

Chapter - V: FROM DEATH TO LIFE :

Graham Greene's sensibility is conditioned by his religious obsession. He writes about human inadequacies which lead man to his spiritual and moral death. Greene regards conscious attempt to sin as a death but experience of such death is real. The deaths he has depicted in his plays are metaphorical. Some characters are shown resurrected in pious and ethical life though they experience such death. Their resurrections are also metaphorical.

Graham Greene uses the Christian idea of death and resurrection. The Bible speaks of death as a result of sin. And because of sin, death is a divine penalty. It is a spiritual death. At the same time, paradoxically, it gives us hope. It points out that the believer will pass altogether out of state which is death. He is brought into a new state, which is aptly characterised as life. He will in due course pass the gateway, we call death (into life). Therefore, his plays depict a hope for those who are degenerated. Greene stresses the need of salvation to guard the society from the fall.

*Fear of death—  
faith in God*

In The Living Room, the room where Rose died is the expression of the elderly sisters' fear of death. It indicates their failure in faith of God. So they are spiritually dead. In the real sense, they do not believe and do not keep God's

word. The sisters are not His true followers. They are closing the doors of every room like closing their faith in God. So they have fear of death. Greene's approach towards the action of the play is religious. As John Atkins says:

The story expressed the death that lurks so politely in The Living Room...There is not the slightest element of comedy in the story. Similarly, when readers called his religious books depressing, Greene's reply was: "Not at all. They are most optimistic. They deal with infinite mercy of God".<sup>1</sup>

Graham Greene has made this play optimistic. ( Except Rose, the luckless heroine, who did not believe in God.) Though Rose kills herself in the living room and falls short of God's grace; yet, Greene has shown that God uses Rose's death as the channel of other's salvation. <sup>He</sup> Greene intensifies God's purpose that He can use anybody as a subject for His purpose. James Browne, the priest, becomes helpless and cannot guide Rose at her last moment. A person as sinful as Rose is driven against her instincts of self-preservation to die for her lust, God has utilised Rose for His purpose of reaffirming His faith in her maiden aunts. At the end, Teresa enters carrying a load of bedding. She is determined to sleep in the room where Rose died. Teresa says to Helen:

"...It's all nonsense, my dear. Why shouldn't I sleep here? We're not afraid of the child. And there'd be no better room for me to fall asleep in forever than

the room where Rose died".<sup>2</sup>

Helen tries to prevent Teresa, but their brother at last asserts his authority:

Stop it, Helen. We've had enough of this foolishness. God isn't unmerciful like a woman can be. You have been afraid too long. It's time for you to rest my darling. It's time for you to rest.<sup>3</sup>

In the last action Father Browne attempted to know his sisters about God's will and law. As Henry Raynor says:

The rules, the crippled priest explains, are man's rules, man's attempt to make God's will into comprehensible law; decisions rest ultimately with God.<sup>4</sup>

So Greene conveys that the faith in God must be firm. When we are spiritually dead we must pass from this death into life, then and then only we will be free from all worries of this world.

verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24)

The play is about hope. A.A. DeVitis aptly remarks: "This hope is a reaffirmation, and through Teresa, Greene exploits the belief in the mercy of God and in a life after death".<sup>5</sup>

As regards the sisters, Greene has very subtly shown the movement from spiritual death to real life. They reaffirm their faith in God and get salvation. R.W.B. Lewis remarks: "Greene's ironically titled play The Living Room discloses at the outset an image of life almost totally invaded by a series of deaths".<sup>6</sup> Greene emphasizes that for salvation and for the real life there after one must pass from death into life.

In The Complaisant Lover, Mary has sexual love with Clive. If she is innocent she unknowingly loves Clive. This sort of innocence is dangerous; it kills the soul. Her husband knows it well that Mary is dead in her soul and so what she is doing is a blunder. He says: "Boredom is not a good reason for changing a profession or a marriage".<sup>7</sup> And about innocence David Price-Jones says: "Innocence must die young if it isn't to kill the soul of men".<sup>8</sup> Victor wants to preserve Mary's soul and to revive her or to bring her into life so he asks Clive to be a complaisant lover.

From the point of view of Christian morality Clive is a victim. He plays with Mary's life. Philip Stratford in The Kenyon Review says:

The Complaisant Lover is, ironically victim of conquering lover, Clive Root. ("The root of all evil", Victor puns at one point, and Clive himself plays on the possible parallels between his life and that of his name sake, Clive of India).<sup>9</sup>

Morally he is also dead. He conquers Mary, she is a prey of (his passions and becomes morally dead. Her way to moral life is blocked by her sin. She stumbles in her illusion. An illusion is one form of death which Mary has.<sup>10</sup> So she has no loyalty towards her husband which is unconventional and leads her to despair. But lately she understands her husband's need and her moral duty towards children; so she remains complaisant and she is regenerated and enters the new life. She has the movement from moral death to moral life. Clive, too, accepts his fate and remains complaisant. He also has movement from moral death to new life. Their moral death is a real experience and Greene has depicted the death and life metaphorically too. Greene shows through these characters' the decay of civilization or the death of morality in modern civilization. He feels that the decadent generation should be revived. So the ending of the play shows that he has made it a comedy, and the family is preserved. Though Mary has sexual love like Rose; yet, she has survived. Greene emphasizes the importance of moral life in this 'World'. It is an authentic existence here and now which essentially is offered as a possibility for those who have accepted the finitude implied by the moral death. Yet to attain life is the highest possible goal worthy of any sacrifice, for, only in this way can one's soul be preserved.

In The Return of A.J. Raffles, the aristocratic burglar, Raffles is the hero of the closed world of burglary. He has an obsession with burglary. He hopes to acquire money for his luxurious life which gives him no revelation of truth

*c.l.  
who is the  
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in his life. Without money he feels sunk. He says: "What poetry would be left in life",<sup>11</sup> Raffles has cheated death as he once cheated Inspector Mackenzie. So he is a burglar as well as great cheater. And cheaters have no morals according to the conventional society. They are morally dead, and so Raffles is morally dead. But when he is caught, Prince of Wales defends Raffles. He is now converted. He promises Prince of Wales that in future England will know Raffles only as a cricketer and not as a burglar.

The moment comes when he gains self-knowledge and is liberated from the death of immorality. Therefore, he has the movement from the moral death to moral life. Greene suggests that it is a clue to an authentic being. It frees us from thrall to petty cares that threaten to engulf our daily lives.

In Carving a Statue, the Sculptor is an ethical man. He fears the lingering death of his wife and runs away and remains in the illusion of death on each day of his life. He tortures himself with the vision of suffering in the world.

He was possessed by the idea of carving a statue of God the Father. This is a theistic work he has undertaken long ago. But it is obstructed by his lust as he uses the girl, for his physical satisfaction. This is an evil deed - an unpardonable sin according to Catholic belief. It is his fall - he is spiritually dead there. An ethical man is alienated

from God. He disobeyed God. So his idea of God is transformed into the idea of Lucifer. But he comes to the senses when his son tries to commit suicide. At this point he is trembling within himself and is regenerated. He has a leap into spiritual life. He says: "It wasn't vertigo. All I needed was a new idea".<sup>12</sup> He moves from spiritual death to spiritual life.

The death which is the result of sin is more than the bodily death. Greene wants to exemplify through the Sculptor's character that men are caught up in a web woven by human inadequacies. Once having sinned, something can be done about it. According to the Catholic belief God is Omnipresent, and if He has decree that death is penalty of sin, it may be spiritual death, He has also determined to give eternal life to sinful men. This is the paradox, Greene uses such paradoxes in his religious plays and fictions.

The Potting Shed is about resurrection - about a human being actually and physically rising from the dead. The movement in the play is from suicide to life. R.W.B. Lewis says:

The Potting Shed has much of stripped, honed urgency, the dazzling but still substantial play of paradox that characterized the best of Greene's prose. The movement from death to life has always been one of Greene's dominant themes, side by side its opposite.<sup>13</sup>

In the play the central figure is James. He has been treated as the hollow man and his hollowness is nothing but his spiritual death. He resembles Wilditch of "Under the Garden" (1963). Wilditch has been all his life a wanderer and an outcast. He has suffered from anguish springing from an abundance of unrealized power and loss of identity. James fears the dark place. The same parallels we find in case of Francis Morton who has the mortal terror of the dark in Greene's story, "The End of the Party" (1929), and the old man fears the loneliness like a child in his latest short story "Cheap in August" (1967). In Greenland the fear of darkness is a symbol of man's fear of death. James is frightened by darkness and says:

I didn't want to go. I was frightened before I left the house, just as though I knew someone was waiting for me, among the laurels, on the path to the potting shed.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible also speaks about light and darkness - 'Life' is associated with light, resurrection and eternal life and is contrasted with darkness, death and eternal punishment. James has the resurrected existence like Lazarus. Greene makes the use of resurrection theme in The Potting Shed. We can find the same theme in his short story "The Second Death" (1929). The story outlines the life of a man who had once been given up for dead. James meets Father Callifer and





realises the reason for his hollowness. Then he becomes a 'Whole man'. Though he committed sin by attempting suicide and had spiritual death; yet, he has the movement from spiritual death to resurrected life.

Greene is quite religious in this play. He has depicted James as a resurrected man and a believer of God. Greene conveys that his life is an example before the non-believers. It is pictured as restored life in which peace and fullness are multiplied and threat of death is completely removed.

Father William Callifer offers faith and for the period of thirty years he becomes faithless, spiritually dead. But who has taken away his faith, God or devil? God can never take away faith, on the other hand He strengthens His faith in his followers. It is correctly pointed out by Mary McCarthy in Partisan Review:

God does not have the power, at least in Catholic belief, to take away; faith can only be lost by the free will of the individual. The devil can take your faith away, if you consent to listen to him. But God would be shocked by the suggestion. If the priest's faith was lost, therefore, it must have been the devil who took it. But who, then, restored the boy's life? It must have been God, since the devil does not have the power to raise the dead.<sup>15</sup>

Greene emphasizes that God for His purpose gives man into the hands of devil. He may be God's priest or any other person. He is made temporarily powerless. Father Callifer

or Father Browne are made temporarily inactive. This only strengthens the case against Him. Father Callifer dies spiritually. As he is spiritually dead there is his failure. But he overcomes it. It is his success. So his success is through his failure. Father Callifer's spiritual death is needed for the half-hearted Callifers. The loss of his faith paradoxically brings success. The Callifers have obtained the salvation through him and his nephew.

Father Callifer is released from the burden of his spiritual death-state when he gives his testimony to his nephew and comes into the spiritual life again. Here Father Callifer has the movement from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Mrs. Callifer, John, Sara and Dr. Baston are disciples of Henry Callifer. All of them do not believe in God. So they are spiritually dead. Their state of spiritual death is a state of sleep, where they are without thought in which they do not praise God. An iron-willed mother is ready to send her son out of home so long as the lie (James's resurrection seems lie to the Callifers) that could be concealed. Therefore, John, her elder son, too, supports his mother for banishment of James. Henry's friend, Dr. Baston, a serious and profound psychiatrist, does not believe in the miracle. He also supports Mrs. Callifer and tries to manipulate the miracle. But, at last unwillingly accepts the truth. He says:

"...I would simply say we had to re-define our terms - the concepts life and death".<sup>16</sup>

At the end they understand righteousness is a 'way of life', and by it one is delivered from the threats of death. They now understand an utter grace of the new life from God - an unfathomable, unexpected and a freely bestowed act of salvation. All have the movement from spiritual death to new life.

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live. (John 11:25)

Greene shows the conversion of Callifer family through James and Father Callifer. It is their leap into belief. The means of redemption allowed to a Greene character are love and charity. It is through these that the Callifers emancipate themselves from alienation. Their regeneration and death are, therefore, vaguely suggestive of a religious principle which gives coherence to so much of Greene's work. He emphasizes the Catholic belief that to believe or convert is to save a soul from death. Greene also conveys that man can neither prolong his soul-life nor destroy it, God can either forfeit it or change it to resurrection-life. So the conversion is the expression of a hope for the real life. The Callifers have the 'doubt' but Greene has universalised this 'doubt' which is gradually shed over the whole human order. Unless it is destroyed completely as a desperation of the senses,

we cannot find out the divine perspective from the ruins of the human. Thus, Greene has disclosed the secret of life and appealed to the audience to have spiritual life and the life which is free from doubts.

Though Greene shows Rose's physical death; yet, he depicts that God has used her as a channel to fulfill His purpose of reaffirming His faith in her aunts. Father Callifer has a spiritual death, it has also been used to change the rational outlook of the Callifers, who were alienated from James and God. Mary, Clive, Sculptor and Raffles are morally dead, their moral life was blocked due to human inadequacies but Greene opens their eyes at right time. All are shown to be regenerated in moral life. At the end Greene asserts belief in the mercy of God and emphasizes that for salvation one must pass from death into life.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. John Atkins, Graham Greene, London: John Calder, 1957, p. 226.
2. Graham Greene, Three Plays, London: Mercury Books, 1961, p. 71.
3. Ibid., p. 70.
4. Henry Raynor, in Contemporary Dramatist, Ed. James Vinson, London: St. James Press, 1973, p. 319.
5. A.A. DeVitis, Graham Greene, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964, p. 130.
6. R.W.B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, London: Lowe and Brydone, 1958, p. 23.
7. Graham Greene, Three Plays, London: Mercury Books, 1961, p. 217.
8. David Pryce-Jones, Graham Greene, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963, p. 91.
9. Philip Stratford, The Kenyon Review, XXIV, 1962, p. 134.
10. Mary has a happy home. In this home she needed husband and her children. At the same time for her physical satisfaction she needed a lover. To have a husband and a lover together is a mistaken belief of her. She was deceiving her mind against the conventional society. She was morally dead. Therefore, to be in this illusion is one kind of death.
11. Graham Greene, The Return of A.J. Raffles, London: The Bodley Head, 1975, p. 31.
12. Graham Greene, Carving a Statue, London: Penguin Plays, 1972, p. 80.
13. R.W.B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, London: Lowe and Brydone, 1958, p. 273.
14. Graham Greene, Three Plays, London: Mercury Books, 1961, p. 103.
15. Mary McCarthy, Partisan Review, XXIV, 1957, p. 272.
16. Graham Greene, Three Plays, London: Mercury Books, 1961, p. 143.

