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THEME OF DECLINE OF MORAL VALUES IN GRAHAM GREENE'S  
'DOCTOR FISCHER OF GENEVA'

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ABSTRACT

Fiction is the most popular genre of the coetaneous English Literature. Right from the eighteenth century till now, every decade has witnessed the rise of new techniques and also the incorporation of newer themes into English fiction, the twentieth century being no exception. Twentieth century English literature in different parts of the world in different genres – poetry, drama, fiction and criticism – reveals unmistakably a convergence of concerns and a choice of not- too divergent artistic strategies. In the novel, Doctor Fisher of Geneva, Greene broaches the important aspect of human morality.

"I hated him for his pride, his contempt of all the world, and his cruelty. He loved no one, not even his daughter. He didn't even bother to oppose our marriage, since he had no greater contempt for me than for his so-called friends who would always flock to him at a nod." (Chapter - I, Page – 10)

Dr. Fischer of Geneva, published in 1980, is one of the latest and short novels of Graham Greene. The novel is menacing. It is all about expectation. Again Greene is seen with the subject of evil which is explored in the context of capitalist greed. Greene exposes the hollowness and evil effects of this unlimited greed. He also hits hard at those rich people who are ready to undergo every kind of humiliation for the sake of money, which is their highest consideration. Her of the novel, Dr. Fischer, is a millionaire, a sort of demi-god presiding over the destiny of lesser mortals. Through Dr. Fischer Greene focuses on the exposure of the greedy rich people.

Dr. Fischer of Geneva is very rich, but because of his immoral and shrewd attitude he is despised by everyone. His wife, daughter, Mr. Steiner, son-in-law Jones, even his friends hates him because of thdecline of moral values in his personality. He has no values, no regard for anyone. Even his married life is a kind of curse for him due to his bad behavior. His daughter Anna-Louise is a 'childhood shock' character. She is not warped rather is an angel compared to her father who she hates since

"he made my mother miserable" and also for his 'infernal pride'. (Chapter – VII, Page – 39)

Dr. Fischer is a complete failure in every relation. He has never respected anyone. One thing which he only regards is money, and only money. He has no value of his wife's sentiments for music. Once to his dismay that his wife seeks the company of a poor clerk who shares her love of music for which Dr. Fischer has no taste. Even his daughter feels that her father is very rude to her mother. Her mother loved music, which her father hated.

Mr. Steiner gave Annas mother emotional support. Both of them have common quality i.e. love for music. They both are good friends. But Dr. Fischer doubts their pure relationship. He even tortures her mentally.

Even her husband was not interested in whether she had the pleasure or not. Anna-Louise's mother does not have any wrong feelings for Mr. Steiner. Mr. Steiner also accepts the fact to Jones that he loved her, but she hadn't ever loved him. According to him, when Dr. Fischer became aware of their relationship and love for music he automatically turned into a man. He destroyed his life. He is responsible for her silent death. When Dr. Fischer came to know about their friendship he questioned her and she told him the truth. Again and again Anna-Louise's mother tries to make him understand that their relationship was not immoral.

She was leaving Doctor Fischer by entering a region into which he could not follow her. He tortured her mentally. Anna-Louise tells Jones that when he began to suspect her he came to such a lower level that he recorded their telephonic conversation. He himself informed his wife that he is recording their conversation. As –

“he put a thing on his telephone to record conversation.” (Chap-XI, Page - 75)

Dr. Fischer's jealousy so infected her that she began to feel that she has committed a crime, a sin and he must have a reason for it – she felt herself guilty of something, though of what she wasn't sure. While telling the truth to Jones, Mr. Steiner was so disappointed for the condition of Anna-Louise's mother that she didn't love him and yet she had the will to die. He loved her and yet he hadn't enough will to die. She apologized, she abused herself for no reason, she told him everything very clearly even which record of Heifetz pleased her most, and even after attitude of Dr. Fischer completely changed for her. He made love with hatred. The moment he suspects his wife to be unfaithful, he arranges to destroy the supposed lover, Mr. Steiner. His wife learnt that he had discovered the name of her friend, that harmless little lover of music.

He went to the man's employer, Mr. Kips and gave him fifty thousand francs to murder him without a reference. After a few years Anna-Louise's mother disappeared too. She compares her mother with an African who can just will herself to die. This incident really pricked Dr. Fischer to the heart and he never recovered. Perhaps it was then he learned to hate and despise people. After her death, the Toads were summoned to amuse him.

Mr. Kips was the first of them. Mr. Kips did what he wanted but couldn't have been happy about Mr. Kips. Main reason behind it was that he had exposed himself to Mr. Kips. Mr. Kips knew his secrets very well. So he had to humiliate him like he humiliated Anna-Louise's mother. So, to shut his mouth he made him his lawyer. When Jones asks Anna-Louise whether Dr. Fischer wept at the funeral of her mother. She said –

“I don't believe that-unless he wept to see his victim disappear or perhaps it was hay-fever. She died in the hay-vever season.” (Chapter XI, , Page – 75)

His behaviour towards Anna-Louise was not satisfactory.

Anna-Louise is young and pretty, warm hearted and intelligent. Her father never gave fatherly affection and love to her. As a result, she fell in love with a man who is more thirty years older than her and earns only three thousand francs a month which may have represented half an hour's income to Dr. Fischer. As a young man he had lost his left hand as a fireman in the blitz. But Anna-Louise searches for true love in Jones and decides to marry him at every cost. Actually, it is not true love which attracts Anna-Louise towards him ,but the harshness of Dr. Fischer and thirst for fatherly love and affection which forces Anna-Louise to marry a man who is old enough to be her father.

Anna-Louise is sure that her father Dr. Fischer may create obstacles in their marriage. So, when Mr. Jones asks Anna-Louise to take permission of her father for their marriage, she warns him that he might set the police looking for him. She boldly says that she is a major and can marry without his permission. But after reading Jones face, she allows

him to meet her father, but also warns him to be careful.

She hates Dr. Fischer and his Toads very much. She even tells Mr. Jones that Doctor Fischer knows quite well where she is now. If he wants, he can easily find out his name, profession, place of business, everything. The police already has his name on the files. And anything for Doctor Fischer is not a secret. There's probably a Toad even among the Police. He can do any harm to them at any time. She again warns him to be careful. Be more than ever careful if Doctor Fischer smiles. Anna-Louise also tells him not to ever mention Dentophil to him. Because he doesn't like to be reminded of how his fortune was made. He is very shrewd. He has a very mean tendency as—

“he mocks others, but no one mocks him. He has a monopoly in mockery.” (Chapter – IV, Page – 25)

Doctor Fischer is a villain not only for his family members and friends but also for common mob. When Jones reaches Doctor Fischer's mansion, he asks a Taximan, a French Swiss about his address.

When Jones meets Doctor Fischer he tells him that he is living with his daughter and they are thinking of getting married. But Doctor Fischer shows a kind of careless and neglectful attitude for Anna-Louise.

Jones was surprised. He tells every thing to Anna. When asks him curiously whether her father was a beast, he says that he was totally different to both of them.

A week or two later they get married at the Marie. But Doctor Fischer does not come to give blessings to his one and only daughter. He sends one of his friend, Monsieur Belmont, a tax advisor with an envelope. When Jones opens the envelope he finds only a printed invitation from Doctor Fischer. Anna declares, he mustn't go. But Monseieur Belmont forces Jones to come and join the party at the given date. He says Doctor Fischer will be very disappointed if he didn't come. He tells them that Doctor Fischer wishes to introduce Jones to all his friends. But Jones is surprised to see that Anna was not invited. Anna tells him there her father wants him to join the Toads. He wants to humiliate him as

he humiliates Toads. Actually Toads were not bad, but her father made them bad.

But finally Jones decides to go to the party as Anna persuades him to attend the party ,but internally she is worried that Doctor Fischer may try to humiliate him in front of Toads. Then Mr. Jones said—

“He can't hurt you or me. We are too little to be humiliated. It's like when a man tries to humiliate a waiter – he only humiliates himself.”(Chapter – VIII, Page – 48)

Anna-Louise is very happy in her married life. But she meets with an accident in a ski-race. During operation Jones tries a lot to inform Dr. Fischer about the critical condition of her daughter, but his servant tells him that he was on no account to be disturbed. Doctor Fischer is too busy to talk to him now. He can't be interrupted. He's preparing for a party. Anna-Louise is dead. This incident shatters Jones completely.

But Doctor Fischer does not come for the funeral and there is no one to watch her being interred, except the Anglican Padre, their twice – weekly maid and himself. Mr. Jones attempts suicide. Without Anna-Louise life is meaningless for him. She gives a message on behalf of Doctor Fischer that he wants to see him tomorrow at any time in the afternoon. Jones is very disheartened and says he could have seen him if he had come to his daughter's funeral.

Jones is shocked on such a neglectful irresponsible attitude of a father for his daughter. But, he accepts his invitation as he wants to humiliate him in his party as he humiliated Anna-Louise, her mother and Mr. Steiner. He wanted to prick his pride. He wanted him to suffer as he is suffering. But when Jones met Doctor Fischer he was expecting that Doctor Fischer will feel sorry for Anna-Louise death. But he saw Doctor Fischer was not sad. After a long silence when Jones asked him why he did not attend his daughter's funeral.

Jones is very much surprised when Doctor Fischer investigates about the income which his wife had left to her daughter, but for life only.

Actually, Doctor Fischer is worried about the trust money. But when Jones tells him he does not need it. Doctor Fischer feels ashamed and surprised at Jones attitude.

Doctor Fischer invites Jones for another party, the last party. He appreciates Jones as he humiliated Toads at the Porridge Party more than he ever succeeded in doing till now. He enjoyed every moment of it. But in some corner of his heart Jones feels bad that after the death of his one and only daughter Doctor Fischer is trying to throw a party; a very serious party.

Doctor Fischer leaves all the blood relationships behind. In his group there are five members, including Doctor Fischer, Richard Deane, Mr. Kips, Monsieur Belmont and Mrs. Montgomery, Anna-Louise hated this group very much and thought that Doctor Fischer had feelings for his friends only. But the poor girl was unaware of the fact that Doctor Fischer is faithful to no one.

There is no place for self-respect among Toads. They all are completely blinded by money. They lose their dignity for the sake of money. They all had around Geneva for the same reason, either to escape taxes in their own countries or take advantage of favourable contonal conditions.

In the end they learnt to laugh even before the joke was sprung. Even the cold porridge party is meant to humiliate the rich 'Toads'. Though when Mr. Jones reaches Doctor Fischer's house he is badly treated by his servant.

Everything is quite strange for Jones at party. So, he finds himself very uneasy among them. When dinner is served everyone is shocked to see cold porridge in the menu.

To his astonishment Jones finds that the Divisionaire and Richard had begun to eat and Mr. Kips had at least picked up his spoon. Within a minute or two they were all eating in silence and with a grim intensity. Perhaps the porridge clogged their tongues. But for prize they are ready to accept any challenge. But Jones rejects Doctor Fischer's meal and said he is not hungry enough.

Doctor Fischer tells Jones that he wants to discover, if the greed of his greedy rich friends has any limit. If a day will come when they'll refuse to earn their presents. Their greed certainly isn't limited by pride. He said that tonight will mark the end of one experiment. Now, he is playing with another idea.

Jones realizes is how mean and selfish Doctor Fischer. But he doesn't feel sympathy for Toads. Their uncomfortable situation does not evoke any sympathy

Jones accepts Doctor Fischer's invitation for The Bomb Party because he wants to take revenge upon him. He wants to humiliate him in the same manner as he humiliates everyone. All the members are very excited for the party. Doctor Fischer requests Jones to help him in his last piece of research. He tells Jones that he wants to see the limit of the greed of the rich. Doctor Fischer declares that there is no humiliation. He only wants to see whether their greed can even overcome their fear – and so he has organized what he would call – a Bomb Party. Everybody is shocked by the name 'Bomb Party'. Doctor Fischer explains the rules and regulations for the party. There are six tubs and each bran-tub has crackers in them. Each cracker contains a check except one. One of the six crackers has bombed in it. They all have to draw them out at random with their eyes shut. It's just gamble with life.

All the members feel insulted. They boldly say that they are not his employers to accept cheques. In the beginning, noone becomes ready to accept his bloody cheque. All are ready to leave Doctor Fischer's party. But, when Doctor Fischer discloses that every cheque will be worth two million francs. All are insensate after listening the amount. Mrs. Montgomery tell everyone that Doctor Fischer is joking. But Doctor Fischer is quite serious. He says they will know by the end of the party whether he is right or not.

Mr. Belmont puts a question if someone is killed in game, it would amount to murder. Doctor Fischer tells them he has all as witnesses. It would not be murder. Doctor Fischer also declares that there are five chances to one in their favour.

Surprisingly all are ready except Mr. Kips. And Mr. Kips will be divided equally between all of them. Belmont quickly calculates the amount and says four hundred thousand francs each.

The Divisionnaire sit silent. He is really crying. But Jones says to him that he will purchase his cracker for two million francs. He purchased death from the Divisionnaire. Doctor Fischer is impressed by Jones nobility and says he wants to talk to him. On the other hand Divisionnaire feels ashamed.

Doctor Fischer and the Divisionnaire, sitting at opposite end of the long table, waiting to hear the sound death. Jones went down to the very edge of the lake, when the slope of the lawn would hide him from both of them, he took the tape between his teeth and pulled the cracker with his right hand.

The silly, insignificant cracker and the silence which followed told him how utterly he had been fooled. Doctor Fischer had stolen his death and humiliated the Divisionnaire; he had proved his point about the greed of his rich friends; and he was sitting at the table laughing at both of us. Then Jones heard the food steps in the snow. He saw Mr. Steiner there. Mr. Steiner repents on the death of Anna-Louise. Doctor Fischer also comes there. Jones introduced Doctor Fischer to Mr. Steiner. Mr. Steiner blames Doctor Fischer for Anna-Louise's mother and tells him that they were never really lovers, but he made one innocence seem culprits.

And yet he fails and commits suicide. His dead body

"no more significance than a dead dog." (Chapter – XVI, Page – 141)

Thus, the dinner party can be read as being an allegory of the Book of Revelations and an assessment of first how deep the caves of greed are sunk. There is no altruism in this bleak world, there is only greed, only me, me and me. Doctor Fischer is indeed a God ..... or at least an evil genius who will test the boundaries of how disgusting a human is prepared to be. Doctor Fischer has a powerful hatred of the human race and by his own direction.

It is very short, unremittingly bleak in its outlook on humanity, and is a savage sarcastic satire on capitalism.

Doctor Fischer is cold, cruel and manipulative man. He is a multi-millionaire, his fortune founded on human hygiene. At regular parties he surrounds himself with acolytes, all rich, all prepared to go through humiliation for one of Fischer's gifts. Thus, all shows decline of moral values. Fischer's view of others; the visceral disgust of his "porridge" party; and the disgust of the corruption of money, and the greed that goes with it.

Aside from the examination of capitalism all aspects of human life are here. We see poverty, extreme wealth, love, and death. And in illustrating these aspects the relationships in the book are conveyed powerfully. The relationship between Fischer and his daughter, a gentle creature abhorring her father's attitude and more particularly the attitude of those acolytes of Fischer, and that of Fischer late wife and her friend are noteworthy.

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