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PLIGHT OF MAN IN WILLIAM GOLDING'S *LORD OF THE FLIES*

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ABSTRACT

William Gerald Golding's fiction reveals his intense preoccupation with human nature. He exhibits a remarkable insight into the eerie working of the inner dark instincts of man. His uncanny ability to portray the shadowy instincts of man has endowed him the status of a social psychologist. His fiction traces the man's inability to sympathize with fellow creatures. Man's inability to have a harmonious existence with the fellow creatures draws the contemporary relevance in his works. The portrayal of the sullen nature of man and the sense of anxiety has given recognition to Golding with a Nobel Prize for literature in 1983. *Lord of the Flies* (1954), the first novel of Golding is an enactment of the boyish adventures in an uninhabited island. The boys on the island pass from one stage of civilization to barbarians. The retrogression in their nature is ascribed to man's inherent evil nature. Instead of sharing a serene society, the children attempt to build a society in the lines of anarchy and stoop down to nurture killer instincts. Thus, Golding draws the plight of man.

Key words: social psychologist, anxiety, civilization, barbarian, retrogression.

The title of the novel, *Lord of the Flies* reminds us of the demonic character in Jewish religious hierarchy, where Beelzebub is known as Lord of the Flies. In parlance, Golding endeavours to communicate the sullenness of human nature and the inevitable vicious circle of living with darkness at man's heart. The aftermath of World Wars and the subsequent misery in the milieu has fostered a pessimistic outlook in the modern life. Golding's reaction as a creative artist is tempered by the state of affairs and projects the original nature of man

Golding, being a representative of realist tradition, makes use of a simple boyish adventurous

story in *Lord of the Flies* to convey an allegorical theme of the plight of man.

*Lord of the Flies* encapsulates the tumultuous episode of the boys' dropping into an unknown island, as a result of war, the ever present threat in the contemporary life. The haunting threat to the modern milieu, the atomic war, forms the backdrop of the novel. The children have reached the island as a result of attack and the subsequent release of passenger tube, amid their evacuation by via Gibraltar and Addis Abba. The unknown island forms the stage for the re-enactment of men at war. The island fits the congenial setting and the spatial separation to capture the behaviour of the boys at a

precipitous moment. The children devoid of adult control indulge in building a representative society, driven by antagonistic forces.

The deterioration in the means and methods of civilization, in the representative microcosm society, is traced and projected candidly. The boys, though from an advanced society, exhibit tendencies to yield to primary passions like fear, anger, revenge and pride. Their descent from a state of organized society to primitive way of life is deplorable as Golding exhibits with uncanny ability to present the evil within human nature, which is the plight of man in theological expression.

Golding's avowed intention is to throw light on the truth that lies behind the mask of appearance. He enacts a realistic story which bears reference to neither psychological nor anthropological evolution of mankind. It is suggestive of a dystopian vision of Golding that mankind can fall back to barbarism from an advanced stage of civilization. The island is seen paradisaic in its panoramic view in the beginning. The vivid descriptions of the coral island is captivating in its plenty with the beach, blue ocean, calm lagoon, the Sun, Stars and Moon. Golding juxtaposes the serenity of the island before the boys' arrival and the destruction of the placid island subsequently.

Golding portrayal of the children on the island is highly metaphorical and yields to various interpretations. It is suggestive of a parable of man stripped of sanctions, customs, and civilization at large. It is further interpreted as the story of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. There is the existence of good and evil together, and it is left to the discretion of the individuals to make a choice. In *Lord of the Flies* the story of the civilization is reversed on the island. The boys reached the island from a civilized society, but in course of time they deteriorate in their social and civilizational mores.

Golding is preoccupied to convey the inevitable dystopia in the absence of restraints of civilization. The boys on the island enact what the adults are fiercely engaged in. The boys enact a story, a narrative of realities hidden behind the boyish innocence. Golding draws a fine parallel by

juxtaposing the state of boys' arrival on the island and their evolution into savages. In the contest of leadership, Ralph, the most robust among the children, could have passed in the contest. The subsequent division among the children over their priorities make them two discreet groups; Ralph and Piggy on one side and the choir with Jack on the other side. In a hiatus of force having social gradient, Jack manipulates the will of other children.

A conglomerate of boys with varied choices turns them into a true representative society in the making. There occurs a clash over priorities, where Ralph advocates safety and Jack exhorts them to involve in the feast and dance. The need for food and greed for power becomes the obsession of Jack. The need for order and finding escape from the island become the obsession of Ralph. He also contrives design for sanitation and the maintenance of signal for attracting the attention of any passing by ship. Piggy, a symbolic and wise character among the boys, reminds of rationality of life. When the two groups confront to win over their resolve Piggy tries in vain to persuade Jack and his savages to follow wisdom, "Which is better to be a pack of nigger like you or to be sensible like Ralph is?...to have rules and agree or to hunt and kill? (*Lord of the Flies*. 199)

Fear, the lurking leaden emotion, surfaces in the life of children in the presence of darkness of the night and forest. The fear of unknown, hitherto been experienced only through dreams and fairy tales, is externalised in the form of 'beast'. The sign from the adult world comes in the form of a dead parachutist. The pilot of a shot down aeroplane descends dead to the island and is caught among the rocks and mountain. The dead parachutist is assumed as a demon at the presence of the noise and the apparition in the darkness of night. The sign from the adult world only exacerbates the situation by fostering superstition among the boys. They attempt to appease the beast.

The disciplined and organized society starts its decadence with the boys' assuming roles of hunters. The new orders is set with the boys rubbing their faces with clay and charcoal in order to

hunt a pig. Jack's disguise into a mask, which frees him of his repressing past and consciousness, only accentuates the indistinguishable oneness with animals. The frenzy of hunting and subsequent dance results in the negligence of signal fire, meant to attract the passing by ships.

Priorities of hunting and exhilaration collide with the choice of order and leads to division among the boys. Jack's inclination for meat, instead of fire (a sense of hope); becomes the order of the day. Fear, the underlying human emotion are externalised with the sign from the adult world in the form of dead parachutist. The parachutist is mistaken for a beast in the dead of the night, is communicated to the children.

Simon, the other character delineated as 'Christ figure', is skinny and withdrawn and having a tendency for seclusion and meditation in the forest. His communion with nature endows him with equanimity of treating darkness and light as the two parts of reality. In the observation of Weekes:

Simon not only registers the heat, the urgency, the riot, the dampness and decay and also registers the cool and the mysterious submergence of the forest in darkness, the beauty of fragrance and starlight and night flower, the peace. Finally, he not only registers both but accepts them, equality as two part of the same reality. (30)

He realizes the truth that beast is really an inborn sickness. His undergoing of symbolic death in the form of seizure leads to finding that the beast is none other than a dead parachutist. In a gory succession of events, Simon is killed by a group of hunters led by Jack. Simon's miserably fails to enlighten the other children about the beast as the parachutist. Strikingly he becomes a victim of the very group he seeks to enlighten. The premonition of death is seen in the Simon's visit of the forest. The tragedy of human anticipation of death is perceived as spiritual understanding of life. Simon in one of his meditative moods creeps into the forest away from the other children. The symbolic act of savagery is stumbled upon by Simon as evidence in the form of pig head left on spike by Jack and his hunting pack. It is an act of savagery to kill a pig to

placate an unknown beast. The pig head is severed and is full of flies. Simon realizes that it is the Biblical demon Beelzebub. He believes that the beast is the inborn fear of man. Subsequently Simon becomes the next victim of the savagery of boys. The spiritual guide is decimated as one last hope among the missing children.

Golding presents the human nature in its true colours. He endeavours to expose the characters without masks at a precipitous moment. It is not only exposing the characters but also unravelling the innate nature of man that lies behind the mask. He undertakes to trace the bestiality of human nature. The boys on the island, enact a mime in which they play different roles. The play turns into aggressive instinct to spill blood. They have missed to hunt a boar, and the role is played by Robert. The other boys, assuming Robert as pig, chant and dance around him. When they miss the hunt they yell:

Kill him! Kill him!

All at once, Robert was screaming and struggling with the strength of frenzy. Jack had him by the hair and was brandishing his knife. Behind him was Roger, fighting to get close. The chant rose ritually, as at the last moment of a dance or hunt.

Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig! Bash him in!

Ralph too was fighting to get nearer, to get a handful of that brown, vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-mastering. (L.F. 142)

Finally, their orgy of mock killing culminates in the real killing of Simon. The first sight of blood is overpowering the squeamish boys. The gruesome murders of Simon and Piggy only degenerate them into savagery.

The penultimate act of hunting down one of their friends, Ralph, is reminiscent of hunting a pig by hunters. The innocent boys, Roger, Maurice and Jack assume themselves as incarnation of evil. The island in the beginning is seen as Edenic in nature and is turned into a hell. The highest point is

the misuse of Piggy's glasses to set the island on fire. The fire on the island attracts the passing by cruiser and the crew comes to the rescue of the boys stranded on the island. The officer of the rescuing ship ironically puts, "What have been doing? Having a war or something? (L.F. 221) The children though saved by the passing by ship, leaves much to the imagination of the readers, as "Who will save the adult world?"

*Lord of the Flies* depicts the sullen nature of man. Golding ironically views that human nature can not accommodate itself amicably. In a microscopic and representative society, the boys struggle for order. The boys reach the island as a result of war. They represent the adults who are at war. Golding attempts to unravel the real nature of man lurking behind the mask of civilization. When the social restrictions are withdrawn the bestiality in the society emerges out. Golding's probing into myriad facets of human nature enables him to depict the plight of man in the novel *Lord of the Flies*.

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