

THE THEME OF VIOLENCE IN GOLDING: A STUDY OF HIS SELECT NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Violence can be explained as an expression of martial tendency of man to show his prowess and to subdue the weaker sections in the society. On account of it being a base instinct in man's psyche, it is linked with the primitive, barbaric self of man. This inherent barbaric self of man is always in search of pride and hate. Golding's novels exhibit the increasing tendency of people to resort to violence in any form. Golding seems to suggest that it is impossible to eradicate violence from the society. But by reposing our faith in the spiritual life, we can scale down the level of violence. The paper explores the theme of sublimation of violence through spiritual urge in Golding's works.

Keywords: *Free Fall, Lord of the Flies, New People, Pincher Martin, spiritual values.*

INTRODUCTION

William Golding(1911-1993) was a famous British playwright and novelist. He won Booker Prize(1980) for his novel, *Rites of Passage* and the Nobel prize for Literature(1983). Some of his famous novels are *Lord of the Flies*(1954), *The Inheritors*(1955), *Pincher Martin*(1956). His trilogy, *To The Ends Of The Earth* earned accolades from various quarters. Known as a pessimist, Golding trusted in human ingenuity to express through words and to communicate with a common sense. Golding expects us to go back and search the basic truths that have been obscured by material progress. Golding underscores the need to reach out to the universe and through the universe to God. But, what is the state of contemporary human predicament?

"Minors forced into cars, raped. Four youths drive away with 18-year-old. 15-year-old Chennai schoolboy stabs his teacher to death. Battered and abandoned, 2-year-old admitted at the AIIMS Trauma Centre". Such newspaper headings certainly do not make for healthy reading. On the contrary, they make us immensely sad as we reflect on the human situation and share Wordsworth's sentiment in the poem, *Written in Early Spring*.

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*And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.*

All the outrages committed on man and his society is symptomatic of the violence that has permeated into society. Every serious attempt on the part of the government and institutions, both public and private, to weed out violence leads us nowhere and we are once again back to square one. This is because violence operated in the primordial past, it gained fresh momentum in the Middle Ages and finally it broke all records in the modern age. When we take into account the enormity of violence in the present age and think how rapidly it has changed its proportions from an endemic one to an epidemic one, we try to discover the similarities, if any, between the violence operating in the cosmos and that operating on the earth. We cannot sever the element of violence from the cycle of creation and destruction. Our thought about the very origin of the universe links us with violence in the cosmos. The violent birth of the earth has its roots in the Big Bang theory. Since man is a biological, instinctual being, it is well-nigh impossible to root out violence from the society.

Golding's primary concern as a novelist is to show the manifestation of violence in the society. Like Conrad, he knows that evil is all pervasive. Like Conrad, he believes in the metaphysics of evil and this evil is instrumental in bringing about all kinds of violence in the society. He believes with the psychologist Jung that evil does not originate from any ontological duality but it is certainly a debilitating psychic force.

The novelist Golding has seen life so closely, thoroughly and intimately that he is forever aware of the dog barking or lurking beneath our skin. Even Nossen while critiquing on the beast-man theme in Golding's novels is accurate in his observation of Golding's world, where he discovers through Simon and Jack, through Lok and Fa that the beast-man is neither all good nor all bad; for it is a paradox of human existence that good and evil are so tightly entangled in man's experience that it is impossible to separate them or at times even to recognize them clearly (Even-Nossen 68-69).

Lord of the Flies depicts a group of British schoolboys who, by sheer accident make an abrupt landing on an island, sometime after the Second World War. In the first few days, they create an impression of being a homogeneous group. But with the passage of time, the signs of resentment begin to make their ugly presence. A split is caused among the boys and the reasons can be ascribed to: the failure of the boys to raise a signal fire, and the jealousy of Jack when Ralph is selected leader of the group. The unified group splits into two: Jack and his band of hunters form one faction, whereas Piggy, Ralph, Sam, Eric and the Littleuns form another faction. The two factions are always at loggerheads with each other. The natural savagery of Jack aided by his instinct for killing makes him an evil incarnate. He has always suppressed the killer instinct in him, but he hits upon a plan to give that instinct hands and feet. Golding states how 'Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness'; he further hinted at the animality concealed in his laughter thus: *his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling* (*Lord of the Flies* 69).

Jack refrains from killing the piglet in the heart of the jungle and the boys, more than anybody else, can read into Jack's psychological motivations clearly: *They knew very well*

why he hadn't: because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood. (*Lord of the Flies* 34). Jack's penchant for violent deeds had been curbed by the restraints of civilization in the English society. But in the society of the jungle, his latent motivation for violence manifests itself not merely in the issue related to the piglet but also in his dealings with Piggy. One recalls in this connection his attack on Piggy which results in the breaking of his spectacles. The smashing of Piggy's spectacles sets in a chain of small clashes among the boys. Jack's senseless behavior has a detrimental effect on the psyche of the boys and that engenders negative emotions: frustration, humiliation, anger and pride. Primitive people have always made a jamboree over their killing of wild animals, but the amazing thing is that these British boys who had all the trappings of culture and British civilization on them, quickly display their primitive instincts when the pig is slaughtered ... *Knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken its life like a long satisfying drink* (*Lord of the Flies* 76). So long the boys have drained out their energy in hunting a pig, it remains hidden. But the latent evil in them now urges them to go for a man-hunting. The boys become splenetic and rash and vent their ire on Simon, who has all the making of a mystic and is like a Christ-figure in his group. The bloodthirsty boys shout at the top of their voices, *Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!* (*Lord of the Flies* 168). The list of their violent acts is long and unending: Ralph pelts stones at Henry; pulls down the sandcastle of Percival and in the ritual of orgy Jack's followers kill Simon and Piggy. Jack would have liquidated Ralph had the naval officer not arrived in time.

Golding's statement of fact in *The Inheritors* seems to be that progress in the society cannot be possible without destruction, death and violence. Here, society is divided into two groups: the new people and the Neanderthals, respectively. The new people are mighty afraid of the Neanderthals, whom they look down as grotesque animals. Golding's description almost imparts a mythopoeic quality to them: *It was a strange creature, smallish, and bowed. The legs and thighs were bent and there was a whole thatch of curls on the outside of the legs and arms.... There was no bridge to the nose.... The shadows lay most darkly in the caverns above its cheeks and the eyes were invisible in them.* (*The Inheritors* 218-219). It is the fear psychosis of the new group that manifests itself in their hatred and lack of trust which they show against the Neanderthals.

The personal lives of the new people are violent and traumatic. Fa has every reason to believe that death and evil walk hand in hand with the new people. She observes in a retrospective mood that the death of Mal was caused by the removal of log. His death could also be ascribed to his standing on the cliff. *They killed Nil and threw her into the water. And the old woman. They have taken Liku and the new one* (*The Inheritors* 114). Lok is flabbergasted with their violent rituals of the hacking of Pine tree's finger. By drinking the new honey that smacks of dead things, they become morally depraved and violent.

Golding explores the adulterous relationship of people and the way it degenerates into sheer brutality. The tribal artist, Tuami, has an adulterous relationship with the wife of Marlano and she is none other than Vivani. Golding likens them to ravenous wolves and boisterous horses in their mating:

Their fierce and wolf like battle ended. They had fought it seemed, against each other, consumed each other, rather than lain together so that there was blood on the woman's face and the man's shoulder. They hunted down pleasure as the wolves will follow and run down horses....' (The *Inheritors* 176-177). Golding hammers his belief that by perpetrating violence and cruelty in nature we tend to destroy the living things in nature. It is therefore our primary duty to keep our pact with Mother Earth unscathed. Golding is naive to the point of crudity when he states that, 'Indulging in senseless slaughter only means that we are violating our pact with Oa, our Great Earth Mother' (*The Archetype of the Great Mother in the novels of William Golding* 10). Both Darwin and Wells come in for a great deal of criticism in the hands of Golding in the novel *The Inheritors*, for their attempt to equate civilization with culture.

Pincher Martin consists of one action that is entire and complete in it and it is replete with violence. The flashbacks in the past life of Pincher go to prove that it is a story that has violence written all over it. The egoism and violence make him cruel, self-aggrandizing and revengeful. He derives immense joy by inflicting pain on others. He oppresses others in as much as Jack in *Lord of the Flies*. The sadism in his nature is not only confined to theft and brutality but also extends to rape and murder. Even while defying death, *he was convulsed and struggling* (*Pincher Martin* 200-201). He knows that if he is free from all emotions, he can tide over the crisis of conscience in his life. Hence he represses all emotions and only allows the emotion of hate to dominate the other emotions.

He is the embodiment of violence and greed. He is a visualiser of memories and those snatchers of memory are full of violence *Waiting for the police by the smashed car, Waiting, for the shell after the flash of the gun* (*Pincher Martin* 139). Goldsmith reduces Pincher to a pair of red claws and in doing so he underscores the truth that when man is violently attached to his corporeal existence, he cares, precious little, for death and oblivion. It is not unusual to see a civilized man showing his nostalgia to return to his primitive state of existence. In Pincher's urge to return to his primitive state, the reader can see signs of his regression to the low forms of animal life (*Primitivism* 44).

His pathetic condition at the end has compelled Weekes and Gregor to quote these memorable lines from *Pincher Martin: Broken defiled, Returning to the earth, the rafters rotted, the roof fallen in ----- a wreck. Would you believe that anything ever lived there?*

(*Pincher Martin* 207)

In *Free Fall*, Golding shows that violence can manifest itself through mental torture. The wily psychologist, Dr. Halde, in the Nazi concentration camp, makes no bones of the fact that, *It is the karma of our two nations that we should torture each other* (*Free Fall* 144). Dr. Halde has to garner all the information from Sammy, so he inflicts all kinds of mental torture on him. Weekes and Gregor imply the irony in the torture when they remark thus: *He is not tortured, but allowed to torture himself* (*Golding, The Man and his Books* 184).

The inordinate egoism of Sammy Montjoy is subject to censorious criticism by Dr. Halde: *What embryo if it could choose, would go through the sufferings of birth to achieve your daily consciousness? There is no health in you, Mr. Mountjoy. You do not believe*

in anything enough to suffer for it or be glad. There is no point at which something has knocked on your door and taken possession of you. You possess yourself.

(Free Fall 144)

During his schooldays, we see Sammy in the thick of gang warfare. There is further decline in his moral character and one day he robs the chastity of Beatrice. Sammy charts the moral decline of despotic persons who lose their freedom and take to torturing innocent people:

Once a human being has lost freedom there is no end to the coils of cruelty, I must.... They said the damned in hell were forced to torture the innocent live people with disease. But I know that life is perhaps more terrible than that innocent medieval conception. We are forced here and now to torture each other.

(Free Fall 115)

In *The Spire*, Jocelin is presented as a religious artist who cherishes the ambition to build a four hundred foot spire. His soul agony, arising from the injury that he has inflicted on others, finds soulful expression in his frank admission to the dying Roger, *Once you said I was the devil himself. It isn't true. I'm a fool. Also I think ----- I'm a building with a vast cellarage where rats live; and there's some kind of blight on my hands. I injure everyone I touch particularly those I love. Now I've come in pain and shame, to ask you to forgive me* (*The Spire* 210-211).

Violence can be explained as an expression of martial tendency of man to show his power and to subdue the weaker sections in the society. On account of it being a base instinct in man's psyche, it is linked with the primitive, barbaric self of man. This inherent barbaric self of man is always in search of pride and hate. Golding's novels exhibit the increasing tendency of people to resort to violence in any form. Since violence is so common to the modern world are we to conclude, that Golding's novels do not point to any message to his readers? Golding seems to suggest that it is impossible to eradicate violence from the society. But by reposing our faith in the spiritual life, we can scale down the level of violence. In a public lecture sponsored by British Council in Bombay, in March 1987, he was asked, "Would you say that an escalation of the cult of violence and repressed sexuality in the twentieth century are the key factors in the decline of spiritual values in society?" He replied in the affirmative. His message seems to be related to spiritual cosmology. He expects us to go back and search the basic truths that have been obscured by material progress. In this way, he underscores the need to reach out to the universe and through the universe to God.

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