

# The Elements of Sin and Spirituality in the Selected Works of Graham Greene

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**Abstract** - Greene feels that the remoteness with spirituality of the human in the modern society has led to a loss of faith in God and traditional human values. The peace, belief and moral values are absent among the human. In addition, he condemns the modern civilization with its deep sense of spiritual sense to reach God from the darker side of life. However, he suggests the hope that any human activity exercised with a strong faith in spirituality, there the souls remain unaffected from all evil forces and sufferings. He also reveals the universal dictum that faith in spirituality ultimately wins. It is the only means known on this mortal Earth that can put human at liberty (*Moksha*) from all kinds of worldly sufferings.

**Keywords** - Spirituality, Sin, Christianity, Redemption, Purification, Religion, Morality.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Graham Greene is one of the most celebrated post-war novelists who gave English novel the spiritual heights. Greene has been classified as a modern spiritual writer. As a Catholic writer, Greene's art of letters deal with the crucial subjects of sin and spirituality via different themes like man's relationship with himself, with society and with God. Greene, in his novels emphatically deals with the ideology that only faith in God can save man from his destruction. His conceptions are that central to Christian theology. For this great reason, Graham Greene is generally regarded as one of the greatest English Catholic novelist of the twentieth Century. Greene's faith in Catholicism is evidently moral, action centered, instead of contemplative or mystic. Jesus Christ brought in the most important principle that the worth of human beings must be understood. The directives, the laws and all the other related rules are to be put to use for the betterment of man and his soul. This will ultimately bless man the basic

spiritual intention of Christianity. Greene's works have always accompanied the personal and social aspects of human with their sin and morality by which his acts and thoughts are bonded. It further intends to teach the world at large about living and making good and moral lives with social restrictions, because if human beings are left free they tend to be selfish. Hence, sense of spirituality plays a helping hand in curbing the evils and sins.

## II. SIN, SPIRITUALITY AND GREENE'S CHARACTERS

Greene has presented such characters very relentlessly. Outwardly, these characters remain perfect, without any fault and are over-confident about their perfection. But in reality they are far from purity –physically, mentally or spiritually. They are always keen in crucifying the common, outwardly imperfect beings without bothering about their own blatant imperfections. Greene pertinently comments through his characters in his works that evil and sin can affect one's life but he wins grace of God with a deep sense of spirituality and purity of mind. He suggests to faithfully look at life with courage and faith in man and God. The characters like Ida Arnold in *Brighton Rock* never win the love and compassion of the society or of God. Greene also mentions 'ego' which stops a person to make an assessment about his own status, physically, mentally or spiritually and these individuals never attain Spiritual progress at the same time their condition moves from bad to worse and in effect there is a retardation or retracing of the steps on the spiritual path. In *The Ministry of Fear* quoted by S. K. Sharma in his book: "Pity is cruel. Pity destroys. Love isn't safe when pity's prowling round" [1].

*The Bible* witnesses of the fact that no man is without ills and sins, not even one, but the divine God, Jesus Christ, forgives and defends them, all. He forgives and derides those who have lost their purity, physically. Again, for their spiritual sins, he criticizes them, as it is in his words when he says, “Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven.”[2]

The noticeable element in Greene’s character is that all bear a strong faith in religion and have complete awareness of the presence of God that enshrines their actions. Even the evil characters in his novels, are conscious of the grace of God if they switch on to the path of saintliness.

Greene is entirely disappointed with the world and he is repelled with the true nature of man as his lack of faith in the true spirituality of man blights any Bible optimism concerning the expectation of goodness in man. We apparently notice in *The Heart of the Matter* when he says, “Point me out the happy man and I will point you out either extreme egotism, evil or else an absolute ignorance.” [3]

In the *Brighton Rock* critics point out that the character Pinkie is driven by forces beyond his control that he is possibly a victim of society. So he cannot be directly considered among the damned ones but for the devil forces, instead he deserves the sympathy and understanding of the others. However, all these, he fails to win from his relatives and society consequently angularities and psychic disorders become a part of his character.

Greene very aptly defends the character Pinkie who is damned, to give a clear conception of sin and spirituality where the moderating circumstances of his sins, holds back him in a favorable light. Thus, Pinkie is a character who may be accepted by God –who is highly merciful with a strangeness of mystery that cannot be just comprehended by other than a religiously spiritual man. Thus, the conventional approach towards sin spirituality is skillfully made in Greene’s novels.

On the other hand, Greene’s character, Ida Arnold keeps him in frustration and dissatisfaction.

Greene sheds his anguish over such characters complaining about their growing attitude towards materialism. These characters have been overconfident, reluctant and pretentious about their character and actions. In reality, they are far from purity and perfection, physically, mentally and spiritually. Although they are very keen in disgracing the ordinary and little imperfect human beings, without bothering about their own inner self. The very characters like Ida Arnold in *Brighton Rock* fail to win either love or compassion of either their society or God. It is all their purity of mind engulfed by their ego. This evil hinders their spiritual progress and retards the steps on the spiritual path.

Greene takes it as an interesting subject to reveal the disastrous effect of such flaws as in the characters that can destroy a man. The flaw of Greene’s character Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* deviates them from their path of sin and immorality and finally leads to the saintliness that is longed for, by any true believer. This is how Greene serves these elements thorough his novels in an exalted and manifested manner. Now considering morality and sin from the social point of view, William Glasser suggests that crimes and sins are certainly due to personality failure of the characters in most of the cases. As a consequence the sinners and criminals should be considered as failures and thus treated with kindness and sympathetic understanding, and not anything else. He further adds that these victims and sufferers failing to establish their identity in the existing society try to resort to all kinds of perversions. This ideology is very similar to the ideology of the character Pinkie, in *Brighton Rock*, who won social sympathy of the readers.

Greene presents this supreme notion through the character, Scobie, in *The Heart of the Matter*, in whose life there is a lot of suffering. Scobie’s character remarks the disastrous effect of pride and pity. He being a catholic ceases to love his real devoted wife Louise, and keep immoral sexual relation for his physical pleasure, which is apparently a sin that he commits very knowingly. He could have declined Helen and stayed with his wife Louise, or he would have owed Helen as legal wife and left Helen. However, he did not, just because of want of

sinful pleasure. He was very much aware of his sins, but ignorance gave him no way and he remained on the errant path, for long. It sets a dialectical tension in Scobie's mind. In this process, he had to suffer a lot in the later phase of his life. He fails to put his faith in trust of God. For his love and faith remains in his short physical pleasure. This indicates so much his theological convictions as his yearning for self-destruction. He prays to God, but fails to comprehend the appalling divine mercy. Because of his pride and does not trust Him who loves him. Nevertheless, Greene remarks that a sinner is very close to God.

Michael Torre in *Greene's Saints* says,

“Scobie is driven to this act is quite believable because his inner anguish is fierce and death seems the only release. In a way, he is trying to be true to that which is best in him, trying to live out the form of his life in faith, trying to maintain his solitude for all those he has undertaken to care for and protect in a way that will hurt them at least. This is, of course, a foolish and pretentious thing to do: he is being too dutiful, is too busy playing God.” [4]

Scobie suffers the maximum for his rejection of God's assistance forever. It is much of his free choice through which he moves toward his voluntary death or redemption. Greene brings out this notion successfully that it is his indecisiveness that Scobie rejects God's help, knowing very well that it would mean damnation. Inside the Church, he imagines that he has an argument with God. He says to God,

“You'll be better off if you leave me once and for all. I know what I am doing. I am not pleading for mercy. I am going to damn myself, whatever that means...but you'll be at peace when I am out of your reach...you'll be able to forget me, God.” [5]

Thus, Greene Records the minutest sensations and impressions through *The Heart of the Matter* where he advocates the central paradox that love is the factor that has led his ardent character in this novel, both to sin and to sanctity.

### III. SIN AND SPIRITUALITY: A UNIVERSAL THEME

Greene has his own ideologies are universal regarding sin and spirituality that revolves every human being inside this universe. For example, despair is thought to be an unforgivable sin in Christianity but Greene is of the opinion that the corrupt or evil man would never pay any heed to it. He is always after fulfilling his desires and lust in the present world as well as the next birth. Greene truly remarks, “Only a man of goodwill can carry in his heart the capacity for damnation.”(62)

This idea qualifies justifiably the attitude Greene has towards his universal characters that are presented as the model of sinners and evils to the readers of the society.

Moreover, the utter feeling of salvation and damnation is appreciated in the character of the protagonists of most of his famous and controversial novels. Such pure and humanistic attitude itself shatters the conventional attitude of the believers and religions like Christianity and Catholicism, about the fate and damnation of a person. Thus, Greene's novels give an elevation to the idea of damnation and purification of the mortal existence of human beings, which is today absolutely absent, but still theologically, remains the only sine qua non of attaining purity and good-will in the eyes of the God, in his created world.

Considering this ideology philosophers and intellectuals discover a universality and commonness of theme in this aspect that Greene has been advocating throughout his works. For example, according to Hinduism sin can be comprehended as the earthly or materialistic lust that takes a man far away from the path of achieving salvation/ *mukti*. In the Indian tradition of spirituality, the ultimate goal of a mortal life lies in liberation, i.e. *moksha*:

“The goal of spirituality, like that of science, is also liberation. It is the liberation of the inner spirit. Spirituality could be seen also as a complementary force that gives a positive direction to science and acts as an antidote to the latter's use for destructive purposes. In the least, it provides coping mechanisms

to deal with psychologically debilitating anxiety, stress, fear and helplessness.”[6]

In addition, our highly religious Indian saint, Swami Vivekananda approves of the factum:

“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 *Acharyakois* or 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.” [7]

Thus, with the above high statement of a universal spiritual saint, it is apparent that Greene too with his great oeuvres has constantly remained hard to establish a spiritual lesson for the common person, with the support of his protagonists of his novels.

Approaching further towards attaining salvation, which is a must to gain the original and pure spirituality, loaded with dignity and nobility of one self, (here presented through the characters of Greene), suffering is the only sine qua non to attaining it back. Greene puts forth the path of religion, Christianity, which ennoble a human being relieving him from the burden of his sins. The more he suffers, the more is his redemption gained. He has got to accept the damnation for the welfare and satisfaction of the others.

#### IV. SOCIAL RELEVANCE

The significance of this paper strictly lies in the social life of a man who lives amidst all activities. Greene attempts to deal with the historical, political and cultural transformation in which the presence of religion and spirituality produce a profound change. Greene’s Literature is but a collective fictitious feeling of spirituality expressed in various forms to reveal the

history and happenings of the past where every work touches the essence that are pious, God fearing and dealing with all good paths of life where every hymn praised the purification, the deeds of the Almighty, with a religious experience of the human predicament.

Many critics and psychoanalysts observe his religious predominance, reflected spiritually, in his novels, at large. Herbert R. Haber criticized the writers like Hemingway, who did not remember the next world but praised for Greene, for whom spirituality has not died; relatively the world at large has chosen to forget Him and for the most Part, He has reciprocated in kind. [8]

The present piece of work emphatically examines an interwoven theme of sin and spirituality, which is too obsessed and consistent throughout all of his literary oeuvres. Sin is a moral evil, if regarded from the point of view of religion, and as distinguished from that of ethics. These elements are much more dominant in the three major Catholic novels of Greene *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter* giving to his works a religious overtone. Greene by bringing back to the English novel this religious sense, and dealt with spiritual problems such as faith, salvation, and damnation in his novels. The finest critic on Greene, George Woodcock states:

“Theologically Greene may recognize original sin, but in his writings, the evil in man is always less than evil without arising from the collective activities of society. His observation of humanity, forces him into a revolutionary attitude” (199) [9].

Herbert R. Haber points out,

“. . . Graham Greene believes that ultimately from impurity will come purity, from demonism saintliness, from unbelief belief, from vice virtue and that is why his heroes often seem closer to demons than to saint.” [10]

#### V. CONCLUSION

Briefly, it can be wisely concluded that Graham Greene has thoroughly and effectively made use of his literary philosophy accentuating the universal elements of sin and spirituality, which strongly interferes with the human

activities that are not born free, but bonded with various religious dimensions and belief as depicted throughout his novels. The spiritual seediness is seen in almost all his works, as it were, the utilization of sin by grace of god, in one's life. His works justify the spiritual dependency that prompts the sinner to think of his redemption. Greene suggests that a true believer in the process of redemption certainly finds the presence of God. With the conventional force of religion and spirituality Greene seems to say that even if, one has committed a moral sin, it is quite possible that he would be redeemed by the mere touch of the grace of God.

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