

Civilizing Massacre: A Socio – Cultural Reading of William Golding's *The Inheritors*

Jincy Jose N

Assistant Professor, Dept.of English, Yuvakshetra Institute of Management Studies, Palakkad

ABSTRACT

The Inheritors by William Gerald Golding, a British post war novelist, playwright, poet and an essayist, is often interpreted as a dark but simplistic revelation of human cruelty. Beneath the veneer of civility lurk malice, savagery, and the will to slaughter. Of all the instinctive feelings shared by every living being all around the world, there is a collective drive in nature called violence. From the most primitive tribes to the post-modern era of present day, violence is the most basic feeling lying under everyone's psyche. No matter what a person's age, status, gender or culture is, from the four-year-old baby to the serial killer, sometimes an angry neighbour and sometimes a looter; the same instinctual desire to harm and the feeling of violence exist in human nature. In other words, violence is explicit in every handle of the live. It would certainly be impossible not to see the reflections of such a shared feeling in literature. Throughout ages, many literary works have focused on this instinction either as the social violence on individuals, or physical violence of characters are exposed to. As the writer of post-1950 period, William Golding displays the violence of the characters in a different way in his work *The Inheritors*.

Key Words: Violence, psychology, post-modern, culture.

INTRODUCTION

William Golding's *The Inheritors* is considered by many to be scathing indictment of modern civilized morality and the innate cruelty of human nature lurking underneath. It depicts the natural man in his Adamic innocence and the tensions and anxieties associated with the loss. Sigmund Freud claims that the human psychology is divided into three basic parts; namely, id, ego and super ego. Id is the part in which all the instinctual feelings including violence is sheltered and Freud suggests that it is one of the basic human instincts in shaping the human life. This is evident in *The Inheritors*. It is a portrayal of two heterogeneous groups of people, namely the Neanderthals, 'the people' and the group of 'new people', that is *Homo sapiens*. Here he tries to make a comparison between the two groups to spell out the captivation of innocence by evil through violence. Our true nature is unveiled through the acts of *Homo sapiens*, as our inherent brutality burst fourth in a torrent of savagery and merciless violence toward other human beings. Bereft of law and social agencies that render violence immoral, human beings become the violent paragons of animality hidden and rationalized by the shallow pretences of civilized morality. And yet Golding envisions something more sinister. Neanderthals or 'the people' are placed until they confront the 'new people'. Then they try to escape from the *Homo sapiens* but they fail.

The Neanderthal world represents a state of perfect harmony between man and the universe. On the other hand the world of *Homo sapiens* full of violence, lust, cruelty and superstition. On the rational level they are superior to the Neanderthals; but on the moral level the new people are far inferior to them. All the new thoughts and gadgets have not altered man's anarchic ways. The novel questions by implication the primacy of thought over feeling, reason over instinct and hints at the enormous cost of which man has acquired superiority in consciousness. *Homo sapiens* through different methods exterminate the Neanderthals. Perhaps this is a suggestion of the origin of racism, and indeed the whole novel is ripe for allegorical deconstruction. *The Inheritors* is a process of *Homo sapiens* or the evil conquering 'the people' or innocence and capturing or killing them one by one. The last of the 'people' is able to watch the 'new people,' to understand dimly man's power and victory. But this last survivor of the people is also able to sense in what ways man is a creature different from the 'people.' He watches man brawl and fight, steal other man's mates, suffer

guilt and anxiety, and tear himself apart between his real ability and his failure to exceed his limitations. The novel carries the implication that man's unique power to reason and think carries with it his propensity towards pride, sin and guilt, qualities that cause him pain and misery. 'The people' are in no way harmful to the 'new people.' Then also the 'new people', the predecessors of human beings destroy the innocent 'people.' Homosapiens in this novel do all sort of evil deeds and want to prove that they are better than the Neanderthal in all respects. On the other hand the Neanderthal man represents good and innocent forces. This novel shows that a struggle for supremacy is always going on between the good and evil forces within society and also within man himself. It proves that civilization is not equal to progress.

The sudden appearance of the new people accelerates the extermination of the people. As a result, Nil tells the others "that is no Ha. The Ha ascent has ended" (67), and this is so because "there is the scent of others" (68). The existence of the people is threatened, yet they are unable to understand the reasons of such a threat. Consequently, violence and savagery predominate the place where the people live. Mal' death is followed by Ha's death. Sudden and successive deaths prevail in the Neanderthals place where peace and goodness were prominent features. Being fully conscious of the presence of the other, namely the new people, Lok cannot help conveying such a conscious awareness to his unconscious dreams. In his awaking, he says: "I dreamed the other was chasing me" (94). The process of chasing is in Lok's dreams, but actually the new people come to intrude upon the quite life of the Neanderthals. This means that the new people's coming to the island is exposed as an incubus in Lok's sleep. Metaphorically speaking, the new people chase Lok, and in fact, they chase the Neanderthals as a whole, in order to take their own lives and dominate the place.

They notice the existence of blood and milk on the rock near the river. Blood and milk are mingled together. Blood is red and a symbol of violence and here it certifies the notion of sin, the new people are sinners in the sense that they kill the innocent Neanderthals to survive. This indicates that the new people dominate and occupy the Neanderthals place by using ferocious violence. Violence leads to murder and killing and is reminiscent of the subvention and devastation from which most of the countries of the world suffer in the second world war in which William Golding was in Royal Navy. Moreover, the milk is a symbol of life, childhood, and innocence that is liable here to the demolishing committed by the new people. So, neither the adult Neanderthal nor the immature one can evade the process of evil and violent decimation brought by the new people. This certified the idea that innocent and peaceful people like the Neanderthals have no place in this world that is the world of the island or their world which is a big zoo where the strong kill the weak.

By killing the old woman, the new people obliterate the good quality that the Neanderthals stick into their life. The Neanderthals are being killed one by one by the new people. The novel depicts the process of conquering the people, capturing or killing them one by one. The Neanderthals are exterminated since they are unable to face evil with evil, though they, and specially Fa and Lok, start sensing the danger and evil surrounding them. Fa and Lok observe the new people carry sticks in their hands as weapons against the Neanderthals. Though Golding calls them 'new people', they are depicted as primitive in their behaviours style of life, their violence, their rituals and incantations and their tools. In addition the sticks are tools of killing and violence. Thus their existence, stay and survival on the island are conditioned by destroying the Neanderthals of whom the new people feel afraid. The new people are truly new in the sense that they reflect the new modern twentieth century man who destroys his brother man in the two world wars. Moreover, Golding here tries to show that there are still nonviolent, good and innocent people living in this world which is pregnant with sin. The Neanderthals are true representatives of those humans who want to live their life peacefully and harmoniously.

Sin becomes inseparable part of the new people's new existence on the island. Sin pervades through evil activities. Thus Sin is exposed as both external and internal. They kill the old woman and Nil. Then they kill Liku, the innocent child without any reason. Everyone is sure that the child Liku will not be harmful to them in any ways. They also they killed Liku. The very incident shows their animalistic nature. The wolves' "pleasure of following their victims is similar to the new people's pleasure of having violent, irrational and bloody sexual intercourse" (177). Due to the new people's malice, evil, violence and ferocity, the Neanderthals' habitation is being destroyed and their number is reduced step by step. In addition, the state of change the new people bring to the island and the Neanderthals make Lok form new pictures about the people

In no aspect the Neanderthals are harmful to Homosapiens. The new people suspect the Neanderthals as demons in vain. To inherit this land the new people, the symbol for evil, kills Mal, Ha, Nil, the old woman, Liku, Fa, Lok, the Neanderthals, the symbol of good, one by one. There is no reason or demolishing these people. The reason is their evil tendencies. The so-called civilized people destroy the natural man. They did not spare even the child Liku. The savages killed the girl and gave it to their God. The modern, civilized, urban, new man is an accumulation of opposites and contradictions. Man seems "new," but in reality he is a sinner and evil; he appears good, but internally he hides an

evil nature, he discloses a meek nature, but he has violent tendencies. This is the modern, new man in *The Inheritors*. He exterminates the male, mild and good Neanderthals as a result of fear. The new people think the Neanderthals are devils, but the fact is vice versa in the sense that the actions of the new people prove them to be like the devil and the Neanderthals manners and conducts show them as angels. Man who lives in civilization, as depicted by Golding, is reduced to a subhuman in the sense that he is exposed as violent, unkind, selfish and more importantly bloody.

Though Golding seems obsessed with fear, evil, insecurity, and most importantly with violence and sin in *The Inheritors*, he believes that there would be a continuous life for the Neanderthals in the far away future since he keeps the new one of the Neanderthals alive. The new people adopt the new one and would accommodate him as their own kid. This may mean that the unity and connection between the new people and the Neanderthal new one in the future may lead to disjunction because what is taken by violence is to be returned by violence also. Golding tries to show that sin, evil and bloodshed prevail and innocence, peace, security and good recede day after day. The new people, who represent the civilized human society, behave in an evil way as if they were not civilized, have no norms or rules of behaviours. They stick to one law: the law of being powerful and strong, even if the application of this law will cost the lives of innocent human beings. The new people are not civilized internally, but they are shadows of non-human civilization that predominate by force and use of violence.

Golding is presenting us with a complex reading of the human organism. *The Inheritors* is a deceptively simple text which can be read as an indictment of human nature and civilization itself. Golding is not disparaging human instincts, however. Rather he is implicating the human tendency to commit senseless atrocities concealed by the civilized deceptions and inventions of morality, justice and ideology. History itself is the nightmare from which we must awaken. Golding is not just showing us that violence erupts when social controls weaken. He is contrasting an ostensibly idyllic image of naive 'people' on a sequestered place with the violent society outside and asserting that innocence will be transformed into massacre when new people invent their own society. Civilization is founded upon murder. There is a spectrum from relatively peaceful societies to those that are despotic and genocidal, but there is truly insidious cruelty even in the most benign society. *The Inheritors* is a parable that is pertinent to the understanding of violence within our culture, and to atrocities inflicted by governments on external enemies. But it can also evoke the genesis of violence in cultures considered more 'savage' and insular. This parable can resonate with recent enactments of violence and murder. It is a literary evocation of the gestation of brutality and contagious violence, and may enable us to envisage the spawning of murder and sacrifice the very birth of atrocity. The culture inflicting such slaughter, which invents, fantasizes, and murders its enemies in savage madness, need not be named here.

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