

Heart of Darkness: Embodiment of Imperialism

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ABSTRACT

Present paper is a comprehensive analysis on the dark truth and theme, 'Imperialism' during the African Colonial era in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Conrad was successful in unfolding the brutal reality of imperialism under the disguise of economic development and civilization in Congo. He exposes the avarice and rapacity of the Europeans, through the main character of the novel, Kurtz who is depicted as the personification of deception and brutality. It examines how the Europeans employed various strategies to imperialize a nation and reveals the agonising story of western destructive power.

Keywords: Idealism, realpolitik, colonisation, nihilistic.

Joseph Conrad, the pioneer of modern English novels, stood as an enemy of imperialism and colonisation when the stars of the British Empire were rising. He suspected the government did not ensure liberty to men. He exclaimed that the world would be a better place without Imperialism as it was a brute force. Heart of Darkness is a very impressive and fascinating piece of art which depicts whitemen's hostile, unsympathetic and inhuman relationship with the backward natives of dark Africa and Mr. Kurtz who is the physical embodiment of Conrad's distrust of the imperialistic forces. It is crying hoarse that in any type of government man's place is, indeed, dark and the future bodes not well for everyone. Conrad's vision emphasises the corrupting power of realpolitik.

Conrad uses Marlow as a spokesperson against all imperialism. The imperial government is greedy and racist as they talk of humanity. He says,

"The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." (Darkness, 7) the realities behind imperialism and capitalism were far more alive to Conrad than what was happening in those days. This contemplation in using them as subject matter can be seen in the shift from the Malay archipelago to contemporary issues. This becomes clearer in his Author's Note to Nostromo:

"...I become then conscious of any impending change in my mentality and in my attitude towards the tasks of my writing life... a subtle change in the nature of inspiration; a phenomenon for which I cannot in any way be held responsible." (Nostromo, 9)

Conrad uses Kurtz as the physical embodiment of his distrust of the imperialistic forces which have been let loose in the name of improving the niggers in the heart of Africa. Yes

on the other hand, Marlow is very hopeful and eager to see the world which is based on Western democracy that can justify imperialism with good deeds. But as he steps into Congo, he is aghast to see the reality. Thus, what he sees defies description. JH Miller appropriately comments,

“... perhaps most explicitly apocalyptic in announcing the end of western civilisation, or of Western imperialism, **the reversal of idealism in savagery.**”(Miller,1983,47)

Review of Literature

Acemoglu et al., (2012) explained that in the Africa, however, this heterogeneity is muted, making an assessment of the average effect more interesting. It is emphasized that to draw conclusion it is necessary not just to have awareness about what actually happened to development of these countries during the colonial period however also to have a look on the what might have happened without colonialism and also to take into account the legacy of colonialism era.

Ubaku et al (2015) write that the current structure of the world economic order is an artificial creation by the advanced countries of the world in their bid to achieve the imperialistic desire. As the result, there exists in the global system evidential in the categorization of the nations of the world as north and south respectively. In the north constitutes, the in-depth industrialized nations are known as the developed nations and the south comprises of the underdeveloped nations where African nations are categorized.

Ball., J. S., (1983) write on Imperialism, Social Control and the Colonial Curriculum in Africa. The common assertion found in accounts of schooling in less developed countries of the Africa is their current day education systems, which are trapped and inhibited in their overall

development. By the legacy of the colony era of their past. Moreover it is taken for granted both by indigenous and Western writers that this legacy stem directly from imposition of forms of Western, and academic schooling by the colonial power.

Objectives

- To analysis on the dark truth and theme Imperialism’ during the African Colonial era in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness.
- To unfold the brutal reality of imperialism under the disguise of economic development and civilization in Congo.
- To exposes the avarice and rapacity of the Europeans, through the main character of the novel, Kurtz who is depicted as the personification of deception and brutality.
- To examine how the Europeans employed various strategies to imperialize a nation and reveals the agonizing story of western destructive power.

Research Methodology

The study is based on the secondary data, which is taken from the various library and other online and offline sources. Descriptive cum diagnostic research design is adopted by the researcher.

Kurtz is a special being who is sent by the international society for the suppression of savage customs on an important mission for its future guidance. He prepares it with,

“... the Argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at must necessarily appear to them (savages) in the nature of supernatural beings- we approach them with the might as of a deity.”(Darkness,78)

Kurtz is a true idealist. The accountant informs Marlow that he (Kurtz) is "...an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else." (Darkness, 37) Kurtz's Oil painting of a blindfolded woman carrying a light torch against a sombre background speaks symbolically of his zeal and enthusiasm for the venture of bringing light to Africa, a heart of darkness.

However, this is the gross realpolitik macabre dance of the imperialistic designs. There is aimless blasting in the name of building a railway yard, add some distance a boiler is valuing in the grass, lots of drainage pipes are lying wasted in the settlement. At the first station Marlow is introduced to the achievement of progress in: "Everything... in the station was in a muddle- heads, things, buildings... a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness." (Darkness, 26) the subordinates of courts merely keep up appearances. The brick-maker is there but he makes no bricks. Their chief mission is to get appointed to a trading post where they can get more ivory and earn more profit. This indignant outburst of Conrad against such administration is commented by Marlow as:

"To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. (They).. grabbed what they could for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a grand scale..." (Darkness, 46)

The intentions of the imperial government are cleared when Marlow's ship passes a French man of war firing into the empty bush where no life is visible.

"There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the

sight... not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives- he called them enemies!- hidden out of sight somewhere." (Darkness, 19) Similarly, Marlow is filled with extreme loathing when he lands at the mouth of Congo as he runs into a catacomb of labouring negroes who are too broken in health to work any longer. Conrad successfully merges the imperial theme with the personal one, which helps the story to run parallels both at the social and psychological levels. Kurtz is a symbol for imperialism whereas ivory is a metaphor for wealth. This bears Congo loads of social luxury due to an untold number of men and animals are butchered for it. Kurtz, on the other hand, is shown to be an idealist whose idea was of elevating the natives while the Manger had nothing of it. This ascended Kurtz to the ladder of deity for the natives due to which he started indulging in every kind of realpolitik to stay in power.

"...Kurtz has lost his footing and plunged into an abyss of degradation, ...he has engaged in unspeakable rites, allowed the tribesmen to deify him, taken a savagemistress, slain Africans whose heads he awesomely impaled on posts outside the lodging..." (Gurko, 1979, 50)

In the process of rising above the masses, Kurtz has fallen in his personal scale to a diabolic and nihilistic level. Conrad symbolises all of Europe in the character of Kurtz who pleads "Exterminate all the brutes." (Darkness, 79) in his Report to the Society to implicate the imperialistic designs of the country. Marlow's comment is appropriate when he utters, "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz." (Darkness, 78) Kurtz's lust for ivory stands for all of Europe in this sort of satanic hunger. In the jungle, the only law is the survival of the fittest. According to Fredrick R. Karl, Conrad has presented his deep insights in the character of Kurtz. "...the manipulation of whole peoples for

purely selfish ends, the obsession with image and consensus, and personal power, the absence of meaningful beliefs, the drive for advancement... have become the expected burden of the ruled in the century.”(Karl,35)

Kurtz’s odyssey in Congo is the corruption of self and death to others on a monumental scale which foretells the results of all such adventures. His last cry of **thehorror** is of his spiritual despair which he has reviewed with all its corresponding terror and has repented of it. This reveals the end of all idealism as in the words of J H Miller, Kurtz’s conquest of Africa means

“... the end of civilisation, with all its ideals of progress, enlightenment, and reason, its goal of carrying the torch of civilisation into the wilderness and wringing the heart of darkness.”(Miller,48)

Marlow’s description of Kurtz lying in the deathbed as “as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind.”(Darkness,117) expresses a painful lesson in the reality of life that civilization brings with its dubious rewards. Marlow is not Kurtz but he has also experienced the darkness and in doing so he has matured. The irony of the story comes full circle as he lies to Kurtz’s fiancée which seems to be sealing his commitment to Kurtz. Gurko states:

“The lie, like the imperialism, to which even Kurtz is allied is an evil thing but isredeemed, as Kurtz’s ivory activities were, by a benevolent and ideal motivation.”(Gurko,151)

The universality of Conrad’s theme is underlined by the combination of east and westlinking the Thames and the Congo, Africa and Europe and the mud paths in this heart of darkness. The character of Kurtz is a universal figure: “His mother was

half-English,his father was half-French. (Darkness, 78) The far-off drums of Africa are compared to the sounds of bells in a Christian country. The history of Europeans and individuals is revealed by the polarity of Kurtz and Marlow. Karl reveals how,

“... the dirty work of this world is carried out by men who reputations are preserved by lies.” (Karl,41)

Heart of Darkness is a crude delineation of what happens when material interests are given more importance in the name of progress and prosperity than human interests. Conrad has not only exposed the sheer futility of Belgian imperialism but simultaneously reminds us about the British imperialists of his time. The theme of im the manipulation of whole peoples for purely selfish ends, the obsession with image and consensus, and personal power, the absence of meaningful beliefs, the drive for advancement... have become the expected burden of the ruled in the century.”(Karl,35)

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