

Descending Morality in the novels of Ernest Hemingway with special reference to *The Sun Also Rises*

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ABSTRACT

Everyone must adapt to the value system. If the values are not adapted we can sense the disturbances in the relationship system created in between humans or the creation or human and creations. Hemingway proposes good values through the depiction of immoral values. It is represented by various characters in the novel and the depiction is quite ironical. Lady Brett is the prime character of the novel. The whole novel revolves around her. She is portrayed as very weak in her instinct beyond the definition of religious ethos and reasoning. The author is very particular about passing the message of morality to the reader in an ironical way. There are numerous elements on the theme of morality spread across the novel. Hemingway uses several indicators and scales to measure the amount of good and bad. The portrayal is to identify different attitudes and uniqueness of the individual characters. This article analyses the decline in moral values in the novels of Ernest Hemingway with special reference to 'The Sun Also Rises'.

Key Words: *Values, Immoral Values, Religious Ethos and Reasoning.*

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Miller Hemingway is a legend of twentieth century American Fiction. He took part in the First World War as an ambulance driver in Italy. He got injured in the war and got admitted Red Cross Hospital in Milan. Ernest Hemingway's major concern is with descending moral values of the modern society. His works are semi-autobiographical and they reflect the feelings of his soul.

The Sun Also Rises brings out the postwar impact on people especially the moral decadence of them. Jake Barnes is the protagonist of the novel and he stands for his moral values. The First World War has changed the country entirely and it brings new ideas to life. Money and social status dominate other emotions such as love and pity, and create havoc in the life of the people. People have become more materialistic and money centered.

The Sun Also Rises delineates the post war scenario and the characters of this novel have searched the easiest method to travel on the road called materialism which ultimately brings out devastation into their lives. The term "Lost Generation" used to refer to the new generation that came of age after the World War I. The opening chapter of the novel starts with the quotation of Gertrude Stein: "You are all a lost generation." The term "Lost Generation" means the generation of people born between 1883 and 1900. They were disillusioned by World War I. In Europe, they are known as the "1914 Generation" or Generation of au Feu. It refers to the heart wrenching reality of the generation those who have lost their identity, moral values and most importantly faith in every aspect. People get morally deprived and become highly insecure and confused with their own existence and they remain lost. At the end, dissatisfaction and loneliness become the major part of the life of "Lost Generation." Physical and emotional lameness remain the truth of their very lives.

Many of Ernest Hemingway's characters are destined to end up in loneliness and never-ending sorrows. At the same time, they continue their journey without bothering the difficult phase they go through, by embracing all situation, they never stop and prefer to move on holding that broken and soulless life. It is perpetual law of nature to proceed and move on. He highlights death in both senses

namely physical as well as moral. Materialism of people has made them insensitive and it causes death of moral values. They focus more on momentary pleasure and forget the true sense of life. (Meyers 112)

The definition of American Dream may vary from one to other; the novelist uses the term to dream high, to become wealthiest and to live a high standard living by any means. Ernest Hemingway contends that without morality and virtue, man's life is worthless. As the world heading towards modernism, the moral standard of people gets descended due to lack of their faith in nobility. In the First World War, Hemingway carried an injured soldier on his back to the aid station in spite of his own serious injuries. All the pains what he has gone through helped him a lot in the formation of viewpoints about the war bruises, sense of death and humanism. "As the world heading towards modernism, the moral standard of people gets descended due to lack of their faith in nobility which Hemingway has transferred into his novels." (Benson 345)

The Sun Also Rises is one of the greatest works of Ernest Hemingway which paints a vivid picture of American society after the World War I and provides the readers with a wider, panoramic vision of the American Dream. The characters have lived in a violent world, wounded in the war and endured psychological consequences such as insomnia and disillusionment. Especially, the protagonist Jake Barnes suffers from bareness in life. Ernest Hemingway's hero always has some sort of activity or pastime that serves to provide order to his life such as bullfighting, fishing and so on. These activities serve as a sort of substitute for religion or any ideology. The novel shows the evil scenario of post-world war effect on the life and atmosphere of the budding generation. His characters are the victims of American Dream.

Ernest Hemingway's novel reveals his own stress and incapability in life. The novel moves with keeping pace in step with the times and gives a powerful dissection and criticism on modern American society with a tragic love story as its chief thread. It sets against a havoc background of affluent and extravagant ruthless society where people regarded the pursuit of wealth, joy and luxury as their only aim in life. As a result, loneliness and sorrows fill the depth of their heart. The spiritual scarcity is one of the major striking characteristics of the "Lost Generation." The novel brings out the contradiction between material prosperity and spiritual belief which exists in American society and its destructive impact on people. The war has not only shattered people physically but emotionally as well. It has destroyed people's belief in noble aspects such as God, religion, moral values, manhood and so on. Jake Barnes stands as a testimony to it.

The protagonist Jake Barnes life heads with full of sadness and emptiness. Jake's unconditional love becomes worthless as he remains empty in spite of his greatness. The "Lost Generation" is caught in a dilemma of holding two contrasting life styles. On the one hand, the cruelty of the First World War dissuades them from the old religious beliefs; on the other hand, the old religious beliefs still exert a great influence on them. The theme of the novel is all about self-exile, indulgence (care-free living) and spiritual alienation which leads to isolation and destruction.

The traits of the "Lost Generation" are: a sense of spiritual and moral loss, inability and aimlessness. The World War is the harbinger of destruction. People who have stuck in between the old and new values are mainly getting affected. They have lost their faith in the good path. Many worthy young men have lost their lives in the war and the survivors have undergone both physical and mental turmoil. People want to come out from pain inflicted by the war and they start to lead their life lavishly. They spend their time in boozing, reveling and whoring and they get temporary pleasures from them. Those who kept their virtue on the dice have received nothing but the feeling of alienation, disillusion or hopelessness and left out. They are strange in the eyes of others and they do not fit in their time and the set of moral and aesthetic standards they live in.

Individuals experienced a feeling of alienation, estrangement, a new different cultural setting which have no ties with the past and no ties with the present or no hope for the future too. The entire generation living in a vacuum, feels completely lost with their time and they wait for the future, for their lives to start, but they get trapped in their own woven net and remain isolated at the end. Ernest Hemingway portrays his protagonist in terms of a code of courage, loneliness and grit. He fights a losing battle in the world of irrational devastation. He has lived with the expectation of fulfilling his idea of ideal masculinity which has traits such as honor, pride, and self-esteem.

In a hope of peace, the generation is brought up in the families which are worshipping God, believing freedom, democracy, and achieving success and happiness through self-struggle. But later they have infused war call and invited their own destruction. However, they feel embittered after experiencing the cruelty of the War and death threatens their lives. With all the miseries and pain, Jake Barnes has never missed any chance to live happily. Many of the characters are running after money and they want to lead life extravagantly. Every character seems to be unsatisfied with their life.

They run after mirage, in search of their happiness in others and end up with emptiness. The eminent critic James Nagel in his book, *Brett and the other Women in the Sun Also Rises* observes:

Brett is by no means the first representation of a sexually liberated, freethinking woman in American literature but rather an embodiment of what became known as the New Woman in nineteenth-century fiction. Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is perhaps the best known of these iconoclastic figures, because her infidelity conflicts so directly with the rigid Puritan codes of the society in which she lives. (Nagel 92)

Jake Barnes indulges in his work meticulously to escape from the pain that the war has given to him. Hence, he engages himself in his work and partying. He could not satisfy his beloved Brett physically due to the injury received at the war. She indulges in promiscuity. Even though he does his work to avoid heartbreaking situation with Brett by keeping his mind busy during the day, at night he finds it much difficult to avoid. After Brett Ashley leaves with the Count, Jake Barnes comments:

“This was Brett that I had felt like crying about. Then I thought of her walking up the street and stepping into the car, as I had last seen her, and of course in a little while I felt like hell again. It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing.”
(Hemingway 38)

Jake Barnes feels suffocation lonely with his wild disturbing thoughts and he thinks of the circumstances which caused his sad state. The injury he received at the War has made him impotent and he cannot perform the act of sex. It is the major drawback of Jake which makes him upset and alienated from a normal life. The novel revolves around Jake's disability and Brett's dissatisfaction. Jake Barnes invokes his work as a reason why he cannot go with Brett; she uses his work as a public excuse for why she and Jake cannot be together. Jake earns enough money to entertain Brett and other friends but not enough to join their ranks. Money becomes mantra and people become slave to it. Relationship loses its chastity as it is no more pious.

The novelist highlights the futility of physical love and he stresses on the incurable wound of the protagonist Jake Barnes and his helplessness. (Martin 38) Brett Ashley suffers from moral degradation and indulges in promiscuous relationship. She longs for physical gratification and Jake Barnes pines for emotional fulfillment.

This conversation shows Brett's insensibility towards Jake and she prefers her physical pleasure. She ignores Jake's pain by saying that she is made like this, which she cannot help. Brett Ashley keeps Jake Barnes beside her as she feels comforted, at the same time, it increases Jake's miseries when he sees Brett with different people: “She (Brett) was smoking a cigarette and flicking the ashes on the rug.

Both Jake and Brett hold an indefinite relationship and suffer as Brett searches many men to satisfy her perfect sexual desire as well as emotional fulfillment. Unfortunately, she could not find anyone to satisfy her in both these counts. Brett's oscillation, to love or leave his lover Jake shows her inner dilemma, where she cannot help herself but to love him as he is. But deep inside, she cannot help her inner sexual desire to get fulfilled which Jake can never fulfill. Pedro Romero's courage, his strong body and ability of winning bullfight drag attention of Brett Ashley as she seeks physical pleasure from him. She decides to go with him. In this tough decision also Jake Barnes fulfills Brett's absurd wish and leaves her with Pedro Romero, despite knowing her intention.

In this situation, immorality grows in the air and marriage and commitments have lost their value among people. Although Brett Ashley engaged to Mike Campbell, she still continues her affair with Jake as well as Cohn and Romero. She is lashed out in front of Jake that she is guilty of having slept with Robert Cohn while engaged to Mike Campbell. Her relationship shows the desperation of her towards sexual need. In spite of her idea of her own old spiritual belief, she chooses immorality and suffers. Her endless desire of physical and emotional comfort keep reminds her again and again of her own miseries.

Brett's indifferent attitude hurts Jake Barnes even more and reminds him often about his inability and helplessness. Morality and virtue get dominated by physical and emotional desire of Brett Ashley and it shows the absurdity of life. If Jake would be eligible to provide Brett physical and emotional comfort, then she might not have searched any other man to satisfy her inner urge. Jake Barnes romantic relations with Brett Ashley have irrefutable feelings for one another, yet his wound keeps them away from accomplishing their love. The frustration of incompleteness makes him more anxious which leads to alcoholism. Although Jake's injury keeps him away from physically having Brett, but

among all other characters, he is the only man to stand truly to her. The non-physical involvement in Jake's nature only makes him the constant man in Brett's life. Jake Barnes's eternal love for Brett Ashley makes him to accept her comeback to him and he takes care of her every time.

The novelist reveals the bare truth of people's disgraceful attitude towards each other and he exposes the shattered people's belief in traditional values such as love, faith, and manhood. Without these ancient notions to rely on, members of the generation which fought in the war have suffered great moral and psychological barrenness. Jack Barnes no doubt sinks in his painful issues but he never lets the circumstances to submerge him. He always keeps his hope awake and remains optimistic in his loss and painful time. To imagine a fruitful life in the barren land is waste.

CONCLUSION

Ernest Hemingway as a moralist establishes the fact that money alone cannot provide happiness and satisfaction for people. Money alone cannot bring comfort to man. Though Jake Barnes lost his manhood, he strives to live a normal and active life. He endures his wound with the heavy heart and accepts his weakness but never leaves hope for a good life. He leaves all problems aside and tries to live a carefree life but subconsciously, he cares others. No doubt, he sets his own ethical standard but unfortunately, he doesn't follow his own parameter. Ernest Hemingway highlights the moral decadence in the novel with the portrayal of the character Brett Ashley who has indulged in promiscuous relationships with many men such as Jake Barnes, Robert Cohn, Mike Campbell, Pedro Romero and so on. All these men indulge in pleasure loving activities such as boozing, reveling and whoring and they never care for God, religion and moral values. The First World War has made such a harmful impact on people and it is adeptly portrayed by the novelist.

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