



## SELF-AWARENESS IN THE PROCESS OF REDEMPTION FROM NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S *THE SCARLET LETTER* (1850) AND GRAHAM GREENE'S *THE POWER AND THE GLORY* (1940)

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**ABSTRACT** Self-awareness is the best awareness ever we could have in our life and it is the first step towards any change in life. What one does in awareness is becoming the “the watcher of self”. When person becomes aware of the positive and negative stimuli it brings about well-being or ill-being in the human person. Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* of Nathaniel Hawthorne proved that growing more in the awareness of his own state enabled him to admit his fault and eventually change his life. The whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory* of Graham Greene was protected from his failures of his past because of his self-awareness. Both *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Power and the Glory* disclose the importance of self-awareness in the redemptive process. Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and the Whisky Priest were aware of the fact that they gave importance to themselves more than God and this was root of all their failure. These characters of Hawthorne and Greene grew in awareness, experienced its agony and misery in its intensity in their bodies all alone and came out as redeemed.

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Self-awareness is the best awareness ever we could have in our life and it is the first step towards any change in life. The Bible enumerates a number of examples which has helped people towards transformation as self-awareness. Jesus experienced in his bodily life the joys and sorrows of humanity in its fullness. He rejoiced with the joyful and wept with those who were sad. He cared for the sick and the suffering. He also felt intensely the rejection of his people. Jesus experienced the miracle of awareness at his agony in the Garden of Olives. The night before he was crucified as a criminal, he felt the betrayal as an innocent victim. Three times he prayed to his God to deliver him from the experience of suffering. He felt the agony in his entire body. His sweat became drops of blood falling to the ground. He was aware of every bit of suffering in his own body for a greater purpose. The suffering reached its maximum intensity and gradually melted away. Peace and calm descended upon him as an angel of consolation coming down from his God. Thus, he attained the fullness of life (Kunnumpuram 180). Buddha was transformed through his awareness. He became aware of the real suffering of people and stayed with it and reflected on it. This gave him enlightenment. The greatest contribution of Buddha to humanity has been the gift of awareness as the key to the alleviation of human suffering and thus bringing about well-being for the entire human race (179). What one does in awareness is becoming the “the watcher of self”. A person becomes aware of the positive and negative stimuli to bring about well-being or ill-being in the human person (35). The characters of Hawthorne and Greene had similar experience of going deep into their own self, resulting in their redemption.

The interior world of Dimmesdale is being explained in *The Scarlet Letter*. As the novel starts out, we are introduced to Hester Prynne's act of adultery with the town pastor Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. As the true father of Pearl, Dimmesdale struggles to reveal his sinfulness and defend his morality. In the course of time he becomes aware of his failure and wanted to confess the truth but the fear of losing his reputation stopped him from confessing it. He had to battle with the thought of losing his name and fame in the society as he was a religious leader. This intensified the fear and guilt in him. He remained ill, unhealthy, thin and sick. The root of all these was negative thoughts which triggered negative feelings and that ended up in negative behaviour of concealing his great fault even when his partner in crime shouldered the result of their inordinate passion. This makes the fact clear that he was aware of his own short coming but was unable to confess it because of his fear of losing his reputation:

I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie. More than once, Mr Dimmesdale had gone into the pulpit, with a purpose never to come down its steps until he should have spoken words like the above. . . He kept vigils, likewise, night after night, sometimes in utter darkness, sometimes with a glimmering lamp, and sometimes, viewing his own face in a looking glass, by the most powerful light which he could throw upon it. He thus typified the constant introspection wherewith he tortured, but could not purify himself. (Hawthorne 158-159)

The self-examination on account of his self-awareness enabled him to reflect about his own actions and finally strengthened him to confess the truth to the world. The struggle within Dimmesdale to make the choice to confess the truth and come out of the negative experience was strong but the temptation to keep his reputation and remain silent about his fault also was more intense. These emotional disturbances and mental stress appeared in the form of dreams. We are forced to conclude the fact that dreams are what we suppress in our mind. They keep coming to us until we attend to them. It teaches us the lesson that our conscience is restless until it reveals the truth. His dreams expressed his inner turmoil and fear: “And now, through the chamber which these spectral thoughts had made so ghastly, glided Hester Prynne, leading along little Pearl, in her scarlet garb, and pointing her forefinger, first at the scarlet letter on her bosom, and then at the clergyman's own breast” (160). Dimmesdale proved that growing more in the awareness of his own state enabled him to admit his fault and change his life.

The framework of sin and saintliness in the novels of Greene has enabled him to a great extent in presenting his characters from a psychological perspective also. The Whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory*, for example, was conscious about his degraded condition. He is presented as in a humiliated position whenever he came across the faith and ardent fervour to help the poor people. This self-realisation kept him always in the grace of God. He never neglected his duty even when he realised that a trap was waiting for him. After having fulfilled his mission, his mind was filled with a sense of disappointment. He felt that he had to go empty-handed to God. Similarly, all the major characters of Greene have a psychological appeal and dimension which is quite interesting. We hear a similar prayer of the Whiskey priest: “O God, forgive me. I am a proud, lustful, greedy man. I have loved authority too much” (Greene 98). Greene brings to light the priest's consciousness of his own inadequacy and unworthiness. On his way to Maria's village his thoughts go back to his past lamenting the fact that five years before he had given way to an unforgivable sin-despair:

Five years ago, he had given way to despair - the unforgivable sin - and he was going back now to the scene of his despair with a curious lightening of the heart. For he had got over despair too. He was a bad priest, he knew it. They had a word for his kind a whisky priest, but every failure dropped out of sight and mind: somewhere they accumulated in secret-the rubble of his failures. One day they would choke up, he supposed, altogether the source of grace. Until then he carried on, with spells of fear, weariness, with a shame-faced lightness of heart. (64)

It was the awareness of his state of life coerced him towards the redemptive process. The whisky priest was conscious of his weaknesses and admitted the fact he made a mistake in life. He disclosed to the world the Biblical truth behind any failure in life is pride.

The angels fell to the state of being evil representatives on account of pride. Adam and Eve had everything in paradise but their gaze turned from the creator to the creature and they fell. It was same with Cain who killed Abel. Samson, a warrior in the Old Testament underwent the similar experience and lost all his grace because of his pride. David, a king, someone most loved by God also ended up in the same situation due to his pride. Jonah in the OT and Judas in the NT were also victims of pride. The whisky priest was protected from similar failures because of his self-awareness and it is the first step in the redemptive process.

Both *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Power and the Glory* disclose the importance of self-awareness in the redemptive process. Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and the Whisky were aware of the fact that they gave importance to each other more than God and this was root of all their failure. This is actually pride according to the Bible which is the root of failure: "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God handed them over to their undiscerning mind to do what is improper" (Rom. 1:28). When human beings place their trust in themselves and in the created things over God, they falter. This was the reason for the fall of man in the Bible:

The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So, she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so, they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. (Gen. 3. 6-7)

This is the ground on which the authors underline the importance of awareness for change. When one ignores the precepts of God and so occupied with the self, it is likely that one can fall like Adam and Eve. It is the same with the tower of Babel:

Then they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth. . . The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men had built. . . Thus, the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city. (Gen. 11.4-8)

The first debauchery of these characters was that they gave importance to each other more than God. The second depravity was adultery and third immorality were that they were trying to hide the truth. These characters like Hester, Dimmesdale, the Whisky priest and Maria had anxiety about their wickedness and it developed in them a heightened sense of self-awareness. For Hester, self-awareness emanated from taking care of Pearl physically and spiritually, performing good works for the community; confronting Chillingworth and confessing the true identity of Chillingworth to Dimmesdale. She went deeper into her life and discovered her real self. Dimmesdale, grew in self-awareness during his vigils and after his forest meeting with Hester. He decided to flee with Hester and Pearl from Boston. He who was found pale, weak and sickly while going to the forest appeared to alive, ready to take on any challenge and eager to perform his last duty before continuing his transformation elsewhere with Hester and Pearl. He found time to be with his own self and that enlightened him like Buddha to accept the reality as it is. So was the case with the whiskey priest. He carried with him the stigma of adultery and when he saw his own daughter the awareness got intensified in him. He wanted to be with the child and her future was a concern for him. He reflected and regretted about his actions. This resulted in his passion for admitting his sin in the confessional. He made several attempts to remove the stains of his sin as the Catholics believe the confession washes away every stain of sin. These characters of Hawthorne and Greene grew in awareness, experienced its agony and misery in its intensity in their bodies all alone and came out as redeemed.

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