

**THE THEME OF RELIGIOUS SUFFERINGS IN GRAHAM GREENE’S *THE  
POWER AND THE GLORY***

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**Abstract:**

*Culture and religion are supplementary to each other. Religion defines culture. According to the religion and culture, every human being tries to behave and tries to follow religious customs. But sometimes culture and the will of man come into conflict. One wants to do something but one's religion does not allow him or her to do so. Such situation of characters is depicted by a twentieth century famous religious writer, Graham Greene. He is known for his Catholic trilogy. The novel taken for research paper is one among his Catholic trilogy. The novel revolves round the religious sufferings of the priests depicted in the novel. Being a priest they could not follow their religion and they regret about it.*

**Introduction:**

Culture and religion are two sides of one coin because our religion defines our culture. The word 'culture' includes conventions of behaviour, the techniques for food preparations, wearing different types of clothes, celebrating different festivals according to the religion, different forms of entertainment. So different cultures came into existence out of different religions. It is difficult to define culture. It can be described as 'a way of living'. It is a kind of set of beliefs and these set of beliefs are mostly based on religion.

**Definitions of Culture:**

Cambridge Dictionary defines culture as a "the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at particular time."

One of the definitions given in Merriam Webster Dictionary is:

"The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or way of life) shared by people in a place or time".

The above definitions make it clear that religion and culture are inter-related to each other. Religion works as a backbone of society. All the things like wearing clothes, preparing foods, behaviour of human beings is depend on their religion. Most of the times, we can understand one's religion by his particular types of clothing. These customs, beliefs are found mainly in their religious books. Religion is important

factor which influence culture on a larger scale. The following quotation from the article “Culture and Religion for Sustainable Future” shows the relation between religion and culture:

Religion is a major influence in the world today. It seems that people in all cultures have a set of beliefs that go beyond both the self and the natural world. We use these beliefs to help explain reasons for human existence and to guide personal relationships and behaviour. . . .Religious beliefs have a strong influence on the culture of a community. Indeed, for many people around the world, religious beliefs are central to their culture and provide the moral codes by which they live. ....(web)

Hence it is clear that religion and culture cannot be separated. Culture and religion are two sided one. Religion is a kind of social conditioning. Religion influences the way of life. Religion works as a soul of culture. Both culture and religion are part and parcel of man’s everyday life. Both defines man’s behaviour as well as personality.

### **Religion and Literature:**

As the religion became the part of life, naturally it started reflecting in literature. The reflection of the religion can be seen on literature from the centuries back. Dante’s Divine Comedy is the best example of it. It is a religious allegory which shows man’s journey towards Godliness. Even George Eliot started her career by translating a theological text.

Though this is a relity, the picture go on changing towards twentieth century. After the two World Wars, there was decline of religion. Very few writers wrote about religion. In twentieth century mainly T S Eliot, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene were the writers who brought the religious aspect once again in English literature. T. S. Eliot’s poems talks about religion and religious doctrines. Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene are Catholic converts and both of them wrote about Catholicism. Greene takes objection that twentieth century literature lack moral, religious values. He says:

After the death of Henry James a disaster undertook English novel . . . .for with (his) death the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of importance of the human act, it was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs. Virginia Woolf and Mr. E. M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper thin. (p 91)

### **Graham Greene as a Religious Writer:**

Born in October 1904, Graham Greene, a twentieth century, multidimensional personality, is mainly known for his Catholic trilogy. Most of his writing reflects Catholicism. Like him, most of his characters are Catholic by religion. he reacts to the Catholicism in a strikingly different way. His religious novels have themes of sin and salvation. He used to believe that only faith can save man from his ruin.

His novels explores man-God relationship. Edward Short says in his article “Catholic Novels of Graham Greene”:

The Catholic element in Greene’s work also received a fair amount of attention, and nowhere more provocatively than in a review of Sherry’s book by the English writer Simon Heffer, who argued that for non-Catholics Greene’s faith is “simply irrelevant” or, worse, “an exposition of hypocrisy.” . . . Heffer concluded that Greene’s religion was “a pose...which he turned into a series of money-making opportunities.” (web)

Being a Catholic, Graham Greene has presented Catholic religion in a more effective way.

### **Religious Suffering in *The Power and The Glory*:**

This is one of the important novels of Greene among the Catholic trilogy. It is set in Mexico and it is based on Greene’s visit to Mexico. Published in 1940, the novel deals with the themes like guilt, betrayal, corruption, crime and violence. It depicts the conflict between State and Church. Like Green’s other Catholic novels, this novel also has religious dogmas. Mexico depicted in the novel is a place where Catholicism was outlawed by the government. Two priests are depicted in the novel. One is whisky priest and another is Padre Jose. As there is ban on religion, no religious customs are done in it. Priests either have to accept the law of the state and have to marry and live their life on pension provided by the government otherwise they would have been executed by the police. So religious suffering is at the centre of this novel. Mark Bosco says in his article “From The Power and the Glory to The Honorary Consul: The Development of Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination”:

Greene's specific genius is the imaginative way he places this aesthetic at work in the wasteland geography of a persecuted Church in Mexico. The whiskey priest undergoes a change of vision through his sinfulness and suffering. (62)

It is their religion that makes them suffer from various agonies. Whisky priest commits sin after sin and feels guilty about it. Throughout the novel whisky priest runs from one place to another place because police wanted him as he has not accepted the law. He used to do religious things secretly and people also used to give him money for that. Though he is a priest, he has married to a mistress and has a daughter named Brigida. While wondering from one place to another place he comes to the place where his mistress and his daughter used to live. Though it is reality, he feels guilty about having a child because priests do not get married but he has committed this mortal sin of getting married and having a child. When he meets his daughter he hides bottle of brandy as he felt guilty that being a priest, he does not behave ideally according to his religion.

When he used to do religious rituals he could not be able to say “my children” because only childless priests can say so and he has a daughter so he feels guilty about it. All the time his religion makes him aware about his sins and he suffers more and more. Even he could not carry the responsibility

towards his own child and this makes him experience more guilt. Aseel Hatif Jassam says about whisky priest his article “The Power and the Glory: a Religious Study of Troubled Psyche:

.... the “whisky priest”, the tormented main character in *The Power and the Glory* and the product of Greene’s own tortured soul. Through guilty, sinful and almost a failure, he is presented as a real hero due to the special love he has for God which is more powerfully felt through his sense of weakness and failure. (7-8)

Towards the end of the novel, Mestizo who is called as a Judas figure by the critics helps the lieutenant to arrest whisky priest. For that he creates one trap and tells priest that one dying man wants to confess and priest being doubtful that this may be a trap takes a risk and goes with him and gets arrested. He compares his arrest with crucifixion. In a jail, he suffers from guilt. His sins are so graver that he feels ashamed of it. He remembers the days when people used to kiss him and give him respect but now he is just a criminal. He used to feel proudly about himself but now he came to know how his proudness has taken him towards religious suffering because pride is one of the seven deadly sins. He started counting his sins. He tells lieutenant:

Pride was what made the angels fall. Pride’s the worst thing of all thought I was fine fellow to have stayed when the others had gone. . . . I wasn’t any use, but I stayed. I wasn’t any use, but I stayed at least, not much use. . . . (233)

His pride and feeling of guiltiness makes him suffer a lot. His psychology becomes worse and worse.

Towards the end of the novel, he started crying out of grief in a jail. He feels that being a priest he does not have followed religion seriously and now he feels totally repentant about it. Out of this grief he even started beating his head on the wall. He wants to confess his sins so lieutenant goes to Padre Jose but Jose rejects to come with his out of fear of government law. This makes whisky’s priest’s suffering more heavy on his mind. He says:

“O God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins . . . crucified . . . worthy of Thy dreadful punishments.” (250)

Religion makes the man to control himself and behave morally. Here priest behave immorally and loses control over himself. If he can be seen as a common human being all his behavior is but natural. Because common man gets married and give birth to the child but here whisky priests suffers only because of his religion. It is his religion that makes him aware about his wrong deeds and takes it towards his mental suffering.

Another character is of Padre Jose. Like whisky priest, he is also a religious character but his suffering is somewhat similar to whisky priest. Padre Jose has accepted the law of government and has got married. Being a priest, getting married is a mortal sin. Because of his marriage, he has become

subject of mocking. Even children also used to tease him and laugh at him. His wife all the time used to call him on bed which makes him so restless and guilty that he could not be able to bear this suffering. He thinks that his place is in heaven as his behavior is against religion. The narrator describes his condition as:

He had lived for two years now in a continuous state of mortal sin with no one to hear his confession: nothing to do at all but sit and eat-eat far too much: she fed him and fattened him and preserved him like a prize boar. (30)

Some people used to request him to do the rituals secretly but he could be able to do so though the wanted to perform rituals for the people. He also suffers when he has to say no when whisky priest was in need of him. Whisky priest begs for the help of Pdre Jose for two times. Firstly he was on run from police and at another time when he was in jail, he wanted to confess before him. But both the times, he struggles with himself as he wanted to help but he could not be. He feels guilty that being a priest, he could not be able to help another priest.

### **Conclusion:**

Greene being a Catholic convert can depict this situation of Catholic priest in more familiar way. Secondly, he visited in Mexico which helped him to depict the picture in a more realistically. Both the priests in the novel suffer only because of religion. If these characters can be seen out of the religious context, anybody can say that they are leading a normal life but their religion makes them conscious about their sins and this led them to suffering. Whisky priest, though addicted to liquor, committed fornication and committed mortal sin, still his faith in religion has remained unshakable. In Greene's religious novels search for God has remained paradoxical. His Catholic characters disobeys the rules if Catholic Church. They seems to be struggling between natural instincts and faith in God. The novel makes the reader think that whether religion is made for man or man is made for religion.

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