The title 'Naturalism in Joseph Conrad's Novels' does not require any explanation regarding what is proposed to be studied in this work. The term 'naturalism' as commonly understood by people, is a style of art or writing in which people, things and experiences are shown as they really are. In other words, it is an art that faithfully represents real life. As a philosophical theory, naturalism rejects the spiritual or the supernatural and insists that everything in the world and in life is based on natural principles or on the laws of cause and effect. The purpose here is to take up this common sense definition of naturalism and deal with it in depth, so as to scientifically establish the concept in all its totality. This process would need observation, evaluation and comparisons.

**Importance of Naturalism: Its relevance:**

There is nothing as interesting as life, and literature essentially deals with life in its myriad aspects, especially, the most interesting of all creations: man. Of all the mysteries of nature, understanding human nature is one of the most
challenging ones and therefore, a study of the works of Joseph Conrad has been chosen. As Conrad’s works are based on naturalism, it is this element of authenticity and nearness to real life and human nature that would interest and encourage one to make an endeavour to interpret human nature by studying naturalism in Conrad’s novels. Moreover this kind of study would represent a novel approach to his works.

Conrad is a unique author in the history of the English novel for many reasons: he is the one and only instance of a foreigner who wrote works of universal applaud in the English language and is also recognized as a writer who revolutionized the novel by developing a special narrative technique that used a character called Marlow. (Who could be used as the author’s mouthpiece). Because of this contribution, he is arguably the most important single innovator of the twentieth century and hence acclaimed as a leading influence in the modernist movement. As Conrad’s literary output falls between 1894 and 1924, he has been a major influence on the literature of the transition period from realism to modernism (1890-1914).

In considering Conrad as one of the significant contributors in interpreting contemporary society in the ethic of naturalism, it is important to know, however briefly, the formative influences and his background. He was a Pole by birth and a Slav by race. He did not know even a single word of the
English language till he was more than twenty and yet, he has produced works of genius in English. He felt that if he had not written in English, he would never have written at all. Conrad was the contemporary of traditional English novelists like Arnold Bennet, D.H. Lawrence, Somerset Maugham, Rudyard Kipling and John Galsworthy and yet his work is entirely different from theirs in spirit as well as in the technique of story telling.

Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski was born in 1857 at Berdichev, a town in the Polish Ukraine, which was then under the Russian government. He came from a family of Polish land owners who had lost most of their estates during the Napoleonic wars. His father, who translated works of Victor Hugo and Shakespeare into Polish, was arrested for conspiring against the Russians in the struggle for Polish independence. As leading Polish patriots, his parents were exiled and sent to a prison camp in the far-northern province of Vologda, their four-year-old son going with them. Partly as a result of these hardships, his mother died when he was about eight, and his father also died when Conrad was eleven years old. Conrad was then placed in the care of his uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowsky. During that time, he read widely in French and German. Thus, for a person whose first language was Polish and second language was French, Conrad’s mastery over English is nothing short of a miracle. As a student, he was very much attracted to and thrilled by books of travel and
exploration. At the age of seventeen, he left Poland for France in order to fulfill his early ambition of seafaring. Though there was no family tradition of seamanship, he joined a French ship at Marseilles in 1874 without heeding the opposition by his relatives. For the next four years, he traveled to and from the West-Indies. During this time, he was allegedly involved in gun smuggling and also got into huge gambling debts. Due to financial difficulties, he attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest, but survived because the bullet missed his heart.

In 1878 Conrad joined the British Merchant Navy and spent the next sixteen years in service (He became a naturalized citizen of England in 1886). He rose through the ranks to the position of Master Mariner and in 1894, after spending twenty years of life at sea he realized that his broken health could not allow him to continue in the mariner’s life. He then settled in England and took to writing as a profession.

As a Mariner, he traveled widely to Singapore, Australia, the Belgian Congo, Bombay and the East Indies. His life and experiences on the seas provided rich material for his stories and we can see that, to a large extent, his chief characters are based on people whom he personally knew or had met.
In 1895 Conrad married Jessie George, who was working as a typist in London where he then lived. Though Conrad did not intend to have children when he married, two sons were born: Boris in 1898 and John in 1906.

*The Nigger of the Narcissus, Lord Jim, Typhoon* and *Nostromo* which were published at around this time did not receive the critical acclaim to which they were entitled. Conrad’s health began deteriorating during the writing of *Nostromo* and in January 1904, Jessie injured her knees in a fall that rendered her a semi-cripple for the rest of her life. By 1908 Conrad had won critical acclaim, but he was not a very popular ‘Selling’ author. He was troubled by the need to make money and the need to retain his artistic integrity. Though he had chosen a sensational topic for *The Secret Agent* so as to gain popularity, the readers found him a difficult novelist because of his complex methods of narration and use of broken time sequences.

At a time when he was under severe mental stress and suffering from malarial gout (around 1909), Conrad had a furious quarrel with his literary agent and came home in great distress, followed by a complete breakdown in health. However, in 1911, his fortune changed when he was given a Civil List Pension of a hundred pounds. In the following year, an American lawyer offered to buy his manuscripts. The novel *Chance* which was published in 1913 became his first best seller and his next short story called *Victory* fetched
him one thousand pounds for its serialization rights. When the film rights for his books brought them about four thousand pounds, the Conrads were relatively well off, but still not free from difficulties. In 1920 he started *Suspense*, a Napoleonic novel which was to remain unfinished. In 1923 he made his only visit to America and on his return was very upset when he learnt of the secret marriage of his son Boris. In 1924, he declined an offer of Knighthood. After suffering a heart attack in July 1924, he died on August 3, 1924 at the age of sixty seven.

A man’s attitude in life is very much a matter of early education and upbringing and Conrad was no exception in this respect. As a child, he was a lonely, suffering soul. He often fell ill while with his parents in exile and once, he came near death. He had no playmates, he saw no happiness and contentment in life. As his parents died in very sad circumstances he was orphaned at the age of eleven, and his nervous system received shock after shock. The ordeal that he passed through was a terrible one, and he was saved only because he turned to books and took to reading. Under the circumstances, he could not but develop a gloomy outlook on life. Therefore perhaps all his books end in tragedy. Conrad was pessimistic as to the human condition and this influence on his works was not very conducive to his popularity.
Conrad’s life itself is a literary volume and his writing expresses his life experiences and suffering. Usually in modern criticism, the author is dead or absent in his works. But Joseph Conrad relives his life in his writings, but with a seasoning of artistic imagination that enables him to impregnate higher meaning into his works. When Conrad relives his life in his works (Sometimes through the character of Marlow), he becomes a romanticist.

Though it is possible to attempt a study of Conrad’s works from other literary perspectives like humanism, existentialism or modernism, the purpose of this study is to focus on making an exposition of naturalistic elements, as projected and discussed in the novels of Conrad. In fact, it will be shown in this study that many aspects are common to naturalism and these theories mentioned above. It shall also be justified that humanism is an incorporate of naturalism. Naturalism as a literary perspective for evaluating Conrad’s novels has been specifically taken up because both Conrad and the theory of naturalism are very significant with respect to the transition period between 1890 to 1914 where almost all writers were naturalists and (the year 1914 also coincides with the start of World War – I). Naturalism as an offshoot of realism is important because it serves as a link between realism and modernism. In addition, it lays the foundation for all the new critical literary and philosophical theories like modernism, structuralism, feminism, new criticism (in American terms),
formalism (especially Russian formalism), and cultural studies. Naturalism actually acts as a channel for the evolution of these new theories.

Though the terms naturalism and realism are sometimes used interchangeably, there are significant differences. The naturalists did follow the realists’ aim of careful observation and faithful representation of the physical world, but their view of the world, the human condition and their particular method of writing was strongly influenced by advances in the medical and biological sciences; especially Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and the concept of ‘Survival of the Fittest.’ The naturalists take up a biologistic view of man as a higher animal who is conditioned by forces beyond his or her control and therefore, mostly devoid of free will or moral choice. According to naturalists, man’s character is determined by external forces like heredity, environment and the pressure of immediate circumstances. These premises make the naturalists appear pessimistic. In addition to biology naturalism also owes to the social sciences, with the social consequences of the industrial revolution being a major formative influence on naturalism.

Naturalism tries to understand the natural flow of life with respect to man, nature and society. According to naturalism, it is not possible to define the external aspects of man without first defining the internal ones. Naturalism deals with the wildness in man, but it is a conditioned, systematized form of
wild nature where the emotions and ferocity of nature are let loose, but systematically, in a manner that is adherent to the system of natural instincts.

In naturalism and in Conrad’s works, all the characters are the products of the interaction between the external and internal nature because for a naturalist, nature is a very important determinant factor in life. Naturalism not only brings out the hidden potentialities in man, but its study also helps develop a mature and comprehensive understanding of man, nature, and society. In other words, a study of naturalism enables one to understand one’s own life in relation to the world within and without.

Man is essentially alone: though he lives in society, he is born alone and dies alone. Therefore, be it the 19th and 20th century of Conrad or the present 21st century, some of the very fundamental values on which human life and civilization stand are universal. Human nature and its basic conflicts are the same, whichever the age or place. For example, we all know that the base, negative qualities of falsehood, selfish desire and greed degrade the human being, whereas truth, fidelity and sacrifice ennoble him.
Relevance of naturalism to our life:

Today, we are living in a fast-paced, globalised world which is dominated by science and technology. Our world is characterized by industrialization, commercialization, consumerism, nuclear power, computers, internet, cell phones, electronic plastic money, hi-tech surgery, genetic cloning, nano-technology etc. However, despite all this, when it comes to all that is good and great in life, we again come across the same timeless virtues of truth, fidelity and sacrifice. Fidelity and sacrifice occur again and again in Conrad’s novels as very important values. In many of his novels, the protagonists sacrifice their happiness, or sometimes even their lives for ideals or for people whom they had not understood (Just as his parents had sacrificed their lives for the cause of Polish Independence). These two virtues of fidelity and sacrifice are central to Conrad’s philosophy of life. In his writings he repeatedly stressed the need for fidelity in human relationship. Nothing stirred his imagination as profoundly as the keeping of faith between man and man.

Man is today caught between two worlds: the choice between science and religion, God and the atom bomb, and this choice has kept modern man in confusion. In his novels, Conrad realistically presents the doubts, the conflicts, and the frustrations of today’s average man. In modern life and especially in the larger cities, man finds himself more and more alienated from his fellows
and experiences a sense of loneliness, rootlessness and ennui. Conrad was also lonely and seeking independence. The same can be seen in his characters too. In some of his novels he deals with the effects of isolation and moral deterioration on the individual.

The Hindu scriptures have already foretold these developments in the modern age – the ‘Kaliyuga’, characterized by the rise of treachery, cruelty, hatred and selfishness. In short, it is an age of moral degeneration and the rise of demoniacal tendencies that lead man to the most unnatural of behaviour. If one observes around and gathers news, one will invariably find the above-mentioned prophecy coming true. It will be found that there are increasing cases of: child sodomy, child pornography, drug abuse, paedophilia, legalization of homo-sexual marriages, incest, sex with animals (bestiality), sadistic torture, sadistic murder, teenage pregnancies, abortions, juvenile crime, suicide, broken marriages; and this list can go on longer, but it is enough to realize the truth. In such a scenario of the modern world it would be wrong to label Conrad or any naturalist writer as a pessimist. In fact they deserve commendation for faithfully conforming to the precepts of naturalism.

A recent example of a grisly crime can be considered where a well-educated man and his servant are alleged to have killed about thirty eight children, (in the past two years) after committing sexual atrocities on them. In
this context, the police came across the skeletal remains of seventeen children while investigating a missing woman's case, just twenty-five kilometers from the Indian capital* (Please refer Annexure -1 overleaf).

At a deeper level naturalism helps one to understand the neurotic chaos in the modern mind. Though the average man today has the utmost physical comforts and time saving gadgets as compared to the previous century, he has lost the sense of satisfaction and contentment. The materialist tendency that has been enhanced by consumerism makes every man get into a rat race and in the absence of a sound value system, he ends up getting frustrated and disillusioned with his life. To comprehend the world we now live in, it is just enough if we compare it to the world a hundred years ago. Naturalism helps discriminate between the healthy and unhealthy and between what is natural and unnatural in human life.

A characteristic belief of the naturalists is that, man is alone and afraid in a world he has not made, and he can maintain himself only through persistent struggle undergoing much suffering. Just as in real life in Conrad also, there are two levels of struggle which the protagonists suffer:

(1) External: With the world and its people.

(2) Internal: With one's own mind.
When a ‘normal’ Indian plays demon

C P Surendran | TNN

The media round-up of 2006 totally misfired on the insane Indian. As it turns out, there are so many. One such could be Moninder Singh Pandher, who stays in Noida, 25 km east of Delhi, bordering on the Nithari village.

Last week, the police arrested him and his servant Surendra in connection with the missing of a woman, Payal, and in the process came across skeletal remains and body wastes of 17 sexually violated children. Some 38 children have been missing from Nithari in the past two years.

Pandher reportedly has been violating and killing them. The upper torso of the victims are missing. It’s not clear if Pandher has been eating them up. No matter, his neighbours thought, “Pandher is a normal guy” — with a credit card, if not with a gun.

To be sure, Moninder apparently has a son who has just finished his studies in Shimla, and graduated from St Stephen’s College, Delhi. Could this be the educated son on Saturday conducted on him, his Canada-educated son on Saturday could not be their killer”.

COMMENT

“Pandher is a normal guy.” But what is “normal”? Pandher is a fully-paid-up member of the upper middle class. He has a flourishing transport business, is married, with a son who has just finished his studies in Canada. Pandher himself went to the famous Bishop Cotton school in Shillong, and graduated from St Stephen’s College, Delhi. Could anything resembling remotely a beast emerge from such polished portals? To be sure, Moninder apparently has some marital problems, but then which normal Indian doesn’t? He also has, more reassuringly, two houses — one in Chandigarh and the other in Noida.

A guy then, with a credit card! If that is not normal, what is? Only, Pandher frequently stays for long spells in the Noida house, in whose dark confines he’s accused of having given full play to the demon that allegedly waited growing and gnashing in the dungeon of his mind all this while.

The one that allegedly abused kids, sawed them up and later disposed them reportedly with a little help from his servant, Surendra, in gunny bags casually thrown down the drain at the back of the house. It’s just that peculiar Indian irony that the posterior of the house faces the impoverished village and the anterior faces the cutting edge of India, New Delhi. While Manika Sherawat was shaking a shapely leg, turling the New Year in, the cops in Nithari were sniffing the rotten flesh up the back side of Pandher’s house, all the way to his personal abattoir, the back room at D1, Sector 31. Within those walls little children had been reportedly subjected to incomprehensible terror and agony while normal looking men went insane and tried to satisfy what Joseph Conrad in the Heart of Darkness phrased as “monstrous gratifications”.

Once was describing Kurtz, the normal colonial white man who went to Congo and found a kingdom of sorts in the very midst of slaves and cannibals, and who in that jungle let his animal urges take over completely. His dying words sum up a life best not lived: “The horror! The horror!” Closer to our time, in the movie, Silence of the Lamb, the last image is that of the cannibalistic protagonist, Hannibal Lecter, looking normal, whistling, walking free in the crowd.

Who’s to say what he had had for dinner? Clearly, a question Sector 31 raises in: what do normal people do behind closed doors? How many out there are, like Hannibal’s Lecter, suited, strolling in the sunshine, looking for a little fun and a lot of blood?

New Delhi: Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Saturday sought central intervention in Uttar Pradesh in the wake of the shocking discovery of skeletons from the village saying there was no law and order in the state.

“No law and order in UP’

There is nothing like law and order in the state的说法 is old. Pandher is but a part of that story. His putting a regular card to the card machine of the Indian credit card system is a new twist.

The BJP has been demanding the imposition of the President’s rule in Uttar Pradesh ahead of assembly elections in the state. The former Prime Minister parried questions as to why no senior leader from his party has so far drove down to Nithari where Congress chief Sonia Gandhi visited, saying the BJP was not competing with the UPA chairperson. “We have no competition with her,” Vajpayee remarked.

CPM slams Mulayam Singh over Noida (UP): The CPM, which has had a close relationship with the Samajwadi Party on Saturday charged the Mulayam Singh Yadav government in Uttar Pradesh with “failure” in preventing the grisly killings of children and women in Nithari village.

“It is a failure of Mulayam Singh government and the local administration,” party polit bureau member Brinda Karat told reporters here after visiting Nithari village in this bustling industrial township adjoining the capital.
That is,

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| Man and his own self (Human Nature) | Internal or Metaphorical Level. |

Conrad places before us, characters with profoundly troubled hearts, and they are set apart from the comforting deceptions that are possible in crowds. In the face of this realization and some ordeal, the characters’ struggle to maintain their integrity and basic decency as human beings, forms Conrad’s main theme. Since Conrad presents wonderful insights into human nature, the present study has been taken up. As the present study deals with naturalism in Conrad, it would not be out of place to take a brief look at the different literary movements in English literature and further discuss some of the related literary trends that act as precursors to naturalism, so as to get a broader perspective on how naturalism and Conrad’s work figures among the others.

Following is a list of modern literary movements\(^1\): that is, movements after the Renaissance. These terms, helpful for curricula or anthologies, evolved over time to group writers who are often loosely related. Some of these movements such as Dada and Beat were defined by the members themselves,
while other terms (the metaphysical poets, for example) emerged decades or centuries after the periods in question. Ordering is approximate, as there is considerable overlap. These are movements either drawn from or influential for literature in the English language.

**Cavalier Poets**

17th century English royalist poets, writing primarily about courtly love, called Sons of Ben (after Ben Jonson).

Notable authors: Richard Lovelace, William Davenant

**Metaphysical poets**

17th century English movement using extended conceit, often (though not always) about religion.

Notable authors: John Donne, George Herbert

**The Augustans**

An 18th century literary movement based chiefly on classical ideals, satire and skepticism.

Notable authors: Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift
**Romanticism**

18th to 19th century movement emphasizing emotion and imagination, rather than logic and scientific thought. Response to the Enlightenment.

Notable authors: Victor Hugo, Lord Byron

**Gothic novel**

Fiction in which Romantic ideals are combined with an interest in the supernatural and in violence.

Notable authors: Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker

**Lake Poets**

A group of Romantic poets from the English Lake District who wrote about nature and the sublime.

Notable authors: William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

**American Romanticism**

Distinct from European Romanticism, the American form emerged somewhat later, was based more in fiction than in poetry, and incorporated an awareness of history, particularly the darkest aspects of American history.

Notable authors: Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne

**Pre-Raphaelitism**

19th century, primarily English movement based ostensibly on undoing innovations by the painter Raphael. Many were both painters and poets.
Notable authors: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti

**Transcendentalism**

19th century American movement: poetry and philosophy concerned with self-reliance, independence from modern technology.

Notable authors: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau

**Realism**

Late 19th century movement based on a simplification of style and image and an interest in poverty and everyday concerns.

Notable authors: Honoré de Balzac, Leo Tolstoy, Frank Norris

**Naturalism**

Late 19th century. Proponents of this movement believe that heredity and environment control people.

Notable authors: Émile Zola, Stephen Crane

**Symbolism**

Principally French movement of the fin de siècle based on the structure of thought rather than poetic form or image; influential for English language poets from Edgar Allen Poe to James Merrill.

Notable authors: Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Valéry
**Stream of consciousness**

Early-20th century fiction consisting of literary representations of quotidian thought, without authorial presence.

Notable authors: Virginia Woolf, James Joyce

**Modernism**

Variegated movement of the early 20th century, encompassing primitivism, formal innovation, or reaction to science and technology.

Notable authors: T.S. Eliot

**Dada**

Touted by its proponents as anti-art, dada focused on going against artistic norms and conventions.

Notable authors: Guillaume Apollinaire, Kurt Schwitters

**First World War Poets**

Poets who documented both the idealism and the horrors of the war and the period in which it took place.

Notable authors: Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke

**Imagism**

Poetry based on description rather than theme, and on the motto, “the natural object is always the adequate symbol.”

Notable authors: Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington
Harlem Renaissance

African American poets, novelists, and thinkers, often employing elements of blues and folklore, based in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City in the 1920s.

Notable authors: Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston

Surrealism

Originally a French movement, influenced by Surrealist painting, that uses surprising images and transitions to play on formal expectations and depict the unconscious rather than conscious mind.

Notable authors: Jean Cocteau, Dylan Thomas

Southern Agrarians

A group of Southern American poets, based originally at Vanderbilt University, who expressly repudiated many modernist developments in favor of metrical verse and narrative. Some Southern Agrarians were also associated with the New Criticism.

Notable authors: John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren

Oulipo

Mid-20th century poetry and prose based on seemingly arbitrary rules for the sake of added challenge.

Notable authors: Raymond Queneau, Walter Abish
**Postmodernism**

Postwar movement skeptical of absolutes and embracing diversity, irony, and word play.

Notable authors: Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Pynchon

**Black Mountain Poets**

A self-identified group of poets originally based at Black Mountain College, who eschewed patterned form in favor of the rhythms and inflections of the human voice.

Notable authors: Charles Olson, Denise Levertov

**Beat poets**

American movement of the 1950s and '60s concerned with counterculture and youthful alienation.

Notable authors: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg

**Confessional poetry**

Poetry that, often brutally, exposes the self as part of an aesthetic of the beauty and power of human frailty.

Notable authors: Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath

**New York School**

Urban, gay or gay-friendly, leftist poets, writers, and painters of the 1960s.

Notable authors: Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery
Magical Realism

Literary movement in which magical elements appear in otherwise realistic circumstances. Most often associated with the Latin American literary boom of the 20th century.
Notable authors: Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz

Postcolonialism

A diverse, loosely connected movement of writers from former colonies of European countries, whose work is frequently politically charged.
Notable authors: Jamaica Kincaid, V.S. Naipaul

The present thesis begins with a detailed discussion of the philosophy of naturalism where a chronological list of modern literary movements is given, followed by a discussion of literary trends that act as precursors to naturalism. This is done with the view of enabling us to get a broader perspective on how naturalism and Conrad’s work figures among the others. Since naturalism as a literary trend originated in France, naturalism as preceded by romanticism and realism, and followed by symbolism is discussed in the context of French literature. Developments in English literature at the turn of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century that are taken up next, help us to understand the social and literary context in which Conrad wrote. Next, in
order to have a more comprehensive understanding of naturalism, naturalism in the arts like painting, theatre and film are discussed in relation to literary naturalism. Opinions of some notable critics about naturalism in literature have been presented next, where we can narrow down to the specific aspects of naturalism in literature.

In the next section, naturalism as a new trend developed from realism has been traced. This helps us to draw a contrast between the two trends, both in the general context and in the American context. As our understanding of naturalism would not be complete without a comparison with some other related isms, it has been discussed in relation to idealism, humanism and existentialism in the next part. This discussion reveals at least five aspects that are common to existentialism, humanism and naturalism and also helps to present humanism as an incorporate of naturalism.

In the section that follows, the growth of naturalism from the Renaissance has been traced and after a brief contrast between romanticism and naturalism, the second chapter ends with the characteristic elements of naturalism as established from the preceding discussion; namely with respect to subject matter and setting, method, plot, characters and theme.
In the rest of this thesis, every chapter deals with one novel of Conrad, taken in chronological order of publication. In these six chapters, each novel is evaluated in the light of the characteristic elements of naturalism that have been established in the first chapter. That is, an attempt has been made to substantiate that Conrad has used all the key aspects of naturalism. The later part of each chapter deals with some other important aspects like: interaction of man and nature, Conrad’s vision of man, interaction between atmosphere and character and finally, Conrad’s philosophy of life. Though each novel is different with respect to plot, story and technique, the present study goes on to justify that all the novels of Conrad taken up here consistently conform to the ethic of naturalism.
NOTES

