I

PREFACE

William Golding is one of the greatest English novelist of the 20th century. The Nobel prize of literature awarded to him is a testimony to his greatness as a writer. He captured the imagination of the readers and approval of the critics from his very first novel, The Lord of Flies, with each succeeding novels till the sea Trilogy which was his last complete work, he went on adding depth and dimension to his works.

The most notable impression that his novels give is that of a moralist.

Golding’s novels are imbued with a profound moral purpose, and even when set in different historical or pre-historical periods they display in several ways a concern for contemporary problems coupled with a realistic attitude towards experience exemplified in perceptions and actions of his central characters. No doubt, he is a religious and ‘cosmic’ novelist. He contemplates the larger issues of life, as darkness, death, judgment, goodness and God. His task is to render the ‘old universal truth’ compassionately and ‘transparently’. He is mostly interested in paths of spiritual evolution. His mass of writing is held together by no formal link but the unique power of his moral, religious and philosophical ideas. The philosophical element in his fiction in unparalleled among contemporary English novelist, with the possible exception of Iris Murdoch and Graham Green.

Golding believes that goodness exists in man but seldom turns towards it. Thus, in the earlier fiction he describes the spiritual dimension with a symbol of darkness. In Golding’s milieu, the point at which man acts triumphantly from his consciousness is precisely the point at which he can fall. His first three novels are directly concerned with man’s struggle for survival with his attempt to maintain not only body but also soul.
Golding is preoccupied with in man and society that leads to gradual moral fall or to the fall of human values-its origin and its resolution. The main cause of the fall of human being is the evil in him and it overpowers a man when he loses his sense of being a man. Golding believes that evil is present in human veins, in his blood and it is genetic. He distrusts those social philosophers who declare that they can engineer a world devoid of evil, by manipulating the adverse environment, which is the cause of moral evil. It is not as Mars, Salinger and Rousseau believe that society corrupts man. Golding indicts man not society for the evil in the world society, is only an enlarged picture of man is fragmented life.

To The Ends of The Earth, the sea trilogy of William Golding that came not in 1991 actually consists of three novels published earlier. They are Rites of Passage, Close Quarters and Fire Down Below. Rites of Passage was first published in 1980. Close Quarters in 1987 and Fire Down Below in 1990. When Golding published Rites of Passage he was not thinking in terms of a trilogy. In his foreword to the trilogy Golding remarks

The present volume began as three separate books and I have made tentative gestures towards turning them into a trilogy. But the truth is I did foresee volumes two and three when I set down to write volume one. Only after volume one was published did I come to realize that I had left Edmund Talbot, a ship and whole ship’s company to say nothing of myself galloping about in the Atlantic with their voyage no more than half completed I got them some way on with a second volume and home and try with a third (vii-viii)
He later on admits that the beginning of *Rites of Passage* provided him with much material which he had not known was concealed there. Things began to take shape when he started writing *Close Quarters*. By the time he wrote *Fire Down Below* he was able to create three novels with major characters, including the central character, Edmund Talbot, and linked incidents in the background of a ship going on a journey from England to Australia. These are the factors common to all the novels.

The trilogy has been written in the form of diary written by Edmund Talbot. Talbot wrote this diary for his godfather who in fact was instrumental in securing a post for him as a civil servant in Australia. The diary has been written in the note book provided by the godfather whom Talbot does not name.

William Golding is known for two things in his writing, his vivid observation of people and objects and his ability to create an ambience. It is through these two things that he creates the moral world that he wants to create. Golding is a moralist. He, however, is not an idealist. He is fully aware of the innate reality of societies. Nor does he ever try to gloss over things. As a result his novels present bold and realist picture of life as in which the novels does not shy away from depicting life as it is in *Rites of Passage*. The picture of society that he creates has been created not through society at large but through a limited number of people shown in the back drop of the ship. *Rites of Passage* sets the tone of the entire trilogy. From the moment Talbot sets foot on the ship which will take him to Australia to the time when the ship is burnt down in the last part of the trilogy. Golding presents his moral vision through a series of characters and situation.
The passengers and crew members of this ship represents a cross section of the British society during the mind twentieth century. Everything has been viewed through the eyes of Edmund Talbot. He is not exactly an aristocrat, but a man with aristocratic pretensions. It is these pretensions that the novelist aims at satirizing. In the course of the daily activity, these pretensions have been laid bare and punched through and through.

The novelist built up the situation gradually. He begins with the ship, its crew members and finally the Captain of the ship, Captain. Anderson and Parson Colley. The conflict that emerges in the novel later on lies in relationship between Talbot and the Caption, on the one hand and between the captain and the parson on the other. Most of the characters play only a minor role, chiefly to create the background.

Caption Anderson has been depicted as the others extreme of parson. Colley in the eyes of Edmund Talbot. If the parson is an object of contempt for Talbot, captain Anderson parson is an object of contempt of Talbot, Captain Anderson presents a challenge to his authority being the captain of the ship, he is lord and master of it. As such, his authority is absolute and he exercises his authority tyrannically. Talbot considers himself beyond the authority of such official lord and in this very fact lies the conflict. He defies the orders of the captain regarding the behaviour of the passengers on the ship and this brings him face to face with the caption and creates situations which ultimately prove tragic.

This encounter has been used by the novelist as the root cause of the crisis that develops later on. It so happened that parson Colley also visited Caption Anderson shortly after wards. The caption who has been depicted as an arrogant and dictatorial person
did not want to interact with the passengers. In the case of Talbot also his reaction had been violent, but despite all his ill temper he was not an impractical person. So he had swallowed his anger when he came to know about Talbot’s connection with the lord who was certainly a very influential person. But, when parson Colley went meet the captain, the later could no longer contain his irritation. So he behaved with the parson in a very bad manner. Using all his authority he crushed the parson’s personality, this had a very strange effect on Colley. Golding however presents the whole thing in a very gradual manner and lets us know about it by stages. This is the mastery of craft that he creates a kind of suspense around the whole situation.

Since the novel has been presented in the form Talbot’s diary, the story also has been presented from his points of view. Golding has presented him as a vain young man who is unduly proud of his birth in a high family and particularly of his connection with an eminent lord. From his point of view Parson Colley who belong to a humble origin and has no social connections is to be looked down upon.

Golding has the story from the point of view of Talbot who is the central characters not only of this novel but of the entire trilogy. However in *Rites of Passage* it is Colley and not Talbot who become the centre of the story. And it is his death that makes Colley a tragic characters. In his life he was a men who aroused more ridicule than admiration but after his death he gians not only sympathy but also respect.

As first it seems that it was this humiliation that drove Colley to drinking and finally took his life. This, however, is not the complete truth. It of course had stared the process of Colley’s
focus was no three main characters-Talbot Colley and Anderson. Other characters, though they played definite roles in the development of the story, were not fully developed and individualized. Even Zenobia was not sketched in detail. This was so with Deverel also because though he was instrumental in bringing tragedy in Colley’s life he was described only as a happy go lucky fellow in the second novel his character has been further developed.

He is still a heavy drinker, but this time he falls in to such a situation that his position is threatened. Because of his love of wine he had deserted his post. Now he was under open imprisonment. Golding gives his characters a new twist when Deverel comes to Talbot to say that he wanted to fight a duel with Caption Anderson. Talbot refused to help him in this connection. A new aspect of Deveral’s characters comes before us later on in the novel when he behaves like a dashing romantic person who causes much anguish for Talbot.

Unlike *Rites of Passage*, *Close Quarters* is full of dramatic events.

Golding has succeeded in retaining the attention of the reader throughout the trilogy. He is a master narrator who knows how to engage the attention of the reader by making him wait eagerly for the next event. For example in *Rites of Passage* we are anxious to know about the events related to Colley. We have many questions in our minds such as what conversations took place between Anderson and Colley, what happened when Colley went to the side of the crew members and finally and what caused Colley’s death. The means through which the novelist retains our attention is the same as used by a writer of detective novels. A detective novel arouses the interest of the readers by creating suspense. This is what Golding also does.
In *Rites of Passage* the leading character Miss Zenobla was not presented romantically. She was no doubt beautiful and had a charming personality but Talbot was always aware of a calculating mind under her charm. He was attracted towards her not because he was in love with her but because he was physically attracted towards her. Once he establishes a physical relationship with her, her attraction for him is considerably diminished. This is not so in the case of Miss Chumley in *Close Quarters*. Golding presents her a romantic love between young man and charming young lady.

*Close Quarters* introduces two characters-Miss Chumley and Benet who were not there in *Rites of Passage*. If the purpose of Miss Chumley is to introduce romantic element in the story. Golding uses the character of Benet to take the story further. One thing is common in both these characters and that is they come from the ship Alcyone. The novelist introduces both the characters very dramatically. Talbot comes across Benet when he was put in a critical condition and was likely to lose his life.

*Fire Down Below* is the third volume of the Sea Trilogy. Unlike the earlier two volumes, it begins abruptly and without any introduction. The reason for writing the First volume, *Rites of Passage* was that Talbot wanted to write a dairy for his god father. The second volume *Close Quarters* was also written as a note book containing the experience of the voyage. The third volume does not have these two excuses. However, the writers has explained the reason for it at the end of the second volume it self *Close Quarters* ends with a “Postcriptium” in which the writer says that he must record in that notebook, itself an explanation for the abrupt ending of his journal.
What is common in all these three books is the back ground 
of the ship, a group of common characters and the hazards faced by 
the ship. What differentiates these books is the focus that each book 
makes on separate characters. In *Rites of Passage* the focus was on 
Parson Colley and the story chiefly described the tragic end of his 
life. In the second volume the focus was mainly two characters. Miss 
Chumely and Deverel. Miss Chumley is important because through 
her the novelist introduced the love story of Edmund Talbot Deverel 
though not as prominent as Miss Chumley, provides a focal point to 
the story. *Fire Down Below* has perforce to shift its focus on other 
charters than the ones that were prominent in the first two books. 
This time the stage is occupied by two characters Benet and 
Summers.

*Since Fire Down Below* is the concluding part of the Sea 
Trilogy Golding ties up all the lose end in this part. That is the 
reason this novel is more eventful than the earlier two novels. It 
takes the voyage to an end and it also resolves the personal tangles of 
the major characters.

The greatest change however that comes in Talbot's life is 
that he is able to meet Miss Chumley once again. Their ship had 
gone to India and now has come to Australia. The entire description 
is highly romantic. Talbot accompanies Miss Churnley on her walks. 
The culmination of their love is marriage. It is with his marriage that 
the novel ends.

Death has been a major event in the earlier two novels of the 
Sea Trilogy also but here it leaves a most moving impact. The first 
novel it was the death of Parson Colley that was the central events of 
the novel. In *Close Quarters* it was the death of Wheeler. This time it 
is the death of Lt. Summers that shocks us. While the earlier two 
deaths had been suicides, this time it is an accident. The death of
Summers is preceded by the happiest moments of life. He had a
dream of becoming the Captain of a ship. Since he had humble
origin, this dream was doomed to be unrealized.

Talbot had promised him that would do everything in his
power to help his friend. So when meets the Lt. Governor he makes a
request to that effect. He is surprised to know that Captain Anderson
and Lt. Benet have also made a similar request. In the fact Lt.
Governor had asked Benet to take the charge of the ship, but he had
refused and suggested the name of Summers in his place. In this way
Golding gives a finishing touch to the character of Benet also.
Ultimately Summers is made the captain of the ship. He is extremely
happy. It is then that the tragedy strikes. The fire that Bent had left
deep inside the ship engulfs the ship as well as Lt. Summers.

The Sea Trilogy, in its final analysis is masters piece
of Golding. It has a very engrossing narrative style. It has a whole
range of character from farcical to tragic. Above all, it is full of
adventures at sea. As a sea voyage it is memorable.