

DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE IN DAVID ADAM RICHARDS'S *MERCY AMONG THE CHILDREN*

Nitin Anandrao Kolekar

Assistant Professor in Communication Skills
Gharda Institute of Technology,
Lavel, Khed (Ratnagiri)
University of Mumbai (MS)

Abstract

David Adam Richards, a modern Canadian novelist, short story writer was born at Newcastle, New Brunswick on 17th October, 1950. Canada's most demonstrably Catholic writer Richards is the author of a number of award winning novels- *Nights Below Station Street* (1987), *The Bay of Love and Sorrow* (1998), *Mercy among the Children* (2000). A Canadian hybrid of Thomas Hardy, Leo Tolstoy and William Faulkner, Richards is prolific writer whose works convey fatalism, tragic heroism, pessimism, poverty, violence and evil side Miramichi people. He is often considered as "regional" writer. The present paper attempts to analyse the depicted violence in David Adam Richards's *Mercy among the Children*.

Since the Senecan convention English literature has been depicting the theme of violence. Violence is the use of physical force to apply a state to others contrary to their wishes. The word violence covers a broad spectrum. According to The Encyclopedia Bioethics, the word violence has the same root as "vehemence" which means "excessive use of force". The Neurobiologist, Jan Olavka defines violent behavior as, intentional physical aggressive behavior against another person. The use of violence is often a source of pride and defense of honor, especially among males. Men are overwhelmingly the aggressors in certain categories of crime such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape in which women are mostly the victims.

Dark harshness of life, poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, filth, fate, power, cruelty and strong desire are some of the literary aspects of violence depicted in literature. In many respects, twentieth century literature defines itself by reflecting the prevalent violence in modern society- from destruction of large scale warfare to individual crimes of murder, rape and abuse. By the close of twentieth century images of violence in all forms of literature had become so commonplace. Thus, violence had become a subject to convey the historical, psychological and artistic landscape of the modern world.

Mercy among the Children (2000) set in the weather blasted Maritimes, is the story of Lyle Henderson's Childhood in grinding rural poverty with his saint like parents and his albino sister and his family's long standing feud with the family of Mathew Pit. Sidney Henderson, Lyle's father is self educated, works as labourer, in an ill-educated community with his academic dreams. Once a small boy is killed in a tragic accident and Sidney is blamed and whole family is regarded with suspicion. He believes in pacifisms. According to him, disputes should be settled

without the use of war and violence. Because of such tendency he becomes the victim of violence many times. Once he is attacked by men, but as a pacifist, he became passive to protect himself.

They knocked my father down, the other men stepped on it as the other two killed him. (52)

But Lyle's ideology is different. He believes in power and violence. On this occasion he states:

I'm sure my father knew who they were, but he didn't want me to know- for knowledge leads to sin. (52)

Violence is sin for Sidney. So he wants to keep away his son from the violence. But his acts resulted in to the violent behavior of his son. According to the Lyle, poverty is major cause of his father's non-violent behavior. He quotes:

He realized their was a poverty in us that had nothing to do with dirt. (53)

Lyle is very eager to change the tragic circumstances of his family. He knows, for that he has to do conflict with society. But it is poverty which is the most important obstacle. Here, he gives the importance to power, money and violence. Rather than Sidney's intellectuality, academic dreams, ideology and gentleness of his family.

Elly, the mother of Lyle, follows her husband's ideology and loves her children. She became the victim of sexual assault and physical violence. (64) Rudy Ballenger molested and raped her not only because; she is alone in the house but also because she is poor helpless woman with her misfortune. This incident describes poverty as the cause of sexual harassment and violence. But Elly, as a pacifist and powerless woman, don't want to know this to her son. Afterwards Sidney and Elly are blamed for the robbery in the house of Leo, the master of them. With the help of this event, Richards uses abuse and destructive language to picturise verbal violence. (66) With this episode, Richards explore evil side of human life and master-servant relationship.

The character of Mathew is one of the important violator in the novel. He uses power and money for the conspiracies against Sidney's family. Actually, Mathew is the person, who is responsible for the tragic accident of a little boy, Trinton, for which, he blamed to Sidney. He is the same person, who robbed the house of Leo McVicer and blamed to Elly. He also victimizes Sidney by beating and abusing him.

He, who had beaten my father, had forced him to drink alcohol. (188)

Through out the novel, Mathew has not changed his views. He still tries to get ahead, not caring about who they hurt along the way. This character expresses the theme of greed, strong desire and cruelty.

Lyle is central and much thought provoked character in this novel. Richards presents the conflict between Lyle's ways of living and his parent's ways of living. His idea of heroism is different than his parents. He quotes:

I wanted my mother who acknowledge my bravery, hit a big fisherman and carried a knife, no one fucked with me. (282)

Finally, his all deeds resulted into tragedy. Lyle, his sister Autumn and little brother Percy had just lost their father and mother and Lyle felt guilty for this. Lyle thought that his reckless and violent ways caring for his family were the right way to face their problems. His drinking and self mutilation did not help. The fact he realizes, that his action hurt family more.

In the childhood when twelve years old Sidney pushes his friend Connie off the roof of local church in a moment of anger, he makes the silent vow:

“Let Connie live and I will never harm another soul.”

At the very moment, Connie stands, laughs, and walks away. Sidney keeps his promise through adulthood despite the fact that his insular, rural community uses his pacifism to exploit him. In the face of the socially sanctioned rejection and humiliation visited upon his family by several members of the community who are alternatively fearful and scornful of Sidney’s passion for books and ideas and suspicious of his stoic individualism. Lyle’s eventual, heartbroken allegiance with violence, against others as well as himself, is in direction apposition with Sydney’s belief that, “they who lift a hand against you do so against themselves” and counter to his father’s refusal to “beg the truth” in the face of falsehood and persecution. This fundamental conflict between father and son creates, on one level of the text, an on-going dialogue through which all of the events, actions and personal responses of the characters are colored.

Percy, the most innocent character of the entire story, was the next to face a horrible fate at the hands of Mathew Pit. This was most heartbreaking part of the story. Percy was waiting for Sidney to come home but he did not come home and Percy went to look for him. The car that Mathew was driving away from McVicer hit the young boy Percy. Mathew didn’t even stop. This poor boy, born into a family with so many problems, who barely knew his father, lost his mother, whose brother was a stranger to him.

In the final section entitled, *Redemption* is the most powerful and terrible. Here Richards describes the violent encounter among Mathew, Rudy Ballenger, Leo McVicer, Cynthia and Gladys. Mathew cheated Leo for his money and power with the help of Rudy and Cynthia. But afterwards all are they became interested for the property. This encounter deals with domestic violence due to the greed and strong desire for money.

Mathew slapped Cynthia for cheating him. Leo and Mathew started to fight for the shotgun, and Leo was kicked in the face. A spurt of blood from the old man shot straight into the air like a geyser. (352)

Although it is painful instances of inhumanity, rife with vivid illustrations of how “evil and darkness attach themselves to the good or great to destroy their will to live.” *Mercy among the Children* is a spell-binding testament to the resilience and purity of human spirit. But there is villainy in this imagined world, it is located much within specific individuals as attached to the blinding and corrupting nature of selfish attitudes, behavior and institutions that fail to honour the internal beauty of human virtues.

John Fraser in his book, *Violence in the Arts*, treats violence as release, violence as communication, violence as play, violence as self destruction, violence as the truest sanity in a particular situation. He gives the positive side of it and presents violence as one of the important characters in the work of art. We can not ignore the violence or its effects or affects in this novel because, violence demonstrates the “real” nature of man, his fundamental disorderliness and will to destruction. (9, 109)

Richards painfully presents his views on violence and non-violence. Lyle and Sidney represent it respectively. Both are trying to protect their family from the evil deeds of others in their own ways. They both have different thinking, but they both resulted into tragedy; which is the only common thing between them.

Works cited:

Richards, David Adam. *Mercy among the Children*, A Washington Square Press Publication, New York, 2000.

Fraser, John. *Violence in the Arts*. Cambridge University Press, 1974.