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EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AS DEPICTED IN THE TRADITIONAL WESTERN WRITINGS

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Abstract:

The Concept of existentialism and existential crisis has been constant themes in writings of authors and writers of classical Western Literatures. Though story-tellers, novelists, writers of prosaic works, poets and playwrights are numerous in English literature, I analyze here incidents and events of existential crisis in the works of a very handful of persons such as Geoffrey Chaucer, the first well-known writer of the English literature, William Shakespeare the poet, and playwright of all seasons, and a few Nobel Prize Winners such as John Galsworthy, T.S. Eliot and William Golding etcetera. These belong to different points of times. I have not included here the persons known only for their poetical works as I think I might do it in my later research.

KEY WORDS:

Existential Crisis , Traditional Western Writings , Literatures .

1.INTRODUCTION:

Geoffrey Chaucer has dealt with the situations of crisis undergone by persons of various strata and caliber. This concept is obvious in his collection of stories named 'Canterbury Tales'. In this he deals with the various kinds of crises in the English Society during fourteenth century. There are specific mentioning of social, political, religious, economic, cultural crises and psychological crises in it. For instance his story, 'The Second nun' is a combination of all the above-mentioned crises of a young maiden named Cecilia. Cecilia strives towards living an unblemished and exemplary Christian life. She prays the Blessed Virgin Mary. She pleads the Virgin Mother to protect her from all harms and save her from every temptation against chastity. This concept of the attitude and prayer of Cecilia reflects the Christians in the 14 century. There was scruples puritan mentality in the whole Christendom. People were almost obliged to live in guilt consciousness even for trial errors of theirs. Society looked upon the one's deviating from the so-called moral consciousness which was, in fact, moral obsession. Having realized that her body and mind and whole life is meant for God Cecilia always aims at living a chaste life. She tries to make this known to her husband and her brother-in-law who were 'pagans' by birth. People who did not believe in Christ or follow Christianity were considered to be pagans. The Christian, in general, looked down upon the pagans. They wanted the pagans to embrace Christianity at one time or the other within their life-time. Cecilia considers the task of converting her husband and brother-in-law to Christianity as her very obligation. She does so in spite of all odds. Consequently, she undergoes persecutions from a pagan ruler who harasses her towards giving up her faith in Christian religion. She refuses to give heed to him. In such process she gets killed and dies as a martyr for her faith and conviction.

The over-all crises that Cecilia undergoes; the way she handles them; the way she suffers due to

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the; the valorous way she overcomes them etcetera are the points of reflection in the story.

'*The Man of Law*' another story placed as the fifth story in the book of *The Canterbury Tales* deals with a Christian Princess known as Constance. This too is a reflection of the Christian culture in the 14th century. Constance was betrothed to a Syrian Sultan. On their betrothal it was agreed upon that he would be converted to Christianity. The mother of the Sultan was against his getting converted to Christianity. She starts to persecute the princess hence. She makes her drifting into sea. In his book, *Women in Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales*, Veneckova says, "Constance was not set adrift in a Christian country... she sailed for three years before being cast ashore in Northumbria" (p.66). The princess faces many adventures. She undergoes many struggles. She faces terrible danger to her very chastity. "Constance is attacked by a man who wants to lie with her." (p. 67). Her very living undergoes threat as she gets shipwrecked. She withstands all the struggles and remains firm in her faith. Not only this. She converts many, whom she comes in contact, to the Christian Faith.

The zeitgeist of the Christendom concerning saints, sainthood, celibacy, virginity etcetera and Chaucer's concept about them are replicated in this story. These concepts were reaching the peaks of their extreme orthodoxy and conventionalism during this period. Even marriage, conjugal relationships, reciprocal love between the husband and wife, any thought about body or sex by any boy or girl or man or woman were considered taboos. Chaucer was aware of all these. One could understand that whether it is in his private life or literary life he was devoted to Jesus Christ. This is why he begs all who listen to his poems or read it dedicate to Jesus Christ all that please them in his poems. All the same, he was rough and tough against those who went against the love and law of Christ. For instance, he had once beaten-up a Franciscan monk for some misbehavior of his. Through various characters he has also brought out in open the corruption within the Catholic Church. There were many evils in the Church such as indulgences such as paying money for retribution of one's sins, mammon-accumulating among the clergy, their lack of concern for the human beings, their heartlessness and slothfulness. Chaucer brought all these evils to the public. He, in an ironic and witty way, made these evils public and enabled those involved in them to realize their follies.

'*The Knight's Tale*', is yet another story that gains its place in the *Canterbury Tales*. This story deals with the crisis of love and loss. It tells about Arcita and Palamon who are cousins. Both of them fall in love with a single maiden known as Emily. The competition arises as who would win her hand. This nurtures jealousy and enmity in their minds. They start hating each other. Emily undergoes crisis within her. This was because she was in dilemma and could not decide whether to marry Arcita or whether to marry palamon. As a result she decides to remain unmarried. She prays to goddess Diana thus:

"Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf,
Ne nevere wol I be no love, ne wif" (p. 49)

The enmity between Arcita and Palamon grows. There was cold-war in them. Inner conflicts and external struggle overpower them. This erupts into fist fights all of a sudden. At the end, they decide to fight a tournament in which it is agreed upon that one who comes out victorious without wounds would get the privilege of marrying Emily. Palomon gets wounded. Arcita, hence, comes out happy to gain his prize. At this juncture he is knocked down by his own horse. He is heart-broken. He could not just grasp the ways of the Providence. He laments thus:

"Alas the wo! Alas, the peynes strong,
That I for you have suffred, and so longe!
Alas, the death! Alas, myn Emelye!
Alas, departynge of our compaignye!
Alas, myn hertes queene! Alas, my wyf!
Myn hertes lady, endere of my life!
What is this world? What asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, without any compaignye..." (p.65)

While he was dying she asks Emily to marry Polomon. Here there is the crisis of sacrifice. Arcita feels that he is not able to gain his love he most wanted. All the same, he did not want her to remain unmarried for ever just because he loved her. He wants her to live her love-life. He feels that this, even though meant total sacrifice, could give her friend and his lover life and happiness. Hence, he tells Emily:

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“As in this world right now ne know I non
So worthy to ben loved as Palamon,
That serveth yow and wol dodn al his lif.
And if that evere ye shul ben a wyf,
Forget not Palamon, the gentil man...” (p. 66)

The tragic plays written by William Shakespeare have been classic examples of existential crises in them. In his famous play, ‘Antony and Cleopatra’, Shakespeare depicts the tragic end of vulnerable human love that is filled with romance, lust, broken promises, subtle betrayals, hidden hypocrisies and other such human follies and flaws. There is a potent political crisis amalgamated in the play. This crisis is based on the oppositions and fights between Rome and Egypt. Each of these nations had their individual and collective identity-complexes. Antony, though acting as an individual, is seen trying to establish his identity which he was not able to do so. He feels as though an indistinctive cloud amidst clouds and indistinctive water amidst waters. Thus, there is a real identity crisis. Does he succeed in gaining his identity is a real question mark.

Historically, Cleopatra was queen of Egypt. As a character in the play, Cleopatra’s love for Antony was not genuine. Rather it was a love of vested interests and malicious designs. She does not hesitate to betray Antony and despise him even when in times he needed her assistance direly. At certain junctures it seems as though Antony is aware of the evil designs of Cleopatra. Direly. At such situations Antony feels helpless. He feels cheated. He feels let down. His crisis of holding his own identity gets doubled and redoubled. He hates Cleopatra at such situations. At one of such circumstances he even remarks: “All is lost; this foul Egyptian hath betrayed me; my fleet hath yielded to the foe; and yonder they cast their caps up, and carouse together like friends long lost. – Triple-turn’d whore!” (p. 769). All the same, an ultimate analysis reveals the fact that his realization does not prohibit him from the peripheral skin-deep love of Cleopatra. Rather, he seems falling into her trap fervently and foolishly. Cleopatra, approaches Antonio, as though purely innocent, and asks: “why is my lord enrag’d against his love?” (p.769). For this Antonio merely despises her saying, “Vanish; or I shall give thee thy deserving...” (p.769). All the same, Antonio cannot exist without his co-existence with Cleopatra. Politically Rome could not exist without Egypt. Each needed to depend on each other in one or other way. Antony had to lean either towards Rome or towards Egypt just as Cleopatra had to do the same though seemingly she resented against this dependence and lack of self-identity. Antony too had to come back to Cleopatra at the times he felt that his individuality has its innate cliché.

Cleopatra takes thorough advantage of Antonio’s romance. Antonio’s love for Cleopatra made him unthinkably blind symbolizing that he could not, somehow, withhold his individuality and personal identity. This was why when Cleopatra self-declared her death rather than making sure the fact Antonio decides to kill himself. He asks Eros, one of his trustworthy soldiers, to kill him, saying, “Draw that thy honest sword... let it do at once the thing why thou hast drawn it” (p. 771). Eros was awestruck. Shocked. He does not dare to strike his master. How could he? Has a servant got his identity independent of his master? He cannot just even imagine of doing such a thing which he clearly considers a crime. He decides to kill his own very self rather than doing away with Antonio whom he had always been holding on high pedestal. It’s hence he says, “My dear master, my captain and my emperor, let me say, before I strike this bloody stroke, farewell... (falls on his sword):- thus do I escape the sorrow of Antony’s death” (p. 771). Antony was taken aback by the authenticity, nobility and courage of his beloved aide Eros. He decides to kill himself hence. Here we seemingly get an impression that Antonio realizes his identity. “Thrice nobler than myself! Thou teachest me, O valiant Eros, what I should, and thou couldst not... come then; and, Eros, thy master dies thy scholar: to do thus (falling on his sword) I learn’d of thee” (p. 771). Yet, even here at this juncture, one could come to the realization that his is an identity of doom rather than the identity of life.

Cleopatra’s or the Egyptian identity crisis follows Antonio’s or the Roman identity crisis. Knowing at the end that all her plans had gone upside-down and helter-skelter Cleopatra finds her existence worthless. She could not find any more meaning of living further. As a consequence, she cries out: “give me my robe, put on my crown; I have immortal longing in me; now no more the juice of Egypt’s grape shall moist this lip:- yare, yare, good Iris; quick,-methinks I hear Antony call; I see him rouse himself to praise my noble act... as sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle:- O Antony! – Nay, I will take thee too:- (applying another asp to her arm) what, should I stay,- (falls on a bed and dies)” (p. 777).

Everything seems to be ending in suicide. Of course, as Jung writes in his psychological work, *dreams*, “one must not forget that under certain circumstances and in certain cases (for instance, in latent psychoses) compensation may lead to a fatal outcome owing to the preponderance of destructive tendencies. The result is suicide or some other abnormal action, apparently preordained in the life-pattern of certain hereditarily tainted individuals” (p. 76). Are the suicides of Antonio and Cleopatra actions of such

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nature...?

'Hamlet', which is considered to be the longest play of Shakespeare, is another tragedy known for its portrayal of existential problems of mindful as well as mindless madness, grief, treachery, vengeance and moral corruption. This could be said to be the crisis Hamlet has been undergoing within and without all through the path of his self discovery. He too seems to be facing the catastrophe of identity crisis. This was because he was forced to live in a world of conflicting ideas and values. He faces the psychological crisis of disorientation. He is confused of his role in this universe. This has been because he had to face contradictory experiences, anxieties and demands internally as well as externally. These contradictory experiences, anxieties and demands emerged in him when he confronted the ghost of his father.

The ghost of Hamlet's late father appears to him and reveals to him the secret that he was killed by his brother Claudius by pouring poison in his ears and that Claudius has set for himself set patterns of immoral values. The ghost appeals Hamlet to avenge the evil-doer and destroy his value-patterns that so that they would not bring harm to any one anymore. Hamlet was in dilemma. He was in conflict with the value system which he himself possessed within and the new value of avenge and revenge inflicted in him by his very biological father.

"Ghost: I am thy father's spirit; Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night, and for the day, confin'd to waste in fires till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purged away. But then I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood; make thy two ears, like stars, start from their spheres; thy knotted and combined locks to part, and each particular hair to stand on end, like quills upon the fretful porcupine; but his eternal blazon must not be to ears of flesh and blood.- List, list, O, list!- if thou didst ever thy dear father love,-

Ham: O God!

Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder." (p. 952)

Hamlet assures his dead father that he would do as he desires. He decides to act as though as a mentally disturbed person till he fulfills the task of avenging his father's enemy. We should know at this juncture the social, political, moral and religious environment of Denmark wherein Hamlet lived. Denmark, though it seemed to be one nation, was divided into different concept-worlds. It was undergoing a time of transition and was trying to establish its identity. It was confronting three kinds of metaphysical concept-worlds. There was the concept-world of heroes and heroism wherein even though killing was a crime it was tolerated and might was considered to be right. There was the political concept-world wherein politicians played ruthless games that harmed their own counterparts as well as the common human folks and thought that the end justified the means. Then there was the Christian concept-world wherein the age-old values of love and forgiveness were held high. Hamlet found himself faced with constant conflicts with these worlds. The conflicts of all the above types get summed up and concentrated into one greatest dilemma: to do or not to do; to act or not to act. Hamlet enters into a split-conscience and consciousness. He gets torn and tormented. He could not content himself often. He questions the settled foundations of destiny and fate. He feels that in the process of accomplishing the work entrusted by his father's ghost he might even get annihilated. This idea of the fear of Hamlet getting annihilated is expressed in Freud's, *The Uncanny*, as: "the destruction of the ego, an energetic denial of the power of death" (p. 952).

Hamlet courts Ophelia, daughter of Polonius, who has been the most trustworthy counselor and friend of Claudius. He explicitly shows off this so-called 'mad-behaviour' towards his fiancée as well. She gets frightened of Hamlet and informs the matter to her father who, in turn, tells Claudius of Hamlet's behavior. Claudius sends two of his acquaintances in order to spy on Hamlet.

Meanwhile Claudius and Polonius persuade Ophelia to meet Hamlet so that they could hide and overhear their conversation. Ophelia meets Hamlet. Hamlet behaves as though he doubts her honesty and sincerity.

"Hamlet: that if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

Oph: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

What it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

Ophe: indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Ham: You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it: I loved you not.

Ophe: I was the more deceived.

Ham: Get thee to a nunnery; why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (pp. 969-961).

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Hamlet decides to perform a play depicting the incident of his father's murder in which he himself gives running commentary. He notices Claudius getting out of the auditorium during the murder scene. This makes him confirm his suspicion that Claudius is the real murderer of his father. Gertrude, wife of Claudius and aunt of Hamlet, calls Hamlet for a conversation. On his way he finds Claudius praying. He hesitates to kill him. The reason he gives for his action is that if he kills him during prayer he might go straight to heaven which he does not want. Polonius, overhearing the conversation of Gertrude and Hamlet takes Hamlet to be a real mad man and shouts for protection of Gertrude. Hamlet thinking that Claudius is spying on him draws his sword and erroneously kills Polonius.

Claudius fearing his life tries to kill Hamlet and sends him to England on pretext of diplomatic mission.

Everything ends in death and decay ultimately. Ophelia drowns herself. In a toast, Hamlet kills Gertrude with poisoned wine. He stabs Claudius with a poisoned sword and makes him drink poisoned wine. In a fencing match Laertes, brother of Ophelia stabs Hamlet, who was already given poisoned wine by Claudius. Hamlet dies.

'Macbeth', yet another play which is considered to be the shortest tragedy written by William Shakespeare, is filled with elements of the concept of existential crisis. The crisis is one of multiple nature even though moral crisis predominates the scenario.

Macbeth and Banquo are returning victorious from war after defeating forces of Norway and Ireland. Three witches appear to him and foretell him that he's going to be a king soon.

"3 Witch: All hail, Macbeth! That shall be king hereafter" (p. 924).

Intoxicated by this prophesy and the ambition of becoming a king, Macbeth, persuaded by his wife, decides to kill King Duncan his very master and lord. Here too, like many conflicting situations of sincere serene human beings, there is the predicament of Macbeth's dilemma of to do or not to do; to kill the king or not to kill. Macbeth is tortured within and torn between fear and morality. This was why his soliloquy.

"First, as I am his kinsman and his subject
Strong against the deed: then, as his host,
Who should against his murder shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off: (Act I, Scene 7)

Macbeth's evil side of his inner self wins his dilemma. He invites Duncan and his sons Malcolm and Donalbain for a banquet in which he, together with his wicked wife, make them get drunk. At night the Macbeths kill Duncan while he was still asleep. Lady Macbeth does not seem to undergo the dilemma undergone by her husband at all. She, it seems, had almost lost her conscience. The greed for power, position and mammon had blinded her badly. Having killed her very guest, she goes on with the evil intention of putting the blame on others. This' why she places the dagger beside the guards so as everyone would suspect them. Later Macbeth kills them too so as to destroy the evidence. This dilemma faced by Macbeth is less seen or, perhaps, not seen in Lady Macbeth.

Having learnt that their life was in danger Malcolm flees to England and Donalbain flees to Ireland. Macbeth gets declared as the king of Scotland. The escape of the siblings of Duncan increases the anguish of Macbeth. His fear of possible revenges later on and probable threat to his throne increases and multiplies his anguish and anxiety. Further, he finds a threat from his very friend Banquo. It's because he remembers the prophecy of the witches to Banquo his friend that he would become father of line of kings. Hence he tries to kill Banquo. The issue of moral crisis goes endless. This' because, every time Macbeth thinks in his mind that he should possess the throne the thought of eradicating any one or everyone who come on the way of his victory motivates him to go ahead with committing sin after sins. When he kills someone in this process, his moral credibility is questioned and the crisis within him gets aggravated. He seems as though getting mingled, as Edgar Allan Poe writes in his *The Imp of the Perverse*, "definite with the indefinite-or the substance with the shadow" (p. 203). Macbeth tries to execute his plan of killing his very own friend Banquo. This he does through two hired men while Banquo and his young son Fleance were on a ride at night. Fleance escapes sensing the danger while Banquo gets killed. The escape of Fleance

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increases the anguish of Macbeth further and makes him more furious than ever as he considers Fleance as an immense threat to his enthronement and even to his very existence.

Knowing the inner weakness of Macbeth, the witches mislead him further. They provoke him and poison his mind towards avenging Macduff, the thane of Fife, who knew the secrets of Macbeth. Macbeth takes the drastic step of murdering the wife and children of Macduff. Macduff is an equal victim of moral crisis as well. This is because, when he discovers that his wife and children had fallen prey to the malevolent enemy, he was caught up in a trap of indecisiveness. He too was torn between the moral dilemma of revenge or pardon. He decides to kill Macbeth. Meanwhile, he realizes his inability to do so as the circumstances were not very conducive. He flees hence.

Macbeth's degradation starts soon. The ghost of Banquo starts haunting him. In the Act III, Scene 4 we see the ghost of Banquo entering the banquet hall and sitting in Macbeth's place. Macbeth, filled with inner guilt and fear feels as though his place is occupied and Banquo has taken his place. It's hence he talks out loud that the table is full. He could not believe when his servant says that the honourable place of the master has been already kept in reserve for him. Unable to believe the inmates and as though smelling some plot of foul Macbeth tries to find out as to who had caused his seat of honour to be occupied. Sensing that something is wrong with Macbeth, the nobles and lords try to get out of the hall. Lady Macbeth, who has no sense of guilt or conscience, tells foolishly tells the guests that her husband often behaves in such a manner and thus confirming that something wrong has occurred in the household. Macbeth talks out his heart ultimately as though addressing Banquo directly and acknowledging his evil-deed.

“Prithee, see there! Behold! Look! Lo!
How say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury back,
Our monuments shall be the maws of kites”

Macbeth started falling completely preoccupied with his sins and guilt-feelings connected with them. Hence, he speaks his heart out loudly. He could not just contain his secret. He could not just care for his guests. He could not just see the presence of his guests at all. Even though he did not want his secrets known to others, in his guilt-contentedness, he could not just keep his heart and mouth shut or whisper silently as Emily Dickinson writes in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*:

“Tell all the truth but tell it slant,
Success in circuit lies,
Too bright for our infirm delight
The truth's superb surprise;
As lighting to the children ceased
With explanation kind,
The truth must dazzle gradually
O every man be blind” (p. 1129).

Macbeth gets caught. The later events turn out to be series of live-plots that seem hatched aiming at solely to bring the wicked deeds of Macbeth to light.

Though Lady Macbeth is seen conscienceless and failing to feel the prick of guilt the crisis of morality and common human ethics are seen weighing her down slowly and gradually. She starts feeling the guilt of her crime. This snatches her of her peaceful sleep. She starts walking in her sleep. She could not just get rid of the smell of the innocent blood of King Duncan who had always been a benefactor to her household. It's hence she exclaims: “Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!” (p.941). She kills herself, as the message says.

The witches disillusion Macbeth of his foolhardiness by revealing the fact that the words they used in their prophesies contained meanings other than the ones they seemingly revealed and that he, in his hurriedness, had failed to discern the exact meaning of their prophesies. He drowns in inner pain and despair. He says: “It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood: Stones have been known to and choughs, and rooks, brought the secret'st man of blood” (p. 934).

Macbeth gets defeated in the subsequent war against the army led by Malcolm and Macduff. He gets killed and beheaded as a consequent of his inherent flaw and folly.

John Galsworthy, a Nobel Prize Winner, depicts an interesting character, Old Jolyon, in his well-known book, ‘The Forsyte Saga’. In it the depiction of Old Jolyon's last days of life, is, indeed,

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heartrending. Old Jolyon gets infatuated with Irene, the estranged wife of Soames Forsyte, his nephew, who is the central character of the novel. Jolyon meets her on and off. He dines with her. He admires her. He boosts her spirits.

“That’s a nice dress – I like the style.”

“I made it myself.”

Ah! A woman who could make herself a pretty frock had not lost her interest in life.

“Make hay while the sun shines,” he said; “and drink that up. I want to see some colour in your cheeks. We mustn’t waste life; it doesn’t do.” (p.411)

He takes pleasure in every split moment he spends with her. He offers donations to her for the women she helps. He shares his heart out as though she’s his most intimate and loved one. She plays Chopin music for him. His attachment to her grows in leaps and bounds.

Once it happens that he wakes up at the middle of the night. He feels that he is faced with two bitter realizations. Both these realizations are connected with his new-found-friend and sweetheart Irene. The first realization is that he is old and ill and that he would not live long to enjoy the company of Irene. He faces the nullity of existence. He tastes its absurdity. He feels as though that when people grow old, the whole world becomes a place where conspiracy is hatched against them in order to limit their independence. Only a little and restricted freedom is given to them. This diminutive freedom is given to them as though for the sake of keeping their breath in them a little longer. This was why in his letter to Irene Old Jolyon writes: “Old men learn to forgo their whims; they are obliged to, even the whim to love must be forgone sooner or later; and perhaps the sooner the better” (p. 423).

The second realization is that he, together with his family, would move away from Robin Hill soon which might distance Irene from him and vice versa and would even possibly separate him from her love forever. These realizations make him sad.

He keeps meeting Irene later too. In the meantime he develops the illness of dizziness. Irene looks after him whenever time and possibility availed her of doing so.

Old Jolyon receives a letter from his son that he, with his family, is returning to Robin Hill. Old Jolyon informs the news to Irene. He realizes that she stops visiting him after this information. He yearns and longs to see her all the same. He feels terrible pessimism within him. He feels as though Irene was going to renounce him. Why should she hold on to an old futile concept such as him? An odd feeling springs up in the interiors of his being. He feels funny about himself. He exclaims within as: “An old man wanting to look on beauty!” (p. 421). He suffers the vague feelings that his “age closed his mouth, paralysed his power to fight. He had no right to what was warm and living, no right to anything but memories and sorrow... Nature had got him in his net, and like an unhappy fish he turned and swam at the meshes, here and there, found no hole, no breaking point” (pp. 421-422). Hence he sends a note to Irene expressing his strong desire of meeting her. Irene replies his note and assures him that she would visit him. He falls asleep while waiting for her and dies in sleep. Though the novel is said to be a comedy, the life of old Jolyon ends in a tragic and gloomy note.

“The stable clock struck the quarter past. The dog Balthasar stretched and looked up at his master. The thistledown no longer moved. The dog placed his chin over the sunlit foot. It did not stir. The dog withdrew his chin quickly, rose, and leaped on old Jolyon’s lap, looked in his face, whined; then, leaping down, sat on his haunches, gazing up. And suddenly he uttered a long, long howl!” (pp. 426-427).

In his play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, well-observed by Study-Aid Series as “a work better fitted than any other twentieth century composition to mark the foundation of a modern poetic theatre” (*Study-Aid Series* p. 9), T.S. Eliot, another Nobel-Prize-Winner, presents the existential crisis with a beautiful blend of history, mystery, social, political and economical.

Historically or socially or politically speaking, King Henry faced the problem of dealing with erroneous clergymen who licentiously committed many follies without any prick of conscience. These were easily forgiven by the Church as it lacked appropriate legal procedures to punish such wayward ‘god-men’. Henry tried to bring about law and order which he could not succeed in doing as the number of such bogus ‘men of God’ increased day by day. The so-called leaders of the Church, especially Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury, felt that dealing with matters connected with the clergy is a Church-Connected-Matter and that the royalty or the secular government should not interfere in the clerical affairs. Henry felt further that the Church, instead of punishing such evil-doers, was giving protection to them as though uncaring for the polity. Henry wanted inflicting punishment on any criminally culpable persons, inclusive of the clergymen, without any interference by the Church. Becket refused to accept such authoritarian attitude of the Royalty. Ultimately, Henry had to take an extreme stand.

Murder in the Cathedral deals with the assassination of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of

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Canterbury, at the instigation of King Henry II. Though literally looking at, it is a mere play containing high literary richness, as mentioned above, it's, a politically complicated story. Though apparently it deals with two persons they in reality represent two powers –the power of the secular government and the power of the Church. The king represents the government and the archbishop represents the Church. There is a crisis of power. There is also a crisis of personal ego and personal identity together with the collective ego and conflict of collective ego and identity of the governmental structure and the Church scenario. One authority does not want the other to interfere in their affairs even if that be erroneous. The church interfered in the affairs of the government. Thomas Becket mediated it. He became the victim, hence. “Four knights, who had just crossed from Normandy, threatened the Archbishop in his palace and on his defiance followed him, with cries of “king’s men”, into the cathedral and there, at vespers, after an effort to drag him from the church, killed him with their swords before a crowd of witnesses” (*Study-Aid Series*, p.7). Here, the meaninglessness of existence is felt when even amidst tremendous name, fame, power and wealth when one becomes a prey to his very egotism and high-headedness. What's the use of the so-called spiritual authority? The Archbishop is murdered during the vespers. Irony...! God, the Yahweh washes his hands when he feels that his devotees are power-thirsty and stiff-necked. Meanwhile the helplessness and pessimism of the common human folks are depicted in the chorus of the play when the women seem chanting, “what danger can be for us, the poor, poor women of Canterbury? What tribulation with which we are already not familiar? There is no danger for us, and there is no safety in the cathedral” (*Murder in the Cathedral*, p.23). The common human folk are not very much worried about King Henry or the Archbishop or the Pope. They are not keen on the affairs of the government or the Church. It's because neither the government nor the Church seem benevolent towards them. Rather they have been persecuting the innocent people. This is the reason why they seem to say, “King rules or barons rule: the strong man strongly and the weak man by caprice. They have but one law, to seize the power and keep it, and the steadfast can manipulate the greed and lust of others, the feeble is devoured by his own” (*Murder in the Cathedral*, p. 25). The common human folks need to face various sufferings. They have no comfort. They feel that God is with the rich and the powerful. They feel that they are born to suffer:

“Winter shall come bringing death from the sea,
Ruinous Spring shall beat at our doors,
Root and shoot shall eat our eyes and our ears,
Disastrous Summer bur up the beds of our streams” (*Murder in the Cathedral*, p. 24).

Lord of the Flies is another classical work that depicts the existential crisis of a few juveniles. It's a novel written by William Golding, yet another Nobel-Prize-Winner. In it the author tries to depict the fact that the human beings, even the adults, are often equal to innocent children in matters connected with adopting and accepting certain behaviours of selfishness, rudeness and frenzied during circumstances of crisis.

The story, peripherally, is connected with a group of British school-boys. In a particular war, which is not named, the Air-plane they were travelling in was shot at. The pilot of the plane gets killed. Some boys survive providentially. They land on in an uninhabited island. There are no elders to guide them. There is no society to promulgate laws for them. There are no elders to guide them. They need to survive on their own. Given the situation, everyone seems to be turning into individual animals. Law of the jungle prevails. They prefer mayhem to democracy.

Each one takes the law unto himself. The stronger among them make themselves masters. The weaker among them tolerate them so that they would not get annihilated or rather they would survive. There is endless moral crisis. though they organize themselves the organization is more of anarchic disorderliness than that of democratic orderliness. Theirs could be named as a kingdom of juvenile-delinquents and childish- regime. The savagery in them dominates their innocence. The natural evilness dominates the blamelessness. They make rules and regulations for themselves. For instance, Ralph, their leader summoned the boys. The agenda went thus:

“There aren't any grown-ups. We shall have to look after ourselves.”
The meeting hummed and was silent.
“And another thing. We can't have everybody talking at once. We'll have to have 'Hands up' like at school.”
He held the conch before his face and glanced round the mouth.
“Then I'll give him the conch.”
“That's what the shell is called. I'll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it when he's speaking.”
“But__”

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Look__”
“And he won't be interrupted. Expect by me.”
Jack was on his feet.
“We'll have rules! He cried excitedly. “Lots of rules! Then when anyone breaks ‘em__”
“Whee-oh!”
“Wacco!”
“Bong!”
“Doink! (pp. 36-37).

They struggle to exit. They face, even at such a tender age, numerous adventures. The life itself had become their adversary. They had to find their basic necessities. Food-finding was not easy. Extra-clothing was denied to them. There was no safe shelter. They had to face every kind of threat of the Nature. Some died in the long struggle for existence. One among them was Simon.

Somewhere over the darkened curve of the world the sun and moon were pulling; and the film of water on the earth planet was held, bulging slightly on one side while the solid core turned. The great wave of the tide moved further along the island and the water lifted. Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellations, Simon's dead body moved out towards the open sea” (p.170).

The ones survived all odds moved away from death to new life when a naval officer arrives with his ship. The physical crisis for existence and survival seems to be ending. Yet, the psychological crisis of anxiety and agony do not seem to leave them free. The pain of death of their dear companions and the loss of their boyhood innocence seem haunting them. “Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy” (p.223).

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