
ANALYZING VIOLENCE THROUGH CONTEMPORARY FICTION: A STUDY ON THE NOVELS LORD OF THE FLIES AND BLOOD MERIDIAN

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Violence is a concept that is deplored by almost everyone. Some people embrace non-violence and a very few publically adopt Violence. Considering that, a world devoid of violence is an impossible utopian view, the above-mentioned position of the world should be considered as an ideal one. But is that so? Are we living in a non-violent world?. By analyzing the current situation the above mentioned overview about people's opinion remains just a wish that they are unable to carry out. People openly condemn violence and practice violence at the same time. We defend our violent practices and justify it in the name of duty, morality discipline etc. Today, the element of violence has become an inevitable part in our lives.

Etymologically Violence means "to carry force towards something" this force could take any form, Physical or psychological. Newton Garver in his Essay '*What Violence Is*' suggests that we should focus on Violence as a violation of a person rather than as a matter of physical force. A person can be violated in two ways 1) with respect to their bodies which is physical violence 2) with respect to their ability to make their own decision (psychological violence). Each kind of violence can take place in two forms that is personal and institutional.

Violence is a practice that was there from the genesis of the universe. It is there embedded in nature .The world is getting more violent day by. Until second world war it was institutional violence that ruled the world now personal violence is proving to be the most brutal and dangerous form of violence. Despite the measures and efforts taken for controlling violence the condition of the world is deteriorating more than ever. Violence is considered as normal in today's scenario. It is normalized in today's world because of its universal and unstoppable presence. This situation calls for some philosophical introspection. Does this indicate that as humans, we are naturally violent? , Is violence something innate to human beings?. And is it possible/ impossible to achieve total non-violence and thereby attain complete innocence? These problems about the nature of the human violence can be analysed through two of the most relevant works of contemporary literature, which expressly talk about violence. These eminent works are *Lord of The flies* (1954) written by William Golding and *Blood Meridian* (1985) by American author Cormac McCarthy.

Lord of the Flies is the first novel written by William Golding published in 1954. The novel is an allegory written in the context of the Second World War. It explores the dark

side of humanity and the barbaric nature hidden inside the civilized human beings. The novel starts with the description of an ongoing war, an institutional violence happening from which the boys are being evacuated in a plain. It crashes and they are marooned on an island. This indicates the extremely violent and chaotic state of their world. From the introduction of the characters in the first chapter, one of the most striking traits is their highly selfish and self-centered nature. Everybody is concerned about themselves, their needs and supremacy. Jack is shown as an unpleasant character that is potentially evil and dominating. He intimidates the younger lots of their group and bullies everyone. He is more like the antagonist of the story, yet the main themes of this novel unfold through his character. The first chapters of the novel revolve around the boys' attempt to create a society of their own, electing Ralph as their head, assigning roles to everyone and setting up duties for them. Ralph makes Jack the head of the hunters; he takes much pride in this position. The progress of the boys stranded in the island is symbolic to the development of human race and its evolution from a mere animal to the conqueror of the universe.

Jack's character is naturally inclined to violence. Initially he is a bit nervous around animals but with time, he masters the act of hunting with his gang. He wants to hunt all day, conquer the nature, and become the leader with his unusual capacity of violence and brutality. The most disturbing thing about Jack and his hunter group is that they do not see hunting as a means to sustain their lives, they just find pleasure in attacking an animal and slaughtering it. From the very beginning of the novel Jack was passionate about killing the pigs, he was frustrated until he finally murders one with his own hands. From that moment onwards, animal slaughtering becomes a thrill to him. They take pleasure in the very activity of tormenting an animal and slaughtering it with utmost brutality. Once they kill the animal, they start singing and dancing around it like primitive tribesmen. This scene evokes the image of the primordial life of savages indicating their descend from civilized behavior to savagery. Jack's evilness grows with each passing day and it finds new heights. One day he jokes about killing one of the little boys instead of pigs. He and his followers enjoy enacting the scene of murdering a pig and celebrate the evening. Jack's disregard for the life of his own peers indicates the level of brutality he has stooped to. Ralph had no interest in hunting but when he does, he starts enjoying it and does it with so much vigour. This signifies the infectiousness of violence among human beings.

One of the most alarming scenes in the novel is when the boys try to light the fire at the hill top and in the process they accidentally sets the forest in fire, it's at that moment they realize that a little boy is missing from their gang. If the boy is not with him then it suggests that he could not make it to the hilltop and is trapped in the surrounding forest, which is on fire now. They don't care for the boy and do not even try to search for him. This shows their indifferent attitude towards the life of the other.

The introduction of the concept of the “beast” and the unusual horror the boys go through on its name is an important part of the story. The beast is not an external figure, which haunts the boys; it symbolizes the monstrosity that resides inside man. Therefore, the beast they fear of exists inside themselves in the form of brutality and violence.

Jack does not like to live under according to the rules of the gang. He quarrels with Ralph and forms another group under his leadership. After parting ways with Ralph and the boys, Jack and his hunter group starts leading a complete savage life with sacrificial rituals, chants, and their life style becomes completely barbaric.

Jack hunts down a sow when she was nursing her piglets; he brutally kills her by thrusting his spear up her anus. It shows the level of cruelty that resides in them. This incident evokes the image of rape and violence against the vulnerable and women. They leave its blood dripping head on a stick as an offering to the beast and run off from there. They do not recognize the fact that they are the beasts that they are running away from.

Jack's new tribe believes that the beast is something that must be feared and worshipped. They start considering it as a deity and in way worship the evil. This implies the authority of the beast over them. The evilness totally takes over the humanity in them. They become the beasts themselves and murder their own peer. Simon's murder indicates the state of insanity that their evilness put them into. They are completely submitted themselves to the beast inside them. Ralph and Piggy's involvement in this incident explains how violent instincts are present in every human being. It is the rational mind, which obstructs these instincts and forms the emotion of guilt.

Jack and the troop filled with their sense of power and evilness become hysterical. They do whatever they feel like doing. They don't shy away from doing anything malicious. At the end of the novel, Jack and the boys are completely dehumanized and devoid of any human emotion. They have become animalistic and sadistic. They don't remember the values of the civilized world they have come from.

The beginning of the most violent activities starts when the stranded boys in the unknown island turns into two groups. The two are set as the binary opposition of each other. The two groups signify the two human impulses existing inside everyone. One is the impulse to live adhering to the social laws and following a system as a civilization the other is to live for one's own pleasures and satisfaction without any order or moral values. The group led by Jack focuses on hunting and merry making. All they want to do is to kill animals all day. They are very vicious and cunning and not bound by any rules and regulations. They are savages. The other group is a group with civilized values led by Ralph. They are organized and have clear aims, set of rules and a sense of responsibility. They are practical and want to get out of the island and work for this purpose. The most violent scene in the novel is the brutal murder of the two boys from Ralph's gang; Simon and Piggy's murder by Jack and his tribe is the main events which show the monstrosity that resides in each of them, in each human being. While lynching Simon the entire tribe led by Jack madly chants “Kill the beast, Cut his throat

and spill his blood". They don't realize the fact that the very beast which terrifies them resides within themselves. In frenzy, they mistake Simon for the beast and murder him mercilessly.

Piggy's death was more brutal as it was clearly intentional. In the middle of an altercation between the two groups, a boy from Jack's group rolls down a big rock aiming towards Ralph and Piggy. After the death of Piggy Ralph runs for his life. Ralph becomes the main victim and focus of the atrocities of the savage group. They make him run and hunt him like an animal. With two murders, they become more ruthless and strong, shedding away all their reservations, they become completely dehumanized. It all comes to an end when rescue officers reach the island looking for them. At the end of the novel, we find a weeping Ralph who remembers his murdered friends and their fate. Through the novel, Golding is trying to convey, that human being is not infallible and perfect. Each of us has an innate tendency to commit violence. He exhibits the dark side the humanity possesses and the beast inside every one. Children are considered as the symbol of innocence but the novel shows that regardless of the age every human being has a demon inside him. It is the ethics and morality we learn as a civilized species makes human who he is. This is the essence of human being, which makes him different from the animals. Bereft of these values he is like any other animal that will go to any extent for his survival. The novel portrays a world of chaos, as the outset of the story is a war, which is going on in the external adult world. The war and conflict of the children stranded in the island can be considered as the replica of their own world and it's savagery in the name of power and money.

In the beginning of the novel all of them were innocent children who worked together systematically for their survival and rescue. They divided their work and behaved well with each other. Their conversation about their home and family member and their longing to meet them denotes their innocence as children but as the novel develops, they gradually lose their sense of innocence and become savages who are capable of hunting animals and killing human beings for the sheer pleasure they get from doing it. The evilness is not something that they develop from the unusual surroundings of the isolated land. Evilness and innocence exist inside every one. Civilization and moral upbringing can suppress the propensity to be evil but it can never be uprooted from humanity. The novel is written in a pessimistic tone, it presents brutality as something universal. Golding uses the war going on inside the island among the children to give a close picture of the war of the outer world. It indicates the savagery of humanity in the contemporary world. They call themselves civilized and developed yet they are committing the same brutality that is being executed by the savage children. In reality, children imbibe the violence and brutality from the world they live in. The savagery depicted in this novel signifies the future of humanity. This is suggestive of the deterioration of the world, which is becoming more chaotic and violent. It is a civilization sinking into savagery.

Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West is another contemporary novel which discusses the theme of Violence of human race. It is the fifth novel written by Cormac McCarthy and it was published in 1985. It is based on historical events that took place on the Texas-Mexico border in the 1850s. Blood Meridian is the story of relentless violence; with jarring images of unsettling brutality, it exhibits a world of dehumanized people. The protagonist of the story does not have a name; the narrator calls him "the kid". He presents him stating that "in him broods already a taste of violence" (McCarthy 1). He describes the Kid's per chance for violence, as it is something inherent in him. This innate violent nature of the kid is symbolized by the meteor shower appeared at the time of his birth. At the age of 14, he runs away from home, abandoning his abusive drunkard father.

The kid is described as having a violent streak, joins several criminal groups and commits innumerable brutal crimes. He proves himself as an effective killer but he is not a bloodlust like his companions. He considers violence as a part of his job but does not take any pleasure in it. He is violent but not vicious. The kid is a fighter he does this for nothing but his own survival. McCarthy writes his novel in a way that it is too direct and emotionless. He never gives a glimpse to the character's inner feelings. In the middle of the novel, the kid seems to have fed up of the violence surrounding him. He has a compassionate soul somewhere inside his cold heart. Even when he gets three chances to shoot at Judge, he opts not to do that. Towards the end of the novel, the kid carries a bible with him though he is illiterate and cannot really read it. This signifies his yearning for a break from all the violence and brutality inside and around him. His soul longs for a redemption. In chapter four, The Kid is shown as helping the wounded soldier. All through the novel, the kid sticks by the other characters in their sufferings; they even tell him to leave them and save himself but he never listens to them and takes care of them as much as he can. This shows a completely non-violent and tender side of the kid. He commits many crimes but he is simply indifferent to it. He does not carry any kind of emotion with it. He does not seem to take pleasure or have any kind of gratification through the violence that he carries out nor does he have any regret about it. He gets tired of it, seeks peace, and decides to lead a normal life for some period. After he gets out of jail, he takes up a few jobs and tries to lead a normal life. Another instance, which indicates the kid's compassionate side, is when he spots an old lady in the mountains. Upon seeing the old woman, he immediately extends his help to her and promises that he will keep her safe, but it is only a little later that he finds out that she has been dead for years. This attempt of him opens up the compassionate soul inside him. The kid is never shown as talkative in the whole novel before this instance. The reader gets an account of his actions but here he talks, he talks about hope and safety, through this McCarthy portrays the growth of the kid to a matured man. However, the dead body of the woman symbolizes death as the ultimate truth and no one is safe from it.

As a kid he has been described as inherently violent, as he grows up it evolves with him and becomes an intrinsic part of him. As a youth, he leads an extra ordinary atrocious life. His transformation from a kid to a man happens during the solitary days he spends in the jail. It is for the first time in life that he gets time for introspection. It changes him completely. He feels guilty for all the brutality that he has committed in his life. He purges the violence from himself. He comes out of the jail as a matured man with a determination to not get involved with violence anymore. Nevertheless, the ending of the novel declares his efforts as futile. It proclaims that no man can disconnect himself from violence. From the genesis of the world, humankind has always been associated with violence. The kid who has now become the man successfully avoids his violent streak. In the end he is not a perpetrator of violence instead his tragic end makes him a victim of it.

Judge Holden is another central character of *Blood Meridian*. Judge is a ruthless character, which everyone is in this chaotic novel, but he is much more than just a murderer. He is portrayed as the purveyor of violence. Violence is his religion and he defends it with so much passion and conviction. He understands and accepts the monstrosity of humankind. He proclaims that he is immortal and sleepless. His external features are rather satanic. McCarthy describes him as

“An enormous man dressed in an oilcloth slicker had entered the tent and removed his hat. He was bald as a stone and he had no trace of beard and he had neither brows to his eyes nor lashes to them. He was close on to seven feet in height and he stood smoking a cigar even in this nomadic house of God” (McCarthy 4)

He is the exact opposite to the Kid. He is a sadist. He gains pleasure through violence. Each crime made him stronger and more brutal. He is very intelligent and highly persuasive. The first time the kid meets Judge Holden is in the town of Nacogdoches, Judge was trying to bring out violence from the common people by accusing their preacher of pedophilia and bestiality. Inciting violence, Judge quite easily transforms a moral, religious gathering into a bloody violent event. People who came to pray and to seek God commit the most devilish deeds. They brutally murder the Reverent and destroy his tent. After everything when judge reveals that all his accusations against the Reverent was false, they treat it as a joke and does not feel even an iota of guilt and regret for violently executing an innocent man. This incident reveals that the attack unleashed on the Reverent was not simply based on the accused crimes he believed to have committed. It was caused by their inner thirst for violence, and upon getting an opportunity they simply uses it by murdering the Reverent and destroying his tent. The important part is, these were the same people who sought inner peace and happiness through religion and God but they acquire it through violence. It is a striking example for the two extremes, which work towards the same end in every human being. They enjoy bloodshed and want to take part in it. This shows the level of violence ingrained in humanity.

Morality has no place in Judge's world. He thinks morality is a standard of judgment for human conduct. He discards morality saying that,

"Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak" (McCarthy 261).

His highest aim is to play a game of war without an end. According to him, war resolves the conflict and he passionately defends warfare and calls it eternal. For him war is God. He believes that violence is a way of living; a way of survival. Violence is his religion and anything innocent is blasphemous in his eyes. Judge is a child predator. He has a tendency to attack children. In the novel he is shown as buying puppies only to mercilessly throw them into the river. This signifies that he can't stand anything that is innocent. Both the children and puppies symbolize innocence. Hence, by ending their lives he is trying to obliterate innocence from his ideal world of violence. He liked the Kid for his great capacity in perpetrating violence. He had great expectations in the Kid. By taking a different direction in life, rejecting violence and bloodshed the kid disappoints Judge. For him it is blasphemy and he metes out the ultimate punishment for him.

Another character, who talks about violence and humanity, is the Hermit the kid happens to meet. The Hermit speaks about humanity, he says that we have the capacity to do anything; we are inherently evil and violent. He says,

"A man's at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he dont want to. Rightly so Best not to look in there It aint the heart of a creature that is bound in the way that God has set for it You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow. A creature that can do anything Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine and evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it. You believe that?" (McCarthy 17).

He talks about the malignity of humanity, which will be there forever because God created them that way and they will remain violent until the end. This is the idea that the novelist wants to convey through this novel. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy blatantly presents a chaotic world filled with violence and brutality. It tries to say that Man is inherently violent but it is up to him to retain and nurture that streak of violence or to reject it and live adhering to morality and Ethics. Either way Violence finds a way to reach to everyone like the Kid, either we are the perpetrator or the victim. The ultimate lesson conveyed by the novel is that complete innocence is unattainable and impossible. The anonymity of the Kid signifies his universality. The Kid was described as innately violent but he grows to be a matured "man" rejecting violence. This is the journey of every human being. We learn to be as just and moral as possible, we are trained to be so but can never fully attain innocence. McCarthy's writing style is quite distinct in the novel. He sets the focus of the narration on violent actions of the people, the physical damage it causes, the blood and the flesh. He hardly gives information about the emotions of the perpetrators or the victims. He does this to highlight the condition of the dehumanized and cold-hearted people without any feelings who are worse than animals.

"A rattling drove of arrows passed through the company and men tottered and dropped from their mounts" (McCarthy 79)

"In this container with hair afloat and eyes turned upward in a pale face sat a human head" (McCarthy 159)

"He pointed with his left hand and she turned to follow his hand with her gaze and he put the pistol to her head and fired" (McCarthy 177)

"Before the last poor n—r reached the bottom of the slope there was fifty-eight of them lay slaughtered among the gravels" (McCarthy 78)

These are some of the innumerable instances where McCarthy's emotionless words foreground the images of the brutality by completely avoiding the emotions. He wants to say that in a world full of violence there is not much space left for any other emotion..

Lord of the Flies and *Blood Meridian* are the two works in contemporary literature, which present the brutality of the violence in the most effective way. It poses the questions related to the existence of violence and innocence in today's world. These two novels bluntly portray the unimaginable brutality that human beings are capable of committing. Both the novels state that violence is an inherent part of human beings. Along with emotions like compassion, Love, Kindness and Anger, violence also coexists inside human beings. Nevertheless, it is man's choice to awaken the side of violence in him, nurture it and to become completely violent. Most of the time this choice is swayed by the circumstances and background of the human being .Nevertheless he/she has the discretion to suppress this immoral side by accepting values of morality and Ethics The kid in *Blood Meridian* is said to have a violent streak, the circumstances of his life develops this streak, and he commits many heinous crimes including theft and massacres. Yet, he reverts to humanity seeking inner peace and yearning for a moral life. We can suppress or control our violent nature but we can never obliterate it from the world. The tragic end of the kid is a fine example for that. We can retain morality within ourselves if we want but the world is a violent place, we can never stay disconnected to the violence that exists there. In the case of the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, the boys are described as inherently violent. While Jack develops this side of violence in him and becomes a savage, Ralph feels guilty after recognizing this part in him; it is his sense of morality that makes him feel like that. Both of these novels put forth the pathetic condition of the world and its deteriorating nature in terms of violence and brutality. We are falling back to savagery because of the infectious and unstoppable violence existing in our world. The sense of morality is what distinguishes human beings from other animals and a failure in retaining this quality takes the entire race down to the position of a mere animal.

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