

## WILLIAM GOLDING'S LORD OF THE FLIES AS AN ALLEGORY 'A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT'

**Dr. Richa Tiwari**

H.N.-1218/A Narmada Nager  
Jabalpur (M.P.)

### Abstract

William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* appeared in 1954, when memories of Second World War, especially the nuclear holocaust of 1945, were vividly fresh in European memory. During a world war parties of young British children were being evacuated to save them from atomic bombs. Some were over the South Pacific Ocean; their aero plane was attached by enemy war planes. The passenger plane was soon on fire. The pilot made an emergency landing on Small Island, dropped the passenger tube containing the children and took off. But the plane was soon destroyed by the fire. In this way a big group of boys between six to twelve years of age were left alone without any adult supervisor to organize their life themselves and lives on till a ship happened to come to the island to reassure them.

The story begins on an ominous note. A nuclear war has broken out somewhere in Europe forcing the authorities to evacuate the children of a school in English Home counties. The aircraft carrying them and touches down at Gibraltar and Addis Ababa on its southward journey, is attacked, loses the lives of its crew member but succeed in dropping the passenger tube somewhere on an island not unlike those in coral Island and carries on. The details in this regard are purposely kept vague as in the locale. Golding found this latter a fitting launching pad to begin his story which, as Louis Cazamian informs us, "did not attract much attention in the beginning" (1) It was only with the passage of time that the latent allegory contained in it. Caught people's imagination and raised the novel to the level it so richly deserves. But for this "Philosophy Allegory" (2), the novel might well have been consigned to the genre of children's stories like R.M. Ballantyne's 'Coral Island' (1857) from which "the frame work of the external scene stems" (3).

The children, who have emerging from the passenger tube start appearing on the scene beginning with Ralph, the protagonist of the novel, and Piggy, who eventually proves to be his steadfast standard bearer. Their chance discovery of a conch, which serves as the most significant and potent instrument in the early part of the story, coupled with Piggy's knowledge of how to use it, makes it possible for Ralph to summon the rest of the evacuees to place which continues to serve as the meeting ground of the children during the course of the rest of the story. It is, in a manner of speaking, the children's parliament.

In response to the call of the conch the children start emerging on the scene ,beginning with Johny followed by the twins Sam and Eric ,Jack Merridew with his choir in their full splendor , Mautice,Roger,Bill, Robert,Herold,Henry and so on.Of them all, only Ralph ,Jack , Piggy, Simon ,Maurice ,Roger and the twins Sam and Eric have major roles to play: the rest remain almost faceless characters in a charade.

The boys begin their social organization with the election of the chief .Ralph is the obvious choice since it is who wields the conch , which , for some inexplicable reason, has come to symbolize authority, something like a scepter in the hands of a king. Though Jack Merridew commands implicit obedience of the choir which he heads and could well have asserted his authority, blustering bully as he is, he has little scope to offer any resistance at least at this point of time. Later, however, he is to acquire different propensities the seeds of which lie dormant in him.

Rules are framed and different duties and chores are assigned to the individual members of the society. These assignments involve the most fundamental necessities like building shelters, keeping them habitable, lighting fire and keeping the flames alive to be used in order to attract the attention of a passing aero plane or ship which would rescue the marooned children. It is obvious that these are children of a society which is deeply steeped in a regimented discipline which Golding himself experienced as an officer in Royal Navy during the Second World War. The children, therefore, behave in a predictable manner entirely in accordance with their acquired conditioning and habit of obedience.

As the story moves on, we see that boys take to these tasks in the only way boys of their age have always taken to; they pitch in vigorously. However, as the days pass, dilution in the performance of duties sets in. Implicit obedience is replaced by commands given explicitly but later still even these are ignored. The veneer of civilized training , always thin and hiding the coarse grains of the elemental man, is corroded and finally allowed to vanish .The beast in man overpowers the good in him .All this has been brought out with a remarkable ease.

This change is not sudden but is precipitated in a gradual manner. It is here that Golding must have drawn extensively from his experience as a teacher of junior forms. He began his career as a teacher. Then came the war in which he saw the sinking of Bismarck as an active combatant of the Royal Navy. He resumed his former career after the war continued to teach from 1945 to 1962. This novel was produced during this period.

The metamorphosis of the children is complete when there come the final parting of ways between the forces commanded by Ralph and those by Jack .Piggy continues to be Ralph's counselor. On the other hand, it is Roger with his furtive qualities that becomes the henchman of Jack, who has moved over to another part of the island along with his followers. It is here that Jack practices his unabashed savagery and in the process converts his pack of boys into primitive barbarians. The climax of the scene comes in the form of the death of Simon, who represents the voice of sanity in spite of his being much younger. It is in these two chapters, viz. A View to a Death and the Shell and the Glasses, that we see the final fall of all that the world terms virtuous .Ralph, that champion of the civilized world, is rendered too powerless to counter Jack who is now the master of the evil. With the death of Piggy in the hands of Roger the established values are almost totally reversed. The transformation of man is complete.

The story thus ends with Ralph being chased and hounded by the forces commanded by Jack .It does not follow the universal belief in literature that virtue is rewarded and evil is punished under all circumstances. It is in this that Golding exhibits his philosophy of life:

Ralph dimly realizes that the world is not ready for its saints, or Simons, nor even Piggies or Ralphs. However, the latter do try to stop relapsing into barbarism. The world of the boys in the island demonstrates that good and bad can exist side by side in the darkness of man's hearts. It is a novel that reveals Golding's philosophy that the world should restore principles in an unprincipled world, restore belief to a world of disbelievers.

(Golding 10)

So much for Cazamian's remark about the novel being a philosophical allegory. In this respect it is the reverse of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* which conforms to the said 'universal belief'. However, what might appear intriguing is Golding's use of young children instead of grown up characterizing this allegory. The reason is not far to seek. The world of adults is far more complex than that of the children. Secondly, children are credited with Wordsworth's attributes in so far as their innocence is concerned. However, in the story their degradation is no less than that of the adults and this lends a different dimension to the strength of the allegory; it becomes more sinister.

At this point it would appear though that the story may well bear other interpretation especially in the form of a political commentary expressed allegorically, for it is difficult not to notice the obvious parallel between the story and the principles and practices of democracy. This however, necessitates a deeper insight into study of the characters of the story.

These characters are prototypes of our world of democracy, which, by universal acclaim, is the most civilized form of governance of the human societies. The children in the novel are essentially creatures of democracy as is evident from the time action begins in the story with the election of a chief through voting:

Let's have a vote

Yes!

Vote for chief!

Let's vote....(Golding 30)

This toy of voting was almost as pleasing as the conch. Jack started to protest but the clamors changed from the general wish to an election of Ralph himself. None of the boys could have found good reason for this: what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance: and most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch. (Emile 76)

Ralph stands out starkly alone as virtuous leaders do in any functioning democracy. His efforts to create semblance of some order are lost on the children who are gradually growing unmindful of their given duties. In the face of Jack's increasing attitude of the children, whose souls have been captured by Jack with Mephistophelean accuracy, advances towards extreme savagery and brutally. This eventually brings about the death of sanity characterized by Piggy and Simon.

Jack Merridew stands for diametrically opposite values in personal and public life. He symbolizes that segment of leadership which is characterized by the authoritarian attitude in any democracy. Utterly ruthless and unscrupulous, he does not lack the following of the gullible and goes on to build his strength against that of Ralph and finally takes over the reins of governance completely by belittling the latter's symbol of authority:

I'm chief, said Ralph tremulously. "and, what about the fire? And

‘I’ve the conch....’ You haven’t got it with you, said Jack, sneering.  
“you left it behind .see, clever? And the conch count at this end of the  
Island....” “The conch counts here too.” Said Ralph, “and all over  
the island.” “What are you going to about it then?”(Golding 186)

This is how the brute force usurps the rational , moral and scrupulous authority of the  
elected in a democratic set up.

Piggy’s case in this respect is more clearly defined, for he represented the middle class  
with its characteristics intelligence as also, ironically, its impotence. Piggy is asthmatic, an  
orphan who is brought up by an aunt, cannot see without his glasses and generally speaking too  
powerless to do anything. What a classic description of the middle class in any democracy!  
When Jack the dictator takes over, Simon, the brilliant albeit mysterious little boy is the first  
casualty and piggy is second. This is one of the correlations between a relentless and autocratic  
authority and democratic middle class; the former would do all it can to devour the latter, for it is  
the middle class which poses the most potent danger to the existence of any dictatorship.  
Roger portrays the dictatorship hence man who not only carries out the wishes of his master but  
takes the liberty to pander to his own whims and fancies .The rest of characters are, to mention it  
once again , the faceless multitudes without whom no system , democratic or otherwise, is  
possible, who suffer the brunt of evil inherent in all the system but who, none the less remain as  
voiceless as they are faceless.

## CONCLUSION

William Golding has, in *Lord of the Flies*, written a strikingly original novel about a group of  
boys between six to twelve years, from comfortable middle class back ground, who are isolated  
on a remote inhabited Pacific Island. The whole novel presents the allegorical influence.it is not  
my case to look these allegorical resemblances if none exit. Golding could not have been obvious  
of these most obvious details. It is not that central character becomes the loss of innocence but it  
is also that the world carries out at a possible loss of human life and dignity which democracy, at  
least as an idea, promises. IT would be preposterous to think that Golding is dismissive of  
democracy just as he is conscious of the fact that good and evil coexist in man, he is also aware  
that barbaric forces are always at work even in the most vibrant democracy. The need is to guard  
against these built in forces in order to protect well developed democratic institutions. This is  
also the message of the novel.

## WORK –CITED

### Primary source:

William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, Educational Edition , Madras : Oxford University Press,  
1962.

### Secondary Source:

Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature* . New Delhi :Allied Publisher  
Ltd.,1960.

Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian ,*History of English Literature* ( New Delhi : Macmillan  
India Ltd., 1981)

----- ,Legouis and Cazamian 1419.

Harvey, Paul Ed. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. London : Oxford Clarendon  
Press , 1932.