



The Spark of Evil within Man as a Driving Factor in Golding's Lord of the Flies: A Study

KEYWORDS

Civilisation, disillusionment, social structure, savagery

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ABSTRACT *With the derailment of the wheel of civilisation in the post war era, there appeared a host of novelists to set right the disjointedness through the cavalcade of works. Among them, William Golding, an outstanding novelist, occupies a prominent place. In order to project the disillusionment and the inevitable doom that modern man has created for himself. Golding resorts to the concept and theme of evil. He explores the dark side of humanity and the savagery that surfaces when social structure is broken down, and rules, ideals, and values are lost. He sees the evil as lying deep in the hearts of modern man accounting the process of regression. Golding finds forces of darkness and savagery working incessantly within man to undermine the beautiful and glittering edifice of modern civilisation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern novel has been a constant referral source of rationality, spirituality, dignity, intellectuality and what not. Though the novel is not life, it is a representation of life and reality reflecting their movement and direction, the changing scene of human activity in all ages and societies; the shadows of the passing events of time are reflected in its mirror in a concentrated and muted form of human passions and endeavour of man's struggle within the orbit of his strengths and effort and failure in the face of forces over which he has no control. It depicts the vibrant resistance of life and man's failing instincts, or his awareness of reality. It takes many forms and expression for the canvas of life is too large to be presented only in the moments of shattered desire of contemplative calm and rising hopes and ambitions.

Robert Michael Ballantyne bases Lord of the Flies (1954) on a popular 1857 English novel, The Coral Island. That novel, like Golding's, is about boys shipwrecked on a Pacific island. However, in Ballantyne's story, the characters live in harmony and happiness. But Golding created his novel to offer what he felt was a realistic alternative to Ballantyne's book. Golding's characters do not live in harmony and order, and the book relates what happens as a result. Golding stated that Lord of the Flies was "an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." He felt that the inherent evil of individuals required the constraints of society in order for social order to be maintained. Golding's view is contrary to that of philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, who believed that individuals in the state of nature are essentially good, and that the corruption of the natural state of goodness can be attributed to living in the unnatural state created by society.

In the present century man is crowded with explosive events that have exposed his very instincts to their bare roots – individual and collective violence, mass hysteria, and man's inordinate weakness in resisting the force of power and succumbing to it.

The concept and theme of evil leading to the loss of innocence is a device to lay bare human psychology and instinctive behaviour. Golding in Lord of the Flies creates subtle contrast between the two worlds – the world of evil and the world of good, believing that essential goodness and innocence are the only desirable. On the one hand, Golding shows that the evil is within; on the other hand, he shows its external manifestation in the irony of modern man's preoccupation with progress.

According to Golding, "the primitive forces within man transform the environmental surroundings to make himself the centre of the universe by dint of spectacular progress in the field of science and technology. "Lord of the Flies projects the inherent darkness that lies deep-rooted in man and drifts him to anarchy and chaos in spite of all his slogans of democracy, reason and enlightenment. Thus, Golding's another purpose is to project the course of time that has absolutely changed man.

The main purpose of the paper is to work out a systematic pattern to show the signs of destruction and annihilation threatening to overwhelm the modern world. As modern man is confronting a diseased society- a society where most of the human beings are striving for power and exercising it. It has become very important to know the root cause of man's annihilating drives. Rather than becoming complacent, human beings has always ventured to explore the evil side of man. Thus, an effort has been taken to highlight Golding's Lord of the Flies intertwined by the concept of the Biblical Fall of man. The paper projects the process of human downfall and the hollowness of man through the journey from boyhood to manhood which includes three different angles: innocence, its gradual loss with acquisition of experience, seeds of evil within him resulting his fall and infinite regression.

II. LOSS OF INNOCENCE AND RATIONALITY IN LORD OF THE FLIES

1. INESCAPABLE THEMES OF EVIL

In the years immediately following the end of the Second World War, a new healthy creative literary writing springs up based on war experiences which could be divided into two halves: childhood and adolescence on the other hand and war on the other. Out of these two inescapable themes, the theme of childhood is most attractive. Golding has pinned down the intensity of war experiences, the vision and the sense of wonder of the unformed mind. He used the innocence of childhood as a kind of camera angle on the world with the result that his novel is filled with strangely foreshortened figures. The terrible but strangely beautiful world of innocence sticks in the memory because anyone reading Golding's novel will feel that it is revealing of the situation of everyone.

Golding has felt acutely the state of unbelief and bewilderment which followed the post-world war. He, too, realised the growing disillusionment of the time and the consequent inability of the novelists to pass anything like a judgement of man and women he creates. The Second World War, Golding

acknowledges, was a turning point in his life. Golding quotes, "I began to see what people are capable of doing. Anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as bee produces honey must have been blind or wrong in the head."

"After the war...I had discovered what one man could do to another... (what could be done) skilfully, coldly, by educated men, doctors, lawyers, by men with a tradition of civilization behind them, to beings of their own kind." William Golding in his essay "Fable"!

2. GREY CHARACTERS SUCH AS PIGGY

Lord of the Flies shows that there is evil in everyone, and that it is simmering just below the surface. The narrative indicates just how easily the facade of civilization can slip. The death of civilization is perhaps mirrored in the death of Piggy, the most logical and good-natured character. In the 1963 film, Piggy addresses the boys who are standing above him on the rocks. By this point, Jack's gang members are no longer speaking normally; they screech and howl instead. Piggy asks them whether it is better to be savages or sensible like Ralph. In what appears to be a response, the boys push a huge rock down on Piggy. The scene is shot from both Piggy's point of view, and that of the boys who tower above. As the rock approaches Piggy, he screams. There is a quick cut to a close-up of Ralph, who shouts out the name of his friend. The scene in the 1990 film plays out similarly. As Piggy is speaking, the boys appear less feral, taunting him with jibes as he tries to get them to see sense. The rock is tipped on him from above, and Hook's film actually shows Piggy getting hit on the head by it. As Ralph screams, a close-up shot of Piggy's bleeding head is shown. The later film appears more adult, both in the language used and in this graphic depiction; however this may well be due to the later period rather than anything else. (Tara Ghai)

3. THE EVIL STORY OF UNCIVILIZATION

The novel Lord of the Flies focuses on a group of British boys who land on an uninhabited tropical at the outset of the World War II. They attempt to establish a social order and a plan for being rescued. The novel follows their attempts at social order and the results of those attempts. However, the majority of the boys turn in course of time into a tribe of idol-worshipping savages and murder two of their own companions. However, most of the boys resort to evil activities, a few boys hold on to their humanity. This spark of human decency gleams in Lord of the Flies.

Golding's novels especially Lord of the Flies feature dark situations and some stern and obstinate characters such as Jack. The novels are "not only sombre moralities and dark myths about evil and treacherous, destructive forces. They are also colourful tales of adventures, which can be read in such, full of narrative joy, inventiveness and excitement." Golding's novels are self-contained wholes beneath whose surface action and realism are to found much wider and, in a sense, containing cosmic meanings.

The brilliance of Lord of the Flies can scarcely be exaggerated, and horrific as it is, it cannot be dismissed merely as a horror-comic of high literacy merit, as a 'sick' comment on R. M. Ballantyne's nineteenth century views on the nature of British boyhood. Golding endeavours to show us as stripped man, man naked of all the sanctions of customs and civilisation, man as he is alone and in his essence, or at any rate as he can be conceived to be in such a condition.

Golding in order to make the readers feel the presence of the perversion and evil thoughts lying deep in modern man makes use of the loss of innocence as a significant technique in Lord of the Flies. The novel show how human being, with the rise of various complexities in his mind, displays his vile thoughts in his attempt to progress in the name of civilisation brings him down in the absence of his knowledge that marks a sharp irony of progress. Golding shows human innocence

and its gradual obliteration with the gain of experience. He sees it in the light of "Original Sin" committed by man; as such, the dream of setting-up a paradise is no more possible after the Biblical Fall. Thus, he ends his fiction with a note of pessimism.

4. THE NEED OF DISCIPLINE

The intention of man to progress and his efforts to set new order and civilization go in vain due to the lack of good wishes and discipline. Golding in Lord of the Flies relates human depravity to the Original Sin committed by man. In Lord of the Flies, the readers may trace the theme of evil resulting fall that highlights the diseased nature of man. Golding vision differs from other visions of the fall. Literature of fall generally looks back at the golden past and forward for redemption. But it may be noted that his vision is confined to the present only. He does not offer any solutions, he does not show us a way out of the fallen state, and the messiahs he creates do not succeed in bringing about any salvation. He implies that man can never be able to regain the lost state of innocence.

It is quite apparent that Golding's subject is not the fall of man but the fallen state of man. The marooned boys in the first chapter of Lord of the Flies are in the initial stage of 'Fall.' Innocence itself is not only visible in Lord of the Flies but the end of innocence and the beginning of experience, the characters almost being thrown out of the Edenic gardens. Golding agrees that the island is a 'paradise,' a virgin, natural world to which the boys bring the evil, hatred and violence inherent in their own nature. Lord of the Flies emphasises the absence of another paradise, the absence of redemption, because man is what he is...a 'morally diseased' creature. The boys' downfall is their very nature, which is evil and sends them into further evil.

Golding like T. S. Eliot make his readers aware of the problems that he thinks exist, awareness being the first step towards resolution and redemption. His prime motive is to move and trouble us out of our complacencies and take us into the world of evil that exists around us, the evil that man has fallen into and the evil that is within man.

Lord of the Flies unfolds with a bang discussing about a group of innocent schoolchildren in the midst of raging war. The boys are dislocated from their world and landed into a deserted tropical island while a plane was evacuating them. The boys on the island descend into savagery when they feel that they are free from the rules and structures of civilization and society. This feeling of freedom and acquired licence is due to the absence of adults on the island who could have resisted them of having their own way. Golding highlights the fundamental human struggle between the civilizing instinct—the impulse to obey rules, behave morally, and act lawfully—and the savage instinct—the impulse to seek brute power over others, act selfishly, scorn moral rules, and indulge in violence. The novel is infused with symbolic significance that conveys the novel's central themes and ideas. In portraying the various ways in which the boys on the island adapt to their new surroundings and react to their new freedom, Golding explores the ways in which humans respond to stress, change, and tension. It dramatizes the history of civilization. Lord of the Flies also is studied in relation to the theories of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who taught that the human mind was the site of a constant battle among different impulses—the id (instinctual needs and desires), the ego (the conscious, rational mind), and the superego (the sense of conscience and morality). Although Golding's Lord of the Flies confines to the microcosm of a group of boys, it resonates with implications far beyond the bounds of the small island and explores problems and questions universal to the human experience.

5. A CONFLICT BETWEEN CIVILIZATION AND SAVAGERY

Lord of the Flies speaks precisely about the conflict between civilization and savagery in the conflict between the novel's

two main characters: Ralph, the protagonist, who represents order and leadership; and Jack, the antagonist, who represents savagery and the desire for power. The novel endeavours to show how different people feel the influences of the instincts of civilization and savagery to different degrees. Piggy, for example, has no feelings of savage, while Roger is hardly capable of comprehending the rules of civilization. Moral behaviour, according to Golding, is something that civilization forces upon the individual rather than a natural expression of human individuality. When people are left out and allowed to have all freedom, power and authority, they naturally revert to cruelty, savagery, and barbarism. This idea of innate human evil is very much visible in *Lord of the Flies*. Of all the characters in the novel, only Simon possesses anything like a natural, innate goodness.

Unlike their previous image in the novel, they now find solace and excitement in savagery as they progressed from well-behaved, orderly children longing for rescue to cruel, blood thirsty hunters who have no desire to return to civilization, they naturally lose the sense of innocence that they possessed at the beginning of the novel.

The story of *Lord of the Flies* has been made into a beautiful stage adaptation as well by Nigel Williams. "It is a work in which ideas and those who hold them fight equally for our attention, in which personalities and principles battle it out in the clear light of something that seems like an island but could be a stage, or even, a certain moments, a classroom. It is an apparently naturalistic work with extraordinary symbolic power – a private story with public significance. And perhaps most important of all for an age in which serious discussion of political ideas is in danger of being spun out of existence, it is, as Golding told me he intended it to be, a debate about the very roots of English society, a discussion of how we have lived and how we ought to live – a way of talking to ourselves about what matters. Theatre." (Nigel Williams)

Lord of the Flies suggests that absent the structures of school, family, and government, which prop up civilization; human beings will always choose anarchy and hedonism over law and order.

III. CONCLUSION

The paper attempts to expose the moral depravity of man by focusing on different issues: gradual loss of innocence and the forces of evil and darkness lying deep-rooted in the hearts of men. It also focuses Golding's art on these aspects of human depravity, which becomes a recurrent theme in his

literary works including *Lord of the Flies*. The concept of evil was given a special weightage while analysing human depravity. No doubt essential goodness and virtue are necessary for the development of a human being but if one looks at the reverse side of it, it cannot be denied that perversion in any form takes the tacit advantage of goodness and germinates the entire being of man and brings him down to a final catastrophe which has been very well illustrated and established in *Lord of the Flies*.

Since *Lord of the Flies* is focused on the marooned children on the deserted tropical island, they are quite vulnerable to perversity. Their excessive goodness gives way to undemocratic thoughts; later on when the corrupting "power" assumes a stronger dimension, goodness is betrayed. The end of goodness brings about vile thoughts as a result of which the end of goodness and the thought of evil are like two sides of the same coin because the end of goodness logically and automatically leads man to face evil. Golding's protagonists aspire for progress which is in no way related to virtue and righteousness. They carry on with their efforts for progress, but the result always become ironical. Ultimately, the boys revert to a base state of evil and savagery which brought their own downfall along with the downfall of other fellow human beings.

As perversion and depravity of man form the recurrent theme in the fictions of Golding, it is quite astonishing to see the technical devices Golding uses to give expression to them. He was successful in highlighting one aspect of modern civilisation which forms the basic core and central theme in *Lord of the Flies*– the darkness of evil that lies deep in modern man's heart. Thus, *Lord of the Flies* shows that there is evil in everyone, and that it is simmering just below the surface. The narrative indicates just how easily the façade of civilisation can slip. The death of civilisation is perhaps mirrored in the death of Piggy, the most logical and good-natured character. This paper is designed to show that modern civilisation with all its astounding progress is doomed to sheer destruction and annihilation unless man overcomes the evil forces, the lust for power, the dark sin and the impetuous passions that are active in undermining the entire human civilisation.

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