CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
The five novels discussed and analysed in this dissertation constitute Conrad's major work of political fiction. His fiction reflects and explores history's most complex and tangled processes where forces of imperialism, capitalism, socialism and nationalism draw his attention. These novels are primarily concerned with the politico-historical forces operating in contemporary life. It is observed that his novels achieve a comprehension of the human situation through a skilful use of the consciousness of human dilemma and moral sympathy. Conrad has analysed the underlying motives and evil designs and intrigues of those who control the political destiny of mankind in our time. By implications and through irony Conrad expresses indignation on behalf of the exploited and the suppressed people. It is, therefore, suggested that his novels show "ample scepticism, about political jargon and rhetoric, about the possibility that a just society could ever be found under conditions of economic imperialism, and about the maturity of man as a political animal."\(^1\) Conrad poignantly exposes the evil designs of the imperialistic powers which dominate the weaker nations in the name of high sounding principles and ideals. As he puts it, the imperialist governments are infected with moral depravity.

Conrad is not a committed politician. He is not interested in active politics. His son John reveals that "he was never known to vote in an English election in the thirty eight years of his British citizenship."\(^2\) He is an artist
who writes on political themes. Political ideas do not play a dominant role in his novels in spite of the fact that the political milieu in his novels is the dominant setting. Indeed, it goes to the credit of Conrad that he uses his artistic skill to give his characters and fictional setting an experiential validity. As an artist, Conrad is much concerned with the moral aspect of modern politics. His novels are creative works of art which constitute a contribution towards knowledge and truth hidden in men, things, life and nature. It may be suggested that Conrad's thought grows gradually from an idealistic conception of life to a critical one. It grows gradually from his temperamental romanticism to a realism of values. This growth is clearly seen in the novels which have been analysed in this dissertation. He emerges as a true witness of the state of politics in the late nineteenth century Europe. He examines in his novels the crisis of moral values from which European civilization suffers.

In fact, Conrad can be labelled as a liberal. He is neither a propagandist, nor a chronicler of events. Also, he is not a political ideologue. It may be suggested that his novels are authentic political works of art. They present an authentic historical world. At the same time he is a moralist-humanist. He is against materialism and finance capitalism which have no consideration for human and moral values. He is against all political institutions because
they are contrary to all that he values most in man. His novels show how much he has felt compassionately at the sight of debasement and degradation of man by the political institutions of the West and the East. However, he subscribes to those institutions which ensure the stability of the system without undermining the dignity and freedom of the individual. Conrad views the world situation from the perspective of a liberal democrat. He admires democracy and freedom in Britain and, therefore, he is labelled by many critics as an Anglophile. But he is mindful of the pitfalls of democracy under capitalism especially when it is divorced from all human and moral considerations in the pursuit of material ends. "Conrad has expressed his contempt for democracy, especially the American form. But we should understand that though he had not much faith in democracy as a form of government, the basic social structure in his sea tales is democratic."\(^3\) He does not see class struggle as the key to the understanding of history and imperialistic politics. He sees England as the only country which can be a model for social progress and radical reform. Conrad has remained to the end of his life a champion of the English constitutional system and the creed of liberal democracy peculiar to England. But it is inconceivable that a talented, moralistic and humanistic writer like Conrad is distrustful of democracy in an age in which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are beginning to take shape.
Conrad's political message can be stated as such: autocracy, tyranny; revolution, radical changes, imperialism, colonialism, authoritarianism are completely rejected as contrary to that he values most in man. Socialism which is imposed by force and appears to go against man's natural tendency to self-government and inner moral restraint leads but to Caesarism. Western democracy is suspected especially under capitalism. The revolutionary forces in Eastern Europe are incited with hatred for much that is good as well as much that is corrupt in Western Civilization. "The bulwarks of liberty seemed to be at the same time the strongholds of materialism and social atomisation." Security and order are prized above everything else. Nationalism is preferred to internationalism. Nationalism is the healthiest way for the development of a nation. Industrialism and commercialism are distrusted. Conrad is thus a liberal humanist who has concerned himself with the destiny of the individual in the world. His political views have a very strong humanistic bias. It is aimed at both the private and the public good. It is a tribute to the foresight and vision of Conrad that he has perceived that no political system, whether contrived by the wisdom of the few or the egoistic ignorance of the many, can sustain the individual or uphold his human dignity and integrity. His moral predilections as well as his scepticism enable him to underline the fact that unless these political systems are inspired by moral and human values, they will not protect the individual from being debased and degraded. He
appears to subscribe to that political system which can achieve freedom and human dignity for the individual. In the eyes of Conrad, when politics is devoid of the moral imperative, it brings in a catastrophe both for the society and the individual. It leads to the degradation of the individual and to the disintegration of the society.

Conrad is a moralist-humanist who has felt compassionately for the sorrowful lot of humanity. If he is committed to any creed, it is surely that of humanism. For him, the moral consciousness is as imperative as the fundamental law of life. As a moralist, Conrad expresses his impatience with a most agonizing chapter of inhuman victimization practised by the colonizers, the anarchists and the revolutionaries in the history of human civilization. He is very sympathetic to the individual who is subjected to the brutality and savagery of autocrats, dictators, anarchists, revolutionaries and colonizers. He appears to oppose all kinds of radical changes in the traditional social and political order. He believes that revolution cannot be an effective means of change. As he sees it, politics is every man's fate in contemporary life. He denigrates anarchic revolution because it subjugates man, dehumanizes him and exploits him. He scrutinizes the problem of the revolutionary spirit when it is let loose from the restraint of moral scruples and considerations. In his eyes, this will lead to violence in society, and it will give rise to the cult of fanaticism and intolerance.
As a humanist, Conrad distrusts imperialism. His mistrust is born out of his love for the individual who relies for his support on the community which itself enslaves him and victimizes him. Conrad hates imperialism. He condemns the white racists who go on European expeditions to exploit the underdeveloped countries in the world. They leave all human and moral values behind them before entering these countries. The coming of the whites to Africa reduces the primitive social order to anarchy. In *Heart of Darkness* as well as in *Nostromo*, Conrad indicts colonialism. In *Heart of Darkness*, he presents colonization as a so-called civilizing undertaking which is being accomplished by brutal and violent means and also destruction. The aim of colonization is not to bring light to the natives but to keep them perpetually low in their relationship to the white man. From Almayer to Carlier, Kayerts and Kurtz they all have the same hatred for the natives. These colonists seem to despise the natives and to evince attitudes that belie the ostensible purpose of their work.

However, Conrad is accused of being a racist in *Heart of Darkness*. Such a reading of the novel suggests that it has become a book of reference for the Westerners in dealing with Africa. The book does not do justice to the natives' real values, although Conrad seems to discuss with candour the effect of colonialism on the native and the expatriate white colonialist. He has sided with the exploited possibly because he himself feels exploited by the company.
Avrom Fleishman writes that Conrad is not against imperialism, instead he is concerned with its social effect on people. He writes that "Conrad has little sympathy for the indigenous forms of social life: native rulers are predatory and rapacious... and tribal history is an almost uninterrupted record of war and enslaving or enslavelement."5

In fact, some Third World critics have accused Conrad of a colonial bias, specially in *Heart of Darkness*. The Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe declares *Heart of Darkness* as an anti-Africans' cliché. As he puts it, "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as the other world, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality... The point of my observation should be quite clear by now, namely, that Conrad was a bloody racist."6 Achebe also comments that Conrad's racism has not been objected to by the Western critics because it is a part of their own thinking. Most Western critics pretend that Conrad's concern is not African. Similarly, the Indian critic Frances B. Singh maintains that Conrad's story "carries suggestions that the evil which the title refers to is to be associated with Africans, their customs and their rites."7 It seems that Singh wants to accuse Conrad of favouring the subjugation of Africans by the whites in the cause of human and moral values as well as in the name of noble ideas and efficiency.
It is argued that Singh supports the opinion of Achebe. She takes the case of the African woman who comes abreast of the steamer. Marlow identifies her with the wilderness. Singh points out that "by describing the woman in terms of wilderness," Marlow does not make distinction between the darkness, the implacability, the savagery of the jungle and that of the woman "because earlier in the text, he called the jungle the 'utter savagery' implying evil."\(^8\)

Responding to the Third World critics, Hunt Hawkins acknowledges the fact raised by these critics, and suggests that Conrad's attitude is complex, critical and hinting at racism. As he sees it, Conrad's story concerns more Europeans than Africans, and it should be noted that some missionary and other Westerners' reports of the period mention the practice of cannibalism. Besides, Conrad's description of Africans is very positive, but Achebe and others fail to mention it.\(^9\)

An objective analysis of *Heart of Darkness* indicates that Conrad's image of the Africans is not negative. Even if it is a little negative, the image of the whites is much more so. They are not presented as worse than their adversaries. As a realist, Conrad can not but portray the African society as it is. He is not supposed to close his eyes to the white colonizers' enterprise in Africa. Conrad characterizes Brussels as the white sepulchre and the door of darkness guarded by the angels of dark. Conrad, by insisting that the
Belgian Congo is not initially a dark but a blank spot on the map, implies that darkness comes with colonial occupation.

Although Conrad sees that the European civilization holds a hundred evils in reserve for every advantage it imparts, he is not against it. Conrad wants a more realistic and humanitarian approach in dealing with the otherness of others' cultures. Conrad's main target in *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo* is colonialism with its ideology, rationale and political and technological apparatus that has given the white man the power to dominate other nations, to commit monstrosities and finally to impose his own culture and questionable values on them. The white man has demonstrated his technological efficiency that exceeds the ferocity attributed to the more primitive societies. Conrad's goal is to see a change in the Western attitude towards the so-called developed and underdeveloped countries. He is not condoning the atrocious and the unpolished behaviour of the Belgians, the French, the English and the Americans. It seems that Conrad wants to awaken Western man's consciousness to the fact that there is something positive in the Third World nations whether in Africa, Asia or in Latin America. In reporting the French and the Belgian attitudes in Africa, Conrad is underlining the cruelty of colonialism in its dealing with the developed and underdeveloped countries and at the same time he is asserting how the whole endeavor is conducted by those who spread colonialism in the name of Christian religion pretending to be the torch-bearers to the
dark regions of the earth. For Conrad, colonization means exploitation, and the mere temptation to benefit and to get rich through exploitation of others is repugnant to him. His far sighted and incisive critique of imperialism at a time when imperialism was strongly supported must be taken into account.

In *Nostromo*, Conrad exposes the dangers of imperialism and the futility of political action. As a humanist, Conrad envisions that imperialism can not bring in justice, prosperity and good life to the ordinary man. The individual man is a victim. He is victimized by the British and American colonialism controlling the country from outside. Man is humiliated in a country torn by civil war, revolutions and counter-revolutions. Indeed, it is to the credit of Conrad that he predicts that the progress of material interests means loss in human and spiritual values. Man becomes the victim of wealth, of material interests. The mine corrupts Sulaco bringing civil war rather than progress. Silver claims many victims. Hirsch the Jewish trader is killed by Sotillo when he refuses to reveal the place where the silver is hidden and which, in fact, he does not know. Even the incorruptible Nostromo falls a prey to the lure of silver. He sells his conscience as it were to mephistopheles. He is yet another victim of the temptation of silver. It is an irony of fate that instead of bringing peace and prosperity to man, the forces of imperialism are hell bent on
victimizing him. As a humanist, Conrad is much concerned with the destiny of the individual who is exposed to the violence of civil war, revolutions, counter-revolutions and economic forces of imperialism in Costaguana. As he puts it, finance capitalism based on unbridled pursuance of material interests cannot bring a happy life to the individual. There can be neither security nor stability in the society like that. The humanist in Conrad sounds a warning that the evil practices of the colonizers in Costaguana will lead to a catastrophe.

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad vents his attack against the democratic processes wherein man is crushed under the weight of freedom. As a humanist, Conrad is much concerned with the destructive effects of the anarchists on the society and how the individual is exposed to their ruthless practices. They bring about the death of Winnie and her brother Stevie. The individual is victimized by these anarchists who are parasites sponging on other members in the society. It is argued that Conrad wants to warn us that the tragic end of Stévie and Winnie is the end of every person who may be exposed to the violence of the anarchists. The death of the idiot Stevie is a violation of human values. Conrad denounces the evil practices of the anarchists; he condemns them and their intrigues. They violate order, security and stability in society and by this they deprive man of his peace of mind. The so-called revolution appears to breed only terror, obscurantism and unrest. It disrupts the moral life and turns it into hell.
In *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad emerges as a humanist who denounces the Russian autocracy and the revolutionary nihilism. Conrad is much concerned with the fate of the individual who lives a life full of terror and fear under the ruthless autocratic Czarist regime in Russia. Conrad provides us with a full graphic report of a society where the people dream of freedom. In the Russian society human rights are violated and there is a total absence of justice, pity, love, tenderness and fidelity. Simultaneously, the individual also suffers from terror let loose by the revolutionaries. Razumov is an example of the man who is victimized by the autocrats and the revolutionaries at the same time.

Conrad thinks that the Russian revolution brings in its wake vengeance and victimization. It does not lead to freedom or democracy. It seems that his prophecy about Russia comes true. He writes another prophecy in "Autocracy and War":

> A brand of hopeless mental and moral inferiority is set upon Russian achievements; and the coming events of her internal changes, however appalling they may be in their magnitude, will be nothing more impressive than the convulsions of a colossal body... It is safe to say tyranny, assuming a thousand protean shapes, will remain clinging to her struggles for a long time before her blind multitudes succeed at last in trampling her out of existence under their millions of bare feet.  

This prophecy has come to be true of Russia. Russians suffer a lot and their economy is on the verge of collapse. They are not able to make big achievements as other civilized and
advanced countries. Now-a-days communism as a political institution has collapsed in Russia and in many other countries in the world. The Russians have started processing their democracy, but nobody can predict the final outcome. As we hear everyday democracy comes under the attack of the conservatives, communists and radicals. Russians go in the street raising their banners and calling for the return to communism. It seems that Russians are not prepared to change themselves. Had Conrad lived up to now, he should have warned us not to be deceived by this change, because the change of political institutions will not usher in a significant change. The evil is in the human nature and this evil seems unchangeable.

As in Under Western Eyes, Conrad, in The Rover, emerges as an anti-revolutionary. He dismisses the French Revolution and the terror, chaos and victimization which have been brought by this political upheaval. He takes a very dim view of revolutions and radical movements. He shows the dichotomy between the high and noble ideals of the Revolution and the blood stained savagery of the revolutionaries. Conrad asserts that the ravages, casualties and damages which happened during the French Revolution were tremendous and sent shock waves throughout Europe. In his opinion, the French Revolution puts man's dignity at stake. In the larger perspective, he reflects, with the impatience of a moralist-humanist, on the most agonizing chapter of inhuman murder and savagery practised by the revolutionaries in the history of
civilization. It is inconceivable that a talented writer of his acute sensibility and imaginative foresight has failed to see the benefits of the French Revolution for the greater good of humanity not only in Europe but in the whole world. The French Revolution has brought in justice and has opened the doors of Europe for democracy. It has made the establishment of political democratic systems which can uphold human dignity and integrity in the world quite possible.

It may therefore be suggested that Conrad is neither a supporter of revolution nor democracy. He is not a partisan of either the royalists or the revolutionaries. His main concern appears to be with celebrating the human values represented by Peyrol. Peyrol sacrifices himself to alleviate the suffering of Réal and Arlette and to enable his country to win one round of its war with England. In spite of the impoverished life Peyrol has lived, he has a feeling heart and a sensitive mind. He feels sympathy at the sight of human suffering and victimization. His delicacy and nicety is contrasted to the malcontent and vindictive behaviour of Scevola. Conrad very subtly and effectively shows that Peyrol is responsive to the problem of good and evil. He is a lover and an advocate of justice. It seems that Conrad stakes his hope in the private virtues represented by Peyrol against the falseness of public life.
It is safe to conclude that Conrad, through his novels, emerges as a moralist-humanist who does not want any man to be a victim. He does not want to see human hearts broken. It may thus be observed that at the core of his writings in their totality he has the good of man at his heart. He is the man who is affected emotionally by the sight of human suffering and victimization. The only solution that he offers for all this is that of a sensitive heart and feeling mind which, for him, seems to be the essential pre-requisite of the success or failure of any system or movement whatsoever.