

The Darkness Within

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Mob lynching is an emerging endemic in India and feeds largely on base primordial human instinct of savagery when coupled with impunity. The same has been well explored by William Golding in *Lord of the Flies* wherein he shows that savagery is more primal than civilization. People cater to base instincts and revert to brutality especially as a mob under the guise of collective identity.

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I. Introduction

Maybe there is a beast... maybe it is in all of us.¹

Lord of the Flies is a novel written by Nobel Prize – winning British author William Golding and was originally published in the year 1954. It is an attempt by Golding to explore mankind's inherent evil and savagery. Set on a small deserted island, the plot focuses on a group of English schoolboys who are stranded on an uninhabited island after their plane is shot down during a war and their disastrous attempt to govern themselves. The boys enter a territory which is free from rules and structures of civilization and society. Some of the boys try to maintain order while there are some who rebel in favour of anarchy and violence – the constant human struggle between the civilizing and the savage instincts. Based on his own experience with real life violence and brutality of World War II, Golding traces man's inherent evil through the dissent of the boys into savagery.

II. Tracing the Characters

The reader is first introduced to Ralph, and then to Piggy. The boys discover a conch shell on the beach which they figure out can be used as a horn. Ralph blows the conch in order to gather the rest of the survivors. Once all assemble, they decide to choose a leader. Jack is already leading his group of boys and is another contender to be the Chief. The conflict between Ralph and Jack is evident and is also the driving force of the novel. However, Ralph is elected as the leader of the group and

appoints Jack to be in-charge of the boys who shall hunt to gather food.

Ralph is the charismatic protagonist of the novel, *Lord of the Flies*. He represents order and civilization and constantly tries to set the rules. He is committed to the safety of the boys notwithstanding that many amongst them are only concerned with playing and having fun. He is hopeful for a better future and, as such, thinks of increasing their chances of getting rescued. His position as the Chief is initially secure but is under constant threat with Jack's ever rising stature.

Piggy on the other hand is the exact opposite of Ralph, especially in terms of physical prowess. He is fat, suffers from asthma and needs glasses to see clearly. He is also thoughtful and has his own set of virtues such as wisdom and patience which make him less attractive to the rest of the boys.

Jack is the antagonist of the novel and represents savagery, violence and anarchy. While Ralph feels the constant need for rules, Jack believes in providing simple yet brute solutions. As the story progresses he plays off the other boys' fears and positions himself as the Chief. In short, he is the anti-thesis of Ralph.

Simon, yet another character, is different from all others in his own unique way and represents innate goodness. He is the only one able enough to resist the innate violent tendencies of mankind. He never participates in the boys' ritual after hunting. He is kind to younger children. He acts morally, not out

of guilt or shame but because he has such entrenched beliefs. In fact, he is the first to recognize the true identity of the beast.

Roger is introduced as a quiet boy in the beginning but goes on to become sadistic and brutal.

III. Decline of Civilization

The well-behaved and orderly children longing for rescue are shown to have transformed into cruel, blood-thirsty hunters who have no desire to return to civilization. Jack and his choir boys slowly transform into 'Jack, the Chief' and 'his Tribe' who decorate themselves with paint and completely give in to the instincts of savagery. Through the boys' decline, Golding attempts to show how civilization mitigates but never wipes out innate evil.

Man's Inherent Evil

In the initial period on the island, Jack is unable to kill a pig because he is still controlled by his instinct of civility as instilled by society. But, soon he develops an obsession for hunting and killing. He paints himself and goes out to hunt. After he manages to hunt down his prey, he relishes it. He is thrilled not because he contributed to the common good by bringing food for the boys but because he was able to 'outwit a living thing'. Killing the pig satisfied his primal instincts. He develops a feeling of power and superiority which is an important milestone in the decline of the boys from civilization to savagery.

Another important instance of civilizational decline into savagery can be seen through Roger's character when he feels the urge to torment the little ones. He gathers stones and throws them at Henry, but leaves a safe distance between the child and the stones. The distance is described as a circle comprising of parents, school, policeman and the

law. The socially imposed standards are still too strong for Roger to completely give in. The cracks, however, are beginning to show.

Simon is the first amongst the boys to see the beast as being a part of the human nature. He comes to realize that they need to fear their own nature instead of any outside force. He hints at the existence of innate human evil without even understanding it at the time. However, in an imaginary dialogue, his theory is confirmed by the Lord of the Flies – a pig's head mounted on a sharpened stick swarming with scavenging flies:

You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you?
Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no
go? Why things are what they are?

Simon is of the conviction that the boys need not be afraid of a monster without, because it is neither real nor physical, rather they need to be concerned about the monster within, that is the innate human tendency to turn towards savagery; they need to be afraid of the darkness that lurks within each of them. The idea of innate evil is further proved when Simon is killed by the boys. Even Ralph and Piggy who try to maintain order ultimately join in on the mass murder surrendering to the thrill of violence and mass hysteria. While Piggy tries to ignore their participation, Ralph is devastated when he realizes that he is no better than Jack or Roger, and that he too has darkness deep within.

The main characters of *Lord of the Flies* are school boys. This shows that the potential for evil is an innate quality which manifests itself unless given a conscious thought.

Civilization versus Savagery

The conflict between Ralph and Jack represents a conflict between different sets of values. This conflict is not just limited to the two boys. It is something which exists within all human beings – a

constant struggle to choose between the impulse to obey rules, behave morally, act lawfully and the instinct of no moral rule, violence, and use of brute force to obtain supremacy over others.

As the novel progresses, Golding shows how different people feel the influence of these instincts differently. Jack, who represents savagery and desire for power, makes a simple and compelling pitch by saying ‘bollock to the rules’ after he has already experienced the thrill of violence through hunting. Piggy is not affected by the savagery. In fact, he is the one who sees the boy’s potential for violence long before and even asks them to remember the civilization back home. Towards the end of the story, Ralph who stands for order is tempted by Jack’s authoritarian regime and regularly forgets why ‘fire’ and ‘rescue’ are important.

Savagery is seen to be a far more primal and fundamental instinct than civilization. Golding goes on to show through the decline of the boys that moral behaviour is forced and it is not a natural expression. The path to civilization is a difficult one. People when given a chance, revert to cruelty.

Mob Mentality

Lord of the Flies brings to the fore the dangers of mob mentality. The boys sing a song ritualistically which they chant as a group:

Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood.

They prefer to enact violence as a mob. By coming together as a mob, the boys transform the upsetting experience of killing an animal into a bonding ritual. As a mob they have a collective identity which gives them the ability to respond to their base instincts and commit worst crimes; and all of these with complete impunity. They use war paint

to hide their individual identity and in order to avoid personal responsibility for their crimes.

Simon’s death is proof of the fact that otherwise moral beings do not hesitate in committing immoral acts when the fears of identification and punishment are absent. They killed Simon as a mob under the influence of a collective fantasy to prevent injustice. Their wilful ignorance of the gruesome act enables them to behave brutally and immorally.

Loss of innocence

The well-behaved school boys lose their innocence and transform into blood-thirsty hunters. The forest glade in which Simon sits represents natural beauty and peace at first, but, it is corrupted by Jack and his hunters when they put and leave the pig’s head on a stake, thus, disrupting the paradise that existed. This glade becomes an unwilling witness to the boys’ loss of innocence.

In the end, Ralph weeps for the end of innocence. Even though he is saved, he will never be the same. He is scarred for life. He has learned the truth about the evil that lurks within.

IV. Mobs in India

Golding’s novel brings to forth the dangers of the beast within – the gullibility of man towards his basic instinct of savagery. In his dystopian novel, he aptly showcases the dangers of mob mentality; an almost identical situation is now increasingly emerging on the streets in India – the ever growing menace of mob violence. No denying that mob violence did exist in independent India, it has witnessed a surge after the year 2015 – at least 92 people have been attacked and killed by unruly mobs on one pretext or the other.²

Instances of mob violence in its initial phases, since the year 2015, were primarily fuelled by a mix of religious fanaticism (specifically, cow protection), increased penetration of social media and politicians, who ranged from being apathetic to instigators of violence.³ Lynchings, however, did not remain limited to religious hysteria over cow protection and the spate of mob violence continued with varied motivations. This, only because hoodlums realized that mob violence could be unleashed with absolute impunity. Soon, several instances of mob lynchings that began to be reported from across the country were found to be premised on the rumours of child-lifting or kidnapping:⁴

On June 27, 2017, a mentally ill woman was lynched in West Bengal after a 14-year old child went missing in the area with [sic] and rumours of Bangladeshi child abductors being active in the area. In June, 2018, a mob in Assam beat two young men to death – again on the suspicious on being child lifters. During the assault, the victims pleaded with the assaulters that they were Assamese – even listing their parents’ names[,] but the mob did not listen. May 2018 saw multiple mob attacks in Andhra Pradesh of [sic] Hindi-speaking people as false rumours spread that child abductor gangs from Bihar and Jharkhand were active in the state. Two months later, five men from a nomadic tribe were beaten to death in Maharashtra.

Then, the Dalits became victims of similar mobs.⁵ And finally, the situation has boiled down to the point where any person could fall victim to such mobs.

The violence unleashed out by the mob is often labelled to be result of intolerance. However, that isn’t the case! Such acts are men’s response to the base instinct of savagery over the cultivated instinct of civilization.

Jack and his hunters hid behind war paint in *Lord of the Flies*. The mob in India hides behind

religion, caste or any other pretext – the participants repel any attempt to identify otherwise. The government which has the responsibility to maintain law and order has been a mute spectator. When the institutions that have the responsibility to enforce society’s moral code don’t act, the mob becomes fearless and completely gives into its instinct of savagery. With no control, the mob chooses violence and brutality over peace and order. They keep on indulging in their collective fantasy of preventing injustice at the expense of innocent people.

V. Concluding Remarks

Lord of the Flies ends with the rescue of the boys. Their savagery has completely destroyed the island. With the naval officer’s presence civilization is reintroduced. The boys realize the horror they have perpetrated and begin to cry. This phenomenon is not limited to a microcosm of boys. Its implications go far beyond.

Mob violence, in India, has become an endemic. In *Lord of the Flies*, a naval officer brought the boys back to civilization, but the question remains as to who will reintroduce the mobs of India to civilization before the country is torn apart?!!!

Notes

¹ William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (Faber and Faber, London, 1954)

² “Hunted: India’s Lynch Mobs” *The Quint*, available at: <https://www.thequint.com/quintlab/lynching-in-india/> (Last Visited May 31, 2019).

³ Shoaib Daniyal, “The Modi Years: What has Fuelled Rising Mob Violence in India” *Scroll.in*, available at: <https://scroll.in/article/912533/the-modi-years-what-has-fuelled-rising-mob-violence-in-india> (Last Modified June 04, 2019).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Syed Ubaidur Rahman, “Mob Lynching in India: The Menace is Growing” *Sify News*, available at: <http://www.sify.com/news/mob-lynching-in-india-the-menace-is-growing-news-columns-sjdmxGjeifeig.html> (Last Modified Sept. 03, 2018).