

The portrayal of Discrimination: A Brief Study of the White and the Black Race in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness

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Abstract

In the novel *Heart of Darkness*, the portrayal of discrimination is between the white and the black race. Colonialism and racism are the parallel themes in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This study will encompass the white colonizer's atrocity towards their subordinate race represented as the black Africans of Congo. Imperialism is nevertheless at the center of *Heart of Darkness*. This novel provides a critical view of European imperial activities to rule like the Perpetrators. Here in this research paper, I will try to figure out the superiority and influencing power of English colonizer and how they prevail on the black African race.

Keywords: Heart of Darkness, Colonialism, Racism

1. Introduction

Joseph Conrad has exhibited the ingrained discrimination between the white and the black race from two different parts like white British and black Africa in his controversial colonial novel *Heart of Darkness*. The main attraction of this novel will only lead to the triumph of white race, whereas the injustice, unkind attitudes towards the black race will inflate gradually throughout the novel. Joseph Conrad directly or somewhere indirectly included some of the notable issues such as colonialism, racism, atrocity, and the cruel ruling system as like the despotic rulers. To analyse the colonialism and racism, it is salient to use the post colonial theories from the African theorists. The novel has rooted from the apt experiences of Joseph Conrad's own life. He had been working as a merchant sailor in Congo, the phenomenon African country. Conrad's own life's portrayal has been occupied by the hideous nature of Belgian colonial project which was responsible for the predicament situation of Africa. Here it is very known to the readers that, the British and European culture are constantly and undoubtedly racist. Therefore in the novel *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad had exhibited the barbaric ruling power over the innocent inhabitants of Congo.

2. Discrimination between the white and black female characters in Heart of Darkness

European female characters are mostly considered as elite, passionate and true existence on earth. Conrad portrayed them as real people. In the novel Kurtz's intended was presented as a vision of idealized womanhood of beauty and love. Here it is proved that Conrad has showed the mesmerised beauty of the white women, he proclaimed that, they have the truth of being a real Woman. on the other sides, Conrad has presented the black woman as like savage, wild, uncivilized. And the clear example is Kurtz's African mistress, who was manifested to be little more than personification of wilderness, the barbaric nature.

To analyse the black women's existence, it is need to look towards the oppressive and avoided nature by the white race. Thus, Conrad has made the white women superior and desirable than the black ones. Marlow had the meetings with two women in the office of the company, when they were busy 'knitting wool' (Conrad 33). Here the black colour symbolized death, whereas knitting wool associated with fate.

3. Chinua Achebe's complains about the White Race's heedless behaviours towards the black natives

Most of the post colonial writers raised their voice against the colonial attitudes. Chinua Achebe has

found the novel *Heart of Darkness* as the symbol of white race's discriminatory attitudes towards the black natives of African country like Congo. Chinua Achebe elucidated the novel's main theme was centered on Europeans superiority over the inferior black race. He assuredly blamed the author and his works. Achebe claimed that, Conrad was a racist and should not be considered a great work of art, thus he exhibited the well established demonstration of his opinion:

"The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a through going racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticism of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked". (Achebe, 1789)

According to Achebe, Conrad had an obsession with white skin colour. A core point in Achebe's criticism is that Conrad thinks everything should be right accordingly to their English culture. Africans are described as savages with wild eyes, sounds like violent drums. Africa has been presented as 'other zone' while Europe has been exhibited as the refined region. As it is the question of African natives reputation, therefore Achebe wanted to generate the African identity strong and stood against Conrad's racial and colonial attitudes in his theories. In his famous critique, "A Image of Africa", Chinua Achebe showed intense complains against Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

"Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as 'the other world', the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality". (Achebe, 1785)

In the above lines, Achebe tried to proclaimed Conrad's thoughts of white men's smug which has encompassed the superlative nature and the traits to undermine all the hardship and simplicity of the African black men.

4. Joseph Conrad's depiction of superior white rulers through the characters Marlow and Kurtz

Conrad described the black inhabitants of Africa as the land of barbarism, uncivilization. The elements of racism packed with colonialism. The main narrator was the white man named Marlow. He sailed the steamboat for the journey towards Congo. On the way of his journey he has observed many brutal scenes happened on the black natives life. Throughout the novel Conrad has presented the white male characters as the strong and helpful ones who has gone to the African region to serve the

natives for their betterment, but actually they have spoiled the landscape.

"They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks- these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being their". (Conrad, 78)

These above lines indicates the inferior status of the black natives and presented them as wild in front of the white men. Kurtz and Marlow are the two credible characters who has been uplifted the spirit of white men's superiority. The novel started with the venturous journey of Marlow who took a job as river boat captain with the company, a Belgian organized to trade in the Congo. As Marlow was travelling to Africa, he has encountered with the widespread brutality and indifferent attitudes in the company's stations.

Marlow observed that, the black people of Congo have been forced in to the company's service, and therefore suffered terribly from over work and ill treatment at the hands of company's agents. Some are chained, some are on the death bed and some are starved and diseased. The chained and criminals who have violated the rules set by whites and soon they will about to face the death as penalty. By seeing such situation of the natives of Congo, it is obvious that, the white man's indifferent attitudes are the main cause for their spoiled life. Marlow lurked his true face with deceptive mask, while his sincere presence as a member of colonizer in Africa became prominent in the novel *Heart of Darkness*.

In this way the entire novel goes on moving between the inhuman, deceptive and the spurious minded colonizer who always presented themselves as the helping hands and good friends of the black natives. In a true sense Marlow has encapsulated the term of 'deceptive mask'.

"Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps, Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails... They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an isolable mystery from over the sea. All their meagre breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, death like indifference of unhappy savages". (Conrad, 80)

"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... the black bones reclined at full

length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young-almost a boy-but you know with them its hard to tell". (Conrad, 82)

In the passage above, through the words 'unhappy savages' means animals and the rags wagging like tails uphold the meaning of dogs and those unhappy savages are the dogs. After that, in the above lines there is an example of feeding a dying man by biscuit to eat is apparently a noble work but from the perspectives of white race, Marlow was supposed to feed a starving bog back on familiar European street. The bit touch of Marlow's kindness implicitly expressed his racism. And it has been uplifted the blatant injustice that are vivid to his biased European eyes. His lack of true sense lies on his careless attitudes towards the black men. Hence he never thought to try to do anything fruitful fir helping the Africans, but saw them suffering around him.

"In few days the Eldorado Expedition went into the patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes over a driver. Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved. I did not unique". (Conrad, 102)

By these lines of Conrad, its almost clear that, he tried to show his narrator Marlow as the true representer of Englishness. Marlow thought the Africans as part of the land but never let them allow for the rightful owners of the land. Marlow first dud praise about the African crew's utility:

"We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows- cannibals-in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them". (Conrad, 104)

By these statements Conrad trued to minimizing their abilities. And showed the traces of the unnamed Helmsman.

"They were big powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences". (Conrad, 112)

"An athletic black belonging to some coast tribe, and educated by my poor predecessor, was the helmsman. He stopped a pair of brass earrings, wore a blue cloth wrapper from the waist to the ankles, and thought all the world of himself, he was the most unstable kind of fool I had ever seen. He steered with no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost sight of you, be become instantly the prey of an abject funk, and would let that cripple of a steamboat get the upper hand of him in a minute". (Conrad, 116)

In the former passages of this paper, the reader has been treated to a wide range of various issues

such as arrogant, entitled, corrupt European men of little skill and even less wisdom. But here in one passage Conrad has depicted the helmsman as the "most unstable kind of fool" because he is black. After the death of the helmsman, Marlow claimed to mourn fir him while simultaneously declaring him to be almost no worth or ability of being an true human being.

"I missed my late helmsman awfully,- I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara". (Conrad, 124)

Delivering all the minimization and degradation in the narrative, it is pretty much sure that Marlow is a implicit racist protagonist documenting an aggressively racist world. Kurtz was one of the powerful colonizer who has uphold the white European's values. He was a petty tyrant, a dying God, an embodiment of Europe. Once Kurtz tested the power that could be in the jungle. However, he has abandoned the philanthropic idea, which he was carried with him. He came to Congo to bring the light of civilization to the black natives. But instead of his this good reputation, he used to made himself up as a God to natives at the inner station. Kurtz language was modelled with the colonial motif of Europeans. He was like a God for the black natives, therefore he did the exploitation in the field of society, relation, policies, etc. He affected to almost all aspects of African society. The very existence of Kurtz proved that he was a man of enthralling last, when he kept his hidden relationship with one black native girl. In an effort to rule them, he even did not hesitate to harass her sexually. Kurtz's mentality was encompassed with the colonial motive and European conduct. Hence he thought about the highest position and attraction from the African natives, also he wanted to prove his superiority to them in different levels.

Moreover, Kurtz was a man of racial power, fascinating savagery with despotic nature. In this novel, it is almost beautifully presented about the destructive activities of the white men over the black natives. Kurtz was the main person to accomplish the pure colonial tasks. He took those natives under his control which is very relevant to the context of discrimination between the white and the black African men. Kurtz exploited Congo to the in- depth satisfaction of his hungry lust. He has sent loads of ivory to Europe within two years, which can clearly present the attributes of the power grabbing colonizers. After all Kurtz has displayed his threatening power to the natives in term of collecting ivory and presented him and the colonialism as the most violent and hideous one. Farhana Haque gave her statements regarding colonialism and how they

overpower the inferior natives in her article “ An Aspect of Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism: A Comparative Study between the Traces of British Imperialism in English Literature and the Counterpoint of Anti-Colonialism in Bengali Literature of 19th Century”

“Hence the superior colonizers thinks that they need to clean and polish the standards of the colonized nations. Their pride is certain to notice because of the ruling conduct towards the inferior subordinates”. (Haque, 2016, p.87)

To relate her statements with the characters of Marlow and Kurtz it has been manifested that, the colonial attitudes were present in Conrad’s time which he has been depicted through Marlow and Kurtz’s superior traits and their pride about being an European man. Therefore the mighty ruler’s ruling abilities towards the black natives.

5. References

Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness explores the exploitation of African people by the white colonizers. Marlow and Kurtz, both are the representator of despotic rulers who has travelled to African region in the name of civilization and educating native people, while its not true at all. They actually there to colonize the people economically, socially, politically and mentally in different areas. In Heart of Darkness the very significant action was to collect the ivory. Ivory symbolizes the white man’s greed and the white man’s commercial mentality, the colonizer’s chief concern in the Congo was to collect ivory and send it to Europe. The greater ivory collected, the greater is his achievement. Ivory is a kind of money, which the European wanted to collect and take in their own control. By doing this they wanted to exploit the natives economically. The white man’s intention was to rule the black Africans in order to prove them superior. The discrimination between the white and the black race lies on the attitudes of the colonizers which made the readers become understanding about the highest levels of atrocity.

6. Conclusion

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