



QUEST FOR SELF IN GRAHAM GREENE'S SELECT NOVELS

Dr. Bimlesh K. Singh

Associate Professor, Dept. of English,
C.R.A. College, Sonipat (HR) Email:drbimleshksingh@gmail.com

Graham Greene is a powerful novelist of modern age. He is not just a catholic novelist indulging in ontological exercises through his stories. He is, above all, a humanist whose concerns are much more varied and profound than that of a mere theologian. He is one of those pragmatic thinkers who had voiced the need for Christianity to mould its “mode and method of revolution” as it stands today. Therefore, Greene offers a new meaning, a new definition of Christianity for the elimination, regeneration of suffering mankind. Hence Greene is a crusader, a profound artist. Critics like John Atkins, Boris Ford, David Lodge talk about Graham Greene’s mind and art. They have focused on the gradual development of Greene as a novelist. But in this paper critical search light has been focused on the endless possibility of liberation of self as embodied by the protagonists of the two major novels by the novelist.

Keywords: Ontological, Crusader, Humanistic, Goodness, Human Tragedy, Possibility.

Graham Greene’s vision of life, as envisioned in his novels, is marked by catholicity and liberalism. It is a vision which considers human actions, not in terms of theological judgment, but in terms of pure intention and circumstantial facts. Dostoevsky in his compassion for the peasantry of his time saw the sinful actions of many a catholic follower, as the result of situational compulsions, but always done with pure intentions. Thomas Hardy calls his Tess “a pure woman”, even after her repeated seduction only because he appreciates her pure intentions and circumstantial compulsions. Hawthorne’s Prynne emerges as angelic despite her adultery, only because she did and does every act out of pure intentions. Hence Greene gives a modern, an unconventional definition of human heart and religion and this makes his vision of life quite fresh and universal. The present paper is an attempt to explicate the quest for identity in the two major novels of Graham Greene - *The Heart of the Matter* and *The Power and the Glory*.

Hence in both of his novels *The Heart of the Matter* and *The Power and the Glory* the protagonists embody and epitomize the humanistic elements. Through Major Scobie (**The Heart of the Matter**) the novelist shows the ultimate victory of human heart i.e. realization of sin leading to salvation. Scobie may appear and remain a sinner, an eternally damned soul to a conservative and prejudiced society (as represented through Louise or Helen). But then the same sinner is transformed into a truly repentant, a true Christian, more inscrutable and more sublime than even the church to a liberal soul, Father Rank. The martyrdom and heroism of Scobie is recognized and established through universal, humanistic Christian perspective of Father Rank. That is why, the sin suffering – regeneration of Scobie appeal to all immediately. He loudly declared has love of god above all. He behaved like a nameless and a pagan saint: ‘Dear God, I love....’. (THOTM, 272)

Physically exhausted, emotionally torn and morally confused, Scobie commits suicide. This act was too bold and great to be appreciated by hypocritical and conservative woman Louise or

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR



9 770234 856124



Helen. As Scobie was not physically and emotionally close to Scobie, she branded him immoral and his act of suicide sinful. Louise's conversation with Father Rank prove that Scobie was true to himself to God and event o man. As he was not ready to deceive man god or himself, he ended himself. Father Rank rightly justifies Scobie's daring act of suicide. 'He was a bad Catholic'. 'That is the silliest phrase in common use.' (THOTM, 273) Father Rank said. 'And at the end this – horror. He must have known that be was damning himself. Father Rank also tells Louise about catholicity the generosity, profundity and honesty of Scobie's heart. Scobie heart possessed a depth, a sensibility, a mystery which no church can define or acknowledge:

I know the Church says. The Church knows all the rules.

But It doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart. (THOTM, 272)

Father Rank also accuses Louise of her being short sighted and unfair towards Scobie's deeds and life. Whereas Louise called Scobie a bad Christian, Father Rank called him a good Christian. He even admitted Scobie's honest character and vociferated; "he really loved God." *The Power and the Glory* is a fresh treatment of Greene's vision of Christianity. Through the exploration of the character of the Whisky Priest, the novelist depicts the complexity of sin and evil. The priest proves that through good and generous attitude, his sin/evil is purged. The power and glory of an individual, as the priest reveals, lies not in secularism/ utilitarianism or theological virtue but in the unfailing expression of the goodness and kindness of human heart. The priest honestly admitted his human weaknesses before the Lieutenant. He expresses his profound anxiety for his moral and spiritual downfall. He also confesses how he suffered from pride, lustfulness and all that. He lived his life fully with human weakness and strength. He declares:

I got careless about my duties. I began to drink. It would have been much better, I think, if I had gone too. Because pride was at work all the time. Not love of God.' He sat bowed on the packing case, a small plump man in Mr. Lehr's cast – off clothes. He said, Pride was what made the angels fall.

(TPATG, 196)

Preoccupied with human intention for the enlightenment of the ignorant and the poor, the priest behaved like an angel. He was at the summit of his spiritual progress. He even deplored that he was the last priest left. Sometimes he felt afraid and deceived:

He squatted beside the window, starting out, and behind his back came the muffled sound of small girls going to bed. It brought it home to one – to have a hero in the house, though it had only been for twenty – four hours. And he was the last.

(TPATG, 220)

But then after the priest's execution, the priesthood/Christianity does not end. The novel closes with the arrival of a new priest. It implies that the priest as a symbol of religion/spiritual source will be ever present for the moral and spiritual illumination and inspiration.

So Graham Greene like Hawthorne beliefs in the basic nobility and goodness of self. Hawthorne also feels that liberation of self is beyond any guilty conscience of individuals.



Puritans or Catholics cannot prevent basically noble soul from attaining liberation of self. He rightly says : ‘These Pharisaical Puritans have yet to learn the forgotten art of gaiety.’ (TSL, 290) Shakespeare also attacks the so-called hypocritical Puritan like Malvolio through Sir Toby in his famous romantic comedy *Twelfth Night* :

Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no
more cakes and ale? (II, III, 357)

To sum up, Graham Greene primarily narrates the spiritual progress of individual soul in his novels. His novels seem to be tragic but then there is a deep current of underlying comic inner progress. Graham Greene’s vision of human tragedy is profoundly suggestive. Even his religious sensibility is predominated by humanistic and pragmatic concerns. All these lend a universal touch to his novels. His novels are, indeed, modern and open-ended. His novels close on the note of assertion of the glory of human heart which defies all man-made or theological definitions of man and religion. Hence, Graham Greene’s vision of human tragedy is profoundly suggestive of infinite goodness and possibilities of human heart. It is something highly optimistic and quite different from the stark pessimism of Thomas Hardy.

Works Cited

- Greene, Graham. *The Heart of the Matter*. London: Penguin, 1948
Greene, Graham. *The Power and The Glory*. London: Penguin, 1940
Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Delhi: Peacock Books, 2002
Shakespeare, Williams. *The Complete Works*. Calcutta: OUP, 1980