart would soar when he gunned the engine and all its ferocity sprang to life with a roar” (p. 19). He heard the engine sound as roar. This transformation is a new kindle for spiritual growth. He realizes that his material gains are barriers for wisdom. First he saw them as “lasting happiness” (Gethin, 1998, p. 235), and but they are “impermanent and suffering” (Gethin, 1998, p. 235). As Julian approaches the center of the village of India, he saw a temple as an austere home of sages:

At the center of the village was a tiny temple, the kind Julian had seen on his trips to Thailand and Nepal, but this temple was made of red, white and pink flowers, held together with long strands of multi-colored string and twigs. The little huts which dotted the remaining space appeared to be the austere homes of the sages. These were also made of roses. Julian was speechless. (p. 25)

He was speechless to see the tiny temple full of red, white and pink flowers. At the heart of the village stood a tiny temple, Julian had encountered during his travels in Thailand and Nepal. Yet this one was unlike any he had seen before: it was fashioned entirely from red, white, and pink flowers, bound together with long strands of multicolored string and delicate twigs. Scattered around it were small huts occupying the remaining space—spare, ascetic dwellings that seemed to belong to sages—and these too were constructed of roses. Julian could only stand in silence, utterly astonished.

Then his transformation inwardly gets a shape. This inner transformation is also highlighted by Dalai Lama who asserts, “We need to appreciate our potential as human beings and recognize the importance of our inner transformation. He talks about how there are two different levels of spirituality”(295) that one gets through meditation and by practicing mental process. Ultimately for Lama, this leads to spirituality: “In identifying the factors that lead to a full and satisfying life, we conclude with a discussion of the final component -spirituality” (p. 247). Carus (1897) talks Buddhahood as a spiritual growth: “The idea of Buddhahood, accordingly, was in its original shape the attainment of a purely spiritual condition which it

was hoped would afford a perfect emancipation from suffering” (p. 256). For him, it is an escape of Transiency of life to the permanent and enduring bliss or happiness. It is a spiritual existence opting for salvation. Dalai Lama in “The Dalai Lama Speaks” asserts, “The awareness of self for awareness of others” (p. 5). He means to say that leads towards being in spiritual realm. In the temple of Sivana, he grows his spiritual strength: “Ultimately, the faces of the Sages of Sivana revealed the power of their way of life. Even though they were clearly mature adults, each one of them radiated a child-like quality, their eyes twinkling with the vitality of youth. None of them had wrinkles. None of them had gray hair. None of them looked old” (p. 26). Carus again talks about how one is always unhappy: “He who clings to bodily form, i. e., the materialised incarnation of pure form, and identifies his self with this compound of atoms, this aggregation of material elements, is not free from the illusion of selfhood; he has not found the eternal resting place of life, the bliss of Nirvana” (p. 262-263). The man, who seeks material gain, like Julian did in his life as lawyer, lived in illusion.

Johnston (2006) while showing a link between Buddhism and environmental issues argues that environmental crisis can be minimized incorporating Buddhist philosophy in our life-style. He also brings the reference of the Dalai Lama: “The Dalai Lama, as the central figure of Tibetan Buddhism, part of the Vajrayana tradition, has long been a proponent of eco-friendly thought” (p. 75). He further focuses on Buddhist thought and practice, especially non-violence, non-injury, and reverence of life. Julian Mantle’s earlier life was not eco-friendly, and he suffered a lot in the city life: “And so began Julian's life among the Sages of Sivana, a life of simplicity, serenity and harmony. The best was soon to come” (Sharma 23). A life of simplicity, serenity and harmony was found in the Sivana:

Eager to expand his knowledge of the workings of the mind, body and soul, and to attain self-mastery, Julian spent literally every waking moment under the tutelage of Yogi Raman. The sage became more like a father to Julian than a teacher, though they were separated in age by only a few years. It was clear that this man had the accumulated wisdom of many lifetimes and, most happily, he was willing to share it with Julian. (p. 28)

Julian is eager to expand his knowledge of the workings of the mind, body and soul which leads to self-mastery. He accumulated wisdom of many lifetimes and, most happily. He is impressed with his master Yogi Raman who told him “that the seven virtues for a life overflowing with inner peace, joy and a wealth of spiritual gifts were contained within a mystical fable, this fable was the essence of it all. He asked me to shut my eyes as I have now done, here on the floor of your living room” (p. 38). This is his spiritual awakening. In this context, Miller (2016) asserts, “Spiritual individuals might also join meditation groups, book clubs in order to connect to others and foster their spiritual life” (p. 46). This is applied in the life of Julian Mantle:

Julian transported me back to the time when Yogi Raman examined this principle with him. He recalled the sage's exact words. "Life is funny," observed Yogi Raman. "One would think that the less one worked the more one would have the chance to experience happiness. However, the real source of happiness can be stated in a word: achievement. Lasting happiness comes from steadily working to accomplish your goals and advancing confidently in the direction of your life's purpose. This is the secret to kindling the inner fire that lurks within you. (p. 75)

The source of happiness comes from steadily working to accomplish the goals and advancing confidently in the direction of life's purpose. This is the secret to kindling the inner fire and inner life. Robin sharma writes, “The secret of happiness is simple: find out what you truly

love to do and then direct all of your energy towards doing it. Once you do this, abundance flows into your life and all your desires are filled with ease and grace” (p. 55). For Robin Sharma, the secret of happiness is to find out what one loves to do and then direct all of the energy towards doing it.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that Julian Mantle’s transformation from successful lawyer to spiritual leader as shown in *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* is to find out true meaning of living as human existence and it can be taken as a guide to living an authentic life grounded in mindfulness and blessing bliss. The true meaning of existence lies beyond the material possessions. Through the transformation of Julian Mantle, the paper conveys the possibility of personal change, and purposeful living. Julian Mantle’s story shows that true wealth lies not in luxury, status, or professional success, but in inner peace, moral awareness, and a life guided by meaningful intention representing spiritual awakening.

It is suggested that spirituality, as embodied in Mantle’s journey and articulated in the philosophy of the Gethin, is to be taken to the point where body is separated from material greed. Thus, it is not a withdrawal from life but as a more profound engagement with it. Spiritual awakening is an amalgamation of awareness of peaceful existence and the inner self with a keen love for others, and being source of motivation for others. Julian Mantle comes to know that material prosperity without inner peace is senseless acquisition of power. It is unfulfilling, whereas a disciplined, tranquil, and thoughtful, and compassionate way of life contributes to personal wellbeing and the collective good of humanity.

In conclusion, this paper asserts that *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* the self-awakening and spiritual salvation are products of Buddhist thoughts which is achieved transcending the boundaries sensory pleasures. It reflects on the limitations of materialism, the search for meaning, and the possibility of spiritual transformation. It further implies that people need to introspect inner peace cultivating mindfulness, love and awakening. Thus, Julian Mantle’s trajectory from material world to spiritual realm serves as evidences for authentic happiness.

References

- Dalai Lama. (1997). *The joy of living and dying in peace* (G. T. Jinpa, Trans.). HarperSanFrancisco.
- Dalai Lama. (1980). The Dalai Lama speaks. *The Tibet Journal*, 5(1–2), 5–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43299968>.
- Carus, P. (1897). The philosophy of Buddhism. *The Monist*, 7(2), 255–286. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27897409>
- Carter, J. R. (1977). “A history of early buddhism.” *Religious Studies*, 13(3), 263–287. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20005420>
- Johnston, L. (2006). The “nature” of Buddhism: a survey of relevant literature and themes. *Worldviews*, 10(1), 69–99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43809323>
- Gethin, R. (1998). *The foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.
- Sharma, R. S. (1999). *The monk who sold his Ferrari: A fable about fulfilling your dreams and reaching your destiny*. HarperSanFrancisco
- Sharma, K. (2021). The Journey Within: Inner Calling as Spiritual in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide* and Robin Sharma’s *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*. *Literary Studies*, 34(01), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.3126/litstud.v34i01.39524>

Mathew, B. (2020). An archetypal pattern of redemption in *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* of Robin S. Sharma. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Arts & Humanities – Psychology*, 20(16).

Miller, C. (2016). “Spiritual but not religious”: rethinking the legal definition of religion.” *Virginia Law Review*, 102(3), 833–894.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43923324>

***Bio-note**

Rajan Kumar BC is an independent researcher and civil servant. He has completed his Masters in Rural

Development and Public Administration from Tribhuwan University (TU), Nepal. He has a willingness to

carry out research in contemporary issues in order to publish in reputed journals from home and

abroad. He is in a proposal development phase of PhD program.

0009-0000-8629-1360