CHAPTER - IV

LORD JIM
Subject Matter and Setting:

The fact that Conrad, in the interest of naturalism bases his stories on real-life experiences cannot be denied in case of *Lord Jim*. Eloise K. Hay, in her essay, ‘“Lord Jim” from Sketch to Novel’ illustrates several interesting parallels between Conrad’s own experiences and those of Jim. Though the story definitely has its roots in Conrad’s inner life, many details can be traced to other real-life sources. While sailing on the *Vidar* in 1887-88, Conrad met a man named Jim Lingard. Lingard was a white trader and he was known to many of the natives he traded with in the East as ‘Tuan Jim’. He is known to have been a colourful, swaggering figure, but Conrad borrowed only his name because his character and moral history do not have anything in common with Conrad’s Jim. A more important model for Conrad was the First Mate of the notorious ‘*Jeddah*’ – Augustine Podmore Williams. The *Jeddah* was an old steamer, that ran into a storm on a journey from Singapore to Jeddah (The Port of Mecca) in the summer of 1880. The ship was carrying more than nine hundred Muslim pilgrims. During rough weather, the heavily insured ship was
abandoned by the Captain and his crew. The Captain reported that the ship had lost all its crew, but like the Patna it was rescued and towed to Port. The Captain’s certificate was cancelled after the enquiry. The cowardly desertion of the ship by its European crew was widely reported in the Asian and European newspapers, which made the episode well-known in the Eastern ports for many years.

An English adventurer by name James Brooke had a fantastic career and was also the subject of a number of books which Conrad had known. Conrad has partly based Jim’s adventures in Patusan on his knowledge of James Brooke. Brooke reached Sarawak, on the West coast of Borneo in 1839, after an unsuccessful career in England and India. After helping to quell a local rebellion, he was made Rajah of Sarawak in 1841. He devoted the rest of his life to his new people, but unlike Jim’s, his career did not end in violent death.

The setting of Lord Jim is the mysterious and exotic East - mainly the Malayan Archipelago and the Gulf of Siam. Nature forms an inseparable part of the human drama. The first part of the story takes place on the Patna with the calm and unruffled Indian Ocean in the background. Conrad has been called the ‘Laureate of the Sea’ and his treatment of the sea in this novel justifies the praise: The action shifts after the desertion of the Patna, to the Court of Enquiry and the setting is an unnamed eastern port. Then Jim wanders
farther and farther towards the east, serving as a Water-Clerk in several eastern ports. The action of the second part takes place at Patusan in the East Indies, a place in the interior of the Malayan Archipelago, and the setting is that of forests, hills, and rivers. The atmosphere is oppressive with the heat and dampness of the tropics.

The novel deals with the feeling of guilt and its atonement in Jim, after he deserts the pilgrim ship *Patna* in a moment of weakness. The novel was written at a time when Conrad was ill, was beset with financial difficulties, and was not yet sure of his career as a writer. As a result, he suffered from depression of spirits, and his own inner gloom is reflected in the pessimism, dark spirit, and morbidity of Jim, the protagonist of the novel.

**Method:**

In *Lord Jim* Conrad uses a very long, rambling narrative and for the first time, introduces his technique of oblique narrative where the story is told through the ironical Marlow, who reappears frequently in later novels of Conrad. As is characteristic of naturalist works, Conrad’s novel is also influenced by the contemporary discoveries and scientific theories of the time. Psychologists like Freud, Adler and Jung probed the human consciousness and revealed that there are layers within layers in the human consciousness.
Beneath the conscious, there is the sub-conscious and there is the unconscious. The past lives on in the sub-conscious and the unconscious and is brought-up to the conscious level, through memory and recollection; the conscious is only a very small part of the human psyche or soul. Human actions are determined more by the sub-conscious and the un-conscious than by the conscious. Therefore, it is seen that there is so much of the irrational and the emotional in human conduct. *Lord Jim* carries the impress of all these theories. Writing many years before James Joyce, Conrad uses impressionistic techniques to depict the human psyche. He seeks to convey the very sensation of living, and not the outer crust. According to J.W. Beach, this makes him “the most notable example of the reaction against the well-made novel.” He is more interested in the inner life of his characters and his technique is aimed at depicting the inner world. There are traditional elements also in the novel, and the story moves forward chronologically, with the various events linked up casually. But judged from the traditional standards, his novels seem loose and episodic in construction. This is so, because the real links in his novels are emotional, and not logical and chronological. As in the psychological novel, the action moves from the consciousness of one character to another, from the present to the past, from the internal to the external, and vice-versa. In this way, his characters are emotionally connected with their past, with the other characters and with the
outer world. The action moves freely backward and forward in time and space, and character and incident are introduced through apparently irrelevant digressions. But in reality, they throw light on some or the other hidden recesses of Jim’s soul. The character of Lord Jim is viewed through a number of eyes and is vividly realized. The purpose of the novelist is to lay bare the psyche of Jim – torn, baffled, and to give the readers an idea of his motives and springs of action. The whole of Conrad’s theory of impressionism can be deduced from Marlow’s remark in the novel; “All this happened in much less time than it takes to tell, since I am trying to interpret for you into slow speech the instantaneous effect of visual impressions”. ¹ We actually get glimpses of Jim, which must be patched together by the readers themselves.

Conrad’s Method of Characterization vivifies the characters in a number of ways. Firstly, he provides them with a suitable atmosphere or setting, and the action and reaction of character and setting imparts to his figures a rare reality and individuality. They seem to be the very emanations of their respective settings. Secondly, he presents his characters both objectively and subjectively. First of all, a strong impression of the character’s personality is created through a direct description. Accordingly, Jim’s external appearance is described graphically and vividly in the opening of the novel and an account is given of his early education, up-bringing, of his ability, courage, fortitude, etc.,
as a Water Clerk. Nonetheless, this clear and vivid first impression is complicated as the narration proceeds, and the character is developed through a slow process of accumulative effect. Thirdly, the character is further revealed in action and movement. Conrad’s ‘larger than life heroes’ are placed in moments of high drama and made to reveal themselves. They are caught in moments when imagination informs their actions, and their words, their moods and even their gestures are recorded. Instead of detailed accounts, a series of glimpses are presented, and these contribute to the building of their respective personalities. In *Lord Jim*, the characters of Stein, Jewel, Brown, Cornelius, Chester, Stanton, the French Lieutenant and many other minor characters serve to reveal the inner self of Jim. Thus, a character is presented through multiple points of view.

Apart from an objective method of narration, we also find an emphasis on meticulous details and frankness with regard to bodily functions (Scientific Objectivity), which are typical of the naturalist method. We can take a look at a few of the many passages that contain detailed and frank descriptions. Conrad describes the Muslim pilgrims aboard the *Patna* sleeping on mats, blankets, bare planks, on every deck and all the dark corners, wrapped in dyed cloths, and soiled rags “with their heads resting on small bundles; with their faces pressed to bent forearms . . .”²
In the same passage, there is a description of how the old men slept on their prayer carpets with their legs drawn up, hands over their ears and an elbow on each side of the face. The raw physical details evoke visual impressions in the readers. In one such passage, Conrad describes the German Captain of the *Patna*, who is in his open sleeping jacket and pyjamas, is red faced and half awake, with his left eye partly closed:

There was something obscene in the sight of his naked flesh. His bared breast glistened soft and greasy as though he had sweated out his fat in his sleep... the fold of his double chin hung like a bag triced up close under the hinge of his jaw.³

The way in which Conrad uses elaborate and meticulous details to create a natural atmosphere can be seen from a passage which describes the scene at the Court of Enquiry, where a yellow dog brought by the villagers is weaving in and out amongst people's legs in a “mute stealthy way native dogs have... The dog, in the very act of trying to sneak in at the door, sat down hurriedly to hunt for fleas.”⁴ A little later, there is a poignant passage narrating the interaction between Marlow and Jim outside the court room. During their conversation, Jim contemplates the “wretched animal, that moved no more than an effigy: it sat with ears pricked and its sharp muzzle pointed into the doorway, and suddenly snapped at a fly like a piece of mechanism.”⁵
There is another episode where Sheriff Ali’s men try to ambush Jim and he shoots one of them in the very act of charging at him with a sword. Jim later ascertains that, “he had shot him through the mouth a little upwards, the bullet coming out high at the back of the skull.” As the man is shot in mid-action, Conrad describes how the man jerks his head up and drops the sword, and continues forward by the force of his rush with a gaping disfigured face, and how he moves forward with open arms like a blind man, only to fall violently on his forehead, barely missing Jim’s toes. Such elaborate details and frankness may be regarded as unwonted by some, but to an imaginative reader, they serve to heighten the visualization, and make the novel very natural.
Plot and Characters:

Most of the features of naturalist works can be seen in the plot and characterization of *Lord Jim*. We have quite a large number of characters representing different races and geographical climes:

1. Jim.
2. Marlow
3. Jewel
4. Stein
5. Doramin (Chief of the Bugis)
6. Dain Waris
7. Cornelius
8. Tamb’Itam
9. Captain Brierly
10. The Malayan Helmsmen
11. The French Lieutenant
12. Bob Stanton
13. Chester and Robinson
14. The German Captain of *The Patna*
15. The White Officers of *The Patna*
16. Brown (The Villain)
18. Rajah Tungku Allang
19. Kassim, the Rajah’s agent
20. The Yucker Brothers
21. Schomberg the Hotel Keeper
22. De Jongh

However, it is not just the profusion of characters, but their authenticity that proves Conrad’s mastery in his craft. Even with abundance and variety, many of his characters are life-like. Richard Curle says that his characters constitute the richest mine of psychology that is known to our generation. He says that these characters, with their variety and individuality of high romance and imagination, have very much altered the face of modern literature. Some critics say that we may apply to Conrad, what Dryden said on Chaucer: “Here is God’s plenty”.

Critics talk of Conrad’s limitations and say that he did not organize his plots well. He often delayed the action while he verbally painted a scene or analyzed a character psychologically. Charges are leveled at him for over complication and the use of obtrusive symbolism. This has been attributed to his inability to plan his novels in advance. It is said that both Lord Jim and The
Secret Agent were initially intended to be short stories, but both took control of him until they became very long novels. His main concern was not with plot, but with the effect of events on the persons involved. He is a novelist of extreme situations wherein his heroes are shown in total isolation either on the sea or in some remote, exotic wilderness, where they are troubled by guilt, or by a choice between betraying a friend or community, or ruining their own careers.

In Lord Jim, the plot is built around the life and fortunes of Jim, the protagonist. The novel can be said to be a romance of illusions, where the contrast between illusions and reality is stressed repeatedly. Jim is an anti-hero who has an idealized conception of his own self, but doesn’t have enough strength of will to live up to his own ideals and illusions. He is a ‘romantic’ with a ‘great ability in the abstract’, but who fails to act when the call for action comes. He has an imposing appearance, looks self confident and determined, seems capable of great things, but his actions show that appearances are deceptive. He acts like a coward in moments of crises. His romantic imagination makes him see himself as a hero, but it also excites in him imaginary terrors, which make him panicky and paralyze his will. He also has the exquisite sensitivity of a romantic and is unable to endure even the least dishonour. Because of this, he quits one job after another as soon as he imagines the danger of his cowardly past being brought to light. In Patusan he
achieves success, earns the love and respect of the people, but as soon as Brown insinuates his 'guilt' in the past, he loses all confidence in himself and commits an error of judgment in allowing a free passage to the brigand Brown and this results in the final catastrophe. However, his death shows that he has at least conquered his tendency to succumb to imaginary terrors. His death has been variously interpreted, but for Jim, it is an act of atonement for his cowardice in deserting the pilgrim ship *Patna*. He still sees himself as a hero and lays down his life in the pursuit of his ideal of honour. His self-sacrifice may be over romantic, but it is the act of a man of conscience, and this final act ennobles and uplifts him. Jim could very well have escaped from Patusan, but because of his ideal of honour, he doesn’t do so.

Thus, we have an unconventional hero who is idealized and who is involved in personal problems and adventures. In his characterization, instead of depicting a conflict between different personalities or between man and nature, Conrad depicts an individual at war with himself. Conrad is not concerned with any overt strife, but with the conflict that goes on in the subconscious regions of the human mind. Conrad’s chief characters are usually dominated by a single idea which almost becomes an obsession with them, and which ultimately leads to their downfall. This obsession, instead of making his characters odd figures like those of Dickens, makes them great tragic figures.
The domination by one idea makes Conrad’s characters grow and rise to
grandeur. For instance, Jim is obsessed with the idea of recovering his lost
honour. He has a morbid craving for distinguishing himself and for living
down his disgrace. The tragic obsession of Conrad’s characters makes them
lonely, wounded souls who cannot share their inner life even with the most
sympathetic of people. They become isolated from the human community.
Accordingly, Jim remains inscrutable and mysterious even to Marlow and
Jewel.

In addition to the chief characters, even the numerous minor characters in
Conrad’s novels are drawn with a deep insight and patience. Even these
characters are vivid and life-like. We cannot see any instance of carelessness by
Conrad. We can consider here the example of the French Lieutenant, who rises
before us dramatically and quite naturally. The same is the case with the fat
German Captain of the Patna, who is portrayed very vividly. The character of
‘Gentleman’ Brown is also another example of Conrad’s intensity of effort in
characterization.
Themes:

*Lord Jim* is a complex work of art with a multiplicity of themes. It bears various interpretations and the most prominent one is that of a man whose strength fails him in a moment of crisis. Like many other works of Conrad, the chief character is a lonely soul and his betrayal of the pilgrims is the major theme that stands out in the earlier part of the novel. Conrad uses contrasts between illusion and reality and tries to show that appearances are deceptive and relying on such appearances leads to much suffering. For example, as the *Patna* sails along, the sea is calm and serene, but this calm is superficial and deceptive. Even as Jim is thinking of the safety of the ship in such calm waters, it collides with the submerged remains of a wrecked ship. To Marlow, Jim appears to be a man who can be trusted, but in reality he has got a weakness in him, which he is always trying to hide and overcome. Jim has his own illusion, his own vision of himself as a hero and he dies as a martyr to this vision. Here, tragedy doesn’t result from crime, but from misplaced loyalty. The story exposes the hollowness of Jim’s illusions regarding himself. Self delusion and betrayal are recurring themes in Conrad because most of his heroes suffer from a delusion by way of a fixed idea or obsession. For Jim, this obsession is his passion for regaining his lost honour and he lays down his life in pursuit of this delusion. Looked at in another way, it is a story of guilt, punishment and
catharsis as a result of suffering. When Jim deserts the *Patna*, he not only betrays the pilgrims on board, but also himself. As a consequence he suffers internally and finally atones for it by embracing death voluntarily. The novel illustrates the dangers of excessive imagination and also conveys the message that human salvation depends on loyalty and duty. In Conrad’s novels, man is always in conflict with nature or himself. Here, Jim is constantly at war with himself and the novel is a powerful depiction of his spiritual agony resulting from his betrayal. His is a betrayal at many levels; it is self betrayal, betrayal of his heroic ideals, betrayal of his profession, betrayal of the community of sailors and the betrayal of the trust that humanity has reposed in him as a senior officer of the ship. In the sailor’s profession, it is only fidelity, duty and solidarity that enable man to fight nature’s fury on the high seas, but Jim’s act of desertion is a violation of these virtues.

After the act of desertion, it is the sympathetic Marlow who uses his good offices and helps him get a job as a Water Clerk. But, every time there is any slight chance of his cowardly past being raked up, Jim quits one job after another, inconveniencing his employers and betraying Marlow in the process. Even in the end, when he embraces death to atone for his past betrayals, he in fact, betrays Jewel.
Interaction of Man and Nature:

Man and Nature are opposed to each other and the human spirit is constantly trying to assert itself and establish its triumph in Conrad's works. It is not only the external nature, but man's internal nature as well. Conrad stresses that evil is present both in man and in his environment. The evil inherent in the physical environment is taken to be malevolent towards man, as can be seen from one of the passages where Jim gets a glimpse of the "earnestness in the anger of the sea" and a "sinister violence of intention" that can be seen only once in a while. At such times, the animosity of nature towards man is indefinable to him and it is forced upon his heart and mind that:

. . . these elemental furies are coming at him with a purpose of malice, with a strength beyond control, with an unbridled cruelty that means to tear out of him his hope and fear, the pain of his fatigue and his longing for rest; which means to smash, to destroy, to annihilate all he had seen, known, loved, enjoyed, or hated; all that is priceless and necessary – which means to sweep the whole precious world utterly away from his sight by the simple and appalling act of taking his life. (emphasis added)

The evil in nature can be seen from its various aspects and from the different incidents that occur. It can be seen in the form of the hidden wreck with which the Patna collides, in the storm which heightens Jim's imaginative
fears and in the sudden and inexplicable going off of the lights of the *Patna* which blocks Jim’s intention of swimming back to the Ship.

Later when Jim comes to Patusan, evil can be seen both in the cunning political intrigues and in the damp and oppressive tropical wilderness, which forms the background to Jim’s adventures. Though beautiful, the jungle also has an ominous aspect. Conrad says that it is full of fatal temptations, with the stumps of felled trees, with flowers destined only for the use of the dead, and having smells that are similar to the incense used in the house of the dead. Conrad describes that the white corals shone like the chaplet of bleached skulls and that the whole atmosphere was pervaded by a silence that suggested that the whole earth may be one big grave.

When the *Patna* collides with a waterlogged wreck, Jim is at first petrified. When he goes down into the holds to check for damage, he sees that sea water has already started coming in. Jim concludes that there must be a big hole below the water-line, and also feels that the ship may sink any minute. However, the Ship stays afloat for more than twenty minutes after the collision. Jim’s thoughts at that juncture express his feelings – He feels that the sleeping pilgrims headed to Mecca were destined to accomplish their pilgrimage because the mercy of the omnipotent God in whom they believed had ordered the sea not to swallow the ship:
. . . had looked down to make a sign, “Thou shalt not!” to the ocean. Their escape would trouble me as a prodigiously inexplicable event, did I not know how tough old iron can be - as tough sometimes as the spirit of some men we meet now and then, worn to a shadow and breasting the weight of life. 8

These words illustrate the constant tussle between man and nature, the unpredictability of nature and man’s indomitable spirit. After the White officers of the Patna desert their ship in a life-boat, the narrator’s words about the whole episode again highlight the strength of the human spirit against the dark and malevolent forces of nature:

It was all threats, all a terribly effective feint, a sham from beginning to end, planned by the tremendous disdain of the Dark Powers whose real terrors, always on the verge of triumph, are perpetually foiled by the steadfastness of men. 9

There is also another side to the relationship between man and nature, which can be understood from Marlow’s words about the sailors who go home after a long voyage. He says that men wander over the face of the earth in thousands, earning name, fame, money or only bread, but for all men, going home is like going to render an account, to face superiors, kindred, friends, the loved ones, etc. Even those lonely persons who have no such ties, have to meet the spirit that lives in the land and permeates the air, valleys, hills, fields, water
and trees like a mute friend, judge and inspirer. For any man to get joy from the spirit of the land, to breathe its peace and face its truth, he must return to it with clear consciousness, failing which he would end up empty handed. Marlow further says that it is the lonely men (who return not to their families or kin, but to the land itself) who experience the disembodied, eternal and unchangeable spirit of the land and it is they who understand best its severity, its saving power and its right to fidelity and obedience. This particular passage seems to suggest that though nature can be harsh and indifferent to man, it can also be benevolent to him. The relationship between man and nature is mutual because, “Each blade of grass has its spot on earth whence, it draws its life, its strength; and so is man rooted to the land from which he draws his faith together with his life.”

Conrad’s Vision of Man:

By the look of it, Jim is a loser because of his lack of courage and clarity of thinking at the time of crisis on board the *Patna*. In his imagination he wants to be a hero, a noble saviour of the weaker ones but in reality, he betrays both his own ideals and the sleeping pilgrims on the *Patna*. This sense of guilt haunts Jim throughout his life and the inner struggle goes on constantly, in search of a chance to assert the inherent nobility of the soul. Some critics are
right when they say that Jim still thinks of himself as a hero even after the
*Patna* incident. His whole life is then, a ceaseless struggle and endeavour of his
soul to manifest the noble virtues of courage, strength and loyalty. The
circumstances leading to the ambush and death of Dain Waris seem to
completely devastate Jim’s spirit and its struggle to attain nobility. Finally, the
spirit asserts itself over fate when Jim voluntarily embraces death fearlessly, in
order to realize his ideals of nobility. From Jewel’s point of view, it seems like
a betrayal of her love. In this context Jim finally emerges above common
human weaknesses and failings because the act of escaping from Patusan to live
a family life with Jewel would be the resort of an ordinary mortal. It would be a
kind of escapism from the responsibility and human values that Jim held in high
esteem. Jim’s final act is not a suicide but a sacrifice. He sacrifices his love for
Jewel and also his life, for the sake of his higher ideals and values. Thus, it can
be concluded that the human soul has finally asserted its nobility and saved
Jim’s soul from an ignominous fall.

Because of the terrible ordeals faced in his childhood, Conrad developed
a particular view of life which, for him, meant quiet endurance for ideals in the
pursuit of which hope might fade but faith was never lost. Whatever the
happenings or circumstances, the virtues such as honour, loyalty, truth and
sincerity were abstract for him. His experiences made Conrad develop
compassion for all men who must suffer – that is, men like Jim, who live in vain hope and constant endeavour in a setting of dark fatalism. In fact, Conrad was not basically interested in the creation of character. Instead, he tries to convey his conception of life and his characters are used as vehicles for this purpose. His characters are the embodiments of his vision of life and we must evaluate them accordingly, and not as portraits, as in the case of Dickens. Quite often in Lord Jim, we find that Marlow becomes Conrad’s mouthpiece, from whom we can gather Conrad’s vision of man. As Marlow prepares to narrate Jim’s story in the verandah of a hotel, he observes that the fresh and starlit evening would make the men forget that they were there (on earth) only on a sufferance and had to be very careful in the journey of life because every minute was precious and every step irremediable. He says that the men go through life trusting that they would manage to die decently in the end, but could never be too sure. They could not even expect much help from the others around, some of whom take life very easily because life is very pleasant for them, like a relaxed, empty hour after dinner, “enlivened by some fable of strife to be forgotten before the end is told – even if there happens to be any end to it.”

Conrad’s vision of man’s indomitable spirit in spite of the susceptibility to his own weaknesses is expressed in the following passage:
...– from weakness that may lie hidden, watched or unwatched, prayed against or manfully scorned, repressed or maybe ignored more than half a lifetime, not one of us is safe. We are snared into doing things for which we get called names, and things for which we get hanged, and yet the spirit may well survive – survive the condemnations, survive the halter, by Jove!¹²

When the businessman Stein describes his entomological collection of butterflies and beetles to Marlow, he says that Nature is the greatest artist which produces wonderful masterpieces of beauty because there is a perfect equilibrium of colossal forces in the products of Nature. When asked about man he replies to Marlow that “Man is amazing, but not a master piece”¹³ Stein’s words embody Conrad’s vision of man. He further says that the artist (Nature) would have been a little mad when she created man because he feels that man has come where he is not wanted, and where there is no place for him; “For if not, why should he want all the place? Why should he run about here and there making a great noise about himself, talking about the stars, disturbing the blades of grass? . . .”¹³

Well, Conrad’s vision of man is definitely that of a struggle, a struggle for survival and an endeavour to dominate, to overcome weaknesses, to get self knowledge or to save his own soul. The rising and falling waves of the seas as seen by Jim before entering the land of his destiny – Patusan, is compared by
him to the image of human struggles; “At first bend, he lost sight of the sea with its labouring waves forever rising, sinking, and vanishing to rise again - the very image of struggling mankind – ” (Emphasis added) The emphasized words accurately express the indomitable spirit of man as visualized by Conrad. Conrad also says that in all his struggles and endeavours, the same things that make man a master, make him a captive too.

**Interaction between Atmosphere and Character:**

In *Lord Jim*, the characters are imbued with the aspects, moods and colours of nature in the form of tropical lands or the sea. In turn, nature also takes on the beautiful, sinister or gloomy aspect of the minds of characters. In short, there is a constant interaction between character and natural atmosphere. This interaction is used by Conrad to develop a naturalistic picture of man. The very quietness of the house where Jim lives with Jewel and Cornelius assumes a morbid and fateful aspect, making the readers anticipate some horrible developments. In fact, a little later, Jim is attacked by Sheriff Ali’s men in the same house. However brief they may be, but the love scenes between Jim and Jewel are very thrilling because Conrad creates a particular image of a sentient nature upon their intimate moments. The mystery of their love and the strange bond
which exists between a white man and a native girl is heightened by the
darkness of the primeval forests and hills.

The moods and emotions of Conrad’s characters are influenced by the
physical atmosphere:

Jim on the bridge was penetrated by the great certitude of unbounded safety and
peace that could be read on the silent aspect of nature like the certitude of fostering
love upon the placid tenderness of a mother’s face. (emphasis added)

Conrad evokes an atmosphere by using the natural background which
influences the characters and adds to their reality. When the night is dark the
white officers and Jim desert the Patna and board a life boat. There is no
moon and not even starlight. The darkness is such that the men cannot see one
another. The other men were angry at Jim after knowing his identity in the
darkness because they had expected the engineer to be there. Though Jim was
also one of them, their malicious behaviour towards him was quite
unreasonable and his thoughts reveal to us that “There is something peculiar in
a small boat upon the wide sea. Over the lives borne from under the shadow of
death there seems to fall the shadow of madness.” This passage reflects the
effect of the dark night and the ominously calm sea on the minds of the human
characters. The dark and brooding sense of uneasiness and fatality in Conrad sometimes becomes oppressive, as in the atmosphere of Patusan, just before the ultimate catastrophe. All the elements of nature – the hills, the sky, the forests and the river, convey the feeling of a menace waiting to manifest itself. Sometimes, nature becomes a symbol of evil, and sometimes it appears that nature and human beings exist almost as manifestations of each other.

The last moments before Jim walks over to face Doramin and die at his hands, are also described in a natural setting:

She sobbed on his shoulder. The sky over Patusan was blood-red, immense, streaming like an open vein. An enormous sun nestled crimson amongst the tree tops, and the forest below had a black and forbidding face.

Tam' Itam tells me that on that evening the aspect of the heavens was angry and frightful. I may well believe it, for I know that on that very day a cyclone passed within sixty miles of the coast, though there was hardly more than a languid stir of air in the place. ¹⁷ (emphasis added)

This poignant scene where Jim breaks away from Jewel is illustrative of the interaction between the aspects of nature and man's temperament. In such passages Conrad uses his pictorial gift to create a powerful natural imagery and atmosphere that delight the readers.
Conrad’s Philosophy of Life:

Conrad’s novels are free from didacticism, because he tries to portray life as perceived by the senses. However, he frequently depicts men of faith and courage who are determined to carry out their duty to fellow human beings. This makes it easy for us to deduce his philosophy, with fidelity to one’s fellows and sacrifice for the sake of such high ideals as the prime virtues.

As Marlow describes Jim waiting in the Malabar hotel, his description reveals the ideals ensconced in Conrad’s philosophy. Jim is said to be a child of parents who belong to the group of men and women who are not clever or amusing, but “whose very existence is based upon honest faith and upon the instinct of courage.” Marlow further says that, it is not any military, civil or special courage, but the “inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face,” which gives one “an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature and the seductive corruption of men.”

Truth, fidelity and sacrifice as the essential virtues in Conrad’s philosophy are reiterated throughout the novel. When Marlow visits Stein to find a stable employment for Jim, he reflects that Stein’s own life had begun in sacrifice. In following his dreams, Stein had traveled far and wide and on unusual paths but “whatever he followed it had been without faltering, and therefore without shame and without regret. . . . That was the way no doubt.”
Jim had betrayed his fellow human beings on the Patna, and this was against Conrad’s philosophy according to which, only fidelity and a sense of solidarity with the human race can enable man to be successful against evil. Marlow as Conrad's mouthpiece in Lord Jim says that the spirit of the land, as befits a great ruler, is careless of innumerable lives. (Individual lives) “Woe to stragglers! We exist only in so far as we hang together.” [emphasis added] and Jim had also straggled in a way.

In another passage in the novel Marlow narrates to his friend the contents of a letter to Jim, from his Father. This is perhaps the only letter he receives from home before he joins the Patna. The letter contains news of some family developments and moral instructions. Marlow says that irrespective of place and distance, virtue is the same all over the world and that there is only one faith, one conceivable way of leading life and only one manner to die. Jim's father wants him never to forget that “who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and everlasting ruin”. He wants Jim to make a fixed resolve never to do anything which he believed to be wrong. In the light of these words, we instantly feel that Jim, in a moment of weakness had given way to the temptation of saving his own life and deserted the Patna and its pilgrim passengers. If we see the story in retrospect, the parson’s (Jim’s father’s) words have come true because Jim’s peace of mind is lost from the
moment he jumped from the *Patna*. In a way, the rest of the tragic story from that point onwards is a story of Jim’s ruin. We can therefore say that the parson’s words contain Conrad’s philosophy.
NOTES

2 Conrad, Lord Jim, 20.
3 Conrad, Lord Jim, 24.
4 Conrad, Lord Jim, 57, 58.
5 Conrad, Lord Jim, 91.
6 Conrad, Lord Jim, 378.
7 Conrad, Lord Jim, 11.
8 Conrad, Lord Jim, 120.
9 Conrad, Lord Jim, 149.
10 Conrad, Lord Jim, 276.
11 Conrad, Lord Jim, 41,42.
12 Conrad, Lord Jim, 51.
13 Conrad, Lord Jim, 2.
14 Conrad, Lord Jim, 304.
15 Conrad, Lord Jim, 20.
16 Conrad, Lord Jim, 148.
17 Conrad, Lord Jim, 521.
18 Conrad, Lord Jim, 52.
19 Conrad, Lord Jim, 266.
20 Conrad, Lord Jim, 277.
21 Conrad, Lord Jim, 429.