

## **A Study of Racism and Colonization in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness**

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Heart of darkness is a novella written by the famous writer Joseph Conrad. It came out in the year 1902. It is one of the most discussed novels in the field of postcolonial studies as it deals with themes such as racism and colonisation. It is inspired by the author's own experience in the Congo River. Here he narrates the story through the main character Marlow. In its essence it is the story about greed for power and for money over the colonized subjects. When we analyse the novel, we can find that the depiction of African people as the 'other' is very problematic. Conrad pictures African people as deprived people and it is portrayed as it is the duty of the colonizers to empower them. This criticism is also reflected in the work "An Image of Africa Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" written by the famous novelist Chinua Achebe.

We can find this trend in many of the modern English writers. They nullify the act of colonisation as sort of purifying machine. In Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" we see the picture of Congo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the height of colonisation. Also, Congo was often described as the centre of colonisation and imperialism. Through the character Marlowe we see how Marlowe analyses this colonial decay. Even though Conrad condemns the colonisation process taking place but also at the same time his portrayal of African people is very problematic. Chinua Achebe in his critical analysis states that 'the purpose of my observations should be quite clear at this point, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this basic truth is overlooked in criticisms of his work is because of the way that white racism against Africa is such an ordinary perspective that its indications go totally unremarked.'

When we analyse the text we can see that much of the criticism pointed out by Chinua Achebe is true. When the novella pictures how the Africans were ill treated but at the same time they were portrayed as animals and mere objects. They were portrayed as inferior to others. We can see instances for this in the novella such as 'black figures walked around drowsily pouring water on the glow, whence a sound of murmuring continued, stream ascended in the twilight and the beaten nigger moaned somewhere.' Here we can see that the use of certain words and expressions gives us the notion of the racist attitude of the author. Also, another interesting factor is that the portrayal of Africa by Conrad. In the novella we see that it is portrayed as some mysterious and monstrous place rather than a humane one. We should realize that it is the colonizer himself who destroyed the beauty of Africa. There are also other instances such as 'it was paddled by black fellows. You could see from a distance the white of their eyeballs sparkling. They yelled, sang; their bodies gushed with sweat; they had faces like grotesque masks'. Here we see Conrad using the term Grotesque Masks to describe their face thereby he portrays them as somewhat ugly and weird.

Here we can see that Conrad often describes men as animals or as savages. His treatment of women is also both misogynist and racist at the same time. We can see that he describes them as 'she was savage and heavenly,

wild eyed and magnificent; there was something unfavourable and stately in her purposeful advancement'. When we closely analyse these statements, we can see that these statements objectify women and also explicitly racist. An important feature here is that it is only the people from Africa that is being portrayed in a negative light all other characters including the British who are the actual intruders is portrayed in a positive light.

One of the major themes discussed in the novella is colonisation. Here we see Marlow acts as a mere but at the same time it is Kurtz who represents the greed the whole west had for colonialisation. The main argument propagated by the colonists was that it is their duty to purify and develop the colonies and it was termed as white mans burden, but really what happened was they were the ones who looted the colonies. Kurtz in this novella actually represents this greed for colonisation. His main aim was to procure as much as ivory as possible. We can also see that he was once a man of enlightenment who then transformed into a cruel person due to his greed. Instead of becoming a person who spread his enlightenment he became a thief who took away the ivories and wealth away from the native people. He then treated people as mere animals. We see here the transformation from good to evil.

Here the colonizer comes up with the assumption that it is his moral duty to take Africans out of the darkness. Thus, they propagate a field of thinking that they are superior to others. Also, the significance of the title of the novella also plays a major part. Here 'heart of darkness' signifies Africa and by thus implying that Africa is a dark continent without any morality from the western point of view. The ending of the novel also signifies to the true nature of Europe and the division they create among people. We see them dividing the world into two as the civilized them and the savage 'other'. But there also instances where the novel condemns the colonial actions. The stand of the author is also confusing here. because we see in the beginning of the novel, he starts by criticizing imperialism but gradually in a way he justifies it. We see that he is pleased to see the expanding British territory in the map and also, he often refers to Africans as primitive and savage. Therefore, we can conclude that in a way heart of darkness depicts the ill effects of colonisation and imperialism but at the same time the portrayal of Africans and other subalterns are extremely racist, also it may be revealing the true thought process of majority of Europe at that point of time.

#### Reference texts

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