



POLITICS AS A WEB OF INTRIGUE AND AMBITION AS PROJECTED IN THE FICTIONAL WORLD OF GRAHAM GREENE: AN APPRAISAL

Dr. S.Chelliah

(Professor, Head & Chairperson, School Of English & Foreign Languages, Department Of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021. Tamil Nadu, India.)

ABSTRACT



This paper throws light upon politics as a web of intrigue and ambition by showing how it gets projected in the fictional world of Graham Greene and examines in depth how Greene evinced keen interest in politics and social relationship which are commonly considered as the fundamental aspects of human experience and life orientation. It also focuses on the way in which human behaviour gets affected by politics. Then, it discusses how he penned down a beautiful picturization about civil corruption, religious degradation and political bias that too, in artistic vein and literary standpoint.

Keywords: *Communism, Democracy, Human Behaviour, Political Bias, Evil Corruption, Picturization.*



The modern age is “an age of deepening inner despair and of appalling catastrophes, an age when society says one thing and does something entirely different, when everybody talks about peace and prepares for more wars Western man is more schizophrenic” (Priestly 266). Like T.S.Eliot. in *The Waste Land*, Greene emphasizes on the sterility and despair of the modern civilization. The first world war unsettled society in many ways, hastening the emancipation of women and promoting a temporary merging of the social classes that had the writers to think and realize that they were living in a time of rapid and disbursing change finding uncertainty, anxiety and a certain fatalism and apathy born out of the helplessness of the individual in the mechanical world of today as the marks of our times. Sisir Chatterjee rightly holds:

“The age we live in is one of disillusionment, Cynicism and agnosticism. The disillusionment of our age has resulted in a marked decline of spiritual quality in contemporary fiction”(33).

The average man leads a purposeless life. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) may be cited as a filling example for capturing the anguish and anxiety of the modern generation. In the 1920's the British to some extent recovered from the shock of the first World War cherishing the hope that things would turn out better. But the 1930's eventually constituted a grim period forcibly drawing the attention of the writers towards the social and political issues. It was found to be a decade of fear, misery and panic leading to great economic depression and as a result, even the common man began to evince interest in political issues. Greene's novels of the thirties have a contemporary atmosphere dealing with the uprooted man drifting in the urban society. His characters are placed in the contemporary setting in the fundamental human situation. In his fictional world, Greene points out the meaninglessness, the seediness and the vulgarity of the society that has already banished God.

“Disloyalty is our privilege” wrote Graham Greene in 1948, in an exchange of views on the relation of the artist to the society. As one critic has put it, Greene is the spokesman of tragic times. His three novels namely *The Quiet American* (1955), *The*

Comedians (1966) and *The Honorary Consul* (1973) may be taken as examples for picturization of evil corruption, religious degradation and political bias. The political issues get beautifully reflected in these novels. In *The Quiet American*, Greene did vehemently criticize the blunderings and the dangerous and misguided innocence of American policy in Indochina. *The Quiet American* is only “a story and not a piece of history”, it has turned out to be as prophetic as it is symbolic. “How many people have to die before you realize... that there's no such thing as gratitude in politics” (TQI 112) *The Comedians* shows the sufferings of Haitians and the Complexity of America. The forces of evil are politically represented by Papa's doc's regime. In *The Honorary Consul*, the Paraguayan rebels in a bid to kidnap the visiting American Ambassador with a view to using him as a hostage to force their government to release political prisoners abduct the wrong man – the Honorary Consul.

Greene has always been interested in politics and social relationships as in religion, for they are all fundamental aspects of human experience which has been his real subject all through his career. Throughout the political scenario, Greene says that there is no political system which is perfect and evil can be found in these systems. Democracy has also failed to bring proper justice and peace among the people. Communism which considers the savior of the poor has not helped to remove poverty but has increased corruption. The three novels of Greene bring home the point that both these systems have not been fully successful. Greene has always been repelled by American liberalism, American capitalism and Imperialism, and would go to almost any length to put feeble twig in the spokes of American foreign policy. Besides the terrifying weight of this consumer society oppresses him. It is not surprising that America should remain a focus a political hostility.

Truly speaking, Greene has fought a battle against the power of abstractions which has tried to dominate politics. In a society which is governed well or bad, the government is a threatening force which exploits man's freedom. Hemingway, Faulkner, Kafka and Greene always attempt to fictionalize the human situation. Their novels evoke dismay, fear and bewilderment. They work from centre to the



periphery and from particular to the general. In their works, "an individual or ordinary individual shall be selected to represent the predicament of mankind in the particular circumstance under consideration and that the reader shall be invited to identify himself with that individual" (Greene 47-48).

Greene deals with political subjects and ideas, his aim is not social reform but examination of human behaviour, which is affected by politics. In all his novels, his social and political concerns are fused with the love-innocence – treachery motif to explore the situation of man, every man in society and in personal relationships. Thus, *Stamboul Train* depicts a failed political movement as it presents love, lust, treachery and failure on all levels in human relationships. This concern for justice and truth infuses all of Greene's work, giving the universe he creates a complex dimension of reality. He has never quit for fighting. His novels are drawn from life as it is. His characters live, fall in love, toil, struggle and die. Each has his place in the society from the judge or a policeman representing the established order to the outlaw, a murderer or a traitor challenging it and in between the industrialist, a worker, a writer or a communist and a priest. In *It's a Battlefield*, Jim Drover, a London bus driver kills a policeman at a Communist meeting. A decent, soft spoken and an honest man is thus turned into a killer. It is a battlefield and its victims are chiefly the poor, condemned by the workings of the economic and social system to insecurity, to mechanized factories, a hand to the left, a hand to the right, the pressure of a foot – or unemployment – the beggar did not beg because he would not work. Justice is unjust for the laws were made by property owners in defense of property. In *A Gun for Sale*, he attacks the capitalist system.

The Quiet American is an indictment of American involvement in the Vietnam War. It is an expression of venomous anti-Americanism. Greene mocks at their innocence. Fowler tells Pyle not to listen to East with their parrot cry about a threat to the individual soul. It is their country and they should run it. The American propaganda machinery that spreads lies and creates public opinions in favour of the widely publicized ideas of democracy comes under a heavy attack. *The Comedians* is an attack on

the police tyranny and diplomatic hypocrisy of Dr. Duvalier's rule. Haiti has a puppet government. The guidelines for Haitian politics are prepared in Washington. The country is passing through throes of civil war. Haiti shows how the Americans exploit the situation for their political ends. By controlling the local political machinery, the Americans wish to assert their presence in Haiti.

The politicians never see what is happening. They sit in their home with their western comforts and send out the Pyles of the world who operate on indigested ideas and create havoc to the necessity for the courageous individual act. Like Pyle, the Smiths are also do-gooders who carry their vegetarianism to Haiti with a missionary zeal. In *The Honorary Consul*, Rivas compares general with archbishop sitting comfortably watching all sorts of horror going on and they feel it all happens because of man's free will. *The Honorary Consul* deals with the repercussions of this bungling on various individuals, especially Dr. Plarr who is drawn into the kidnappers plot against his will. *The Quiet American* deals with Indochina of 50's when United States tried to intervene in order to stop communism and spread democracy. In all the three novels, terrorism plays a tremendous role in making common man's life difficult. In *The Honorary Consul*, the Paraguayan terrorists attempt to kidnap the American ambassador to Argentina which results in seizing the Honorary Consul for Great Britain. *The Comedians* exposes the brutality of the regime and shows America's willingness to support any amount of violence to prevent Haiti from becoming another Cuba. In a word, there is a subtle treatment of politics in *The Quiet American*, *The Honorary Consul* and *The Comedians*. Thus, politics in Greene is a web of intrigue and ambition.

WORKS CITED

- [1]. Chatterjee, Sisir. *Problems in Modern English Fiction*. India: Book Land Pvt. Ltd., 1965, P 33.
- [2]. Priestly, J.B. *Literature and Western Man*. London: Mercury Books, 1960.
- [3]. Jones, David Pryce. *Graham Greene*. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963.