

## Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad as an indictment on Colonialism and exposes the real face of Colonizers

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### ABSTRACT

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is based on Conrad's own exploration of the African country and the famous Congo river flowing through that country. Joseph Conrad himself observed the mentality of the white traders and the manner in which they treated the native Africans. Joseph Conrad was very much disappointed when he witnessed the various events in which white Europeans are committing against native population. White Europeans are treating them as slaves and are plundering their natural resources, besides giving them inhuman treatment. In the novel, the writer has expressed in lucid terms the condition of native Africans who are living under dark colonial rule of Europe. The writer feels sympathy for their sad condition and exposes the real face of colonizers, whose sole motive is to loot their natural resources and using various tactics in order to strengthen their colonial rule. The book is regarded as an attack on imperialism and criticizes immoral treatments of the European colonizers in Africa in the 19th century. The purpose of this study is to focus on the pathetic condition of Africans who are considered by Europeans as savages, uncivilized, barbarous, beasts, rude and wild etc.

Colonialism is about the relationship between colonized people and their colonizers, the colonizers consider that the culture of their ancestors was extremely civilized and that is why they define native people as savage or underdeveloped, in other words the colonizers see themselves as superior to the colonized people and that is clearly seen when we read the novel. *Heart of Darkness* is actually an autobiographical novel but Joseph Conrad does not narrate the story, the main story is told by a fictitious character having the name of Marlowe and there is another narrator in the novel too but main part of the story is told by Marlowe. The title of the book *Heart of Darkness* has two meanings literal and symbolic, literally it means the interior of the dark country known as the Congo and symbolically it means the inner depths of human mind and consciousness.

At the beginning of the novel Marlowe calls Africa as 'one of the dark places on the earth'(3) but the real darkness is in Europe rather than Africa due to European's mistreatment against the natives. Marlowe who was himself filled with the knowledge that African people are not humans in real sense, they are beasts living in jungles of Africa and are half humans and it is burden on our shoulders to civilize them, and it was a fantasy for Marlowe. But he was shocked when he personally saw them and he feels pity on them for their abject poverty, food they eat and the place where they reside is really deplorable thing to describe. For instance, Marlowe sees a group of black people mostly naked, moving about like ants, and he sees half a dozen men chained to one another, and each wearing an iron collar on his neck. Marlowe feels deeply upset to see this sight, what kind of crime they have committed and the laws they have violated. Europeans in order to please themselves have made in human laws and rules and who disobeys their rules was given harsh treatment and writer has put this scene in these words:

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air—and nearly as thin (Conrad 18).

Marlowe cannot define exactly the bad condition of natives who are living under despotic colonial rule and how much they suffer is difficult to explain. These Europeans are so cruel and greedy that they inflict unbearable pain on them so as to keep them under subjugation, besides plunder their natural resources which is their main and sole motive and for which they can go to any extent.

I've seen the devil of violence. And the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! These were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men—men, I tell you. But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther (Conrad 17).

Marlowe as a European feels ashamed of what white people are doing in Congo, in order to extract more and more ivory. One among the white Europeans was Mr. Kurtz, whose sole motive was to collect ivory from the jungles of Africa and

earn more and more. Marlowe feels ashamed when he meets Kurtz because of his immoral activities. In order to collect more ivory, these white people have themselves become uncivilized and barbarous as for a long time they have remained away from civilized society. Violence is an indispensable part of colonialism and it is only through violence that they keep natives under subjugation, they terrify them and use various other tools and techniques in order to control them. For example Marlowe tells us that a native thought to cause fire, has been beaten ruthlessly and he was screeching horribly and it was a kind of alarm for entire natives, if they do anything against white people they will be given even more harsh punishment and Europeans justify this violence by giving one pretence or the other, but the question here is why the rest of natives remain silent as they were lifeless, is the threat they have if rebel against them. On other hand Europeans choose to beat the African people to prevent probable conflagrations as stated in the novel:

Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. 'What a row the brute makes!' said the indefatigable man with the moustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression—punishment—bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future (Conrad 29).

Marlowe feels pity for the natives unlike majority of Europeans who are showing superiority over them and who treats them with hate and scorn. These Europeans are not addressing them by their names, infact they are using very rude language while addressing them and using mean words such as savages, beasts and cannibals. Marlowe comes to know the inadequate attention his citizens pay for the natives, but these natives are mere beasts and cannibals for Europeans. In one episode Marlowe is saved on the river by these people whom Europeans consider as burdens and Marlowe was extremely grateful for their benevolence and he even does not know why they are called cannibals by white people, rather by their good names. Marlowe has not personally witnesses any instance of human eating in Congo, apparently these people are not cannibals but there is an inherent hatred among Europeans which force them to call them as cannibals otherwise they too are humans having same complexion. Europeans feel immense pleasure while inflicting pain on them who are innocent people having little knowledge about their nefarious designs. These people are very simple having confined knowledge and are misled by white people in the name of transferring technology to them, but their real motive is to loot and plunder their natural resources and earn more money.

These natives are forced to work hard from dawn to dusk, and are given hardly anything to eat. When Marlowe was with them in one voyage, it was a terrible experience as he and his members heard a mournful clamour. This unexpected noise filled everybody on board the steamer with a strange fear. It seemed that there was a hostile tribe somewhere in the forest.

One of the natives on the ship said that they would not mind if they could get hold of a member of the attacking tribe because they were hungry and would like to eat human flesh. Marlowe wondered why these natives had not attacked any white men on board the ship in order to eat his flesh. Actually these natives are hungry for past many days and are extremely hungry and this is natural if anyone is extremely hungry he can eat anything in order to sustain his life. But it is these white people who force them to do so as they are not feeding them properly and the incident is narrated by the novelist in these lines:

Their headman, a young, broad-chestlike black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me. 'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake. 'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth—'catch 'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' 'Eat 'im!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry (Conrad 47).

The Europeans deliberately regard the natives as cannibals so as to justify their colonialism but Conrad does not talk about the concrete evidence of cannibalism throughout the novel. In *Heart of Darkness* we see violence and brutality through Mr. Kurtz who is the chief of Inner Station who is gifted with exceptional abilities and who came Congo with his sole motive to civilize the uncivilized. Kurtz was very hopeful in his mission but in the meantime he forgot everything and started his another mission of collecting ivory from untrodden and unexplored jungles of Africa. Marlowe describes him as a remarkable man and Kurtz takes every recourse in order to rule the natives. His way of collecting ivory is terrible and if any one disobeys him he is sure to be butchered as his hut is surrounded by the skulls of men who do not obey him. He deliberately turns the faces of these skulls to the house so that natives will recognise his power. When Marlowe sees them for the first time, he was bewildered and confused. Kurtz uses these skulls to threaten the others and this shows his brutality against the natives and Marlowe explains his confusion as:

Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing—food for thought and also for vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky (Conrad 68).

Marlowe hates the cruel treatment against the natives and he respects them as humans and he is totally against this colonialism and feels sympathy for them. He has personally witnessed various events of callousness and his heart melts, he desires to help them, feed their bellies and is deeply

affected by the cruel inhuman treatments imposed by Kurtz on the natives and he clearly remembers his experiences when he returns back. Marlowe ironically depicts Kurtz's mistreatments and greediness and his appearance in these words:

I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived—a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence (Conrad 91).

Kurtz whose intention was to provide education to natives but in doing this noble job, he exploits them and starts collecting ivory and he himself says about his job as "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing"(conrad 38). But Kurtz tortures them rather than educating and Joseph Conrad shows this reversal of intention in this novel. Kurtz imposes worst form of inhuman treatment on natives in order to gain more and more, and still his greediness does not end. He does whatever he likes and there is no one to ask him any sort of question or who will restrict his activities. He prefers to remain in unexplored jungles of Africa in order to collect ivory and he remain out of contact with a civilized society and thus forgets his civilized life, in other words he himself became more wild and uncivilized among natives and such things are bound to happen. Kurtz is so obsessed with ivory that he even forgets his past civilized life and his main task was to start ivory trade and for this he can do anything mean.

But when anyone does anything wrong or act against God's commandments this result is very bad and God does not give a chance for repentance and same happens with Kurtz, who treats the natives so violently that in the end he regrets for his actions in the end and cries twice as "The Horror! The Horror ( ) before he dies. These words clearly reflect his state of mind and deep remorse but his end is near and he is no more a powerful king. When he was in his hey days he used to terrify the natives with his words, for example he writes "Exterminates all the brutes"( ) in his report about the future guidance of natives. When one reads these statements one comes to know the kind of mentality and attitude these Europeans have towards natives and writers purpose too was to criticize colonialism ardently. When Kurtz dies it was a horrible thing to see as writer says:

I saw him open his mouth wide—it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. He fell back suddenly (Conrad 72).

The image which the writer depicts one believes that imperialism and colonialism is detrimental for both the colonizer and the colonized. In the novel *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad talks about the futility of European colonialism not only in Congo but in other parts of the world and he was a champion for their rights. He believes that all humans are equal and there is no one superior or inferior and it is against human values if we hate and discriminate each other, rather we should help each other and eliminate backwardness and poverty and the writer has successfully conveyed his ideas to his readers.

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