CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

There is a reversal of civilization and savagery in Golding’s novels but this reversal is not like the two never meeting ends of the earth. V.S. Pritchett observes about William Golding, “He is the most original of our contemporaries in his intense visual gift... torn between a primitive inheritance and the glimmer of an evolving mind”.1

In our present day world of anarchy, futility, depravity and soullessness, Golding underlines a profound modern need for humanism and love. There is a need to break down barriers among classes, sexes and races as is achieved by Matty in Darkness Visible in the transcendental experience with Sim and Edwin: “We broke a barrier, broke down a partition. Didn’t we now?”2

In Golding’s novels, “civilized” persons turn to the utmost savagery when overpowered by egotism, selfishness, callousness and unbridled gratification of desires. This reversal of civilization and savagery is overt in Golding’s initial novels but becomes covert and complex in his later works. The notion of being civilized is unconnected with learning, education, tradition and culture. The supposedly civilized persons are the persons who are arrogant, wicked, violent, callous and selfish. Due to these evils, their actions dip to savagery in the extreme. Sensitivities which should be enhanced through education, intellect, discipline and religion are overpowered by greed, selfishness, callousness and disregard for others’ feelings. These patterns of civilized and savage behaviour in Golding’s major novels have been examined in this study in the light of Michel Foucault’s concepts and theories thus providing an inter-disciplinary aspect to the work. Michel Foucault in his book Madness and Civilization has made it clear that madness as an affliction is akin to a peculiar disease of our civilization, conjured up to evade a moment of our existence, a refusal to confront the chaos in our own selves, to escape some anxiety as also to
externalise its cause. The consequences of this attitude are immense, though they go unrecognised most of the time.

Golding’s novels suggest that evil is not located outside human beings in a different dimension. Human action ought not to be seen as operating under the controlling influence of God, whether for good or evil. Evil is located in a human being and is not a cosmic accident or a cosmic mistake. The fall into sin and the experience of pain are the consequences of the human entity’s inordinate clinging to its combative animality and selfish personality. Real evil appears in man when his egotism turns him into an arrogant, wicked and dangerously violent being.

In many of Golding’s novels, the protagonist realises his evil only when he is confined. In Lord of the Flies, Ralph hides himself to escape being killed by Jack and his co-hunters. At that moment, he realises that evil is inherent in human beings. Similarly, Sammy, in Free Fall, comes to know of his own evil inside the prison cell. Lok, in The Inheritors, watches the violence of the New People when he is hidden by leaves or is covered with water. Michel Foucault does not believe in the public display of evil. He feels that only oblivion can suppress evil. He writes: “Confinement, on the contrary, betrays a form of conscience to which the inhuman can suggest only shame. There are aspects of evil that have such power of contagion, such a force of scandal that any publicity multiplies them infinitely. Only oblivion can suppress them” (FMC, 63).

Golding is concerned with the diabolic perversions of human beings and the inordinate greed and selfishness in the present civilization. The need is for reassurance and Golding expresses it in terms of the primitive. Golding longs to see an end to class war. He examines the evils of class war in England, which leads to the disintegration of human relationships in The Pyramid, Rites of Passage and Darkness Visible. Golding’s quest is for a world wherein people can live equably. In his work, Golding had visualised a classless paradise on earth but his vision was rudely shattered as he grew up. Utopias are a myth that idealistic writers in a class-ridden society like to envision. Golding, sadly
realises that there is social divisiveness in society. He presents a brilliant contrast between a pre-social and post-social primitive group in *The Inheritors*.

In Golding’s works, dystopian elements that are the antithesis of utopia can be found. Oppressive social control of Jocelin in *The Spire*, avoidance of nature by Christopher in *Pincher Martin*, actions of the Liar at the risk of his life in *The Scorpion God*, promiscuous sexuality of Jocelin in *The Spire* are some of the dystopian traits in Golding’s works. Dystopian politics are oppressive. Paul Crawford’s version is that Golding was distraught with the cruelty of the “civilized” world during World War II. Golding wants the English to realise that their complacency in thinking that they are different from fascists is misplaced. Absence of kindness, sympathy, consideration and love in “civilized” characters in Golding’s novels also point towards dystopian traits in his fiction.

Golding’s optimistic conviction is that “We must produce homo moralis, human beings who cannot kill their own kind, nor exploit them nor rob them”4. Not only is Golding one of the most daring confrontationists of the human situation, but he also reveals the reasons why he is in full engagement with it. In most of his novels, he seems to suggest that it is only through control and sublimation that man can achieve a higher goal and evolve into a moralist. Golding has a compassionate attitude towards man’s foibles. But he also has the keen insight to look into man’s primeval beastliness. The civilization of Golding’s Tuami, Martin, Jack, Jocelin and Sammy is a mere mask beneath which lies a seething cauldron of repressed predatory tendencies.

Golding’s novels are imbued with a profound moral purpose and they are concerned with contemporary problems whether they are set in historical, pre-historical or spiritual other-worlds. We also find a realistic attitude towards experience exemplified in the perceptions and actions of his central characters. Golding is a powerfully visual, moral, religious and “cosmic” novelist with a cosmology of his own. Golding says:

I think it’s quite likely that we’ve got black holes out there because we’ve discovered them in here... we’ve done some
things in this century that we didn't think human beings could do and which are indescribable, and those are black holes in a way. So the next thing we do is to find them out there in the universe. In other words, I think there has been a tendency in man's mind, man's nature, to make the universe in the image of his own mind.⁵

Science can be blamed for the world in which the myth of progress has failed but the rival myths of necessary evil and universal guilt have come back without bringing God with it. R.M. Ballantyne's Coral Island and H.G. Wells' Outline of History look wrong to Golding. Golding owns that he is a religious man and is comprehensible to a person who believes in godliness. Like Yeats and Eliot, Golding allies with the illiterate.

Golding creates situations in his novels which show "his deep sense of agony about what has gone wrong with the world we live in. He is a brooder on human destiny. He is aware of alienation. He wants to reveal the world in all its diabolical perversions"⁶. If Golding bemoans violence in human life, he also recognises its creative fire in tortured artists like Sammy, Jocelin and Tuami. The pessimist in Golding decries man's savagery, but the optimist believes that it can be channelised into creative ventures. The price of art is pain, suffering, and sacrifice.

In Lord of the Flies, the boys on the island come from the so called "civilized" world of grown ups caught up in a violent war. The boys themselves turn savage, and the rescuer at the end generates not much optimism for the boys who are ready to return to the savage world of grown-ups. In subsequent novels such as The Inheritors, Pincher Martin, Free Fall and The Spire, the "civilized characters" end up being savage either due to their own inherent flaws or being bred by greed, or ego or selfishness, or bias of ill-conceived notions. The characters in Golding's novels behave in a savage and uncivilized way, contrary to our expectations. On the other-hand, the so-called uncivilized characters show kindness, sympathy, and natural goodness. Sometimes they show ignorance due
to their simplicity of mind and heart. In all the novels, it is the protagonist who influences most of the circumstances and characters. The exception, of course, is Ralph in *Lord of the Flies* who is helpless against the circumstances created by Jack and his co-hunters.

In *Lord of the Flies*, it is ironic that barbaric fury, rather than conscious effort, should lead to rescue. Throughout the novel, it is apparent that innocence and sanity are doomed. Suddenly and inconsistently at the end of the novel, we discover that sanity exists. The British Officer turns into a public school master. But the whole statement is not contradicted by the ending, for as Golding directly points out, Ralph has learned from the experience: “And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, Ralph wept for the end of the innocence, the darkness of man’s heart, and the fall through the air of the true wise friend called Piggy”7. The rescue is ultimately a ‘gimmick’, a trick, a means of cutting down or softening the implications built up within the structure of the boys’ society on the island. But this ‘gimmick’ lays bare the cruelty of the “civilized” world already caught up in violent war. The British Officer is to take the children to that world which is bereft of common sense, peace, security and kindness.

In *The Inheritors*, the ‘People’ act by instinct and have a code of ethics. There is no squabbling or guilt. The novel is the process of man conquering the ‘People’, capturing or killing them one by one. The last of the ‘People’ dimly understands man’s power and victory. The novel carries the implication that man’s unique power to reason carries with it his propensity toward pride, sin and guilt, qualities that cause him pain and misery.

Most of the novel is told from the point of view of the last of the ‘People’. But the last chapter is seen through the eyes of one of the New Men. Here, the ‘gimmick’ does not change the point of the novel. Awareness and rational intelligence are still inextricably connected with human sin, and the ‘gimmick’ at the end of the novel, breaks the unity without adding to the perspective. The New Men are presented, throughout the novel, as cruel, oppressive and sinful. The last
chapter, from the point of view of one of the New Men, does not change our opinion about the cruelty of the New Men.

Golding is interested in spiritual evolution. Thus, narrative patterns, religious substructures, recurrent Christian symbolism and allegorical action are important. Golding’s moral, religious or philosophical ideas permeate his writings. The philosophical element in his fiction is more overt. Each of Golding’s novels is unique in its deliberate technical innovativeness, though the themes might be familiar. This makes the critics uncomfortable. For example, in his *Lord of the Flies*, Golding put several versions of the island story and the metaphors connected with it into a new myth to articulate the persistent anxieties of modern man. In *The Inheritors*, he gives a primitive perspective to our civilized assumptions. In *Free Fall*, he puts himself face to face with the ultimate problems in aesthetics: the nature of the artist in the act of creation. Prior to Golding, both Lawrence and Joyce, had struggled to give shape to the creatively chaotic world of the artist in the act of creation, though their artists had remained trapped in their own intellectual and technical predilections. *Free Fall*, thus, marks a radical departure in British fiction, for not only does it provide a critique of earlier fiction but it is also a critique of contemporary fiction. Its importance lies in its originality and radical poetics. Liberating the novel from sociology, Golding has given it the dignity of an aesthetic object.

After *Pincher Martin*, Golding’s writing became deep, obscure and complex. Golding had a change of mind about the status of authorial interpretation but not due to an intellectual conversion to the Lawrentian dictum ‘Never trust the artist: trust the tale’. It was a part of his natural development as a writer. Golding was unusually intolerant of total explanations, whether they came from the scientist, the anthropologist or any other quarter.

In Golding’s novels, people are tested in the crucible of life to the point of near destruction in the quest for truth. Sammy Mountjoy of *Free Fall* resembles Golding in one important respect; his art grows out of, and is galvanised by, a fearless contemplation of the darkness in the human heart, a daring delving into the cesspool of sin and depravity. Golding, like Coleridge, believes that creation
is a productive conflict, or tension of opposites, resulting in a synthesis in which the conflicting parts are reconciled into a new whole.

The characteristic gap between visual perception and moral or intellectual understanding suggested by an image has been implicitly highlighted in many of Golding’s works. In *The Inheritors*, Golding introduces the long central section in which Lok and Fa watch the new people from up a tree.

Parting the leaves cautiously as if he were looking for eggs, Lok found that he could make a hole no bigger than the eye-part of his face; and though the edges of the hole moves a little he could see the river and the other banks, all the brighter for the dark green leaves around the hole- as though he had cupped his hands and was looking through them. On his left Fa was making herself a look-out, and the edge of the cup gave her something to rest her elbows on. The heavy feeling sank in Lok as it always did when he had the new people to watch. He sagged luxuriously. Then suddenly they forgot everything and were very still.

The dramatic force of the episode lies in the way Golding’s narrative adopts the viewpoint of Lok and Fa, not only mentally and emotionally, but also as physically. Actual events, besides mental “pictures”, seen by Lok and Fa, are framed by leaves so as to make it a mosaic. Part of the importance of this lies in the fact that from this point on Lok and Fa are increasingly learning to “think.”

Lok and Fa have to sufficiently separate themselves from their experience to perceive causal relations and to rely on a personal, as well as a communal centre of consciousness and value. At the same time, their reasons for learning to think are anything but detached. Their perch in the tree expresses physically this combination of feelings. They are intimately involved and yet distanced. The events are close up and yet framed. The two factors are not merely combined by mutual reinforcement. Lok’s vision is “all the brighter for the dark green leaves
around the hole”. It is as if they are not merely watching the events but learning to read their experience. This is reminiscent of Golding’s description of his boyhood days when he used to climb up a tree for collecting pictures for later understanding.

Several critics have followed Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes in noting what we might call the reverse alienation effect. Rather than have a familiar object made strange, we have a strange object suddenly appear familiar. The actions of the “New People”, presented as enigmatic to Lok and Fa, are recognisable to us because of our human complicity with them. Looking through the interpretative consciousness created by Golding’s narrative medium, we see not so much a clear mirror image as a ghostly and suggestive reflection of ourselves.

The visual image is clear but not its moral significance. In fiction, this unresolved ambivalence produces, at times, a sense of straining after significance, a kind of hypostatising of complexity per se. In later works, the self-conscious ambivalence seems too self-enclosed. In The Spire, particularly the ambivalence of Jocelin’s central project in building a tower seems to remain essentially notional. Significances are built into the book by a conscious artistic technique. Ambivalences are piled around Jocelin, rather than placed in him, so that his possible dramatic reality is increasingly pre-empted. Unlike the fables of R.M. Ballantyne or H.G. Wells, The Spire requires an independent, novelistic reality in Jocelin which, for many readers, he does not command. Hence, the technical and narrative density of the book, which is meant to dramatise the ambivalence of Jocelin’s character and motivation, acts as a transparent screen behind which a notional play of meanings occurs, separated from any substantial sense of life. It is a transparent screen because what is on view can, of course, be pointed at and discussed as if it were real.

Lord of the Flies (1954); The Inheritors (1955) and Pincher Martin (1956) are governed by a massive metaphorical structure—a man clinging for survival to a rock in the Atlantic Ocean. This metaphorical structure is designed to assert something permanent and significant about human nature. These unique and
striking metaphors, at the end of each of the above mentioned novels, turn into 'gimmicks' or clever tricks that shift the focus of the novel as a whole. The 'gimmick', seems to work against the metaphorical meaning. Rational democracy does not stand before boys' fears in *Lord of the Flies*. Also, the terror of the unexplained 'beast' grips the boys' mind. The fact of the 'beast' (dead man in his parachute) is discovered by one of the boys and he is killed in the ritualistic dance. Barbaric frenzy has a sway over sensible regulations. The forces of light and reason fail to alleviate the predatory brutality and the dark, primeval fear at the centre of man has a sway over sensible regulations. The forces of light and reason fail to alleviate the predatory brutality and the dark, primeval fear at the centre of man.

In an aesthetic sense, one feels cheated at the end of a Golding novel, tricked by a 'gimmick' that cuts down the force and range of the metaphor. But, in another sense, each 'gimmick' provides a qualification on the metaphor itself. It widens the area of perception even as it lessens the force of the imaginative concept. 'Gimmicks' do not contradict the metaphors but point to the complexity of contemporary experience.

In *Pincher Martin*, Christopher's rational self is worn down by time and the weather, along with the guilty consciousness of his past sins. He is pushed by nature, both external and internal, toward death and damnation. The conflict between survival and extinction is extended by a consistent use of microcosmic imagery. The rock is constantly compared with a tooth of the world; the struggles taking place on the rock are a mirror of the struggles taking place all over the world. Martin's battle for survival is imagistically made the battle of all men for salvation, a battle in which reason, sanity and careful order are not enough. Martin himself is made a kind of universal focus. His head is frequently a 'globe', his own teeth are linked to the shape of the rock:

His tongue was remembering. It pried into the gap between the teeth and re-created the old, aching shape. It touched the rough edge of the cliff, traced the slope down, trench after aching
trench.... understood what was so hauntingly familiar and painful about an isolated and decaying rock in the middle of the sea.

Similarly, the issues of Martin’s salvation or damnation are presented within his own body. He sometimes feels his ‘center’ in conflict with the memory of his loins. His eyes are ‘Windows’. The forces of nature that defeat him are linked to forces within himself. Ocean currents are tongues; the mind is a ‘stirred pudding’. The microcosmic imagery, connecting the man to the rock and to the universe, becomes a vast metaphor to convey the futility of man’s sanity and his careful and calculated attempts to achieve salvation.

The ‘gimmick’ in Pincher Martin occurs in the final chapter. Pincher’s body is washed ashore and the naval officer who comes to identify him points out that Martin couldn’t have suffered long because he didn’t even have time to kick off his seaboots. Supposedly, in the narrative itself, the first thing Martin did, before he even sighted the rock, was to kick his seaboots off. In other words, the final scene shows that the whole drama on the rock was but a momentary flash in Martin’s mind. The dimension of time has been removed and all the microcosmic metaphor is but an instantaneous, apocalyptic vision. In the ultimate sense, this revelation enhances the microcosm and compresses all the issues into a single instant in time. But the revelation, in fact, makes the situation too contrived. It seems to carry the development of the microcosm to the point of parodying itself. One can accept the struggle of the forces on the rock as emblematic of a constant human struggle but when the dimension of time is removed, when the struggle is distilled to an instantaneous flash, one immediately thinks of parody in which the struggle was not significant at all. The ‘gimmick’, in this case extends the technique, but it so magnifies and exaggerates the extension that the novel ends by bringing its own parody.

In Free Fall, unlike Pincher Martin, the futility of rationalism is not the central issue. The metaphor is Faustian. Finally, Sammy localises his loss of freedom in his early decision to pursue Beatrice at whatever cost. The decision to sacrifice everything in order to achieve an aim indicates human pride and
egoism. It is human to abandon concern for others for the satisfaction of one’s own ends. Sammy is not satisfied as the appetite for pride is endless. He deserts Beatrice and she finds herself in a mental institution. The ‘gimmick’ in the final scene shows us the external consequences of Sammy’s sin and becomes, in Beatrice’s unfortunate behaviour, almost a parody of the damage caused by human pride. The novel shifts from Sammy’s self-examination to the disastrous effect of his pride on others. After Sammy’s sin is externalised, the doctor questions the possibility of directly charging one person with the responsibility for another and, to some measure, cuts down Sammy’s guilt. By making the issue exterior, the ending both exaggerates and simplifies the nature of the man involved. It both softens and hedges man’s guilt and lessens the sense of gloom.

Golding tries fervently to salvage the light of optimism from the darkness of logical pessimism. In each of his novels, he does this through the agency of human worth and the potency of creative genius. He has aroused the conscience in man by his innovative and yet traditional approach to twentieth century morals. In Golding, we see an artist’s power to celebrate the fullness of human life, its splendour and potentiality even in a world full of suffering. He believes that love, courage and tolerance are the ways to combat human ills. Golding hopes that the spirit of man will respond to the wisdom of the fourteenth century Egyptian sage, PTAH-HOTEP: “‘If thou be among people make for thyself love, the beginning and end of the heart’” 10
NOTES


2. William Golding, *Darkness Visible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 234, Subsequent references in the chapter will be cited as DV.


