



Civilization And Savagery In Joseph Conrad's 'Heart Of Darkness'

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- *Abstract :*

This paper exposes the novel's analysis of civilization and savagery. The delineation of frailty of civilization is explicitly portrayed removing the preoccupied notion about civilization. The savagery is described as a power that throws away the disguise of modesty and exposes the concealed barbaric instinct within the human soul. Themes of ethical obscurity, colonizing tormentation, exploitation over natives, and harmful intentions of human beings are the main aspects of darkness that remain within the human soul. The tutorial also shows Conrad's criticism over the immoral impact of imperialism. The main theme here is European imperialism that brings out the decay of the moral circle. He also questions the real nature of human beings, ultimately claiming that the blur between civilization and savagery is narrow. Thus, the decay of civilization from savagery in the form of a frail constitute and masquerade is explored through the following discussion.

- *Keywords :*

civilization, savagery, ethical obscurity, imperialism.

- *Introduction :*

Joseph Conrad's novella '*Heart of Darkness*' throws light on colonialism, civilization, wilderness and innate habit of manhood. Placing the backdrop of European imperialism in Africa, the novella delves deeply into the psychological and critical dilemmas of colonialism and explores the shape of colonization and savagery. The darkness is an important theme here and serves as a major motif that exposes the extreme darkness of the human heart.

- *Analysis :*

- *Civilization as a frail constitute :*

From the very beginning, civilization is shown as a frail construct, simply camouflaging the innate savagery of humankind. The protagonist, Marlow travels into the African bottom to rescue an ivory trader, Kurtz who has passed away for his madness in the jungle. Throughout this journey, Marlow meets his own preconceptions about civilization and its taming power over human beings.

Marlow's journey is a metaphorical journey which he made up the Congo River. This journey explores the downhill part of the human psyche. Into the bottom of Africa, he becomes stricken from the structure of European society and its prevalent pathetic condition. Brutality, cruelty, chaos, violence and moral degeneration are the common pictures. This violence of the continent represents itself as a catalyst throwing away the space of civilization and demonstrating the radical savagery of the European colonizers.

In '*Heart of Darkness*', Conrad reveals the imposture and hypocrisy of European colonialism, which is often exposed as a civilizing mission to evoke improvement and consciousness to slow-footed and backward societies. But all the time, torture and exploitation over native people, barbarous loot of resources and moral decay of the colonizers are vividly exposed and Marlow is the observer of all these happenings. The European presence in Africa is remarkable by cruelty, rapacity, corruption etc. The question often arises in mind: who are the actual savages?

Kurtz is the representative figure between civilization and savagery. At first, he is presented in this novella as a great powerful man - an elegant, stagnant and intelligent individual who is constantly bringing '*light*' to Africa. Remaining strict at his aim, he risks into the wilderness. He realises that he has left the hypocrisy of civilization and has wrapped himself into the jungle. The imminent breakdown of civilization is also portrayed through Kurtz who removed the structures of the continent. The jungle's heart is not only covered with darkness, the darkness also dwells in Kurtz's own soul where the encirclements of religious and ethical anthologies have been destroyed.

- *Darkness as an important theme :*

An important theme in '*Heart of Darkness*' is darkness which is not exterior but interior. The darkness of the forest is not just the restless and wilderness of Africa, it is an image of pathetic human condition. Observing the activities of colonizers, Marlow thinks that civilization is not a cover against savagery but simply a slender, frail veneer. Barbarity, severity and cruelty lie under this veneer.

Kurtz's last words - "*The horror! The horror!*" - are a confession of the darkness that remains within the human heart. Kurtz feels worried about the rules and regulations of European society. Throughout his journey he comes closer to the true nature and real image of humanity. This situation horrified him terribly. So, the isolation in the jungle is not the reason for his crazy behaviour but his confrontation with immense darkness strikes him very much.

This darkness is not confined to Kurtz; European and African people also have lost their moral circle covered with this situation. Numerous individuals are the prey of this immense darkness. The European traders are portrayed as cruel and tricky, directed by power, authority and greed under the disguise of establishing civilization in Africa. They obey their duty of Company's work but their behaviour towards African people is quite brutal and ruthless. According to Conrad, the imperialistic intention of the European race is the true heart of darkness. These people claim to spread enlightenment, but instead they actually spread cruelty, violence and exploitation.

- *Civilization as a masquerade :*

The main controversy of '*Heart of Darkness*' is that civilization appears in the form of masquerade that hides the real disposition of humanity. When individuals are free from social obstacles, they expose their primary instincts fully. This subject is illustrated by Kurtz, who at first arrives as a civil and subtle person but ultimately appears as an oppressor who dominates his extreme power over the instinctive people.

Kurtz's lack of goodness demonstrates the frailty of civilization. Though he is a cultured and sophisticated being, he cannot control his greediness of power and greed. He accepts his base desire in the jungle void of social rules and regulations. Kurtz thus becomes a figure of dismay and subjugation obsessed in darkness.

Marlow is also influenced by this journey of darkness. Though he doesn't sink into craziness like Kurtz, he also changes his preconceptions through his viewpoint. He realises that civilization is a mere construction, and behind this sphere human beings are unrevealed horrors. He is the witness of real human nature. After returning to Europe, he becomes disappointed that he cannot view this dark world through the same mirror.

- *The role of forest :*

The forest acts as a literal and symbolic setting in '*Heart of Darkness*'. The place serves as a secret, dangerous, mysterious world of European society. This world is constructed with chaos and confusion. Into the heart of Africa, Marlow confronts the darkness that lies within himself and the other figures.

Conrad presents the forest as an image for the strange, insensible and restless sight of the human heart. It represents the oppressed and subdued aspects of human nature - violence, narrowness and moral decay. As Marlow ventures into the forest, he comes to know the fact that the African savages are capable of cruelty and Europeans want to civilize them from their brutal and hideous behaviour though they are actual brutal beings.

Thus, the forest is a symbolic representation of the darkness of the human psyche. This ground is the border between civilization and savagery scandal, where real human attitude is explicitly disclosed. The delineation of forest threatens the idea that civilization is nothing more than a mask and fragile construct, and reveals the raw spirit of humanity.

- *The obscurity of light and darkness:*

Conrad throughout this novella '*Heart of Darkness*' exposes the idea of light and darkness. Light is mainly related to virtue, consciousness, wisdom and civilization, while darkness mainly related to ominous, barbarism and savagery. However, this idea is not drawn explicitly in this novella. Like, European colonizers are generally the holder of civilization and light, but they are ever demonstrated as representative of darkness. Their acts like subjugating the people, controlling the land in their own power and making oppression over the whole community bring out their violence and cruelty. On the other hand, though the African forest is presented as a dark reflection, it is not actually dark. The heart of human beings resides in this forest that reflects immense darkness.

The changes of conventional sign reveal the ethnic obscurity of the novella. There is no explicit discrimination between civilization and savagery as well as light and darkness. Therefore Conrad points out that good and bad aspects remain within all human beings. So, the human psyche is the actual heart of darkness. This darkness does not remain within a people or a place.

- *Conclusion :*

Joseph Conrad's '*Heart of Darkness*' is a potent analysis of the darkness that resides within the human psyche. He makes a powerful question about aspects of civilization, receptivity of savagery and ethical outcome of colonialism. The novella threatens the idea that civilization is always superior, and also reveals that human beings are able to possess brutality and moral degradation, throwing away the social obstacles.

Finally, '*Heart of Darkness*' is a criticism of European colonialism and human position. It highlights the brutal reality about colonization, a frail structure and immense darkness that lies within the human heart, not only within the colonizers. The true heart of darkness is the darkness within us.

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