

Iris Murdoch's "The Bell": Sagacity of humanism and liberalism

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Abstract: *A merge reflection of humanism, liberalism and existentialism is overflowing in the novels of Irish-born Booker Prizewinner British author, philosopher, novelist, Dame Jean Iris Murdoch, which is still a mere appetite for social sustenance. She was a humanistic by spirit but apparently she knows the ruling power of suppressed Individuality & severity of real world over humanity., She looks at human behavior not only through the eyes of the writer, but through the person doing the behaving which connects her to their inner feelings and self concept of human nature and their behavior and conditions.*

This paper reveals Murdoch's revolt against the conventional social hierarchy system, gender discrimination, prejudicial conduct, wide-ranging social pre-assumptions and misconception about the real self-determination with the help of her thought provoking novel "The Bell". Her fiction shows the modern changes of society such as changes of the science of the human psychology and their revolutionized modern phenomenon like sexuality, homosexuality and other rising social issues like women empowerments, major distinction among bigotry, superstition, religion and spiritual aspirations which leads a path towards true liberalism and empowerment of not only the individuals but also to human society. This paper clearly confirms her favor to humanism, liberalism, and immortal declaration and its hardcore need for human society.

Keywords – *Humanism, liberalism, spirituality, religion, humanity, ethics, morality.*

I. Introduction

Like Dame Jean Iris Murdoch (1919-99) has been acknowledged as one of the best and foremost female novelists of twentieth century who wrote twenty six novels within forty years. Among all 20th century novelists, Iris Murdoch has established herself in a very strong position through her dynamic and different approach towards society. As a working moral philosopher and novelist, the intellectual agenda that Murdoch pursues is at once philosophical, practical and ethical. All such issues are framed in an imaginative exploration of the ways human consciousness can be expressed in art and conducted by means of fascinating experimentation in the novel with the help of this paper. Although Iris belongs to twentieth century yet the revolutionary changes had started from the Victorian age in the literary field. 'The Bell' gradually became the prevailing outward appearance in literature during the Victorian Age. A fairly constant accompaniment of this era was the yielding of romanticism to literary realism, the accurate observation of individual problems, social relationship, religious & spiritual reformation, liberalism and humanism. It was clearly reflecting that old traditions and values have been discarded and yet they have not been replaced by new ones which could be the possible threat to humanity. The modern man is swayed by conflicting intentions, and is, therefore, erratic and inconsistent in his behavior. In no department of life we find postulates which can be accepted at their face value. But Murdoch condemns the absence of common bases of moral values and humanity. Murdoch also shows her worry about it, "'the key concepts of our general social morality . . . have become practically unconscious and are taken for granted.'" {1}

More than any other novelist of her generation Murdoch tries to isolate approach and explore problems concerning art, truth, life, reality, and also the element of humanism to reflect these in her fictional works. I shall now proceed to explicate the concept of humanism and liberalism, their nature and extent. Once the concept of humanism comes out clarified and its elements are specified, it would be tenable to analyse this fiction of Iris Murdoch and illustrate from them her humanistic vision in religion, morality, love, marriage, society, individuality, liberty, goodness and adultery. The concept of humanism is an approach to life based on humanity and, reason and recognizes that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience alone. Humanism depends on two important components, an individual and society.

II. 'Self' or 'Society'

Like the great realistic novelists Tolstoy and T. S. Eliot, Dame Jean Iris Murdoch is preeminently concerned with the problem of how to live humanistically in a world of accelerating change and declining moral, ethics and faith and what is the most essential society or individual. The ultimate goal of humanism and liberalism can't be achieved without developing the understanding about 'self' and 'society'. As commonly used, individual refers to a person in a society that pressures human independence and the importance of being self-

reliance and autonomy. And a society is a group of individuals which is characterized by common interests and may have distinctive culture. It is a common truth that man is social by nature and no human being is known to have normally developed in isolation. Man lives in society because necessity compels him to do so. It means necessity makes a man social and there is a great need to live in society for his psychological, mental and intellectual expansion. But sometimes circumstances create the conflict between human and society. Although the individual is a creation of the social order of culture and civilization, sometimes more or less serious antagonism between him and some aspects of his society may arise. He may have acquired personality which is unable to coexist with the circumstances. The man who all his life wants to lead an army in to the battle, but never gets an opportunity to do so, experiences some degree of frustration. Opposition between the individual and society may also come from the deterioration of the social organism. An individual brought up in political and social freedom will find the status of slave irksome and authoritarianism. Under compulsion he may play the role but he will resent it and come in conflict with the society producing tensions in him which in time may release them in sudden and unprecedented substitute. But the truth is that individual and society are inter-dependent. The goal is to achieve humanism and liberalism.

One of Iris Murdoch's most successful novels, *The Bell* (1958) portrays well-developed characters living in a realistic fictional world that is rich in symbolism. The novel's success is perhaps owed its depiction of certain philosophical and aesthetic concepts that Murdoch also explores in her non-fiction, namely the tensions between moral vision and human selfishness, sexuality and spirituality.

The story of *The Bell* moves around the actions of Dora Greenfield, a young, disenfranchised and unfaithful wife, returns to her husband 'Paul' after six months separation. Dora has involved in extra-marital love affair with Noel, a young reporter. She is new in Imber Abbey. Paul tells a legend about the bell of the Abbey; the original bell called 'Gabriel' flying in to the lake when a nun at the Abbey refused to confess of having a lover and then drowned herself due to the curse of a holy priest. During the compile, Dora meets to all other members of the community, Michael Meade, the head of the lay community distrusted from wise leadership by earnest daily wrestling with his faith and seeking to serve God while protecting the secret of his homosexual relationship with Nick, Catherine's twin brother as well as Toby, a Youngman in search of religious retreat, Catherine, a saintly young woman desires to be a nun and last but not the least James Tayer Pace, a very conventional leader of the community. Toby tells Dora about his secret search of the old bell. Dora helps him to dig out the old bell so that she can replace it from new bell. Dora wants to do this outrageous and unconventional miracle in a religious ceremony in front of the entire society. Noel comes to know about Dora's plan from Nick. Seeing Noel in the ceremony Paul feels offended and cheated by her wife. Dora hears all the conspiracy planned by Noel and Nick. Under the pressure Toby discloses the secret about Michael's homosexuality in front of James. Suddenly the bell falls in to the lake. Catherine who has identified her entry in to the Abbey with the entry of the bell, trying to commit suicide but escapes because of Dora. Nick, who has lost Michael's love, is not ready to lose his sister. He thinks that he is responsible for destroying their lives because Catherine loves Michael. He commits suicide. From Nick's death everything changes. Toby returns to Oxford for study. Paul leaves Dora alone in Imber. Michael gets involved in worldly activities for the sake of Catherine's love. In the end Dora is alone but with her true liberty and dignity of 'self'.

Murdoch's ability to blend social satire with a sharply observant yet considerate view of her lettering is fully displayed in "The Bell", often considered her most distinguishing and agreeable novel. The whole story is set in England at an undetermined time roughly contemporary in its year of publication (1958). Due to the influence of Victorian era, Murdoch's work is extremely rich in allegory, symbolism and literary symmetry. The novel *The Bell* begins with a brief review of Dora Greenfield's life up to the moment when she is traveling in a train to retort her alienated husband, Paul, after a six month parting. Paul is constantly associated with the world 'violence', he is 'a violent man'; he craves violent scenes; he acts with 'violent and voracious gestures; he sets traps for Dora and oscillates "between brutality and sentimentally." {2} Dora is unable to make up her mind completely to leave Paul. As other novels of Iris Murdoch, points out that 'physical escape is not freedom but mere a dream of it' and Dora is still enslaved by her vision 'of Paul, a bond which can not be broken by simple corporeal absence. Dora herself had found no genuine freedom in her original escape from Paul and it is in the enclosed community of Imber court and its silence that she begins to come to terms with her own life. As Dora says'; "That was marriage, to be enclosed in the aims of another." (17) A rising question is about the actual existence of liberalism in society where freedom does not mean to be physically free but to be a free spirited individual with having a right to choose one's free will. The depiction of physical and domestic violence shows the need of women empowerment in male dominating society and without it we can never be blessed with true liberalism. Man's choices and priorities are governed by his thirst of real freedom eventually.

In *The Bell*, Paul Dora relationship makes us realize how a marriage not based upon equality between the partners is going to be doomed and result in extramarital relationships. Paul belongs to upper class and Dora belongs to middle class. Murdoch points out in a subtle way that economic, social and mental differences are the causes of division in society which always prove baneful for the individuals. Paul marries Dora for her vitality and Dora's reasons for her marriage are different. She married him for his good taste and his flat in

Knightsbridge. She married him for a certain integrity and nobility of character which she saw in him. She married him because he was so wonderfully more grownup than her thin neurotic art.-student friends. She married him a little for his money.... to be able to get inside society and learn how to behave She married finally, because of the demonic intensity of Paul's desire for her. (8) . Murdoch clears her view point about it, "We differ not only because we select different objects out of the same world but because we see different worlds." {3} 'Seeing different worlds' means selecting different choices which is clearly based on the priorities of an individual.

Paul wants to get a son but she was not ready. He is a jealous husband and does not like any attention shown to her by any other male. She feels disturbed by the violent and predatory gesture with which he destroys the 'rhythm of her self surrender'. She passionately wants to escape from her husband. And in a fit of psychological torture, she develops relationship with Noel Spens, a young reporter. In the conflict between her husband and lover for possession of Dora, it is the lover, Noel, who wins in starting and then it is the husband, Paul, who triumphs afterwards. P. P. Punja opines, "Dora-Noel Spens relationship is an attempt on the part of Dora to escape from the mentioned tortures inflicted by Paul.... In fact, it is Paul's humiliating attitude that makes Dora to seek an escape for him. He has failed to understand her. Instead of giving her his love and respect, he makes her feel inferior and lead "a bohemian life" with Noel." {4} Noel always tries to convince her that she is a 'free agent'. But she is not so, because she is 'attracted towards Paul' and is 'compelled by herself to return to him." So we find Dora is always coming back to Paul from Noel Spens. When Noel Spens comes to Imber Court to cover the Bishop's visit on the baptizing Ceremony of the new bell in the later part of the novel, she asks him to go away. P. P. Punja remarks: "In the Sand Castle, it is the wife who winds; here it is the husband who wins." {5} Paul wins because society supports him against Dora. His views and conceptions about life are tantamount to the values of society. Before her arrival at Imber, Dora is not having any identity as an individual or not having any importance as 'human being' in society. But while expedition Dora's attempt to set the butterfly free foreshadows her own metamorphosis and liberation at the close of the novel.

The action of 'the bell takes place at Imber Court, the Palladina Country house, the setting for an austere Anglican lay religious community. It is attached to a convent of cloistered Benediction Anglican nuns. Imber Court is said to draw its energy from the convent as from 'a power house. The chapel of the cloistered red nuns is described to Dora by Mrs. Mark, another member of the community, in the following manner; "this is the place where outsiders like us can come nearest to the spiritual life of the Abbey.... It is true that these women lay upon themselves austerities from which you and I would shrink in terror. But just as we think the sinner better than he is when we imagine that suffering ennoble him, so we do less than justice to the saint when we think that his sacrifices grieve him in the way they would grieve us". (68-69)

Imber community is an experiment and privilege given to those people who can not leave the world and yet have a yearning for spiritual life or "who can live neither in the world nor out of it." (81) It is midway between the spiritual life inside the walls of the Abbey and materialistic yearnings in the outside world. The community has been voluntarily formed by its members, and they are supposed to receive their power from the Abbey. The effort here is not to seek the highest regardless of their spiritual life, but to seek that place, that task, which will make their spiritual life most constantly grow and flourish: and for this must use a divine cunning, be as, " wise as serpents as harmless as doves." (81) As Murdoch refers to in her essay *A House of Theory* (1958) "the vision of an ideal community in which work would once again be creative and meaningful and human brotherhood is restored." {6}

There is also a legend linked with the Abbey about the flying of the Abbey's bell named Gabriel and falling in the lake when a nun at the Abbey refused to confess to having a lover and then drowned herself due to the curse the Abbey given by a holy priest and its magnificent bell flew from its tower and sank in to the nearby lake. The bell supposes to have miraculous powers, "It was very good at keeping away plague and evil spirits." (43) The bell rings sometimes from the bottom of the lake and the hearing of the ringing of the bell "pretended a death." (43) The bell and its legend highlights the struggle among divine, social and human power, where the divine powers win at last. Bran Nicol comments, "Positioned between the ascetic world of the Abbey and the numinous "real" world Imber is not quite a version of purgatory but it is certainly poised between two extremes: the spiritual world of the Abbey and the secular outside world." {7}

The brotherhoods at Imber Court have planned a mild celebration in honor of the new bell, designed to draw the 'right kind of attention'. At Imber, Dora attends the gala, a religious service where she meets to Michael Meade, the leader of a religious community; Catherine, a saintly young woman who is about to become a nun and enter the cloister at Imber Court; Nick, Catherine troubled twin brother who destroyed Michael's career due to having homosexual relations with him; Toby, a young eighteen years old boy to start his studies at Oxford who joins the brotherhood for a short-time in search of religious retreat and illumination and at last to James Tayper Pace, a very conventional leader of the community. The spiritual goals of the group gathered at Imber Court enable. Murdoch investigates the question of whether moral absolute must be modified to accommodate humane nature. As Murdoch puts her clear notion about it, "The central concept of morality is 'the individual' thought of as knowable by love." {8}

Howard German observes that *The Bell* apparently “draws upon only one work, Dante’s *Inferno*.”{9} The topography of Imber, with its four rivers and the lake, the ferry and the causeway with one damaged section, seems modeled upon Dante’s Hell. The inmates of this community have very strong spiritual inclinations. Torn between their commitment to their own ‘self’ and a desire to search for some meaning beyond this confinement these characters come to reveal the ambiguities of spiritual life. As Michael says, “Our duty is not necessarily to seek the highest, regardless of the realities of our spiritual life as it in fact is, but to seek that place, that task, those people, which will make our spiritual life most constantly grow and flourish. (81) Murdoch herself quotes about spirituality “I certainly want to suggest that the spiritual pilgrimage (transformation—renewal—salvation) is the centre and essence of morality, upon whose success and well-being the health of other kinds of moral reaction and thinking is likely to depend.” {10}

The Abbess’s moral code seems to urge others to escape life’s complexities. But Murdoch is only offering a meaningful environment. The proposal shows her awareness of man’s various capacities for the spiritual life. Not necessarily to seek the highest, while still being drawn by the highest, is the Abbess’s view. It is a human compromise, a dynamic one. Hence she reminds Michael, “The way is always forward, never back.” (235) K. K. Bajaj is right to say, “Man’s duty is to act, to seek, to make imperfect love perfect. Renunciation, devoid of a sense of moral discrimination comes to naught. The establishment of the Imber community itself highlights the dangers of any such renunciative act which refuses to consider the moral ambiguities and complexities. *The Bell* explicitly takes up to examine the relationship between God and Good and this relationship is examined keeping in mind human frailties and limitations.”{11} It is clear that in the encounter between ‘Good’ and ‘God’, for the author being good is above all, because God will follow Good, but ‘Good’ must encounter with reality. As Murdoch pursues “The sun represents the Form of the Good in whose light the truth is seen; it reveals the world, hitherto invisible, and is also a source of life.”{12} Further, she quotes that the ‘Good’ is “the light which reveals to us all things as they really are.”{13} R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, in their commentary on the Republic, describe the equivalence between the sun and the good, “Just as, then, in the visible world the Sun is the cause of light which enables visible things to be seen and of sight which enables the eye to see, though it itself is neither light nor sight, so in the intelligible world the Form of the Good is the cause of truth, which enables the Forms to be known, and of knowledge, which enables the mind to know, though it itself is neither truth nor knowledge.” {14}.

The community is made up of a group of people withdrawing from various reasons from society. Some of the members at least are there because they hope to earn a holiday by retiring from the world and from human frailty in themselves and from others. Michael Meade, the protagonist of the novel, on the other hand, is another typical Murdoch character who strives for a “trouncing of personality” (86), through religious services. He has suffered a conflict between homo-sexual tendencies and his strong urge to become a priest. It never occurs to him that his sexual habits could ever clash with his religion. He instead feels: “Indeed in some curious way the emotion which fed both arose deeply from the same source.”(99) Later, when the conception of becoming a priest turns into a reality, Michael tries to give-up this practice and get rid of the guilt which had made his prayers “incoherent moments of emotion” and later comes to believe that he is a favorite of God and a man with “a definite destiny.”(p.82) He believes that the impersonal world is concerned about him and directs events for his benefit. After Nick’s betrayal he feels, “At times it seemed to him that the catastrophe which destroyed his first attempt had been designed to humble him, his real chance was still to come.” (108)

His image of himself as one favored by God leads to spiritual pride and to a facile optimism. He overlooks the consequences of his actions because he believes that: “God should not ultimately let him suffer ship-wreck.”(83) Some critics feel that Michael is a near-saint, defeated by trying for more than is possible. But the sin of pride is the only consequence of moral over-reaching. Michael arrogates to himself acts that are above his spiritual beveled. The Abbess enjoins the use of ‘divine cunning. As wise as serpents as harmless as doves’. (83) Murdoch’s suggestion neither aims at judgment nor negativity. It emphasizes the need to escape the past and to attempt to live in a loving present with a sense of forward movement. As Peter Brooks comments, “I think memory work both ways in that the returns are both returns to and returns of moments when the past seems to come forward, as in the return of the repressed or when memory takes us back in to the past.”{15}

Murdoch wisdom includes both the place of perfection in life as well as the individual capacity to attain that ideal of perfection. She is shrewd enough to understand both Michael’s fondness for inner drama and Nick’s desperation in coming to Imber. Nick can be saved by some evidence of affection from Michael. But instead of “attending” to him, Michael tries to become his spiritual guardian. Moreover, his experience has taught him that ‘one simply can not ignore one’s personality’. He risibly finds that it is his force of personality that holds the community together. For him religion does not really come from outside himself. In his Sunday sermon he says, “Each one of us apprehends a certain kind and degree of reality and from this springs our power to live as spiritual beings; and by using and enjoying what we already know we can hope to know more. (204) He fails to realize that religious concentration and observance are inadequate to make one rise above the confusion of sex and eryngoes the flaws of love. In spite of prayer and religious rigors he cannot help to check

the flaws of love of having a homo-sexual affair with Toby Gashe. The ease with which this deception occurs suggests that a subjective sense of sincerity is a poor substitute for self-knowledge as a moral guide. Perhaps Frank Kermode is right in describing Michael as an "accumulator of disaster." {16} Once again he is entrapped between social, religious and moral values from one side and desires of a "individual" or "self" from another. No member of the community is free from the contradiction between the desire to seek self-transcendence and emphasis on the self as a means of seeking the ideal. James holds the view, "The chief requirement of the good life is to live without any image of oneself.the whole conception of personality is dangerous to goodness what we need most is just precisely to see reality. (131) As Murdoch puts it, "We use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it The value concepts are here patently tied on to the world, they are stretched as it were between the truth-seeking mind and the world.. . . We can seethe length, the extension, of these concepts as patient attention transforms accuracy without interval into just discernment. Here too we can see it as natural to the particular kind of creatures that we are that love should be inseparable from justice, and clear vision from respect for the real." {17} In sum, Murdoch argues that love is purified and becomes a great force in the service of Good: "Love . . . is capable of infinite degradation and is the source our greatest errors; but when it is even partially refined it is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good." {18}

James despite this knowledge, himself comes nowhere near the state he preaches. He sees the religious life, governed by unquestioning obedience to rigid rules which must be followed under all conditions. He only advocates a disciplined following of an external good, "Truthfulness in enjoined, the relief of suffering is enjoined, adultery is forbidden, sodomy is forbidden.... These are rules by which we should freely judge ourselves and other too." (132)

James has completed opposite attitude towards life from Michael. James is a rigid moralist who is unself-conscious perhaps unself-knowing a character of transparent gentleness. Ethics for him is a matter of unthinking rules and duties. He obtusely lacks any sense of human difference. Living conventionally by outward rules is possible for him because he believe whole-heartedly in God who exists outside himself and gives the rules. His faith is not a matter of: "sudden crisis or any rejection of his earlier pursuits but it is inherent."(85) He wants to judge others and wants to be judged by them in the light of religiously "enjoined" and religiously "forbidden" rules. He links religious faith with absolute morality, for him, religion comes from outside. James considers Nick Fawley as "pansy" and Dora as a "bitch". When Toby makes confession of his flirtation with Michael, James judges the whole matter in the light of conventional morality. He thinks that Nick has done only one good act by sending Toby to make confession in the later part of the novel. He feels Michael has broken the known rules so no good can be done to this community. Ultimately James and the Abbess decide to dissolve the community. In fact, it is James great regard for society that prompts him to condemn emotions, ideas and people who threaten the "special fabric". He realizes how easily the individual falls in to a moral and psychological morass once he deviates from the simple rules like those in the Bible. His moralistic living makes him the undeclared leader at Imber Court. With conventional morality and rules, James can't have any intimate relationship with anybody. It is people like James at Imber that make Dora feel inferior and a "penitent wife". The fact about James is that he does not tie his religion to primitive needs. His fate can not give him any knowledge of the unsocialized inner life of himself and others. His ignorance makes him unintentionally unloving and destructive.

James's views are in the favour of the society and Michael's views are in the favour of the freedom of individuals. For James: "the chief requirement of the good life is to live without any image of oneself."(131) And according to Michael: "one should have some conception of one's capacities." (200) He goes to say, "Each one of us has his own way of apprehending God.... Each one of us apprehends a certain kind and degree of reality and from this springs our power to live as spiritual beings: and by using and enjoying what we already know we can hope to know more. (204) She also questions and argues about it, "The average inhabitant of the planet is probably without hope and starving," she wrote, "Can one go on talking about a spiritual source and an absolute good if a majority of human kind is debarred from it?" {19}

For James, sodomy is not deplorable, it is forbidden. But for Michael, it is important to know how and why it is deplorable. He justifies his homosexual tendencies, "God had made him so and he did not think that God had made him a monster."(205) Michael endorses Milton's viewpoint that "Knowledge of good requires knowledge of evil: they are inseparable and can only be distinguished if we know them both." {20} Murdoch's reformed protagonist Michael is a symbol of her mystic hero. She defines the mystical hero was "the new version of the man of faith, believing in goodness without religious guarantees, guilty, muddled, yet not without hope." She described the latter as "the man who has given up traditional religion but is still haunted by a sense of the reality and unity of some of sort of spiritual world" (Murdoch 1970, 227). {21}

Toby discloses his secret about the old bell which he has discovered to be lying under the ramp. Dora decides to make use of this discovery by giving a surprise to Imber Community. She uses Toby in hauling the medieval bell from the lake. She plans to replace the new bell with the old bell "Gabrial". Dora is determined to "make a miracle" through she knows that her "miracle" is nothing more than a theatrical device. She has created a new wore for herself; "in this holy community she would play the witch." (198) In reality she wants to take

revenge on the lay religious community at Imber court. She revolts against the conventional rules and regulations of the society over humanity, which affects the lives of individuals unconstructively. She can not imagine that the nuns would be very happy in the Abbey, "You can't really want to go in there.... To shut yourself up like that when you are so young and beautiful. I'm sorry, this is very rude and awful, in know but it makes me quite miserable to think of you in there ! (138)

Dora, the female protagonist gives importance to the freedom, love, brotherhood and equality of the individuals like the male protagonist, Michael. She wants to revolt against the society but when she comes to know that her plan may lead by Nick and Noel to ridicule the community, she realize that the bell embodies something larger than her own wishes: "She had thought to be its master and make it her plaything, but not is was mastering her and would have its will."(249) The gates of the Abbey close at the very moment when the new bell which was to be installed inside the Abbey, falls in to the lake. Catherine had identified her entry in to the Abbey with the entry of the bell. In frustration, she attempts to commit suicide but escapes.

No human being can live in this world without love. Nick has lost Michael and now he is near to lose his sister. In remorse he commits suicide. Suicide acts prove the defeat of true love- and pure emotions of individuals over the customs of society which is quite realistic and also represents the daily happening of the cruel society. After Nick's death, Toby returns to Oxford, Paul leaves Dora alone and Michale accepts worldly responsibilities once again for Catherine, who loves him. Now Dora remains alone with her freedom and self- discovery and knowledge. Murdoch's objective has been symbolized to demand for the equal human right for woman in the male dominating society and also to break the religious discriminatory treatment.

Peter Conradi argues the "the ending of the book asserts the triumphant survival of personality, the devious tenacity and the resilience of the self." {22}

Murdoch suggests not to renounce the world and seek salvation but to indulge in "Karma" and move forward in life in search of truth. The disintegration of the community makes it clear that in the modern world, moral orders need to become comprehensive so as to accommodate the psychological and moral contradictions for individual. As Anthony Giddens pointedly says, "If we do not see that all human agents stand in a position of appropriation in relation to the social world, which they constitute and reconstitute in their actions, we fail on an empirical level to grasp the nature of human empowerment. Modern social life impoverishes individual action, yet furthers the appropriation of new possibilities; it is alienating, yet at the same time, characteristically, human beings react against social circumstances which they find oppressive. Late modern institutions create a world of mixed opportunity and high-consequence risk. But this world does not form an impermeable environment which resists intervention." {23}

The Abbess's message to Michael enjoins, "Have faith in God and remember that he will in his own way and in his own time complete what we so poorly attempt. Often we do not achieve for others the good we intend but we achieve something, something that goes from our efforts. Good is an overflow where we generously and sincerely intend it, we are engaged in a work of creation which may be mysterious even to ourselves and because it is mysterious we may be afraid of it. But this should not make us draw back. God can always show us, if we will, a higher and a better way; and we can learn to love by loving. Remember that all our failures are ultimately failures in love. Imperfect love must not be condemned and rejected but made perfect. The way is always forward, never back." (235)

The Abbess' message clinches the issue. God as an abstract concept alone may not give any sustenance to life. It is the holiness of the heart's desire which matters and has to be made meaningful. She also gives words to her message to the readers, "Religion is the love and worship of the good, and that's the real basis of morality" (Murdoch 1986, 519). It is "beyond us, it's more real than us, we have to come to it and let it change us, religion is spiritual change, absolute spiritual change" {24} Murdoch's clarifies her objective and also succeed to achieve it, " Literature is a way to picture and understand moral situations." {25}

III. Conclusion

Although different prospects of the plot, characters and happenings give different definitions to human emotions yet her idea of creating the scene of classic downing bell and arrival of new bell indicates that like bells somewhere old traditions, values and culture have been vanished from society and people are waiting for the new ones to replace them but the idea to restore the old bell by protagonist gives an idea to readers that old traditions and values should not be completely forgotten but to restore, to reform and to merge them all together in welfare of the society. The path in between will lead human to humanity accompanied with liberty, disciplined and organized and free. Here with the help of different characters who pursue different religious faiths can give the realistic idea about bigotry, superstition, true religion and pure spiritualism. James Tayer Pace, a very conventional leader of the community is a fine example of bigotry who is the leader of religious community and superlative priest with no humanistic sentiments. Now the question is that the rule to follow religious beliefs should be present without humanistic approach or not. Catherine, a saintly young woman desires to be a nun is an example of blind superstitions but not true religion. Her attempt to commit suicide

indicates that blind faith can lead a person away from liberalism. Her exile shows her reincarnation from superstition to true religious faith and liberty.

Michael Meade, the head of the lay community is not only having his faith and seeking to serve God but also struggling with his homosexual tendencies. Sexuality has no relation with religion and spiritualism. He wants to serve human in a true way but society doubt it due to his homosexuality. He decides to be true to himself because the best way to get is to be true to 'God' and 'Self'. Michael gets involved in worldly activities for the sake of Catherine's love.

Different choices of people show their different vision to deal with human life and their different aspects like being moral and ethically good in modern realistic and practical world. When people will be free from blind religious values only after that they will understand true spirituality which exists in serving manhood and in being humanistic to find true essence of liberalism. This transformation from religious path to humanistic path shows writer's ultimate selection of true spiritualism, humanism and liberalism.

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Declaration

I Dr. Richa Tripathi, submit that the research paper, "Iris Murdoch's "The Bell": Sagacity of humanism and liberalism" is an original work of mine and any text taken from other sources are properly acknowledged. I personally take the responsibility of any discrepancy regarding the originality of the text