

Clashes between *Femininity* and *Masculinity* in William Golding's Novel *Lord of the Flies*

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Abstract

William Golding's famous novel, Lord of the Flies, published in 1952, expresses deep concern about the traditional conflict between "femininity" and "masculinity." On the surface, the novel represents the theme of civilization and savagery, however, the clash of gender becomes significant in the course. Masculinity overpowers femininity in the usual sense and that could support the archetypal drive of humanity. In general, in the development of civilization, man is always positioned himself at the center, alluding to women in the periphery. Therefore, the present paper lights on gender conflict devoid of the feminine character available on the island.

Key Words: Femininity, Masculinity, Civilization, Human impulses,

Lord of the Flies is a novel written by the Nobel Prize-winning author William Golding gives the impression of a clash of civilizations. The savagery is the part of the human being that arises every minute by forcing the civilized impulses downwards. The Golding philosophies that the innate impulses of the human being have been inclined more toward savagery than towards goodness. The impulse of humanity is being imposed to whom everyone surrenders reluctantly. The core of his philosophy is that human is evil by nature. Moreover, the conflict between male and female has been prominent woman is considered to be man's other.

"Femininity" stands for "a womanliness, a quality or nature of female sex." *Collins Online Dictionary* defines 'femininity' as "the qualities that are considered to be typical of

women.” It signifies attributing a number of qualities, behaviors, and roles to girls and women so as to entangle them into specific behavior or activity that, of course, become their inherent characters. However, these factors are socially constructed than affirmed biologically. The aforementioned idea obscures the definition of the biological female sex as both males and females can exhibit feminine traits. (Ferrante 269–272). Traits that are traditionally been cited to femininity include gentleness, empathy, sensitivity, powerlessness, emotive, and many more that are influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors. Gentleness is the feminine principle opposite to masculine principle of aggression. We observe that way mother treats baby with-feather caresses and sweet kisses, with methodical swaddling and dulcet lullabies. This is how mothers cuddle, soothe, and even discipline their children. So instead of accepting impulsiveness and risk, women turns towards compassion. It’s why women commit less violent crimes and take less risks than men. Sensitivity is a fine tune of awareness knowing happening around you on emotional plane. It connotes with awareness and empathy. Women are more likely to react verbally than physically when they get angry. They have a greater tendency than men to relate to the pain or joy that another person experiences, and they spend more time communicating with others in order to understand how the other feels. Despite positive connotations of these characteristics, society has internalized the idea that being female = being weak. And such social beliefs embedded deeply in the psyche that causes idolizing of masculinity. Many of the characters in the novel shows such feminine traits, and thus, persecuted without error. In contrast, “masculinity” means the qualities or set of behavior ascribed to boy and man. Masculine traits that are traditionally stamped include independent, non-emotional, aggressive, tough-skinned, hard, strong, active and self-confident. These qualities positioned him at the center of the family what is called as “patriarchy.” Germaine Greer’s in her book *The Female Eunuch* (1970) explores the destructive neutralization of women within patriarchy. According to Kate Millett “patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women.” (Seldom 123). *Lord of the Flies* points out many feminine traits that are evident in the behavior and action of many boys. As male and female exhibit mutual traits and behavior, their behavior can have a gender fringe.

The novel embodies the confrontation between masculinity and femininity. The theme of gender difference catches our attention devoid of female character present on the island. Traits of femininity is available in most of the characters, while in the course of time, masculine instinct of some boys get transformed into feminine instincts. It universally accepted that femininity has always been rejected by masculinity, and this criteria is applicable to this novel also as male characters are rejecting femininity. For example, the

protagonist Ralph confirmed that he had never read book standing on his shelf that describe about two girls (Golding, 125). Also, boys refuses to tie their hair back like a girl saying that it would look like a girl (Golding, 196). So, the novel involves feminine and mescaline struggle through the behavior and speech of characters. In light of this, this paper argues that Ralph and his group possess feminine impulses and in contrast, Jack and his band possess masculine impulses. And vociferous nature of masculinity overpowers femininity, which was the main reason of final disintegration of the society on the island.

Lord of the Flies paints the disorganization of the law and order and the collapse of the harmony mainly embedded in the battle between Ralph and Jack, the two competing leaders in the novel. The novel is set in the midst of a nuclear war, a plane carrying a group of British boys is shot down on an uninhabited island stranded without adult supervision. Initially, by their collective endeavor, they try to found parallel civilization similar to the one they left behind. Two of the boys, Ralph and Piggy, discover a conch and make use of it to assemble other boys. In assembly, Ralph is selected as leader, assuring the responsibility of rescuing everyone from the island. Rules are formed for housing, sanitation, maintaining fire and collecting food. Jack was the major hurdle in the path of the said civilization who wanted to become leader. He was given the work of hunting. Out of enraged, slowly, he starts uprising against Ralph. In the course of time, the democratic values on the island are demolished and boys are divided into two groups namely Jack's group which waters savagery and Ralph's group which waters civilization. The satanic impulses among the boys are further fortified by the rumors of presence of beast on the island. Despite the presence of beast, Jack uses its presence to control the "littluns" by promising them to kill the beast. Thus, most of the boys follow Jack unwillingly. Of all the boys, only the mystic Simon has the courage to discover the true identity of the beast sighted on the mountain. However, perceiving him as the beast, the boys beat him to death. Then, with the death of Piggy, Ralph becomes the outcast and is hunted like an animal by Jack's group. At the end of the story, a British navy officer finds Ralph and rescues the boys. In the novel, Jack's overpowering Ralph illustrates how brutality and savage vanquish order and civilization, leading to the disintegration of the society.

Critics have already elucidated many reasons for the chaos in the society founded on the island in *Lord of the Flies*. However, conflict between aggressive instinct of masculinity and mild nature of femininity seen throughout the novel was much discussed. The author, William Golding, once provided the explanation by himself. According to him, the cause of the societal breakdown on the island results from nothing more complicated than the inherent evil of man: "the boys are suffering from the terrible disease of human being" (Golding, "Lord of the Flies as Fable" 42). Thus, chaos arises from men's irrational and defective part

of the soul. Many philosophers argue that the lack of strict law and order help unconscious instinct to overcome conscious instinct that result into chaos. The children on the island nourish human nature, and therefore, the rupture is a corollary. Therefore, the conflict of masculinity and femininity may have one of the reasons for the breakdown, and it can provide an alternative point of view towards this issue.

Masculine instinct is always fraught with the idea of propelling men to shut out every affiliation with femininity. This is due to fear of humiliation resulting from being conceived effeminate by other men. Michael Scott Kimmel, an eminent American sociologist argues that manhood conceives man to act and behave like a man, and disown femininity, since men are afraid of being deemed effeminate ones. Kimmel maintains that “masculinity is a homosocial enactment,” and men are “under the constant careful scrutiny of other men,” so men have to perform manly enough to gain other men’s recognition (Kimmel, “Masculinity” 214). Therefore, to avoid “the fear of emasculation by other men, of being humiliated, of being seen as a sissy” which dominates the culture of manhood, men then have to exclude or escape from femininity (Kimmel, “Masculinity” 219). Further, Kimmel mentions that according to Freud, the main task of the little boys is to “develop a secure identity for himself as a man” by renouncing the emotional attachment to their mothers, and who fail to do so will be unmasked by the other men, being regarded as “a wimp, a Mama’s boy, a sissy” (Kimmel, *Gender* 32). Child or man flees from the mother-like figure and prepares his separate identity by diminishing femaleness. After pulling away from his mother, the boy begins to regard her not as the source of nurturance and love, but as an “insatiably infantilizing creature, capable of humiliating him” (Kimmel, *Gender* 32). In short, man leaves behind all feminine association including motherly values and adopts every exclusively nature of masculinity due to be under constant surveillance of other males and being regarded as effeminate.

In *Lord of the Flies*, the main cause for changing civilized instinct into brutality is the implementation of feminine values by Ralph and his group. Whereas, Jack and his choir implement masculine values and endeavoring to retain gender differences in the demi-civilization. Everything that Ralph stands for such as order, work, burden, reprimands etc. have a maternal connotation. Death of sow, Piggy and Simon and the planning of the murder of Ralph by Jack’s group intends to be the punishment for men who implement feminine values for the boys who are eager to display their masculinity. Thus, the characters Ralph, Piggy, Simon, Sam and Eric etc. nurture feminine ideals, and the characters Jack, Roger, Robert etc. nurture masculine ideals. Some characters, like Ralph, initially manifested masculine traits but in the course it turns into feminine. The originality of characters looms up and reveals the real nature of the character. This may be the failed attempt of character to project

into sublime in order to escape from reality. Let's us find out the masculine and feminine traits in the personality of main characters of the novel that gives rise to conflict.

Throughout the novel, Ralph has consistently been consistently preaching about the importance of law and order. He gives much importance to family. His mind is always obsessed with the idea of escaping from this quasi civilization on uninhabited island and return to the original world. Thus, the impulse of fear might work on him or he wants to live under the protection of family as he enjoyed earlier in his home. In the beginning of the novel, all the boys follow his command like that everyone follow mother, however, the situation after spending days get change. Most children fed up of his affectionate nature and constant vigilance, and want to take a breath of freedom that they find in the company of Jack and his gang. Natural tendency of masculinity inclines towards rashness, hilarious and feeding other, but, these activities were banned by Ralph. He uses not to respect for masculine impulse and forces moral obligations over and over again without considering individualism. This is the state of childhood where we find such situations. Moreover, Ralph's excessive reliance over Piggy from the beginning to the end of the novel doubts about his masculine activity. Piggy is the perfect representation of feminine force, and Ralph has a true attachment with him. This result in love-hate relationship between Ralph and the other guys. And gradually this relationship increases leaving behind hatred for him as, for them, Jack was perfect idol of masculinity. The next thing is that Ralph did not have any interest in hunting, which need manly courage and power. Therefore, there are two antithetical behavioral impulses found in Ralph's personality. At one extreme, he shows care for the children, while on the other hand it does not participate in the hunt, that is, to find food for the children. This is motherly affection towards children. In the family, the responsibility of finding food has been given to male and the mother feeds what was brought by the father. So, the boys naturally inclined towards Jack despite his savage character. So, at the end of the novel, he found himself alienated form the society. In many cases, the novel witnesses his contemplation of the terrible situation of the islands, his crying like a woman when things get worse and his loss of hopes of rescuing the island. For example, when Ralph is in the process of trying to remind his group of the importance of maintaining the smoke, he suddenly becomes silent, seems to be lost in himself, forgetting about the significance of the fire. The incident implies that due to the growth of people's numbers Jack's group, Ralph starts to lose or forget his insist on the duties. Instead of finding solution for problems, Ralph starts losing his hopes and group members contrast to Jack. At the beginning of the novel chosen as the leader by all the children of the island, hoping that he would do something for the children, unfortunately, the same boys tried to kill him because of his failure. This is disgusting situation. He is a faithless, boastful and timid as like woman. Dispute and

challenge are supposed to the main inbuilt traits of male. On the number of occasion, Ralph had dispute with Jack, but each time he made compromise keeping one step behind. He never raise any physical conflict against anyone who does not follow him, nor even win any of them. This adjustment promulgates his femaleness than maleness.

Piggy is the close companion and lieutenant to Ralph. He, more than Ralph, represents and truly implement feminine values. As very close to Ralph, Piggy helps Ralph in every situation and boost him to fight for right. Whenever Ralph becomes silent he takes initiatives and endeavor to solve the problem. This is what we perceive in any family where mother is very close companion to father to provide advises, instead of taking lead to solve the problem. She is always second to man but close to him. Furthermore, Piggy's physical traits and behaviors and his position in the group are coded as feminine. He carries more feminine traits, and obviously suffers from the oppression and exclusion from the masculinity. In Western civilization, there is the strong belief that "the femaleness is a deformity." Likewise, Reynaud has argues that "the body is the instrument of masculinity" (Reynaund, 141). Piggy is very obviously physically weak, considered unmanly. He is very fat, wears glasses since three and is "the only boy in [our] school with asthma" (Golding, 3). When Ralph takes off his shirt to swim, Piggy "looked critically at Ralph's golden body" and also "watched Ralph's green and white body enviously" (Golding, *Lord of the Flies* 5, 8). Furthermore, directly derived from his chubbiness, he is named as "Piggy", which is not his real name but a nickname he does not want. This implicitly reinforces Piggy's image of a feminine character. Piggy's family background gives him a touch of femininity. Piggy is raised by his aunt who runs a candy store, and it is undoubted that Piggy has a very strong bond with, or is very dependent on his aunt, since he keeps retelling what his aunt tells him to Ralph. In terms of this, Piggy to some degree represents the female voices because of his aunt. Despite of his knowledge and scientific attitude, Piggy's position on the island is very inferior due to the association of his body and upbringing with femininity. He is always been rejected by masculine impulses of other characters. His ill physical health and upbringing gave him a new face in social interaction. Piggy does not force other to call him by his real name implies that he has lost his subjectivity. As he is defined by others, he might have lost his identity, and as a result he may be considered as less important in the masculine-valued society. No one pays attention to his speech and instruction proves that he natural masculine drives to avoid and belittle femininity. At the end of the novel death scene of Piggy is the as bloody as the way the sow dies. Thus his death has no value at all as he is figured as feminine impulses. The distribution of job on the island also demarcated femininity and masculinity. And this pushed Piggy to feminine position as he is not allowed to explore the island and hunt. Instead Piggy is assigned on the "domestic" works, to take care of the "littluns" as the

mother-like figure. He always accepts the role given by the other, a sign of being considered inferior and less powerful. For example, Ralph and Jack first go to explore the island. When Piggy wants to follow them, Jack says to him, “you’re no good on a job like this,” (Golding, *Lord of the Flies* 21). Thus, feminine trait makes him regarded as the inferior on the island among boys.

Simon is another character on the island which shows feminine traits. Like Piggy, he spend most of his time caring “liitluns.” He is the only boy who has innate goodness and equates with nature. In Indian culture and in many others, the Earth is worshiped as “mother” and holy, pious and spiritual place where we get pure happiness. Thus, Simon and the nature have much similarity. Simon bears all the actions done by other boy, and he is always ready to help other forgetting all the past just like mother. His death symbolizes the death of the mother and the increase of chaos on the island even more. Thus, he is the victim of male ordered society which always try to keep hold over female.

On the other hand, Jack and his gang strictly follow the mescaline codes from the beginning and encourage others to adhere firmly to the impulses. They punish those who do not follow those codes. Thus, the killing of sows, death of Piggy and murderous attack on Ralph are the outcome of this impulses. Echoing the fierce rejection of femininity, the nature of masculinity strongly shows in the job of explorers and hunters. Being explorers Jack is displaying and implementing his manhood. For Kimmel “Masculinity” stands for “the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest” (Kimmel “Masculinity” 217). As for Jack and his choir, they deem the island something submissive, so that after exploring the island, “eyes shining, mouths open, triumphant, they savored the right of domination” (Golding, 28). They display and implement the masculinity by “dominating” and “owning” the island. Moreover, hunter is also a job encoded with strong message of masculinity. Jack acquires every opportunity to present his masculine power over others, such as frequent verbal and physical confrontations with Ralph’s group, snatch Piggy’s glasses, his blood thrust for hunting, painting faces, his wild dance with wild songs, his offering the head of sow to beast, his false rumors about beast, his ignorance to the work assigned by captain Ralph, his attempt to kill Ralph etc. so, Ralph is true representative of masculinity on the island and he watches other boys closely to make them behave like male. His punishment to other children is nothing more than an attempt to teach male codes by eliminating femininity. As a result, in the split of the groups between two, the role of the “Other” shifts to Ralph’s group against by Jack’s team because of Ralph’s groups association with femininity. In the novel, Jack accuses Ralph of being like Piggy and saying things like Piggy so that he is “not a proper chief”, implying that a qualified chief should not be linked with the effeminate Piggy (Golding, 149). Besides, Jack’s slaughtering of maternal sow suggesting masculinity’s brutal wiping out of

the femininity, also forecasts Piggy's death. After Piggy's death, Ralph, who is regarded as the betrayer of masculinity, becomes the only outsider and the only target who needs to be rejected in order to build Jack's fully masculinity. Thus, if Ralph had died at the end of the novel, his death would have been a fitting punishment for men who implement feminine values for the boys who are eager to display their masculinity.

In Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph and his group is the representation of femininity, and this novel illustrates how the exclusive nature of masculinity leads to the final societal disintegration of on the island. The traits of masculinity motivated men to dominate or even kill off every connection with femininity because of men's fear of being measured unmanly by other men. Here, Ralph and group is regarded as vulnerable, feeble that ascribed them label of femininity by other boys on the island and relegated as "second" in quasi civilized society. Briefly speaking, under the lens of masculinity and femininity, *Lord of the Flies* is a novel about clashes of gender impulses, driven by the exclusive masculinity, try to get rid of femininity, and the final outcome is in the collapse of the civilization. Thus, clash between two aforementioned impulses is the central to the novel with other interpretations.

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