


Charity, Sacrifice and Self-Denial: Keys of True Happiness Through Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*

Kamalakar Baburao Gaikwad *
Assistant Professor and Head, Dept. of English
MGV's Arts, Science & Commerce College,
Nampur, Tal-Baglan, Dist-Nashik.

ABSTRACT

Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* (1888) has a biblical base which deals with principles of Christianity. The prince experienced a fortunate youth because he was only permitted around cheerfulness and exquisiteness. After his bereavement, he becomes a golden statuette and can perceive the insufficiency and unhappiness in the town. He lived comfortable life and died in the same manner. He never experienced sorrow and grief in his life. However, after his death, he stood in the form of a sculpture on a plinth and observed pain, agonies and miseries of deprived people with his naked eyes. The major objective of this research paper is to delineate charity, abandonment and selflessness are the epitome of true happiness. Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* showcases the clandestine of true happiness, which is obtained not through material wealth but by implementing the qualities of compassion, donations, sacrifice, self-denial, caring of others, communal unfairness, liberating influence of affection, forfeiture of blamelessness and unselfish obligation. The prince donates his body parts for the unfortunate folks in order to eradicate poverty from the society and the Swallow with full commitment, donates his life for the well-being of the underprivileged and penurious. Eventually, the contented prince misplaces its superiority as an entity of embellishment and substantial assessment and seems as a monstrosity in the town while the Swallow drops down in a powerless and emotionless state, i.e. in a deceased state with deprivation. They both become debris for the people in the town and were despised by them but they received heavenly reward, i.e. they received praise and acclamation from God and His holy angels.

Keywords: *Oscar Wilde, happy prince, epitome, true cheerfulness, compassion, charity, obligation, sacrifice, self-denial, social injustice, redemptive power of love etc.*

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) is considered as an eminent Victorian personality. He was the versatile Irish short story writer, novelist, poet, playwright, journalist, editor and reviewer. He was recalled for his witticisms and theatres. He was known for his acrimonious humor, intelligence, pretentious dressing style and remarkable conversation. His well-known and noteworthy works are: poems: *The English Renaissance, The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), novel: *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, Plays: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), *Salome*

* Author: H. Daniel Raj

Email: gaikwadkamalakar@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1434-1108>

Received 16 Feb. 2025; Accepted 22 Feb. 2025. Available online: 25 Feb. 2025.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#)



(1891), *An Ideal Husband* (1895). His criminal conviction entitled *Gross Indecency for Homosexual Acts* is significant. Later he was influenced by theory of aestheticism lead by Walter Pater and John Ruskin.

Research Methodology

The researcher has employed qualitative method and close reading of the text. The present study explores the secret of true happiness, which is obtained not through material wealth but by practicing the virtues of compassion, charity, sacrifice, self-denial, caring for others, societal prejudice, rescuing command of adoration, damage of incorruptibility and self-sacrificing assurance. Reading a text helps to interpret several thematic aspects. It also helps to generate textual evidences from the text at large scale so that inclusive information can be envisaged and put before the readers comprehensively. Therefore the researcher has construed the literary texts of the story for better appreciation.

Literature Review

Literature review is the crucial characteristics which investigates the former researcher's interpretations on the conjectural topic. Here the researcher has rendered the clandestine of cheerfulness by practicing numerous qualities such as understanding, support, sacrifice, self-denial, caring for others, communal iniquitousness, redeeming stimulus of love, penalization of incorruptibility and self-sacrificing commitment through Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*. Bibliography of the present research itself focuses on the facts and truths and it helps to understand the heavenly attributes of both *The Happy Prince* and the little swallow. Following literary references will help to understand the research in detail.

a. Wilde Oscar, *The Happy Prince, Fairy Stories*, 1888

This primary source helps the readers to understand the connection between the little swallow and *The Happy Prince* and their motives for the well-being of the society.

b. Wilde, Oscar. *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 2003, Collins.

In this research, there is a inclusive catalogue of works and a sequential table of life span and work of Oscar Wilde.

c. Wilde, Oscar. *Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*. Vol. 4. NBM.

This source highlights complete adaptations of Oscar Wilde's fairy tales.

d. Fonseka, Gamini. *Selfless Commitment to the Comfort of Others: A Critical Reading of The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde*, University of Ruhuna.

In the short story Oscar Wilde employs his inventive influences to transport a worldwide

communication of assistance and charity through its main characters.

e. Cowell, E.B. The Jataka Book, Vol-15, Issue-499, Sivi Jataka, New Delhi: D.K. Publishers, 1997.

In this book, there is a description of Jataka which is basically a Buddhist biological history. Here Buddhism is recounted in detail. This book describes the earlier confinements of the ancient Buddha entitled Prince Siddhartha.

Key Concepts

Before going to discuss, let us throw a light on the key concepts such as charity, sacrifice, self-denial, true happiness etc. These key terms will help the readers to comprehend the research in detail.

Charity

The word *charity* is a Christian word which is derived from French word *charite* which refers the feeling of love for others. It leads to humanitarian quality such as generosity and act of giving willingly. Charity or virtue is a principle of Christianity. In real sense, it is the strong sense of voluntary which help to those who are in need. Its foundation is self-interest.

Sacrifice

The word *sacrifice* is used to do good for others by suffering tremendous pains. It is the contribution and offering of materialistic belongings. It is derived from the word *sacrificium* which means performing priestly functions. The term *sacra* means sacred or holy things and *facere* means to perform. In Indian context, it is also called as *yadnya*.

Self-Denial

Self-denial refers to self-sacrifice. It is an act of authorizing go of the self. According to Christianity, it is the positive trait and phenomenal advantage. It is the preparedness to relinquish individual preferences or undertake particular prosecutions in the quest of the augmented upright of others.

True Happiness

Happiness is a sense of experiencing positive feelings and emotions. It conquers over the negative aspects such as anger, depression, frustration, loneliness, boredom, sadness etc. Happiness is the symptom of joy and cheerful state. It is the indication of good and pleasant life. It is a sagacity of welfare, joy, or satisfaction. People feel happiness when they become efficacious, innocuous or fortunate. True happiness lies in affection, compassion, consideration, kindness etc. We experience happiness by humanizing vigorous associations,

practicing self-care, mindfulness, mentality, tracking your imaginings, desires and comforts etc.

Spirituality

Spirituality is a condition in which we get associated to the virtuous and sacred standards. It is a way of thinking about the life that always considers spiritual experiences. There is no place for physical experiences. Spirituality focuses on significance of lifecycle, nature of cognizance and probability of immortal aspects. Associations, beliefs and life persistence are the fundamental foundations of devoutness. Religiousness can assist people to discover a sagacity of persistence and implication. It fosters a resilient groundwork for better psychological healthiness and peace of mind.

Discussion

Oscar Wilde's The Happy Prince revolves around the central idea: 'any habitation you love is the cosmos to you'. The story deals with several thematic concerns such as kind-heartedness, charity, sacrifice, self-denial, care for others, communal discrimination, emancipating power of affection, forfeiture of virtuousness, unselfish obligation etc. Adoration and sacrifice are significant principles in human life and contentment comes to those who make others life blissful. The people with empathy, apprehension, real joy, kindness and charity offers true happiness. Helping others especially poor and needy in their distress is the key element of the story. As a human being, it is our duty to treat others with the spirit of affection and benevolence.

In this story, the prince gave his jewels to the underprivileged and the swallow also demonstrated through her affection and sacrifice. During his life on earth, the prince behaved as a happy prince as he was always cheerful and unaware about the pain and sufferings in the world. He never recognized despondency when he was alive. He always lived impressive and comfortable life. The concluding part of the story explains that almighty God interrogates his messengers to carry with them two supreme aspects from the town and transmit the ponderous temperament of prince which was thrown out when the statuette was liquefied down and the body of the deceased swallow was also present there. The story narrates that these archangels carried the little swallow and the lethargic soul of the prince's statue to God, who announces they will live forever in His golden city. This embodies the perpetuation of class dissimilarities and relegation. The story is the representation of cheerfulness and desire. The main purpose of the story is to escalate the worth of sacrifice, charity, consideration and true pleasure. Happy

prince in the form of statue was decorated with expensive gems and gold, administers a city where deficiency and adversity succeed.

Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) consists of five stories such as: *The Contented Prince*, *The Nightingale and The Rose*, *The Egotistical Behemoth*, *The Enthusiastic Companion* and *The Amazing Skyrocket*. In a town, friends of little swallow went Egypt, six weeks before in winter season. Only the little swallow was left behind. After couple of days, he met lifeless happy prince's statue who lived his life comfortably and never experienced sorrow in his life. He lived in a palace with a tall memorials and he doesn't have any idea about a sorrow. He never witnessed scarcity, anguishes and hostility of people in his life. *The Happy Prince* enquires the swallow to take the huge red ruby from his sword hilt, two bright sapphires from his eyes and the gold leaf covering his body to provide to the poor. As winter comes and *The Happy Prince* is uncovered of all of his beauty, his lead heart breakdowns when the swallow perishes as a result of his unselfish actions and unembellished cold. The people were ignorant about their good manners. They take the statue down from the pillar due to its dilapidation and liquefy the metal in a furnace, leaving behind the fragmented heart and the lifeless swallow, which are thrown in a dust heap. These are taken up to paradise by an Angel that has believed them the two most treasurable things in the city. This is confirmed by God and they live forever in His Golden City and Paradise.

In this narrative, both the sculpture of happy prince and the swallow act as breathing human beings who endeavors to eliminate problems such as discomfort, anguish, miseries and dearth and offers elucidation in the form of virtues such as charity, sacrifice, obligation, self-denial, liberality, kindheartedness etc. for them. They both improve an ethical disgrace to contribute human beings and turns it into a realism. The main endeavors of the short story are as follows:

- i. Tombstone of Happy Prince
- ii. Commendations and Denunciations established
- iii. Broken hearted and devastated Little Swallow
- iv. Unoccupied Territory of Little Swallow
- v. Enlightening Individuality by Happy Prince
- vi. Swallow's three assignments
- vii. An intentional proposal to have syndicate
- viii. Swallow's Farewell
- ix. Demonstrating Uniqueness

i. Tombstone of Happy Prince

Wild introduces the life style and death of happy prince. He also tells that happy prince lives in a palace of Prussian King at Berlin. Wilde highlights the magnificence of the town skillfully.

‘Tall above the town, on a high pillar, stood the figurine of the Happy Prince. He was covered with gold all over with tinny leaves.....outsized inflamed ruby shined on his rapier hilt.’ (The Happy Prince: p.72)

Oscar Wilde showcases the statue of happy prince in third person narration. On a high pillar, the figurine of happy prince was installed. His entire body was decorated with gold. He was the main attraction of the tourists as well as the citizens of the town.

ii. Condemnations and Denunciations Received

Oscar Wilde praises the art of the carver who made a statue of the happy prince. The people in the town and the visitors appreciated its beauty. They made good comments on it. Oscar Wilde depicts the happy childhood of the happy prince. His mother showered too much love and affection on him. She never made him cry. Both father and mother provided him all worldly comfort and pleasure to him. He lived a life of satisfaction and contentment. He received all things which he asked to his parents. He was born and brought up in jovial manner. He never experienced the feelings of sorrow, depression, frustration, anguish, wretchedness etc. He lived an aristocratic life. The ostentatious town commissioner condemned for the presence of statue of happy prince in the city. He gave the disapproval for it. He tried to imbibe the fact among the people of the town that statue of happy prince is not beneficial to them, on the contrary, it is an absurd thing for the entire city.

iii. Broken-hearted Little Swallow

A little migrant swallow left alone in winter. He took the shelter at the foot of the statue of happy prince. The broken hearted and pathetic swallow had no other option except to stay there. The swallow left behind because of infatuation with the small midriff of a Cane, a domestic bird with a streaked brown head. In order to escape from winter, his friends went to Egypt just six weeks before. The traits and lifestyles of the Swallow and the Reed were absolutely different from one another. Little swallow goes on ingratiating his mate despite the other swallow’s warning. His attachment and associations proved futile. The Reed politely rejects his proposal to join him to go the monolith. Later the little swallow started his journey and saw the tall pillars and fresh air of the town. He reached in the town where the statue of

The Happy Prince was there. He immediately took the shelter at the feet of it. The swallow is shown the mediator and helper of *The Happy Prince* through which the story progresses. The little swallow encouraged *The Happy Prince* and they both engaged in doing the well-being of others. Through their reunion, the betterment of humanity could be made possible.

iv. Unoccupied Territory of Little Swallow

Oscar Wilde explains the intelligence and understanding of the little swallow like a human being. He maintains the relationship with the Reed and later he comes to the town and takes shelter of the statue of happy prince. The feet of happy prince becomes the unoccupied territory for the little swallow. He certainly predicts the changes in the environment of north Europe. He distinguishes the difference between sunny and vibrant firmament. When he was at the bottom of the statue of happy prince, the tears fell down on his body. He considers these tears as the drops of rain. Out of curiosity, he looks up and discovers the truth of tears shed by the statue of happy prince.

There were tears in Happy Prince's eyes and it were running down his golden heroisms. His outlook was gorgeous in the moonshine that the little Swallow was filled with adversity. (Wilde: 1888).

v. Enlightening Individuality by Happy Prince

Oscar Wilde demarcates the multifarious passionate growth of his characters. The Swallow seeks the shelter at the bottom of the statue. He observed the grief and sorrow of happy prince through his tears. He experiences that happy prince is standing on the pedestal in the form of statue but it is not lifeless. He might be a living creature witnessing the sufferings of the poor people in the town. He enquires the reason of weeping of happy prince. Here we witness the contradictory components of happiness and sadness. Contented prince confesses that he lived a comfortable life in a palace when he was alive. He was unaware about the grief and tears. He lived happily and died happily too. Happy prince sadly explains that after his death, people set him up on a high pedestal and now he can observe the bad plight of the people in the town. So except weeping, there is no alternate to show his frustration. During his Bodhisattva days, prince Siddhartha decides to renounce his palatial life when he encounters the four omens of samsara: an old man, a sick man, a dead body, and an ascetic, which functions as a piece of a puzzle he has to solve with his super-intellectual powers (Anandamaithreya: 1985). Prince Siddhartha closely observed the pain and sufferings of human beings when he was alive on

the contrary happy prince experienced it after his death. After listening the true confession of happy prince, the swallow admired happy prince.

vi. Swallow's Three Assignments

The swallow and *The Happy Prince* became close friends. Happy prince requested the little swallow to carry out few of the tasks for the well-being of the poor in the town. Little swallow noticed the compassion and righteousness of happy prince for the poor. Through little swallow he helped the poor woman and her crying son who was not feeling well, by giving an orange and a precious ruby. Thus he closely witnessed the woman's struggle and reduced her grief. Swallow shows respect and feels sympathy for the happy prince. Little swallow wishes to meet his other friends at Egypt who were busy in merrymaking and were indulge in taking the advantage of warm weather. *The Happy Prince* this time wishes to quench the thirst of a boy and to soothe a mother's heart. The swallow took an inordinate crimson from his sword and reached to their house. He kept the claret nearby the table of a woman. Thus swallow finished the first assignment successfully. He succeeded in comforting of little boy. He revealed his radiance and fitness. He suffered and resisted the cold. After the long flight, he came back and reported everything to him. This represents spiritual satisfaction, act of charity and selflessness.

Early in the morning of winter season, the good hearted swallow, suffered cold, hunger and fatigue and made the prince happy. Once again the swallow was ready to do good action for the prince and displayed his desire to give more jewels to the poor. Here happy prince expressed his inability to give more jewels. He showed his willingness to give his own eyes made of sapphires, like Bodhisattva. (Cowell: 1997). He demanded the swallow to remove his eyes and give it to the needy. He also urged to give it to the jeweler, purchase foodstuff and kindling and complete his performance.

Happy prince saw that an unfortunate little girl was in a great torture. Her father will beat her mercilessly if she does not transport specific currency with her. She was crying and her condition was very disastrous. Happy prince assigns the third task to the swallow and requests swallow to remove his another eye and donate to her so that her father will not torture her. He wishes that girl should not go home penniless and should avoid the punishment from her father. He wants to end her struggle. The swallow is not ready to complete third task because he know that if he pluck another eye of the happy prince, he will became blind. *The Happy Prince* insists

him to carry out his command. After this, swallow plucked another eye of happy prince and went in search of a poor little match girl. He searched the girl and gave the precious jewel to her. The girl accepted this exotic gift as a piece of glass. The swallow completed this third task happily. He appreciates happy prince for his indescribable sacrifices.

vii. Intentional Agreement to Keep Syndicate

Swallow feels sympathy for happy prince and observes charity and selflessness. He decides to stay with the happy but blind prince for his spirit of charity. Happy prince has too much satisfaction for the little swallow's contribution. He finally expressed his wish that swallow should leave him. But swallow remained firm on his decision to be with him forever. Here happy prince became poor after donating his two eyes. Little swallow shared everything which he has done in the unknown country. The blind prince after losing his eyesight, wants to listen the sufferings of others with great curiosity. For him, suffering is the most amazing of everything and misery is the most enigmatic of everything. Thus prince admits the certainty of his gloomy appearance in return of contributing gold to the underprivileged people.

viii. Swallow's Farewell

Little swallow behaved with a prince like a loyal friend. He suffered everything for the prince. He obeyed to the commandments of prince. At the last moment of his life, he approached to *The Happy Prince* and sat on prince's shoulder and asked his permission to join to his friends. The prince gave him approval and expresses his gratitude to the little swallow. The moment he embraces and kisses the prince, he falls down at the feet of statue and takes the exit of this world. At the same time, the leaden statue also breaks into pieces. Thus two friends say goodbye to this world considering one another's grief and sorrow.

ix. Demonstrating Uniqueness

Happy prince gave his gold and gems for the poor as a charity. After losing his beauty and glory, people in the city decide to destroy his statue. Now prince became an eyesore for the entire city. His look was very horrible. Therefore the Mayor and the Town Councilor get tormented. They considered prince as a vagabond population of the city. On seeing the dead Swallow, they issued a decree against birds. Art Professor at the university recommended to remove the statue because of its ugliness. Mayor of the city declared to set his own statue on the pedestal. This created a chaos among the Town Councilors. The

commissioner asserts that the statue to be melt in furnace. They threw the statue down. Wilde says that thus these two souls united together. They both received wonderful reward and acknowledgement of donations from God. The swallow will resonate in the heaven and happy prince will admire the almighty God.

Conclusion

Thus, present research paper focuses the significance of heavenly traits which are very essential for human beings in their life. Man is mortal but his virtues are immortal and only they can decide his destiny and reward, whether heaven or hell. The researcher claims that the charity, sacrifice and self-denial are the good actions and they are always taken into consideration by God, the almighty. He constantly rewards us with the same proportion which we always expect from God. In this story, the statue of happy prince and the little swallow both gave their hundred percent contribution for the well-being of the poor, needy, unfortunate and underprivileged people. Their sociological, religious, economic, cultural and aesthetic aspects are taken into account when they were in this universe and after their death they both got heavenly reward. No matter what world does to us after our death but after our death these good deeds represent our generosity and spirituality. Happy Prince develops a good relationship with a swallow. They become support to one another and proved their loyalty and removed their loneliness in the companionship. Happy prince tried to eradicate poverty from the society and swallow assisted in competing the missions of him. Thus we see the morality and maturity of happy prince throughout the short story. He exasperated to associate the gap between the elite and the underprivileged people. He taught us the lesson of keeping ourselves far from the materialistic belongings. The climax of the story lies in the death of a swallow and the removal of a happy prince simultaneously.

Works Cited:

Anandamaitreya, Balangoda. *Gautam Buddha*. Samavardhana Book Shop.

Biography.com. "Oscar Wilde." Biography.com, 2014.

Cowell, E. B. *The Jataka Book*. Vol. 15, Issue 499, Sivi Jataka, D.K. Publishers, 1997.

Fonseka, Gamini. "Selfless Commitment to the Comfort of Others: A Critical Reading of *The*

Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde." University of Ruhuna.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). *The Happy Prince*. Classic Literature, Dec. 2023.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Happy Prince* and Other Tales. 1888.