

# CHRONICLE OF HUMANITIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES (CHCS)

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**FROM THE EDITOR'S Desk .....**

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**WE** are delighted to present Vol.7 Issue 6 of *Chronicle of Humanities & Cultural Studies* (CHCS) with valuable contributions from India's renowned scholars. The journal is run by 'Centre for Humanities & Cultural Studies', Kalyan. It is a brilliant offshoot of the Mahatma Gandhi Education & Welfare Society, Narwadi, Dist. Parbhani. It has been established to contribute to society's education and welfare to empower individuals for a better future.

We are confident that the issue will be helpful for readers, critics and researchers. We are grateful to all our contributors for their responses.

We gratefully acknowledge the guidance and help received from various persons during the completion of this issue. We thank all the members of our advisory board and editorial board.

CHCS is a refereed journal, published bi-monthly (Six issues in a year). In order to make *CHCS* self-sustaining, we need your support and patronage. As our well-wisher/friend/patron, we urge you to enroll new members for the journal. In turn, we assure you that we will not compromise on quality in matters of content and production

Our Next Issue will be published in January 2022. We hope you can make it successful with your valuable contributions.

We hope you enjoy this month's reading and as ever, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at: [chcskalyan@gmail.com](mailto:chcskalyan@gmail.com).

- **Dr. Kalyan Gangarde**

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## 7.

**Ideological Crisis in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*****Dr. Sanjay N. Kadam**Head, Dept of English,  
ACS College, Gangakhed, Dist. Parbhani

*Heart of Darkness*, as the name signifies is a story of a voyage into the very heart of the Dark Continent—Congo, in central Africa. However, it is symbolically a journey into the inner darkness of the heart of man—more pertinently its hero, Kurtz, and the darkness to which he has descended. The story as well as its setting is hellish. Marlow excited by the success stories of Mr. Kurtz envisages a journey up the river Congo, fascinated by the lust to meet Mr. Kurtz. The story written in three parts begins with Marlow who narrates one of his nerve-shattering experiences of a trip to Congo. The story opens with Marlow confiding the reader that England too had been a dark Island at the time of Roman conquest and now it was British, who have set forth to different parts of the world to civilise the masses.

The story opens in Brussels in the office of ivory company where Marlow finds “Two women, one fat and the other slim sat on straw bottomed chairs, knitting black wool.”<sup>1</sup> (HD: 110) Conrad in one of his letters written in 1897 said the universe “knits us in and it knits us out.”<sup>2</sup> The sight of two women knitting is symbolic of the darker forces acting in this universe, especially the one that “knits us out.” Together with black wool it shadows death. This sight of “black wool” annoyed Marlow. To overcome the erring feeling, he quickly signs the paper and submits himself to medical examination by a doctor, pays a visit to his influential aunt before leaving for voyage, who asks her to work for “bringing civilisation” to those “ignorant millions” in Congo. (113)

The picture of colonial exploitation and Conrad's philosophy of women juxtapose here. Marlow reflects that woman live in a world of fantasy, which when brought into contact with reality would shatter into pieces: “It's queer how out of touch with truth women are” (113). After reaching the mouth of Congo he runs into a grove filled with dying Negroes, who are unable to bear their chain gangs any longer. Marlow expresses this horror as “death in life” (115) and describes his journey as “a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.” (115)

The first station of the company is thirty miles up the river. The natives enslaved by the white people work in inhuman circumstances and Marlow calls the place an “Inferno”. Marlow opines the exploitation of the Negroes by the white men from postcolonial view point. “Nightmare” is an illusive term, which brings into being the inner psychosis—a state of human psyche wherein various fears merge forming a permanent clotting of nervousness.

“Black shadows of disease”, “starvation”, and “confusedly in the greenish gloom” (118) portray the exploitation as well as horrifying darkness of the dark content. One side of which is the crushed natives and the other is of the delighted white people. Marlow here encounters the company's chief accountant, impeccably dressed and groomed. It is the accountant who first mentions “Kurtz” to Marlow. He is all praise for him because he sends more ivory than anyone else. “Mr. Kurtz was ... a first class agent ... and; ‘He is a very remarkable person’ ...” (120). The accountant talked in length about Mr. Kurtz fascinated



Marlow and the rest of the journey to follow into the “Heart of Darkness” is directed by this fascination and the lust to meet Mr. Kurtz.

Marlow leaves the station with a group of sixty men to sail two hundred miles up the next station. The central station at is even more desolate, surrounded by forest and mud. There in an accident sank the steamer Marlow had come. The General Manager of the station, a pity ordinary fellow with no ability whatsoever, was most concerned to get the ship sailing in order to reach Kurtz, who is ill in the interior. The station is full of aimless men wandering on circles, waiting for the ship to be repaired, thinking of ivory, “The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed... a taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse” (125). The cruelty to the people has been shown with a faith for they have been referred to as pilgrims. The two adjectives whispering and sighing linked with the word ivory becomes a symbol of relationship infuriated and fanatic resulting into the exploitation of natives by the white people. One evening there is a fire and a Negro is beaten to death to ensure no other fire breaks out.

Marlow comes across an agent who has been at the station for a year, waiting for material to make bricks, it is his description of Kurtz that fascinate Marlow: “He is a prodigy... an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else... (127). The portrayal of Kurtz is not of man but of a continent, the image acquires a finer shape in the later pages of *Heart of Darkness*. Words like "Prodigy," "emissary of Pity", and "a man of higher intelligence" wrung up Marlow's mind they stand not merely for Kurtz but for entire Europe. He consequently gets more interested in Kurtz. The agent further draws a parallel between Marlow and Kurtz; he says both are of a new kind, the “gang of virtue, the same people who sent him specially also recommended you.”(127) Who are the “same people”? It evidently refers not merely to a company but to the entire continent. It is a personification of Europe—the place where people of “higher intelligence” live; which has set for the so called task of civilising the “savages”. The description is not grandeur instead is horrifying. The words “and devil knows what else” connotes more than that is written sketching Kurtz's figure—an emissary entrusted by Europe to accomplish a task and something else known to devil only. It is this hidden devilish task that constitutes the essence of fundamental theme of the novel, but the action as well psychology of Kurtz who is an epitome of white people. Further the phrase is also indicative of unknown horrors to turn up now and then in the course of the story.

One evening lying on the deck of his steamboat Marlow overhears two people discussing Kurtz. One of them is upset for Kurtz can manipulate the company administration in the way he likes. The second man accounts for Kurtz's illness and opines that climate will kill him. But, the wonder is that Kurtz is alone at the inner station and is still sending more ivory than all other agents put together. Reports coming from the interior tell of his illness and his imperfect recovery. No one is with him except a lone trader.

Kurtz had his own viewpoint about the station, which makes Marlow think that Kurtz is a man of ideals. He believed that “Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanising, improving, instructing.” (135) Certainly this relationship is inversely proportional not merely to Kurtz's philosophy, his psychology, his temperament, his conduct, but, to the white people whose embodiment he stands as and substantially to the theme of the novel. This is also the earmarked philosophy of colonial exploits. We can also conclude that Kurtz was honest in his conduct and loyalty to the race he represents.



On the Central station the manager and his henchmen—busy extracting as much ivory as possible out of the country; are the true example of the two facets of Kurtz—the developing and the exploiting one: “To tear the treasure out of the bowels of the earth was their desire with no moral purpose at the back of it then there is in burglars breaking into safe.” (133)

The psychological process of the mind of white people working in association with imperialistic thinking in the light of immoral values supported by their philosophy and moral paradigms helping to fulfil these of the objectives are more horrifying than the exploitation meted out to the local people. It is this horror that leads Kurtz into an abyss and now Marlow is going to join this batch as a replacement of this grand trader in the very darkness of Africa. He was soon moving deeper into Africa: “Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world, when vegetation rioted on earth and big trees were king.” (136)

The wilds of Africa depicted here are inviting—inviting the white people to exploit this rich corner of the world. On the other hand the phrases “empty stream”, “great silence”, and “impenetrable forest” reflect hollowness in the modern society creating a horrifying picture of the colonial exploits. The epithet “long stretches” and “overshadowed distances” are correlated. If transposed long distances and overshadowed stretches they fittingly reflect the extent of exploitation by the white people.

Conrad’s images of colonial exploitation find clear expressions now. The natives live in an abominable condition, they are fed on rotten meet, and have appearance that they are “held there captive by a spell” (138). Despite exploitation Conrad distinctly draws the distinction between the two worlds:

It made you feel very small, very lost, yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle crawled on—which was just what you wanted it to do. Where the pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don’t know. To some place where they expected to get something... (138)

The description of the landscape is enthralling. It brings to light the richness of the native region that has lurked the Europeans towards it. The pride in the ruled territory that makes one “feel small” is noteworthy. This is symbolic of differences between the white people and the natives. It is these differences mingled with a feeling of inferiority among the white people that has created a rift betwixt the two communities. The picture of “grimy beetle” that crawled on a “lofty portico” is “altogether depressing” for white people. It is this feeling that has made them feel inferior—a feeling perhaps responsible as well as the backbone of the colonial exploitation. This psychology has led to the depletion of resources in the native region.

Penetrating deeper into the heart of darkness Marlow comes across an abandoned cabin with a neatly piled stack of wood and a note warning them to move “cautiously”. A few miles below from Inner station fog makes impossible for the ship to move. When it lifts for a second and drops back, an anguished cry rings out from all sides as if fog itself has screamed. They anticipate an attack, which comes in the afternoon. Marlow holds to steer the ship amidst terrible fighting which leaves the helmsman dead. This fills Marlow with a mysterious foreboding that he will never hear Kurtz’s voice, nor would see him, and that he would be dead before he reaches him. Out of his eagerness to meet Kurtz, Marlow talks about the “origination of Kurtz”.

Shortly after the attack the ship arrived at the Inner station where a white man advises Marlow to keep enough steam to blow the whistle, if the natives attack again. He was a Russian trader—a disciple of



Kurtz; who had served on English ships. The Russian tells him that Kurtz was powerful, dominating, ruthless, cunning, but still the Russian was in all prays for Kurtz. Kurtz raided the country with a group of armed follower—who adored him—in hunt for ivory. Kurtz is fanatic about taking into possession more and more ivory. One day he was on the verge of shooting the Russian, as the latter possessed a piece of ivory given by the villagers for whom he usually shot game. This makes Marlow conclude Kurtz was mad. But the trader doesn't think so that a man full of beautiful words could be mad, even probably. Marlow begins to realise the extent of Kurtz's lack of "restraint" and cruelty, yet the trader and a number of others defend him. This shows the deep-rooted imperialistic feeling among whites who think themselves superior. To extract profit they are ready to deplete the continent from "ivory" and in order to do so, clear the land and the native people. Conrad has given Kurtz a cosmopolitan status more of European rather than international character. Conrad says about Kurtz:

All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by-and-by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance. (154-155)

Kurtz was the product of European culture. His conduct, his ideology, his philosophy as well as his behaviour reminds us about the Eurocentric view points. As Europe draped itself in the clothes of civilising Africa, so did Kurtz in exploring the natives. Ivory is the only word that is whispered, is sighed, and is heard. What about the voice of Africans? Who hears them? Evidently nobody—here where suppression is supposed the only way of civilisation. This image of Kurtz contains within itself certain hidden facts. Conrad wrote the story about the turn of the nineteenth century the time when colonial expansion had reached its limits and entire Africa had been divided among Europeans. The law of human history stamps the validity that the rise must be followed by the destiny of fall. Colonialism has now reached its peak with the seeds of destruction contained within it—exploitation. More properly it was the time when squabble among European nations has started for the redistribution of the resources of the continent. Conrad has lucidly deciphered the hollowness beneath the sheen of power.

Marlow's first glimpse of Kurtz was ghastly. The man for whom he has longed to meet, who has been realised by all powerful, who is an outstanding example of western superiority, about whom Marlow had in mind a grand picture makes his maiden appearance on a stretcher carried by slaves. It was an evening while the trader and Marlow were roaming in the jungle, a group of savage came out of jungle carrying Kurtz on a stretcher. This is the first glimpse of the "mysterious man" whom "*All Europe*" has contributed to make: "Kurtz—that means short in German—don't it? Well the name was as true as everything else in his life—and death. (166)

These lines are more than sufficient to speak all about Kurtz. His "arms extended commandingly" symbolises his terror and power in the area. The truthfulness of his also accounts for the truthfulness of his life, philosophy, conduct, and of his name. Beneath all there is only darkness to which the darkness of the continent is no match. His weak physical condition not only accounts for his but the resulting fear and horror consequently. His image of "death carved out of old ivory" is truthful picture and also a token of exploitation of the localities at the hand of whites in the name of civilising and humanising. "Dark glittering bronze" represents the evil darkness beneath the shine of the sheen.

The natives carry Kurtz to the ship. The savages close around the ship led a majestic native woman who performs some strange rites disappearing into the wilderness. Kurtz had to be taken away from this



place for medical treatment, which he desists and vows to return. The Manager of the station is a man of pure greed for wealth, without the imaginative greatness. Marlow is annoyed by the simple selfishness of the manager than the evil Kurtz and prefers Kurtz, for at least he has the greatness of imagination. One midnight, Marlow is awakened from his sleep. On the hill above the station burns the ceremonial fire. Marlow finds Kurtz absent from the ship. He searches for and finds him crawling through the grass. Thirty yards from the nearest fire he meets Kurtz. Kurtz threatens Marlow to "Go away" yet Marlow succeeds in bringing him back to the ship. They leave the station the following day, the ship surrounded by disappointed savages led by the tall majestic women and some witches.

As they move down the river Kurtz's grasp on life weakens. He raves in his delirium about wealth and fame. A delay caused by machine failure shakes Kurtz's confidence and he gives a bundle of papers to Marlow to keep them away from manager in case of his death. As death approached the evil in the man becomes evident on his face:

I saw on that ivory face an expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense hopeless despair... He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision ... 'The horror! The horror!' ... (177-178)

Later that day his servant announced: "*Mistah Kurtz—he dead.*" (178) Upanishad mentions that every devil contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. So it is true here. But not for Kurtz, he is not the devil. The expressions "sombre pride," "ruthless power," "craven terror," that are on his face symbolise "hopeless despair" on the face of Europeans, whom he represents. The last words Kurtz utters are not symbolic of something but are foretelling of future.

The element of horror in the story doesn't end here. When Marlow is back to Brussels an officer of the company tries to get the papers left by Kurtz in Marlow's care. A man who calls himself Kurtz's cousin comes claiming them, followed by a journalist. Marlow decides he would give the papers to Kurtz's beloved. He visits the girl, who more than a year later is still in mourning. Her views of Kurtz are highly different than Marlow's. She too had high esteems for Kurtz. When she forces Marlow to tell the last words of Kurtz, Marlow lies. Marlow says that Kurtz last uttered her name as he died. She sobbed and Marlow reflects: "It would have been too dark... too dark altogether" (186) to tell her the truth. Truth certainly is strange, but stranger is the fact of hiding a strange truth and that too in the strange circumstances Marlow was in.

The entire story is symbolic, symbolic of darkness. "Ivory" stands for the lust and greed of man. "Kurtz" is an agency for it, as truthful and unreliable as the name itself. The story is not individual but universal. It reflects the exploitation of Africans by "All Europe" and not merely traders. Conrad accentuates that the real heart of darkness lies beneath our own "hearts" where the evil lurks.

The boldness and originality of Conrad's critiques of imperialism can be understood when we recall that the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the heyday of imperialism as trade rivalry grew among various industrialized nations. Conrad, no doubt, was an Anglophile who shared the nineteenth century imperialist enthusiasm for the British Empire in which 'the sun never sets'. Nevertheless, he had known at first hand, the ruthlessness of Imperialism and later the inequalities in Congo. It is to Conrad's credit, that living as he was in England, during this time, he could attack imperialism and awaken the readers to the horrors of colonisation.



Conrad examines men both in society as well as in isolation bringing out the hidden self in them. His personality and philosophy finds frequent mention in his writings and often intrudes in his works to the extent of calling them autobiographical.

Conrad's religious scepticism strengthened in the coming years. In *Under Western Eyes*, he shows his humanist morality: "All a man can betray is his conscience." (UW 37) Conrad was not merely a realist; he was also a thinker and a poet. In his works can be traced a strong ethical element. His idealism foreshadows his agnostic view of life and the ideological crisis that Europe has slipped into and something which in later years led to the Great War.

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