



Portrayal of Sin in the Fictional World of Graham Greene

Dr. Asif Ali Malik

Abstract:

Graham Greene, a prominent writer of 20th century England has vehemently explored the sins committed by human beings through his novels. Ostensibly, a man commits sins on daily basis by this or that way. Greene presents the corrosion of moral values of human beings. The writer proposes grace of God and saintliness as the two indispensable weapons by which man can attain peace and prosperity in his life. The sinners in the society should not be devalued or disrespected but should be treated with compassion and understanding. Greene through his novels presents the path on which human beings could get salvation from their bad deeds practised in past. Besides that salvation is not the right of individual but it is the gift of bounty of God. So the present study focuses upon the sins of human beings; their redemption from such sins which could only be possible by submitting their desires and wills before God.

Key words: *Condemning, Grace of God, Isolation Spirituality, Sainthood, Salvation, Sin, Redemption.*

Introduction: Graham Green has gained his familiarity as an English novelist, playwright and a literary critic. Initially Greene was an Atheist but later on attained the faith of Roman Catholics. He is best known for his four novels which are *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and The Glory*, *The Heart of The Matter* and *The End of The Affair*. Greene is also an author of an autobiography named *A Sort of Life*. Greene is treated as the great novelist among twentieth century novelists England. The novels of Greene are non-serious in context but have the thrust to propagate the moral values. His novels are unromantic in nature and fully express the ways of life to live. The settings of novels are in Greenland and the novels circumambulate around the idea of 'Grace of God'. The predominant theme of Greene's novels is Faith of God. The novels vehemently focus upon the corrosion of morality of man. The fascination of sin and salvation are clearly visible in his novels. He has categorized his novels in to two segments i.e., 'novels' and 'entertainments'. The novels deals with serious matters while as the entertainments are not which one should call as thrilling. The concepts of saintliness, condemning, redemption, salvation, isolation, spirituality and bounty of God fall in the category of 'entertainments'. Such elements are prevalent issues in Greene's novels like *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter*. These novels primarily stresses on the good will of man and his soul. In Christianity the redemption of man is the sole intention. Besides that physical and mental health is also the pivot of Christianity. In Bible, Jesus Christ focuses upon progress of man in three arenas that are mental, physical and spiritual. The fact in Christianity is that one (sinner) who approaches God should get salvation. Thus the teachings of Christianity flow on the pages of Graham Greene's novels. The Bible is testimonial of that Jesus Christ had a compassionate heart towards



prostitutes, tax-collectors, bribe takers etc. thus every abuse of man against man should be forgiven but any abuse against God should never be forgiven. Thus Christ scolds and mocks those who have lost the serenity of heart. The issues raised by Greene in his novels are also highlighted by Murdoch and Compton-Burnett in their novels but Greene has meritoriously propagated the Christian principles in much conceivable manner as compared to Murdoch and Compton-Burnett. Highlighting the greatness of Greene, Herbert Haber has said: “writers like Hemingway, didn't remember the next world but that for— Greene, God has not died; rather the world at large has chosen to forget Him and for the most Part, He has reciprocated in kind”(The Two Worlds of Graham Greene 256)¹. The nexus between this world and the other world is the matter of interest for believers. These followers try to put their lives on such platforms as if they will be remunerated in this world as well as in the other world. The reward in this and other world gets the person who has spent life in the boundary of religion and according to the will of God and should remain aloof from the shadows of sin. In the novel *The Heart of the Matter* the priest asks Louise that he himself is ignorant about the sins of individuals. When Louise disclosed the extra-marital affair of Scobie, Father Frank said: “That's the silliest phrase in common use” (*The Heart of the Matter* 319)². The father asserts that nobody knows the mercy of God. According to Greene the people who are merely associated with the material world and believe in enjoyments in life could not attain goodness. These are the persons who remain unchangeable throughout their lives. Greene treats such people whom we encounter them on daily basis.

The novels of Greene are fully embedded with the social awakening. The persons who are aware of their defects can make efforts to improve them. The person who treats himself as perfects naturally commits more and more sins. These people always through aspersions on others but are intentionally ignoring their way of living. At the same time they are not realizing that they are themselves approaching towards the home of destruction and annihilation. Graham Greene treats sainthood as the best way of achieving salvation. Beside that Greene condemns those people who are suppressing an emotion without free expression. These people cannot be trusted. In his essay ‘Greene’, D. Zabel tries to show nexus between Greene’s Brighton Rock and T.S.Eliot’s essay Baudelaire. Baudelaire was a French poet to whom Eliot says: “sin took on a curious dignity and damnation itself seemed to him an immediate form of salvation...because it at least gives some significance to living”(Haber, *The Two Worlds of Graham Greene* 206)³. Greene was highly dejected and depressed with the nature of man. He desires that a man should proceed his life in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. In his novel *The Heart of the Matter*, he says: “Point me out the happy man and I will point you out either extreme egotism, evil or else an absolute ignorance” (*The Heart of the Matter* 139)⁴.

The characters of Greene have staunch faith in their religion and their trust on God infuses a new zest in their lives. Even the evil characters of Greene have faith on God and if they thrust themselves in the way of goodness, they could achieve benevolence and redemption. Thus there emerges the concept of tug of war between good and evil. If the characters are not able to follow the right path, Greene has clearly shown their destructive future. In the novel *Brighton Rock*, the cleric says: “mean a Catholic is more capable of evil than



any one. I think perhaps--because we believe in him--we are more in touch with the devil than other people” (*Brighton Rock* 246)⁵. The main character in the novel is Pinkie, who accepts her sins but Greene says that even after her acceptance of sins, she could be accepted by God, who is merciful and benevolent. To follow the way of God is very difficult for a common man. In the opinion of some critics, Pinkie is a character who is forcibly driven by some external forces in her life and thus can be treated as the victim of social norms and victim of horrors of life that she faced. Thus the character of Pinkie cannot be treated among damned ones. For a person who fell victim of such horrendous pressures needs compassion and understanding. This is the reason why Pinkie could not win from her nears and dears and society from her childhood and thus became psychologically harsh. This leads Pinkie to behave queerly, brutally and the word affection towards others is too aloof in her life. The peculiar nature of Pinkie is so sympathetic and the author has praised her in the novel. In comparison to Pinkie, another character named Ida Arnold is completely opposite to her. The characters like Ida Arnold are highly degraded by Greene in his novels because such characters are adhered only to gain material comforts rather than focusing upon the teachings of God. This trait is sheeny visible among the people of modern era of science and technology. Greene is much disappointed by seeing that such individuals get adulation from others. He has highlighted these characters very ruthlessly. Such characters are busy in exploring their faultless life before the people but the fact is that their life is itself a fault and is physically, mentally and morally degraded persons. They are always busy in challenging other's drawbacks but they have never peered in their bosom whether they are spiritual enough to accuse others' defectiveness. Characters like Ida Arnold can never receive any compassion from others because their minds are highly embedded with ego and arrogance. The writer proposes that a man with ego will never achieve mental, physical and moral redemption. Such type of person lacks the attainment of spiritual progress and thus their condition undergoes a transition from bad to worst. The character of Ida Arnold in *Brighton Rock* is similar to Louise in *The Heart of the Matter*. The characters in both the novels display ego, arrogance and degraded moral character. The way of presentation of sin and sinners by Greene in his novels is highly pleasing and full of craftiness. The characters of Greene do not show any connection with their societies. If they had a strong bond, Scobia would have evaded the circumstances that created a despondency in the society and the people associated with him. Thus Scobia cannot be categorized among the people who commit sins due to their failures in lives. Thus the sinners and faulty persons in the society should be treated with care and sympathy. They are engaged in faulty doings because of their isolation in the society. This fact would arise among the readers a sense of compassion even towards the character Pinkie in novel *Brighton Rock*. The association of an individual with its society is presented by Bertrand Russell as:

Man's needs and desires are not confined to his own life. If his mind is comprehensive and his imagination vivid, the failures of the community to which he belongs are his failures, and its successes are his success; according as his community succeeds or fails, his own growth is nourished or impeded (*Principles of Social Reconstruction* 20)⁶.



There are different types of sins committed by man according to Greene. Disappointment and gloom are treated as unforgiving sins in Christianity. The characters of Greene are fully satisfied with their damnation for achieve their goodness and redemption. This concept of salvation or Mukti in Hinduism is also propounded as:

In certain moods when we would be seized with a passionate longing to break all bonds and fly unto the Highest, he would say that his works and activities as a religious teacher and preacher were all vanity, and superimpositions upon his true nature... Viewed from the highest standpoint, all work, even that of doing good to others, is no doubt Maya, a hindrance to personal mukti. But illumined souls like Vivekananda who belong, in the words of his Master, to the class of Acharyakotisor world teachers, are born to take upon their shoulders the burden of a whole world. They care not for their own mukti, or for remaining merged in the bliss of the Absolute, though these are within their reach (Vivekananda, *The Man and His Message* 322)⁷.

Greene in his another novel *The Power and The Glory* proposes that to live a saintly life is more easy than to live a sinful life. The opinion of Greene towards the concepts of sin and saintliness is completely different as hold by conventional believers. Greene says that sinful life is easy to live while as saintly life is difficult to live as it demands certain rules to be followed i.e., self-restraint, self-control, pious etc. In the Novel *The End of the Affair*, its character Bendrix is entirely opposite in behavior to that of Scobie. The character of Scobia is presented as a compassionate human being towards others and wants everyone to be happy. In the contrary, Bendrix is a character who enjoys the miseries and despondencies of others especially his lover, Sarah. Bendrix got separated from Sarah for a long time but his jealousy kept blazing him inside. He has the capability to understand the goodness in others and when he gets acquainted with the goodness of Henry, and tries to build a conflict between Sarah and Henry. Henry is presented as a figure of humility and gentleness but Bendrix is presented as epitome of evil. The character of Henry is totally contradictory to Scobia because Bendrix mistrusts Sarah and Scobia trusts Helen. In a certain bargain, Sarah pleaded God to forgive Bendrix and then she left Bendrix and finally associated herself in the path of God. She prays for the life of Bendrix and his plead is accepted by God. Thus Sarah went in search of god and his bounty showers upon her gradually and she became conscious about her sins. Thus Sarah is pleading to God as:

. . . Where do you find this immortal soul they talked about? When do you see this lovely thing in me--in me, of all people? I can understand you can find it in Henry--my Henry, I mean. He's gentle and good and patient. You can find it in Maurice who thinks he hates, and loves, loves all the time even his enemies. But in this bitch and fake where do you find anything to love? (*The End of the Affair* 106)⁸.

Thus the salvation of characters of Graham Greene is visible in his novels at the end but there are some characters of his novels that will never change in their lifetime.



Conclusion:

Thus we can conclude that Greene through his novels wants to propagate the message to its readers about the sainthood and propagation of love in the universe. The wrong doers have changed their attitudes and have decided to walk on the path where spirituality prevails. There are only some stubborn and megalomaniac people who remain aloof from the grace of God. Graham Greene has successfully portrayed the concept of sin in Christianity and has implemented upon the characters in order to refrain them and become pious. So the persons who are treated as sinners, useless have now become saints and worthy personalities by embracing the path of God Almighty.

References

- [1] Haber, Herbert. *The Two Worlds of Graham Greene: Modern Fiction Studies*. London: Thomas and Hudson, 1957. 256. Print.
- [2] Green, Graham. *The Heart of The Matter*. London: William Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1997. 319. Print.
- [3] Haber, Herbert. *The Two Worlds of Graham Greene: Modern Fiction Studies*. London: Thomas and Hudson, 1957. 206. Print.
- [4] Green, Graham. *The Heart of The Matter*. London: William Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1997. 139. Print.
- [5] Greene, Graham. *The Brighton Rock*. London: Penguin Books, 1970. 246. Print.
- [6] Russel, Bertrand. *Principles of Social Reconstruction*. London: George Allen and Unwin Publishers, 1980. 20. Print
- [7] Vivekananda, Swami Mumukshananda. *The Man and His Message*. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995. 322. Print.
- [8] Greene, Graham. *The End of The Affair*. London: London: William Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1974. 106. Print.