CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION:

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As a novelist, Conrad has concentrated his attention mainly on man. And, as we have seen, he has consciously placed man amidst strange and challenging situations: social, political, domestic and natural. This is a part of his device to reflect the multi-dimensional aspects of life. In a letter to Warrington Dawson, Conrad says: "... I don't believe in the oneness of life. I believe in its infinite variety." (20 June 1913). To Conrad life does not stand for one single connotation; it means multitudinous experiences of different types. It involves complexities, uncertainties, doubts and transgressions of set values at regular intervals. But, in Conrad, behind these tortuous events, there is the unmistakable human note - the idea that these events are designs for highlighting man. To Conrad the "infinite variety" of life rotates round human nature and each aspect of "life" has a direct bearing on human nature.

Conrad's fiction, more often than not, is centred on out-of-the-ordinary situation. The situation is either an exotic seascape or a jungle or one of extreme political chaos and
revolutions. Conrad used the sea and the jungle and the topsy-turvy political situation because, first of all, he had acquired direct knowledge of most of them and secondly, each of them freely offered opportunities for studying human beings in extreme situations. To be sure, these situations in themselves had nothing to offer to his readers, but the thrust of the characters amid such situations brought the desired catalytic effect. We may recapitulate Richard Curle's observation:

... in all his stories he was concerned deeply with only one thing --- human nature. Everything else was the mere setting, valuable mainly in so far as it heightened the drama of passions, hopes, and fears which are the common heritage of mankind. 2

Conrad was too conscious an artist to exploit only the grotesqueness or the unusualness of a situation. As he treated the exotic and extra ordinary settings, they became positive devices to heighten the drama of passions, hopes and fears which take place regularly in the human mind. Conrad's centre of focus, thus, is on the human mind.

When he turned aside from the sea and the jungle, he still needed extreme situations of a kind not easily found in Pre-1914 Europe. So he had to shift his canvas to Russia and explore the violent revolutionaries as he did in Under Western
Eyes and The Secret Agent or to the jungle of shady finance as in Chance. The chaotic disarray in private and public life that was seen in South America while attempting new capitalistic state-formations in a multi-ethnic backward region is reflected in Nostromo. The out-of-the-way situations provide Conrad with a vantage-point to observe human souls in extremity, interacting with the outer world. The world outside, the material reality, comes within his analytical focus, as it constitutes the peculiar bias in human responses. We must not forget this importance of man's immediate surroundings since Conrad's friends repeatedly emphasize Conrad's exclusive concern with human souls. There is Grace Willard with her comments on Conrad:

Paradoxically, Conrad was an indoor man. No one ever saw him take any exercise. Did he pace the ship in the old days as sailors are thought to do? He never walked in the garden. It was a lovely garden, too; old, square, with much ancient box and plums ripening on rose-brick walls. I doubt if he cared for 'nature'. He disliked flowers in the house. The human comedy, observed as an analyst, interested him; the drama of souls. And that was almost all."

Grace Willard is right in her observation that 'the drama of souls' is Conrad's principal concern; but the world outside
had also received equal attention as it helped him crystallize his vision of this inner drama. The singularity of the background in Conrad's fiction cannot be abstracted away as it is relevant in bringing to focus the inner drama or in putting a frame round his peculiar insight.

And that is the justification in interpreting Conrad's novels as a critique of colonialism despite the emphasis on man as Conrad's principal subject. In my study, by emphasizing Conrad's focus on man, I have not tried to minimize Conrad's concern regarding the evils of colonialism as colonialism is not simply a political or economic setting, but, it makes a deep dint in the human psyche. Conrad, I have tried to show, had a deeper aim: to show the impact of colonial domination on the human psyche, both on those who wield power as well as on those who are victims of that domination. In Conrad's novels, colonialism was not just a "mere setting" as suggested by Richard Curle, on the contrary, it was an inseparable socio-political and moral situation that entraps man. As we have referred earlier to Conrad's own experiences of suffering under colonialism, it was a glaring reality for him to be easily ignored. His novels display how the colonial framework subverts the psychology and the morale of man, of both the white man and the non-white natives. By portraying the perversion in the psyche of the white man, Conrad has subjected to ironic
reflection the civilizing mission of colonialism which grants unlimited freedom to the colonial ruler, only to destroy him. While turning to the natives, he has found that a crippled and stunted psychological growth, an irrational fear of the white man as a supernatural being and a violent mistrust of men in general are the effects which colonialism generates on the minds of the colonized. Conrad assessed colonialism thus in a moral perspective and hence he was interested in raising philosophic questions inherent in the imperial experience.

Conrad’s reservations on the vaunted claims of civilizing mission of colonialism are grounded in his scepticism. Conrad was contemptuous of the contemporary socio-economic idea that material interests are all supreme, as this often leads one to make a mismatch of economic and moral issues. This vision of Conrad makes him sceptical about the claims of human progress in the contemporary society. In a letter to Garnett, he says frankly: "... where is the thing, institution or principle which I do not doubt?" (8 March, 1895). He was too conscious about human proclivity towards degeneration. At times he seems too harsh on man: "... a man is nothing if not perverse", he wrote in another letter to Garnett on 15 March, 1895. In a letter to H.G. Wells he wanted to affirm his difference from him in the following manner: "You don’t care for humanity but think they are to be improved. I love humanity but know they
are not!" This is the paradox of Conradian vision - his sympathy is with the imperfection of man and he engages his efforts in chalking out a heroic cause of unsuccess in a political situation (i.e. colonialism), which he puts under sharp analytical focus.

One principal demerit which Conrad identifies in colonialism is the wrong criterion which it offers to judge human worth. To Conrad, in a colonial milieu, claims to superiority are ridden with false assumptions of racial privilege. Thus the idea that the white group of people as a so-called superior race has any inherent right for dominance over the non-white groups is essentially morally unsound and ultimately it leads to disastrous results. Ian Watt is right in his observation on Heart of Darkness that what emerges from the fictional study is that "nothing is more dangerous than man's delusions of autonomy and omnipotence." In Ian Watt's view, Heart of Darkness advocates a commitment to human solidarity. Civilization is a thin veneer, at bottom we have more things in common with each other and we need humility rather than pride to understand that. But colonialism distracts its agents from arriving at such an insight.

It follows that Conrad was a conservative rather than a liberal in his political outlook. Zdzislaw Najder linked this
political skepticism with the tragedy of his Polish background which "made Conrad a man disinherited, lonely, and (for a Western writer of that time) exceptionally conscious of the sinister brutalities hidden behind the richly ornate facade of bourgeois political optimism." The direct experiences of "the sinister brutalities" enabled Conrad to discern the gap between political claims and the resultant practice. Naturally Conrad was led to believe that political action can improve human condition only in very minor respects. That is why his novels display an ironical attitude to the tall claims of colonialism which is basically a political strategy for domination. Both Almayer and Willems develop a racial pride and an inordinate desire for riches in conformity to the prevailing colonial ethos which leads to their disastrous ends. Notwithstanding his philanthropic zeal for the Malayan natives, Tom Lingard betrays them for the sake of an English girl. The prevailing colonial situation of isolation in the midst of an alien population strengthens the sense of solidarity among the whites and slackens their commitments to the natives when a choice has to be made. Both Jim and Kurtz could have been quite different persons had they not found themselves in the net of colonial compulsions. Charles Gould and Nostromo were destroyed by distortion of values created by the ethos generated by financial imperialism.
Another way of understanding Conrad’s critique of colonialism is to look at the universe created by colonialism and the roles women play in it. It is a common observation of all critics of Conrad that his women characters are feeble. In colonial settlements women play an inferior part. Colonialism is basically a male enterprise and male-supremacy is taken for granted. Here women stand to men in the same relationships as the natives to the colonial masters. They are for domination and sexual exploitation. There is Willems the white man about whom Mrs Vinck, his colleague’s wife, says: “I have heard he beats his wife.” (OI, p. 10) In the authorial commentary, too, there is the same suggestion of ill-treatment of his wife:

His wife! He winced inwardly. A dismal woman with startled eyes and dolorously drooping mouth, that would listen to him in pained wonder and mute stillness.... Nothing could startle her, make her scold or make her cry. She did not complain, she did not rebel. That first difference of theirs was decisive.... It had frightened the soul out of her body apparently. A dismal woman! A damn’d business altogether! (OI, p. 9)

This description obliterates the difference between a wife and a slave. Just like a slave, the wife attends her husband with ‘startled eyes’, ‘dolorously drooping mouth’ and ‘mute stillness’. This servility of the wife has originated from her
racial difference with her husband: she is a half-caste Eurasian girl and he is a white man. In a colonial situation, the master-slave relationship vitiates the psyche of a young couple with equal intensity.

It is assumed by some critics that Conrad feared women and that some of his women characters have the attributes of the failing mother or the devouring and murderous lover. But as Conrad presented his characters in the colonial environment of racial suspicion and domination, one cannot make any comment about this aspect of Conrad's fiction without taking into account the nature of imperialism. Ruth L. Nadelhaft draws our attention to this fact:

A new feminist reading of Conrad must take into account the nature of imperialism, of course, but it must also acknowledge the degree to which the women who were objectified by imperialism come to their subjectivity in the literature Conrad created around them.

When women do not have any right in society, they become just objects of lust or pity or attraction or hindrance and their subjectivity is very little taken note of. And within the colonial framework of ethnic superiority and domination, women suffer double enslavement. For women, Conrad has shown, this double enslavement becomes unbearable and hence perversion
and disorientation creep into their psyche. Mrs Almayer engaged herself to secure the love affair of her daughter, "in which she took a great and benignant interest" against the will of her husband (AF p. 79). She was instrumental behind Nina's elopement with Dain Maroola, who was, to Nina, "the ideal Malay chief of her mother's tradition.", but this act ruined Almayer wholly (AF, p. 78). But Mrs Almayer's "anger and hate" (AF p. 185) against her white husband and the white men in general and her "mercenary instincts" (AF p. 79) which found their gratification in Dain's generosity were products of the colonial scenario. To her white husband she was nothing but a "slave". This aroused her antagonism. From the pervading ethos of commercial gain, she imbibed an overwhelming desire for riches. It appears she gave away Nina to Dain in exchange for "shining guilders and Mexican dollars" (AF p. 81). In Conrad's portrayal of the family relationship of the Almayers, the perversion of the colonial ethos is fully reflected where Mrs Almayer comes out with an individual identity in her protests against her 'white' husband.

The colonial situation had brought Aissa close to the race that was already categorized in her own milieu as the one that "steals every land, masters every sea, ... knows no mercy and no truth -- knows nothing but its own strength" (OI p. 153). So her approach to marriage was one of conquest rather than of
love. Aissa was aggressively possessive and said that "She would keep him here a slave and a master; here where he was alone with her; where he must live for her or die" (OI, p. 153). That is why, when, in the end, Willems introduced Joanna, his first wife, as "My wife according to our white law, which comes from God!" (OI, p. 355), she became mad with rage at his racialist and superior air and retorted: "She is the first! Am I then to be a slave?" (OI, p. 355). The sight of Willems' child made her more angry. She violently abused him of hypocrisy: "... while your man-child and the mother lived you told me there was nothing for you to remember in the land from which you came!" (OI, p. 356). She understood that Willems believed only in one single relationship between the white man and the non-white woman, the relation of hate: "the hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity, the hate of blood..." (OI, p. 359). And she shot him like a "murderous woman".

Mrs Almayer comments bitterly on the attitude of the white colonialists: "They speak lies. And they think lies because they despise us that are better than they are, but not so strong" (AF, p. 188). She has grasped the basic problem with a remarkable acumen. The white man as a lover betrays the native woman at a deeper level and it frustrates her emotionally as well as socially. The cultural incompatibility and the consequent feeling of guilt that characterize this relationship
breed violence and inhumanity and create an antagonistic self-consciousness in the woman. Mrs Almayer's daughter Nina too understands the barrier in spite of her father's love for her. Even a legal conjugal relation cannot keep the racial antipathy at bay. So she charges her father to this effect:

"Between you and my mother there never was any love. When I returned to Sambir I found the place which I thought would be a peaceful refuge for my heart, filled with weariness and hatred-and mutual contempt. I have listened to your voice and to her voice. Then I saw that you could not understand me; for was I not part of that woman? Of her who was the regret and shame of your life?" (AF, p. 239)

As a half-caste child, Nina has understood her precarious position in the colonial society and she vehemently protests against this type of inequity in the system. We have noticed that in Aissa's view too, white men and their land are embodiments of falsehood and oppression. White men are "born in the land of violence and of evil wherefrom nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white" (OI, p. 153). Aissa's estimate of the colonial white men is strikingly similar to that of Mrs Almayer and mutatis mutandis this is the response of the enslaved races to their colonial masters. What they see in these men is their superior power, their strength, and feel that only
for this superior strength, their word will be laws. The white men have the will and others must submit to their ways.

Jewel in *Lord Jim* too has her grievance against the white colonialists. Like Nina, she is also a witness to her mother’s desertion by her father. Her mother was a Dutch-Malay girl and her father was a white man. The intimate relation which did not materialize into marriage gave birth to Jewel. Later on the white man was forced by circumstances to leave Jewel’s mother. When Jim promised to marry her and be with her for ever she was incredulous. As Marlow says,

> What notions she may have formed of the outside world is to me inconceivable: all that she knew of its inhabitants were a betrayed woman and a sinister pantaloon. Her lover also came to her from there, gifted with irresistible seductions; but what would become of her if he should return to the inconceivable regions that seemed always to claim back their own? Her mother had warned her of this with tears before she died. (*Jim*, p. 225).

Hence Jewel too had some reasons for complaints against white men. She was sceptical about their fidelity and attachment. Her lingering suspicion was that “They always leave us” (*Jim*, p. 227). Thus by the identical feelings of the native and half-caste women that they are inferior in the eyes of the white men, Conrad made them co-sharers of oppression in the colonial society. Through these women Conrad made his attacks
on the racialist approach of the colonialists to human relationships more stringent. He not only specified women's deplorable state, he made them vocal too against male-domination which is an essential characteristic of colonialism.

It follows that Conrad's treatment of women brings into sharp focus a grim tragedy -- the tragedy of miscegenation: the result of the relation between the native women and the white men, a natural by-product of colonial society. The dream of upward social mobility and greed for riches in the women and the urge of physical passion in the men result in such marriages against the social codes. Of course for Jim it was a more human and uncalculating relationship based on compassion and sympathy for Jewel. But still as a representative of the colonial society, the white man fails to establish a sensitive relation with the native woman. So this type of union is usually not successful. As soon as the heat of passion is slackened, the unbridgeable gap between the white and the native starts looming large. Conrad has a perfect understanding of this discomforting situation in human life. Not a single couple united across the barriers of races has been happy in Conrad's fiction. Jewel's mother, who herself was a Dutch-Malay girl, who could not achieve a happy married life with her white husband, died deploiring the alliance. Jim's love for Jewel was sincere yet she was mainly a hand-hold for him.
struggling to regain his lost honour. Jewel understood that Jim had only one interest and that was to make the white world reclaim him as "one of us". She was only a stopgap arrangement, she thought, and surely like all white men he would leave her: to her it seemed that there was "no forgiveness for such a transgression" (Jim, p. 257). Such tragic misalliances between white men and native women were common in colonial settlements. Conrad has highlighted the disastrous effect of this type of marriages on the children too. As we have seen in the case of Nina, she was not accepted in her father's society. Even Willems had "an immense distaste for those encumbrances of his life", meaning Joanna (his wife) and his child (OI, p. 25).

So far we have concentrated on the plight of the native and halfcaste women who fell into the dragnet of colonialism. But in Conrad we have a few other women characters. Among them there are at least two glaring portraits of white women who have emotionally suffered because in the colonial society, sentiments of love have no place. The obsession for material riches has repelled these women, has frustrated their desire to carry on a happy married life. Mrs Travers in The Rescue and Mrs Gould in Nostromo are the cases in point. The marriage between Mr and Mrs Travers is a mismatch, Mrs Travers being too sensitive and enlightened compared to her husband. When Lingard, the busy British colonialist, wondered at the loyalty of Mrs
Travers to her husband notwithstanding their temperamental difference, she gave him an ironic answer: "You ask... Ah!" She cried. "Don't you see that I have no kingdoms to conquer?" (Res, p.181). She had no choice except concentrating on her family duties. She had no role to play in the male-dominated world of colonial settlements. For women, no matter how cultured they are, there remain only the hackneyed household chores and supervision of their family. The lamentation of Mrs Travers is almost echoed in the authorial comment in Nostromo: "Mrs Gould had no silver mine to look after" (Nos, p. 149). While Charles Gould was obsessed with the silver mine which engaged him almost as a "fetish" worship, Mrs Gould stayed away only as an onlooker. Her husband identified himself with the economic ends of life and the wife became redundant in the world of financial and political manipulation. Thus by relegating women to a corner, colonialism creates a partial world, where arteries of human feelings are hardened.

In his fiction Conrad subjects the actual relationship between the individual and society to deep scrutiny. Evidently he decries man's uncritical surrender to arbitrary dictates of society. His three remarkable political novels, Nostromo, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes almost prophetically analyse the twentieth-century dominant political forces like financial imperialism, anarchism and the propensity for fanatical po-
political action. These works reflect Conrad's disillusionment with contemporary politics and his commitment to traditional Western humanism. He shows the folly of committing one's self to political ideals at the expense of human sentiments and private relationships. In these three novels Conrad appears to show that political movements including colonialism are often led by people who are less motivated by ideals than by unacknowledged psychological needs. Hence the relationship between man and society becomes problematic. Though Conrad considers man to be a social animal, yet he finds him rather as a self-propelling individual. The observation of David H. Stewart is useful in discussing this aspect of Conrad's presentation of characters in his novels:

If we have a quarrel with Conrad, it is because he was too typically modern, an early displaced person who adopted the peculiarly modern instrumental view of society. His psychological, interiorizing tendency agreed perfectly with the scientific reductionism of the twentieth century that provides individuals a spurious freedom by treating them as random atoms cogitating in a void.¹²

What Stewart seems to say is that Conrad's characters tend to retreat into themselves and enjoy "a spurious freedom" which instead of fulfilling their instinctive needs, leads to their distraction and disintegration. Perhaps what Stewart wanted to point out is that in Conrad's fiction characters are determined
by forces which they do not fully understand or understand too late. So the individuals seem like "random atoms cogitating in a void"—though the void is inhabited by forces beyond their control. So Conrad's approach seems to be existential though it is essentially moral. Conrad has never isolated man from his socio-political environment. The individual case-histories of Conrad's characters are all framed within the socio-political parameters. The disoriented ideologies and the psychic disintegrations of man disturb Conrad since they pose serious threats to the solidarity of human society. Hence the existential analysis is mastered by his moral vision.

The colonial figures in the universe of Conrad's fiction assemble from different countries of the Western World. Tom Lingard, Jim, Sir John and Charles Gould are British. Almayer and Willems are Dutch. Kurtz has a cosmopolitan origin. Holroyd is American. Nostromo, the blind tool of imperialist masters, is Italian. In addition to this there are concrete marks of Belgian colonialism in Heart of Darkness. There are unmistakable shades of differences among the groups he assembled, owing to their different cultural and genetic background. Those who have come from liberal countries like England, have a vestige of humanitarianism in them though the character of Sir John is a notable exception. But, for others, it is usually downright rapaciousness. Here one should note that Conrad never places
the characters in a straight-forward way. His narrative style reflects his characters through a haze showing them at second and third hand through the eyes of others. These reflectors each have their idiosyncratic insight, and blindness and thus the reader never sees the characters at their integral clarity. Hence there is scope for different readings of his characters, even when he does not want to discriminate them categorically.

In the Malay novels which are his earliest creations (except the Rescue), Conrad does not employ any roundabout technique of presentation. Here the story moves spontaneously. It is narrated through the voice of the omniscient author. Lingard is British and in his character a veiled ego-centred mode of colonialism is noticeable. Sooyoung Chon in her review of Heliena Krenn's book, Conrad's Lingard Trilogy; Empire, Race, and Woman in the Malay Novels, mentions Ms Krenn's reading of Lingard's role in the South-Eastern imbroglio:

Conrad's exploration of the problems of colonial Southeast Asia finds Lingard at the center and origin of the futile adventures and moral inadequacies of Almayer, Willems, and the characters in The Rescue. As a patron and manipulator of the fortune hunters and a maker of unfortunate matches based on material interest, Lingard's 'many virtues and benevolent appearance' are seen as masking self-interest and 'his ambitions' as betraying 'the same desire for power, influence, and gain that on a large scale has
resulted in the contention of European nations for overseas territories'. Taking Lingard as 'a proof of Conrad's belief in a viable form of colonialism' may sound plausible when he is compared with his morally inferior protégés Almayer and Willems respectively. The intertextual reading, however, brings out a Lingard whose loyalty vacillates between Europeans and his Malay friends and who ultimately betrays the expectation of the latter when he is forced to choose between the two. Even the most benevolent looking colonial relationship proves to be morally treacherous. 13

What this observation makes clear is that Lingard at his best is not like other rapacious colonialists. He has some sort of responsibility and commitment towards the natives. But when there is a conflict between the native interest and the interest of the white community or, for that matter, the broad colonial interest, he knows which side to back. Beneath his humanistic veneer he evidently has the same self-centred outlook with which colonialism unperturbably looks for the solidarity of the white men even if it means betrayal of human trust and amounts to moral treachery.

Among the British colonialists, Jim represents the most innocuous altruistic idealism. To quote Ian Watt: "Jim does something which no other hero of a great twentieth century novel has done: he dies for his honour" 14. It is idealism because it espouses honour and it is altruistic because he laid
down his life for the island of his adoption. Though Jim's "exalted egoism" urges him to be a "conqueror of fame" (*Jim*, p. 306), yet, despite its narcissistic overtones, Jim's death is still a sacrifice. Of all British colonial characters, perhaps he is the most transparent and hence lovable. The climate of colonial cynicism regarding human worth made him make gross mistakes at the beginning of his career but he atoned for it through humiliation and suffering and eventually laid down his life for the native life lost through his miscalculation.

Though chiefly a puppet in the hands of the financiers, initially Charles Gould devoted his life to the mine, not just for money but for his filial commitment to redeem his father's failure. In addition to that, when he had a chance to influence politics directly, he chose to support progressive liberal governments as he was unknowingly becoming an agent of nascent capitalism in an anarchic state of Southern America. But, as we have suggested earlier, as a human being on moral terms Charles Gould is not totally innocent. The dream to be wealthy and materially successful cannot remain morally innocuous in such a background. Gradually with success and with his total immersion in the passion for making the silver mine prosper, his vision of life gets altered and he turns a deaf ear to ancestral promptings of the Goulds -- he becomes indifferent to family happiness and seems to harden his finer feelings towards
his idealistic and dedicated wife. So finally materialism clouds all finer instincts of humanism in Charles Gould.

In Nostromo we have also another Britisher, Sir John, who is the Chairman of the Railway company. As a blinkered business-magnet, obsessed with the promotion of his business, Sir John is ready to take any step to remove obstacles on his way. The developments in Sulaco under the impact of the growth of the silver mine have a paradigmatic appearance of the development of capitalism in a backward state. The Railways are the arteries of transport and the promotion of the Railway necessarily means spoiling the countryside. But these will have to be gone through to guarantee material prosperity. The "blind conservatism in Sulaco" will have to be confronted and the finer feelings of Mrs Gould for landscape and tranquillity will have to be ignored to achieve success. Sir John could present dramatically his dream of expansion: "... more steamers, a railway, a telegraph-cable -- a future in the great world..." (Nos, p. 36). These are the agents for the exploitation of natural resources towards capital formation and are often taken as harbingers of modern civilization. Sir John, an unctuous materialist, fully concentrated on the aims of achieving prosperity. He represents perfectly the masked face of colonialism with promises of civilized gifts through trade-expansion.
It appears that Conrad often specifies the difference between British and other white colonialists by highlighting British dedication to work. Lingard, Jim, Gould and Sir John—all of them suffer from megalomania, but this is partially redeemed by their dedication. Though they are proud of their white superiority at heart, they have not shown crude ethnic hatred, and they always preserved self-possession. Lingard controlled the empire of the Malay islands, Jim had his Patusan, Gould reactivated a dead world into new life through his hard work in the mine and Sir John, though an avowed materialist, made positive contribution to his own projects in a dark corner of the universe. Compared to them, the two Dutch characters, Almayer and Willems, bungled their lives as well as the lives of others who came under their domination as they lost their ethical moorings too early. Awkwardly they brandished their identity based only on their assumed sense of ethnic superiority without affirming them through action or dedication. In the Malay islands both of them dissolve as non-entities, doing little either to promote business proper or to make any impact as civilizing agents. They have imbibed the colonial pride and the greed for material wealth. But having no cultural foundation inside, no ethical self-possession, they failed to achieve anything. The only impression readers receive of them is that they are moral weaklings, unfit to work in any respectful
capacity. Holroyd, the financial magnet in Nostromo, is an American but Conrad seems to underline that his lineage was German, Scotch and English, with remote strains of Danish and French blood, which gave him the "temperament of a Puritan and an insatiable imagination of conquest" (Nos, p. 76). He was undoubtedly a successful business magnet. He was energetic and industrious, operating invisibly from a distance. But being an American, he also represented that ruthless thrust for success which one associates with the world of American business. With intensity and determination and frank affirmation of business ethic he pushed Gould ahead in order to achieve optimum profit from the mine. Holroyd, from his Puritan lineage assumed that God's blessings were with him, and, in business-like dealings he made God a sharer of his profits by increasing his donation to the church.

We cannot, however, generalize by saying that Conrad always presented colonialism with English background more favourably. Kurtz expresses much devilry despite his English background. Kurtz was educated partly in England and his mother was half-English. In addition to that, he had a cosmopolitan origin: "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz"; the authorial comment affirms (HD, p. 144). Still he remained "hollow at the core" (HD, p. 160). Conrad's suggestion may be that none can completely transcend the colonial environment.
Conrad draws attention to the different colonial groups to highlight how things aggravate in the colonies due to lack of cultural restraint among the protagonists and because of envy, jealousy or self-centredness or money-grabbing that vitiate human relationships. This is a regular occurrence everywhere. The differences, if at all are there, among the colonial groups, are mainly the differences in degree of carrying out the "loot". Perhaps Conrad wants to say that in his view colonialism is, what David Trotter would like to say, "a text without an author". None of the colonizing nations, none of the colonizing groups can claim to have given any unique characteristic to the performance of colonialism. The convenient utilization of the ideals of colonialism as a mask for exploitation is difficult to deny in most cases. Neither class background, nor education, nor national or racial origin can really guarantee an ideal character for a colonial ruler. The nature of colonial supremacy being one of illegitimacy and usurpation -- some stain in the soul is inevitable.

Now the question arises as to Conrad's attitude toward dismantling of colonialism. Does he consider this aspect in his various presentations of the colonial panorama? Conrad in many ways was ahead of his time in thinking candidly about colonial situations but it is not possible for anyone to transcend one's
time completely. So it is a fact that Conrad saw some aspects of colonialism favourably, though like Kurtz and Marlow he saw also the horror of it. His vision becomes ambiguous as he does not fully separate the political aspects from the moral aspects -- darkness that has to be dispelled or illuminated spans over the divide and the illuminator as well as the illuminated get embroiled in it. Edward Said makes certain relevant remarks on this point. But he seems to insist that Conrad should have seen this darkness more politically and realize that the darkness which was non-European, "was in fact a non-European world resisting imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence,...". Said further says:

Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that 'natives' could lead lives free from European domination. As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of imperialism that enslaved them. 15

I think it is fair enough to place Conrad in his times and not to imagine him as a pioneer of colonial freedom. Besides, the areas on which Conrad concentrated were the Malay Archipelago and Belgian Congo where the backwardness of socio-cultural and economic settings were extreme and Conrad rightly
highlighted the horrors of the situation - and he could legitimately have shared some of the positive aspects of colonialism as a civilizing project. A great writer expresses truth as he sees it and feels it and though we can see the limitation of it, we cannot accuse him of hypocrisy. The image of Marlow at the end of *Heart of Darkness* is perhaps emblematic of Conrad's own state of mind, he preferred to meditate like a Buddha rather than claim to have found an answer to the problem of evil in the world.

Frances B. Singh has accused Marlow of prejudice against Africans:

...as long as he associates the life of depravity with the life of blacks then he can hardly be called anti-colonial. He may sympathize with the plight of blacks, he may be disgusted by the effects of economic colonialism, but because he has no desire to understand or appreciate people of any culture other than his own, he is not emancipated from the mentality of a colonizer.

If Marlow is to be taken as Conrad here, then this view seems unjust and I feel that this incomprehension of cultures other than their own is a besetting sin of many novelists who are avowed non-colonialists. Abhorrence of primitive rituals or cultural habits across the religious and ethnic divide is a common feeling among many. Even E.M. Forster could not under-
stand the religious festivals in India though he lived with considerable intimacy and reverence with Indians. One cannot easily emancipate oneself totally from one's religious and cultural moorings.

May I now take note of another issue which is at the heart of colonial ideology that colonialism leads to progress? T.H. Huxley's famous lecture entitled "Evolution and Ethics" delivered at Oxford in 1893 gave a firm basis to this thought. Huxley says that two thousands years ago, before Caesar's arrival, the whole of Southern Britain was in "a state of nature." But Britain had greatly changed in these two thousand years after Caesar's invasion of Britain and this was possible due to the impetus received from the Roman conquest. We may contrast this view of Huxley with that of Conrad in his Heart of Darkness. At the beginning of the narrative of Heart of Darkness, we have Marlow commenting: "I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago -- the other day ... darkness was here yesterday" (HD, pp. 58-59). It is quite evident here, as Allan Hunter has pointed out, that Conrad has deliberately challenged Huxley's evolutionary views that colonization leads to progress in terms of ethics and civilization. The inevitability of progress assumed by Huxley seen in the context of the Congo in Heart of Darkness is rather belied. Conrad shows just how small is the
divide between savagery and civilization now. Conrad also makes a comparison between the Roman "colonists" and the modern European counterpart. Conrad says that the Romans were men enough to face and tackle the darkness, but we see Conrad's characters are dragged down by their contact with darkness. So instead of assuming that Conrad was pro or anti-colonialism, we need to emphasize Conrad's imaginative understanding of the phenomenon of colonialism in the present day context.

There is a danger in assuming that Marlow is Conrad wholesale. Marlow after all is a character though he is given the voice of an observer. He is only a reflector which the author uses and one can see that Marlow is held in mild mockery occasionally. The story that Marlow presents to Kurtz's Intended for the sake of preserving his memory is a lie, but the truth is already known to the reader. So the opinions of Marlow are a part of the narrative strategy. Marlow is not Conrad and Marlow's observations should not be taken as the last word in the novel.

For Conrad, the socio-political background is paramount in understanding the modes of actions of his protagonists. To illustrate his point of view, he shows how the colonial framework controls the lives of the people in a colonial society and places barriers between the individual and his avowed ideals.
In a colonial society all live with full cognizance of the ethnic barriers between the white rulers and the native population, and mutual suspicion is the norm there. The native fears the white man, the white man holds the black and the brown in some degrees of apprehension and abhorrence. It is not possible to overcome this mental divide. This situation is so deeply inlaid in a colonial society that at the slightest opportunity it overpowers human relationship. Brown's treachery is immediately interpreted in terms of Jim's secret alignment with his race and lack of genuine commitment to the natives. That the two white men such as Brown and Jim could be as different from each other as two black men from each other — will not be understood in a colonial frame. It is the group that has an identity and not the individual. Jim's individuality and past performance as a friendly person is instantly forgotten. Hence colonialism is not a way of building bridges among nations and ethnic groups but is essentially an experience that creates distances among nations. The colonial setting overwhelms all individual efforts and the analysis of this setting is Conrad's central focus. Thus Conrad integrates the political and the moral phenomena of colonialism in a composite vision.

The traditional view of a colonial empire presented the colonizer as a man lured by the prospects of new and unlimited
opportunities for adventure. David Trotter suggests a more rational basis for the colonial empire. To quote Trotter, "Empire... provided one of the conditions under which men and women could be expected to use their mental and physical resources to the full". Of course it did. It used to take out a person into adventure in distant lands, confront him with unimagined physical and moral strains which, it was expected, would strengthen the fibre of manhood in man. But when the colonizer becomes a beast of prey, he renounces whatever ethics he inherited in his own country and sets accumulation of wealth as the ultimate justification of his efforts. So the conscientious projects of carrying culture and civilization go by the board. The conventional bond of human brotherhood gets a short shrift. Conrad's centre of focus is this breakdown. The Malayan scholar, Lloyd Fernando has made this point clear in his article, "Conrad's Eastern Expatriates".

Conrad did not deal with the same character over and over again but with the same problem whose infinite complexity demanded a multiplicity of approaches in different works. Through his protagonists he explored some of the important alternative responses that men could fall into or adopt in the mysterious territory uncovered by the experience of contact with other cultures. Whatever the nature of each response, and whichever the style, all were doomed to failure. (italics mine).
The novels, Lloyd Fernando is right in saying, record 'alternative responses' to the same problem - the cross-cultural encounter in an unknown territory - where all meet the same end. Conrad's attitude to colonialism does not undergo any major chronological evolution in his novels. He hammers in the same point everywhere. Human beings qua human beings fail to collaborate. Cultures confront each other with abhorrence and fear. Civilization does not spread but coagulates and remains splintered into groups of uncomprehending and alienated people. Commerce does not spread culture within the colonial framework, as it does not become an exchange between equal people. Ivory is looted or collected through exchange of trinkets rather than with legitimate price. Human beings are dominated and rarely befriended.

Rarely did Conrad speak with enthusiasm about any white colonizer. Most of the time he finds them hidebound, tied to petty self-interests. Jim is an exception in maintaining his self-respect in almost all circumstances. Similarly Lingard had certain positive points which we have noted earlier. Jim remained however as one who was not suitable for the rough-and-tumble of the colonial world. He was too sensitive to be a successful colonial ruler. Stein is another exception, but he is seen as someone who has withdrawn from the active life of a colonial agent and is a lover of butterflies. He adorns one
corner of the colonial world but cannot escape from a suspicion that he had a past of a kind which conformed to the colonial paradigm. Thus Conrad's vision cannot separate even the most conscientious colonial agent from the gravitational pull of the colonial situation. In such a situation, human beings struggle to survive like worms but cannot shine and fly like butterflies.

We have observed that Conrad's novels are explorations of the moral and psychological condition of man amidst inescapable socio-political dragnets. The metaphor, imagery and fictional situations project this thrust of Conrad towards ethical and psychological representation of man. In Heart of Darkness, there is a reference to the Eldorado expedition group. The group consisted of white goldhunters, black labourers and donkeys. After their departure when the news of death of all the donkeys came, Marlow retorted: "I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals" (HD, p. 112). The obvious reference is to the labourers who are valued less than the donkeys. This is the perverted ideology of colonialism that leads one to consider natives worse than beasts and to treat accordingly. Such type of disoriented value-system is crudely evident everywhere in the colonial world.

Conrad's ironic appraisal of faulty administrative poli-
cies in the colonies is founded on observations in South American States. Don Juste Lopez, an Italian, is the head of the Provincial Assembly in Nostromo. Conrad compares him to an insect: "Don Juste's eyes glowed dully; he believed in parliamentary institutions -- and the convinced drone of his voice lost itself in the stillness of the house like the deep buzzing of some ponderous insect." (Nos, p. 367). Conrad carefully devised this diminution in human stature to show the nature of democracy headed by such petty politicians. Towards the end of the novel, Captain Mitchell informs: "we have the Parliamentary party here of which the actual Chief of the State, Don Juste Lopez, is the head." (Nos, p.478). Conrad wants his readers to ponder what kind of progress and enlightenment will follow in the reign of Don Juste Lopez's parliamentary party which finally would take over administration in Costaguana after numerous vicissitudes of political changes. Thus Conrad is essentially a pessimist in politics as he is deeply concerned with moral and psychological reality of man's political existence. Hence Conrad's treatment of Marlow, a merchant seaman, in Heart of Darkness puts questions on his moral integrity rather than applauding his professional competence. As R.C. Stephens points out to the following effect:

... here is the situation of a man of intelligence and good character who has no illusions about the fake idealism surrounding the 'civilising mission', who knows that it
is run for profit and that it is likely to be a dangerous venture for himself, who admits that he feels that he is joining some evil conspiracy and that he is an imposter. Yet he does not withdraw. To the question 'Why?' there seems to be no immediately satisfactory answer, no rational explanation. We have to be content with Marlow's representation of himself as a silly little bird fascinated by a snake. \(^2^1\)

So Marlow represents the ambiguous white man who sticks to the colonial enterprise despite his awareness of the crime and duplicity attached to it. This infatuation with the hypocritical system of one of Conrad's principal spokesmen gives a colouring of ambiguity to Conrad's exploration of the colonial imbroglio. All one can say is that Conrad approached a political subject with a moral perspective.

Earlier I have discussed *Lord Jim* in a racial and imperialist perspective. But now I feel that beyond the colonial framework, another vision of Conrad is also enshrined in the novel. We see that Conrad closes the novel with an attempt to explicate the phenomenon of Jim through another narrative reflector in the presentation of the views of the "privileged man". It is to this person that Marlow sends his last packet of letters (chapter 36) and a narrative of events of the Patusan episode, a paradigmatic picture of colonial adventure which Jim underwent. The comments of the privileged man places before
us his explanation of Jim's failure. And the view taken by the privileged man confronts us like a quiz. But before discussing the privileged man's opinion let us see how Conrad has placed him before us. In what way is he privileged? Is he so because Marlow could entrust his report on Jim with him with a conviction that he was the most likely person to understand him because of his own colonial experience?

But this assumption of moral or epistemological privilege is undercut by describing his privilege very literally as due to the physical situation of his flat in a high-rise building: that he is privileged to see from his window the vast cityscape of roads and high roofs of buildings. But the narrative also implicates that this kind of view is at best a confused one. Hence his understanding of Jim is also put within brackets of ambiguity. His notion is that trying to do good in the colonized world ("giving your life up to them", that is, the non-white population in the colonies whereever they may be) is "like selling your soul to a brute" (Jim, p. 249). The assumption of the privileged man is that idealism can be understood only within a uniform pattern of culture, that we can only attain any good if we fight "in the ranks" -- that is not by deviating from our class or racial solidarity, otherwise our actions are not likely to be understood or appreciated. This view is however challenged by Marlow's immediate observation
that Jim's mode of action cannot be understood from outside easily, that probably Jim was not fighting only for the colonial ideal of bringing "order and progress", but he was trying to set another example of martyrdom with the assumption of his father's homely wisdom: "Virtue is one all over the world, and there is only one faith, one conceivable conduct of life, one manner of dying." (Jim, p. 251). Jim wanted to go beyond the colonial framework - he wanted to establish his human relationship with the non-whites. And so the racialist and the imperialist view of the privileged man is inadequate to understand the "terrifying logic" of destiny which, according to Marlow, hunted him down amidst his altruistic mission (Jim, p. 252). Daniel Born has rightly observed; "The enduring problem raised by Marlow's choice of the privileged man as final audience and judge is simply this: why the choice of such an overtly racial and imperial perspective?" Conrad seems to say that Jim's life and action cannot be abstracted from the colonial milieu and we must make an attempt to understand Jim as well as the setting which time and history had laid around him.

In Conrad's fictional works, the centre of focus is on man and his fallibility in a historical or political situation which envelops his existence. But we must not forget that human existence is larger and deeper and human beings can look beyond though cannot fully transcend the framework. Hence moral and
philosophical questions arise and confront us and cumulatively create reverberations in our minds which go beyond the action of the narrative. Intuitively we feel that we can apprehend the vision of the writer but we cannot pin it down to this or that without falsifying it.
NOTES AND REFERENCES
CHAPTER - VI


20. Lloyd Fernando, "Conrad's Eastern Expatriates" *PMLA*, 1976, 91, 1, p. 84.
