Chapter-II

THE FAR EAST
The "Orient" always held a fascination for Conrad, the sailor and the writer. The Eastern sea, the tropical nature and the native races left a permanent imprint on his mind. He beheld the East in all its manifestations with the curiosity of a man eager for wonders and tried to grasp the mystery the Eastern world was for him. By the time he embarked on his literary career, he had direct experience of several European countries -- for example, Poland, France, Russia, Spain and Great Britain; but it was his experience of a land in the Far East, Borneo, that fired his imagination and spurred him on to creativity. Thus we have works of exotic beauty and aesthetic significance such as Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, The Nigger of the Narcissus, Tales of Unrest,
Lord Jim, Youth, Rescue etc., -- works which take their inspiration and sustenance from the life of the people in the Far East. They not only established a rapport between "the British public and the British sailors abroad and at home and the Eurasian and native flotsam and jetsam in eastern seas, but a bridge between the British and the Continental spirit." ¹

The Malayan Archipelago which furnishes the background of Conrad’s eastern novels and short stories had witnessed for the last four or five centuries, scenes of intense rivalry and frantic activities relating to colonialism and trade among various European powers. Exaggerated accounts of the 'sweet riches of Borneo' reached the ears of the early Dutch, Portuguese and English voyagers and they regarded it as the Eldorado of the Eastern Archipelago. However, the Spaniards were the first Europeans to visit Borneo (then called Bruni) in 1521. The Portuguese followed them in 1526 and from 1530 they kept themselves in touch with Borneo from Malacca which the great Alfonso d' Albuquerque had conquered in 1511 until they were expelled from that place by the Dutch in 1641. The rise of Great Britain as a political power

in the Malayan Peninsula commenced only during the later half of the Eighteenth century. The first English voyage to this part is, however, shrouded in obscurity.

Conrad's first voyage to the Far East took place in the year 1883. He landed at Singapore after the wreckage of the bark Palestine (Youth). But his stay was quite short. On 22nd Sept., 1885, Conrad arrived at Singapore on board Tilkhurst. This visit had been the longest, and, in terms of his works, the most significant, extending in all from July 1, 1887 to March 3, 1888, a period of eight months. As the second mate of S.S. Vidar he plied extensively among those stations and ports which figure prominently in his works. S.S. Vidar was registered at Benjarmassin, one of the chief ports of Dutch Borneo. Her course was to sail from Singapore through the Carimata strait, from South Borneo to Benjarmassin, then between Isle of Pulo Laut and the east of Borneo. Conrad made five or six voyages between Singapore and Bulangan in Borneo, the place to which he gave the name Sambir in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. Its river Berau he christened 'Pantai'.

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It is during this time that he met Olmeijir, Tom Lingard and Syed Abdullah and gathered information about other characters who figure in his fiction. On board the Vidar Captain Craig, James Allen and John C. Niven in particular, were able to supply him with the antecedents of these people. Indeed, were it not for his experience of the Malay Archipelago, Conrad may not have become a writer at all. In his A Personal Record, he says categorically:
"If I had not got to know Almayer pretty well it is almost certain there would never have been a line of mine in print."\(^3\)

Conrad's life in the Malayan Peninsula has been laid bare to us through the pioneering works of J.D. Gordan\(^4\) and Norman Sherry.\(^5\) Yet these works are purely investigative. The writers set before themselves the task of finding out the originals or derivatives of Conrad's personae. They also most assiduously tried to identify the barks or ships in which

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\(^3\) Joseph Conrad, A Personal Record, p.87.
Conrad undertook his voyages, the exact location and route of these voyages on ships and his temporary stay at ports. These books have merits of their own but they tell us very little about life in the Far East. They are not very illuminating when it comes to an enquiry into the cultural and political conditions prevailing in the regions at that time. That was an extremely crucial time for both the Europeans and the natives and enormous changes were taking place in the primitive societies as a result of their exposure to Western political and cultural ideas.

Yet Conrad chose the life in the East not just because of its exotic appeal or to lend enchantment to his subject. These factors might have contributed to his choice, but they are only peripheral. He approached the East as a place testing human character. Conrad was always preoccupied with human nature and human values. By exposing his characters to a set of values or ideologies, he tries to explore their responses and reactions to those values in his novels and stories. They are essentially studies in human nature in particular political and cultural environments. Values are set side by side for the
purposes of contrast and comparison. We find a fine juxtaposition of the values a Westerner lives by and those a native aspires to. They hardly intersect. As a matter of fact, they are in most cases antagonistic to each other. Even then, man cannot remain an island unto himself. He needs communication -- be it for the purposes of profit or philanthropy. This necessity of communication among various racial and cultural groups resulted in social, political, cultural and linguistic interactions. Conrad's Malayan novels attempt to present these interactions in varying dimensions.

Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands - Conrad's first two novels should be considered together, because both of them constitute a single story. Almayer's Folly (the first novel in composition though second in terms of fictive chronology) picks up the thread from where An Outcast ends. Both the novels illustrate and highlight the drama of racial incompatibility. Both hold up for discussion the discrepancy between the 'civilised' and the 'savage' humanity, the clash between cultures resulting in the psychological tensions of the main characters. The Europeans and the natives, their impressions and
reactions, are studied against the background of their peculiar socio-political surroundings.

Conrad explodes the prevalent myth of 'white superiority' in the 'Author's Note' to Almayer's Folly. It shocks him how the 'civilised' Europeans gave currency to the theory of the 'Whiteman's burden' which was, in fact, the Blackman's or the Brownman's burden. There are no basic differences, he contends, between Europeans and 'that humanity so far away':

I am content to sympathise with common mortals, no matter where they live; in houses or in tents, in the streets under a fog, or in the forests behind the dark line of dismal mangroves that fringe the vast solitude of the sea.  

This anticipates, however indirectly, Conrad's debunking of the stereotypes of native races prevalent in European societies leading to a more meaningful communication between communities and races. It is this concern with human solidarity, this interest in the possibility of improving human relationship through the exposure of popular myths which seems to be the disguised social project (if they have any) of some of his early novels.

The major thrust of Almayer's Folly concerns the racial incompatibility between the Europeans and the natives. The narrator has skilfully dramatised the conflict between cultures that led to tension, isolation and betrayal. The cultural and political themes merge with each other and are woven into the structure of the story of Lingard, Kasper Almayer and his wife, Nina and her lover Dain Maroola. The novel begins with the shrill cry of Mrs. Almayer calling her husband, and "the well-known shrill voice started Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour."7 Almayer's life was 'unpleasant' and unhappy because, besides other things, his fortunes had been tied with those of a native woman. He had to acquiesce in the marriage with this native woman whom he regarded as no more than a slave to respect the wishes of Tom Lingard, his mentor, who held to him high hopes of gold and money if he married his foster-daughter. Conrad's ironical treatment of Almayer comes into operation right from the first chapter in the way he shows how Almayer suppresses his racial prejudice in order to express a reluctant compliance with Lingard.

7 Almayer's Folly, p.1.
Mrs. Almayer was the legacy of a group of notorious pirates who fell upon Tom Lingard's brig one day to rob him of his possession. Mrs. Almayer was then a mere girl but with the rest of her companions she fought desperately on board the prau. When the fight was over and the pirates were done away with, Lingard found her under a heap of dead and dying pirates. In normal circumstances, the girl would be treated as a slave by Lingard as was the custom of making slaves of the war-captives. But Lingard took a fancy for the girl. He adopted her as his child and resolved to give her proper education. He also swore to get her married to a white man and leave her all his money. The girl had, however, no cravings for sophistication and accomplishment. She was quite content to live the usual life of a Malay woman -- "the usual succession of heavy work and fierce love, of intrigues, gold ornaments, of domestic drudgery, and of that great but occult influence on her man which is one of the few rights of half-savage womankind." But she submitted to the wishes of Lingard to get an education. She was put at the Samaran convent for a number of years to cultivate and acquire the western values of life. But the education did not bring about the desired metamorphosis in

8 Almayer's Folly, p.22.
her. In her mind she remained as native as ever. Her acquaintance with western values and the white people only deepened her dislike of them. She had no pleasant memory of her life at the convent and we later find the reactions of a native and half-caste woman fully spelt out in her daughter Nina. The novelist does not deal with the mental reactions of Mrs. Almayer to the new life at length. Even then we get frequent interesting glimpses into her psychology through the authorial comments:

Perhaps had she known of the high walls, of the quiet gardens, and the silent nuns of the Samarang Convent ... she would have sought death in her dread and hate of such a restraint and the teaching and the new faith -- with calm submission, concealing her hate and contempt for all that new life.9

Almayer, who she was married to, was a Dutch. His father was subordinate official employed in the Botanical gardens of Buitenzorg. At home, the father "grumbled all day at the stupidity of native gardeners", and the mother "from the depth of her long easy chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam."10 Lin- gard took a fancy for him thinking that Almayer would make a good match for his adopted daughter. But he

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9 Almayer's Folly, p.22.
10 Ibid., p.52.
was aware of the fact that any white man would think it utterly disgraceful to marry a girl of native origin, however accomplished and beautiful. So while making the proposal to Almayer, he took care that other considerations might weigh heavy on him (Almayer): "Nobody will see the colour of your wife's skin. The dollars are too thick for that! And mind you they will be thicker before I die." The author's disapproval of Lingard's sense of 'white' superiority is evident from his excessive preoccupation with his adopted daughter's colour and in his defensiveness. Almayer, too, shares Lingard's sense of superiority and arrogance in addition without a grain of human compassion. The alliance is racially repellent to him but he concedes to it because of mercenary expectations. He dreams of eventually inheriting Lingard's wealth and settling down in comforts in a mansion in Amsterdam. But a conjugal relation based absolutely on profit motive can hardly be expected to be a happy one and we eagerly look forward for complications in Almayer's 'mixed' marriage and fortunes.

Soon the marriage reaches a stalemate. Almayer

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11 Almayer's Folly, p.10.
wanted unquestioning obedience from his native wife but the wife stubbornly refused to submit to any of his racial hang-up. When she realised that Almayer looked upon her merely as a commodity to be bargained for, she swung to the opposite pole. She started to hate him with all the vehemence at her command. Not only did she scorn his assumed posture, she destroyed the elaborate paraphernalia in the house that reminded her of the fake culture of the western people. She tore off the expensive curtains to make sarongs for the slave girls and burnt down the showy furniture piecemeal to make fuel for cooking the family rice. The novelist has not put many words in her mouth and there is little verbal exchange between the husband and the wife from which we could make conjectures. But her silence seems to be more expressive and meaningful. Her hatred and disgust seem to be too deep for words. Thus a good many years' convent education and cultivation of European values could not bring about an effective change in the basic nature of the native girl.

The husband and the wife got totally alienated from each other because of the enormous cultural gap between them. One could not respond spontaneously and sympathetically to the other's most natural needs.
one could not appreciate the other's point of view. The rift between them kept on widening until they got totally estranged. Almayer sought solace in the dream of Lingard's nebulous 'mountain of gold' and Mrs. Almayer removed herself to the cottage made for her where she spent her days in tantrums and intrigued with Lakamba and Babaltchi.

The birth of their daughter Nina did not bring any welcome change in their relation. The character of Nina is important inasmuch as through her Conrad has tried to show us the acute identity crisis and traumatic disorientation of half-caste children. We find Nina oscillating between the mores of the East and the West. She is scarcely able to identify herself with any set of values. In her predicament is dramatised the plight of whole generations of rootless children in all the erstwhile and present colonies. The events of her life -- her miserable interlude in the convent at Singapore, the relation of mutual hatred and disgust between her father and mother at home, her longing for dignity and finally her idyllic romance with the native prince Dain Maroola show the interplay of the two cultural strands in her make-up and the final triumph of the native elements in her inherited from her mother.
over the elements of debased western culture symbolised by her father.

Lingard arranged for Nina to stay at Singapore with the Vincks. There she was admitted to the school meant for European children. But the treatment meted out to her at Singapore was not at all congenial to a healthy development of her mind. She had to put up with all sorts of insults and indignities that were laid at her door because of her being a 'half-caste'. The supposedly liberal whites refused to take her into their fold. Nina soon realised that it was her unhappy lot to carry on the disgraceful stigma of her birth throughout her life. Referring to this time, she pointed out to her father on a later occasion that he himself was quite indifferent to her agony:

"You never asked me", she says, "and I thought you were like the others and did not care. I bore the memory of my humiliation alone, and why should I tell you that it came to me because I am your daughter."{12}

Even her own teachers used to remind her of her disgraceful origin on every occasion. Mrs. Vincks, too, lost no chance to humiliate her on this score. Nina was living in a society where there was none she could

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{12} *Almayer's Folly*, p.190.
call her own. Everyone she met despised and looked down upon her. Her dilemma and her father's blindness to the unpleasant reality is brought home to us by Mr. Ford, the captain when he tries to make Almayer see reason with these words:

"She was never happy over there. Those two Vinck girls are no better than dressed-up monkeys. They slighted her. You can't make her white."

This fact is further illuminated by the remarks of the Dutch officers visiting Almayer. They were enchanted by Nina's unexpected beauty, but could not forget her real status in their eyes: "She was beautiful and imposing" the young sub-lieutenant reflected, "but after all a half-caste girl."

Almayer displays a singular lack of understanding of Nina's predicament. He dreamt of taking her off to Europe and marry her off to some white youngman. He did not realise that Nina would not be accepted as an equal in the European society. Conrad's attitude towards Almayer is ironical all through. His criticism of Almayer's racism is implicit in the very portrayal of Almayer's Folly, p.31.

Ibid., p.126.
of Almayer as a dreamer and coward. He cowered before the solemn figure of Nina when she came back from Singapore. He vaguely expected her to give some reason for her unexpected arrival, but did not have the courage to ask her. Nina did not so much as allude to her life at Singapore. The memory was too galling to be recalled. Later in life when Almayer, in a moment of disappointment, asked her if she had forgotten the teachings of so many years, she gave an outburst of her real feelings:

"No", she interrupted. "I remember how it ended also. Scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate for hate..."

Conrad's dramatisation of Nina's tensions is very effective and convincing. The racial discrimination faced at the convent totally undermined her balance of mind. During the first few days after her return, it seemed to her that she would die out of despair and disappointment. But gradually she overcame this feeling of inertia and adjusted to her conditions wonderfully, so much so that after six months it appeared to her that she had known no other life. Almayer saw that she had submitted to her life at home with exemplary patience and passivity. But it was not

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15 *Almayer's Folly*, pp.178-79.
a willing or total submission. Nina had been weighing the different factors that would determine the course of her future life. By then she had had enough acquaintance with both the worlds — the world of her father and that of her mother. She had sufficient knowledge of both the worlds to condemn one as inferior and accept the other as superior. She found the Europeans and the natives equally endowed with virtues and vices. The common motivations of love and hate and sordid greed were at work everywhere:

It seemed to Nina that there was no change and no difference. Whether they traded in brick godown or on the muddy river bank; whether they made love under the shadows of the great trees or in the shadow of Cathedral on the Singapore promenade; whether they plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and unrestrained fierceness of nature as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same manifestation of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shades.  

The acuity of Nina's perception is borne out by the narrative. However, mercenary greed has been shown to be a particularly western vice. Most of the white

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16 Almayer's Folly, p.43.
Most of the white men in the novel are clearly in pursuit of material ends. Lingard, though benevolent, is an exalted pirate and loves to acquire and spend on a grand scale. He lures both Almayer and Willems with money. The Dutch presence in the region (including that of Almayer) and their rivalry with the English for political supremacy is directed towards economic exploitation of the natives. The society represented by Almayer's family in Java and the Vincks at Singapore is that of bourgeois commercialism. In analysing Nina's thoughts the author fully brings out the bitter joke only hinted at in the 'Author's Note'. As John A. McClure points out: "It is not only that the Malays are far more civilised than they first appear to European eyes but that the Europeans themselves are far less so than they believe."  

After a long period of indecision and oscillation, Nina finally began to feel more drawn towards her mother. She could perceive that her mother's people (the Malays) were not, at least, hypocritical. In comparison with the Europeans, they are less given to disguising their motives with "sleek hypocrisy.

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... polite disguises, ... virtuous pretences."\(^\text{18}\)

Listening with 'open-mouthed wonder' to the glories of her forefathers where men of her race shone far above the Orang Blanda, she saw "with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality, in which good-meaning people had warped her soul, fall away"\(^\text{19}\)

and during those moments she could identify herself totally with her mother. During this climactic period, Almayer could not provide her with any emotional sustenance. Nina felt cheated so far as her father was concerned. As regards Almayer, he loved Nina most, but in his own way. His fabulous dreams of parading her beauty throughout Europe sustained him through severe disappointments and setbacks. It is another matter that in his obsession with his superior origin and money, he did not realise the fact that he loved Nina more as a projection of himself than as a human being with her own individual feelings and thoughts. As a matter of fact, Almayer's colonial upbringing is responsible for his gross confusion of values and his failure to appreciate the cultural displacement from which Nina suffers.

Thus Nina's alienation from her father was very

\(^{18}\) *Almayer's Folly*, p.43.

p Painstaking and gradual. And alienation from her father symbolised estrangement from the white people and their values which her father swore to live by. The callousness and hatred of the Europeans drove Nina further and further from their world. She had found out to her cost that the 'civilised' values of her father's people were mere pretensions and that with all her accomplishments and beauty, she would always be looked down upon by them.

Nina's abandonment of western culture was final when Dain Maroola, the ideal Malay prince of her mother's tradition, appeared on the scene. A man totally untramelled by any influence of civilised self-discipline, Dain's words opened up to her a whole treasure of love and sympathy to which she had been a stranger so far. Here was one (Nina thought) who had no contempt for her half-caste origin and who was ready to accept her as an equal and on her own merit. A prince himself, Dain loved Nina for herself and not for money as Almayer did his wife.

In his treatment of Dain, Conrad seems to suggest implicitly that the Malay's traditional pre-colonial culture was superior in important respects to that of modern western civilisation. Before Nina met Dain,
her view of both Malay and European societies was dominated by a perception of egotism, hatred and greed. But Dain, with his simplicity and dignity demonstrates to her that traditional Malay societies, unlike the colonial societies that had replaced them almost everywhere, also cultivated generosity, love and courage. The prince of the royal family in Bali, Dain came to Sambir seeking gunpowder to repel European incursions and met Nina at Almayer's house. It was more or less love at first sight. In courting Nina, Dain shows all the chivalry and 'open-handed generosity' of his race. It is significant that there is no counterpart of Dain Maroola in the European society in Almayer's Folly. Tom Lingard, though towering far above others in courage and enterprise, is essentially an egoist. He is acquisitive and rootless. In the end he just disappears 'swallowed up' by Europe. Thus Dain is pitted against Almayer in a comparatively uneven contest for Nina's heart. The result was fairly evident right from the beginning.

When Almayer finally realised that Nina was abandoning him, he tries to hold her back by any means. But Nina could not be shaken out of her resolution. The memory of the past years was too bitter to be forgotten so quickly: "You ask me why I want to go and
I ask you why I should stay?" she asked her father. She also reacted sharply to the word 'savage' applied by her father to Daln and pointed out: "You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife?" Almayer could not give her a straightforward answer.

The fault with Almayer lay in the fact that he could never get over his obsession with 'white' superiority and the dream of unearned wealth. In his complacency he took it for granted that he and his daughter belonged to a superior race and culture and that the natives, not excepting his wife, who belonged to an inferior race and had no culture at all, just did not matter. When the truth finally dawned on him, it was too late. The shock that Nina for whom he dreamt all those dreams was ready to abandon him for a native was too much for him and broke him down completely. It is also significant that Almayer's immediate thought was not of personal tragedy but that of social disgrace:

"I am a white man, and of good family, very good family," he repeated weeping bitterly. "It would be a disgrace ... all over the island... the only white man on the coast. No, white men seeing my daughter with this Malay. My daughter." But Nina was impervious to all persuasions. She had

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20 *Almayer's Folly*, p. 179.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
got the glimpses of a new life and nothing was going to hold her back. She had realised through suffering the truth about the Europeans and the natives and could no longer be deceived.

By his treatment of Nina and Dain Maroola, Conrad demolishes the myth of imperial ideology more strongly than the 'Author's Note' suggested. Nina is bitterly critical not only of the racism inherent in most Europeans, but their acquisitiveness and mercenary motives as well. "You were speaking of gold then" she reminds Almayer, "but our ears were filled with the song of our love."23 John A. McClure24 rightly points out that Almayer's dreams are those of his cash-nexus society and that Dain's more human preoccupations make him and the culture he represents seem superior. The relative incorruptibleness of Dain's traditional Malay character, in contrast to the characters of colonised Malays, suggests that the contact with Europeans, far from improving them, has made them corrupt. This fact has been suggested more than once in the novel. Mrs. Almayer reproaches Babalatchi for inaction in the face of aggression with these words: "Men with arms by their sides acted otherwise when I was young", and

23 Almayer's Folly, p.179.
Babalatchi’s retort was: “And where are they, the men of your youth? ... killed by the Dutch.” The suggestion here is quite explicit. The European deprivations destroyed the Malay’s traditional qualities of heroism and bravery. The new political situation calls for hypocrisy and craftiness. Free from the shackles of European domination, the native kingdom of Bali had been prospering. Nina is happy with her husband and child and her happiness confirms the wisdom of her choice.

It must, however, be pointed out that Conrad does not romanticise the native culture. The least impressive aspects of Malay culture is represented by Lakamba much as Almayer represents the disreputable aspects of western culture. Lakamba is a former warrior-adventurer who had come to power through a series of crime, intrigue and accident. As we find in the novel, he is unscrupulous, predatory and indolent. The Rajah is now old, but ever willing to intrigue through his minister Babalatchi. Further, the native society in Almayer’s Folly also demonstrates mercenary attitudes. On two occasions Nina had been the subject for potential transactions, first when

25 Almayer’s Folly, p.154.
Abdullah offers Almayer three thousand dollars to purchase her as a wife for Reshid and again when Dain had to pay Mrs. Almayer a small fortune to marry her daughter.

An Outcast of the Islands is written as an inverse sequel or pre-history to Almayer's Folly. It takes us back twenty years when Almayer was still young and his daughter Nina quite a child. It also dramatises the phenomenon of racial incompatibility, the gulf that separates cultures and the individual from his native community. Its world is, again, Sambir, peopled by virtually the same cast of Malayans, Arabs and Europeans. The atmosphere is grim and sombre. The story may conveniently be summarised as follows: Peter Willems, a Dutch youngster who has jumped his ship, is befriended by Tom Lingard, who eventually places him as a clerk with the firm of Hudig and Company. Willems unscrupulously prospers, but is caught allocating company funds towards covering his own speculations and fired. Rejected by his native wife Joana (who is, unknown to Willems, Hudig's illegitimate daughter), he decides to commit suicide, but is once again rescued by Lingard.

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26 Almayer's Folly, p. 45.
who takes him to Sambir to stay with Almayer. Despised by Almayer (who has his own interest to protect), Willems disconsolately takes to wandering in the jungle. On one of these walks, he meets the Arab girl Aissa, for whom he develops an overwhelming passion which is exploited by Babalatchi and Lakumba. They compel Willems to guide the ship of Lingard's rival Abdullah up an entrance to the Pantai, known only to Lingard and in a state of total drunkenness reveals his enormous supply of gutta and rattan.

Willems's relation with the family of his first wife Joana is symptomatic of the way colour-prejudices determined the social behaviour of people. Willems's feeling of inferiority in regard to the 'pure' Europeans and the compensations he derives from the colonial situation are made explicit enough by his relationship with his wife's dark-skinned relatives, the Da Souzas:

That family's admiration was the great luxury of his life. It rounded and completed his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestionable superiority. He loved to breathe the coarse incense they offered before the shrine of the successful white man.  

It is, however, from Chapter V onwards that the racial

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tensions get intensified. The relationship between Willems and Aissa is a complex one. It is a relation between a European and a Malayan without experience of western culture and civilisation. The extended development of this relationship between two people divergent in racial origins and cultural experiences brings into focus the differences in temperament that makes for incompatibility. Unlike the love of Nina and Dain Maroola, their love is associated with death and decay. Aissa and Willems are irresistibly drawn to each other, yet they have no shared experience, no commonly shared values on which they could build up a lasting relationship. Willems, no doubt, is appealing as a figure from exotic romance - the European enslaved by the 'seductive' native woman. But his love for Aissa could not transcend the barriers of culture, the obstacles that arose because of a lack of communication and understanding of each other's society and ethos.

Willems is acutely aware of his degeneration and demoralisation. He, "a white man, the admired of white men, was held by those miserable savages whose fool he was about to become."29 He served the cause of Babalatchi and Abdullah not because he had any affection or admiration for them; he felt for them all.

29 An Outcast of the Islands, p.126.
the hate of his race, of his morality, of his intelligence. He knew very well that he was going to be made the victim of political expediency. He also knew that his act would amount to a betrayal to his white father, Lingard, and benefit the Arabs. But he could not help it. The more he served them, the more was his loathing and indignation against them:

He was carried away by the flood of hate, disgust and contempt of a white man for that blood which is not his blood, for that race which is not his race; for the brown skins, for the hearts false like the sea, blacker than the night.

Willems here seems to voice an attitude typical of most Europeans who regarded the natives and everything pertaining to native life as 'black' and 'treacherous'. Between him and the natives there was a gulf - deep and unbridgeable. He needed Aissa badly. Without her, he thought, there would be no life for him. But he wanted her away from her despicable people. He loved her but hated the race she sprang from.

Later on Willems's feelings towards Aissa change considerably. Civilisation and barbarism struggled within Willems and when he woke up from his

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30 *An Outcast of the Islands*, p.152.
hallucination, he began to realise what a mess he had made with himself. He looks upon himself with dismay and pity. "A savage woman!", Willems's conscience is too sensitive for that; and "yet he perceived that he could think of nothing else but of the three days of their separation, of the few hours since their reunion."31 That was Willems's dilemma. He could neither extricate himself from Aissa, nor could he identify himself in anyway with her. Gradually the irreconcilable nature of their relation is borne in on him. His maddening fascination for her fades gradually and he nostalgically remembers his own people:

Instead of thinking of her caresses, instead of forgetting all the world in her embrace, he was thinking yet of his people; of that people that steals every land, masters every sea, that knows no mercy and no truth - 32 knows nothing but its own strength.

He makes a fervent appeal to Lingard to take him away from 'that woman'(Aissa), to save him from the quagmire of betrayal, sloth and slavery. Inspite of his claim that he has "no colour prejudices and no racial antipathies",33 he regards his "love" as

31 An Outcast of the Islands, p.126.
32 Ibid., p.153.
33 Ibid., p.35.
"surrendering to a wild creature the sustained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilisation."\(^{34}\)

On almost all occasions of mutual encounter between Willems and Aissa, the author highlights the fact of racial incompatibility. They differ from each other radically in their sense of propriety, in their sense of right and wrong with regard to social norms. Aissa thought the love of the western people which Willems taught her was of the Devil. She detested European women because they were 'shameless' and had 'fierce eyes'. Willems got angry with her when "she beat her breast, and tore her hair and mourned with shrill cries as a woman should"\(^{35}\) at her father's death. This was obviously not his (Willems's) idea of mourning. When Babalatchi came to visit them, Aissa transformed herself to what Willems thought "an animated package of cheap cotton goods"\(^{36}\) as was the custom among native women, though he expressly forbade her doing so. In these moments we find Willems reflecting upon Aissa's disobedience and its possible repercussions in future. It occurred to him that she would never change. He wondered whether his ideas themselves would ever change so as to agree with her own notions.

\(^{34}\) An Outcast of the Islands, p.80.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p.228.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., p.128.
of what was becoming, proper and respectable. The novelist highlights their immense diversity in the following way:

This manifestation of her sense of proprieties was another sign of their hopeless diversity; something like another step downwards for him. She was too different from him. He was so civilised! It struck him suddenly that they had nothing in common - not a feeling.\(^{37}\)

Among the native characters, Aissa and Babalatchi are eloquent in their criticism of the Europeans. Aissa vividly remembers the scene when her father's band of pirates was wiped out by the European sailors: "It was an unequal and unfair encounter. They dropped whistling fireballs into the creek."\(^{38}\) The encounter was 'unequal' and 'unfair' because the Europeans were equipped with firearms and stormed Omar's (Aissa's father) boats carrying his bands who were armed with traditional weapons. In Aissa's eyes, it is the Europeans who are savages and Europe itself is "a land of lies and evils from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us -- who are not white."\(^{39}\) This sharply contrasts with Lincard's idea of the natives in need of a benevolent father, like him. Aissa's remark

\(^{37}\) An Outcast of the Islands, p.128.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., p.46.
\(^{39}\) Ibid., p.144.
certainly proves true in her own case and illuminates the whole imperial situation — the hypocrisy of the Europeans that was a hurdle in the way of establishing meaningful communication. Lingard and his sailors rendered her homeless; Willems deceived her (he concealed the fact that he was married and had children), alienated her from her father and finally denounced her with revulsion and left her in a condition of utter loneliness. Each time Aissa speaks on this — and she speaks on at least four occasions in the novel, her voice rings true. She tries to bridge the distance with love but fails miserably, and in the end, "hate filled the world, filled the space between them — the hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity, the hate of blood." The edifice of love falls apart and disintegration sets in.

Among the critics of European political domination, Babalatchi is the most perspicuous. Omar's death made his real feelings well out of his heart. He has all along worn the mask of deference to the Europeans but now he faces Lingard on equal footing. When Lingard self-righteously provides justification for his long opposition to Babalatchi's ambition,

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40 An Outcast of the Islands, p.359.
Babalatchi makes a clean breast of his feelings:

"This is a white man's talk" exclaimed Babalatchi with bitter exultation. "I know you. That is how you talk while you load your swords; and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say - obey me and be happy, or die! You are strange, you white man. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true."  

Thus Babalatchi explodes Lingard's fraternal pose in no time. He puts his finger on the correct spot when he dismisses Lingard's fraternal pose as a stalking horse behind which the imperialist musters support and strength for the onslaught that will establish him in the only role that he craves for himself i.e. the role of a paternal despot.

Babalatchi, through his long experience and vicissitudes of life, has arrived at a vantage point from which he can make a dispassionate assessment of the Europeans. He accuses them not only of deception but of wilful blindness or self-deception as well. Secure in their idea of white superiority, they regarded themselves as philanthropists working for the enlightenment of the native communities while in reality they were inflicting irreparable damage on those

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41 An Outcast of the Islands, p.226.
societies. All Lingard's action in Sambir, though ostensibly altruistic, demonstrate his love of power and domination. He congratulates himself on the score of protecting Sambir from predatory incursions, but this is not true. He does it only to keep his monopoly of domination intact. When Lingard points out that Babalatchi has merely traded one white power, himself, for another, the Dutch rulers at Batavia, Babalatchi's retort is full of his political wisdom:

The partner away is the master, the easier it is for the slave, Tuan! You were too near. Your voice rang in our ear always. Now it is not going to be so.\(^4^2\)

Conrad's appreciation of this kind of triumph becomes significant when we remember the domination of Poland by a power situated far away in Kremlin.

Thus in the first two novels, Conrad highlights the divergence in the cultures of the East and the West. As life frames they are different and in the end incompatible. Both the Malayan and European life have been treated under different aspects, though with different degrees of intensity. All attempts at reconciliation or symbiosis resulted in something unhappy and even disastrous. The intermixing may be healthy, but only to a certain point; when that point

\(^{42}\) An Outcast of the Islands, p.226.
is reached, disintegration creeps in. However, in their very nature, Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands are Conrad's juvenalia. The social, cultural and political implications in these works have a spirit of tentativeness that defies categorisation. On the one hand, we find that Conrad takes recourse to the racial stereotypes supplied by the genre of colonial adventure romance and presents the east as exotic, brooding and evil. On the other, we find that Conrad's juxtaposition of the two sets of values and the mixed response it evokes do not follow a uniform pattern. The individuals and the codes they live by are so different from one another as to make any generalisation ill-conceived and erroneous. Like the political ambivalence of some of his major works, the racial and cultural dualism of the early novels is much more complex than it appears at the first sight. Conrad has as much praise for the good and human qualities of the Europeans as for those of the natives. Again, when it comes to exposure, Conrad unmasks the 'civilised' pretences of the Europeans with as much vehemence as when his tone while describing the vices of the native people is acerbatic. His portrayal of characters and ways of life -- European and Malayan, bears ample testimony to this fact.