



The Evils of Imperialism in Conrad's Lord Jim

By

Md Masihur Rahman

Research Scholar

T M Bhagalpur University

The Patna scandal offers Marlow, the primary narrator in Lord Jim, an occasion to develop his close rapport with Jim, the first mate of the ship. This affair which involves the abandonment of 800 Muslim/Malays pilgrims on the ship by Jim, a white European crew, is a prime concern which was being thoroughly investigated. The episode reflects a suppressed tension between white and non-white in a world which is already divided.

“indeed, this affair, I may notice in passing, had an extraordinary power of defying the shortness of memories and the length of time: it seemed to live, with a sort of uncanny vitality, in the minds of men, on the tips of their tongues.”(Conrad 100)

Yet the way Marlow speaks of the event several times, it appears that he has failed to understand and communicate the importance of the event on the common people. Marlow's apparent indifference is curious because this incident involves racial relationship between colonizer and the colonized. Several times in the novel Jim's story and his activities address the function of White man in an atmosphere dominated by colonial settings. But surprisingly the issue of race underlining the Patna scandal is ignored and Marlow becomes more concerned with the moral and metaphysical question of the relationship between duty and responsibility. Eventually this incident leads Marlow to analyse the dichotomy between an individual's sense of heroism and his personal capacity.

So, Marlow's tale originates from a racially charged incident but his narrative is more involved with larger issues at epistemological and metaphysical level. This dimensional change from racism to epistemological and metaphysics is truly representative of Marlow's narrative. His chief concern with the state of a man's soul rather than Imperial setting in the context of a white man's fleeing from duty and responsibility is smacking colonial discourse.

By closely observing some areas of narrative structure like, first- the appearance of Marlow in chapter 4 into to the narrative, second- the time when his oral narrative ends and his written narrative starts and third- the shift of the narrative to romance and adventure I would like to argue that “Lord Jim” deals with the evils of imperialism. The discourse of imperialism is used to justify even the failing of duty and responsibility. But Imperialism and its ugly face is exposed in the Colonial space and “Lord Jim” can be read from colonial perspective.

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By using multiple narrative voices Conrad has perhaps made it transparent before the reader that he is primarily interested with the ways in which events leave footprints in the individual consciousness rather than what happened in the story. The late Victorian period was more interested, according to Raymond Williams, in the fact of mobility and alternative viewpoints this perspective affected the novel writing. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow's position as a narrator is undermined primarily through Conrad's use of several narrative voices. Marlow's endeavour to learn more about Jim only deepens the obscurity. The multiple narrative personas have strengthened varied ways of seeing a character/incident as well as lack of seeing. Marlow's narrative in *Lord Jim* mainly deals with discovering the different facets of human subject and it also delicately speaks about the limitation of seeing the human subject as a whole. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow opines that to him "the meaning of an episode was not inside a kernel but outside enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze". (Conrad 105) This comment helps clarify his technique of tale telling also in *Lord Jim*. His concerns with the glow that drags out the haze is of prime importance to his way of talking of Jim. Conrad's narrative technique is generally hailed as main characteristics of Modernism. *Lord Jim* the novel's Complex narrative structure drives our attention away from the larger story and puts focus into the process and through which the meaning of the novel may be/may not be clear to us.

Omniscient narrator tells the first three chapters. In these three chapters we see a prompt understanding of Jim's life at the parsonage, as a water clerk, his experience as a fast mate in the ship *Patna* and his role as Tuan Jim. Chapter Four mainly deals with the trial where Marlow is introduced in the novel and after that Marlow took the reins of the tale telling from the Omniscient narrator till the end of the novel. The remaining part of the story is told by Marlow first after dinner at Charley's and then by later to the privileged man through letter. Marlow's narrative is occasionally halted by the omniscient narrator. As a result of such a method of telling we have an idea that Marlow narrates Jim's story and he is helped by other figures in the novel. The change in the narrative in chapter 4 establishes Marlow as a prime narrator. There was a tensed atmosphere in the beginning between the demand for facts by authority over *Patna* fiasco and limited explanation that facts of Jim can offer. The Omniscient narrator tells us of what Jim is thinking.

"they wanted facts, facts. they demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything." (Conrad 21). Frustrated Jim's roaming eyes met Marlow and he (Marlow) realises that speech was of no use to him any longer. Jim had a feeling that Marlow "seem to be aware of his hopeless difficulty" (Conrad 24). Instantly a bond was made. Although "Jim looked at him (Marlow) then turned away resolutely as after a final parting" (Conrad24), he is getting a robust narrator who would explain his story. Following paragraph clarifies that "later on, many times, in distant parts of the world Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly" (Conrad24). After that Marlow's narrative begins with words "oh yes. I attended the enquiry, he would say" (Conrad26).

By analysing the limitation of facts, chapter 4(four) sets the floor for another kind of exploration - an exploration which will help reveal "the true horror behind the appalling face of things"(Conrad 22) since Jim and Marlow are "members of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct"(Conrad 37). Marlow's earnestness in Jim is noticeable. Both seem to understand the limitations of language. Marlow is convinced of the limitation of language imposed by speech for justifying/defending his position and starts pursuing Jim for he finds a bond between them. Due to Marlow's understanding of the restrictions of language he is willing to

see him differently. He is also an apt narrator to tell Jim's tale to the readers. Although we get several facts about Jim's life, the crucial fact- Jim's jump reveals itself during Marlow's Speech. This encourages us to the point that he is an apt narrator who can explain the jump in its fullest sense. But we are driven by the narrator's shift of interest from the superficial how to the fundamental why. We can try to understand the shift from another perspective. Through Marlow's way of interpreting Jim and his crucial jump from Patna the apparent focus on imperialism and the role of white people is relegated to the background and the question on the nature and role of heroism and of duty comes to the surface.

Peter Brooks has a different take on the modernist and postmodernist phase according to him "there is a pervasive suspicion that plot falsifies more subtle kinds of inter-connectedness(Brooks 113).

This helps explain the shift of interest from facts to all that facts cannot provide. Jim's leaving of Patna ship offers the reason to discuss thoroughly into the nature of heroism and of duty to enquire into the state of a man's soul bypassing the idea of a man's simple act of cowardice. The way Marlow is sided with Jim by throwing words of sympathy readers are influenced and unwittingly they suspend exploring jumps in terms of social demands and racial angle. The leaving of the "human cargo" (Conrad 12) by the white crews of the Patna is resultantly seemed to be a chance happening. Marlow's tell telling approach can be problematic if it is found that his narrative creates an atmosphere that obfuscates/blurs the involvement of racial angle. The blending of chapter four (4) of two different modes of perspective as far as character of Jim is concerned. The only silent narrator is rather ironic. His description of Jim is like a school boy's fancy for fame. Jim's jump has an ironic touch. The circumstantial preparedness of Jim's readiness was much below the circumstantial demand. Despite Jim's fancy of being heroic, the Omniscient narrator puts emphasis on Jim's well-nurtured habit of forgetting reality through his dream of Grandeur.

On the other hand, we see a strong understanding between Marlow and Jim from the first exchange of looks at the trial. This is the first in a series of moments loaded with significance. Such consecutive moments of connectedness suggest more than simple human bonding. After all, as Marlow narrates, he has "a confounded democratic quality of reason" (Conrad 68). Probably due to this quality Marlow sees Jim as "my very younger brother"(Conrad 161), "my Jim"(Conrad 68), "the youngest human being now in existence"(Conrad 159) and "Jim is one of us"(Conrad 32) Many times we come across such assertions of identification.

So, through the gaze during the trial of Jim, both of them establish a long-lasting connection which also begins to structure the narrative from a different perspective and new version of Jim as a representative human being comes out.

When Marlow's oral narrative ends in Chapter 36, the audience disperse without offering a remark except a man. This privileged man listened to the end of Jim's life. So this only privileged man hold interest in Jim. Strangely despite Marlow's preference for telling the tale Marlow is engaged in a written dialogue when Marlow is offering the tale to the listener, he neither asks nor is offered any response. The first conversation through letters between Marlowe and the privilege man can be summed up- the privileged man holds the view that Jim's "self-appointed task" (Conrad 246) in Patusan will lead to abominable end. Marlow says the opposite. No further dialogue is possible since the privileged man's perspective on Jim is summarised by Marlowe in his choice of words in the written format. The last words on Jim was of Marlow's whose narrative successfully restricted the view of the privileged man.

Marlow, by his authority as a narrator opines that “Jim had no dealings but with himself” (Conrad 246). Marlow deflects readers’ mind from the privileged man's position by reasserting that Jim had no dealings but with himself because he has precisely opined in the same way. An impression of “total and utter isolation”(Conrad 197) is felt and that “his loneliness added to his stature” Conrad 197). Surprisingly people of the colonized place-Patusan have been denied any presence and existence in the narrative which supports the recognition of Jim by the Malay people. Jim is shown as another and solitary figure away from the native ground. This is a conscious shift away from Jim’s presence in the novel as a white man. We can have an impression while reading that Marlow does not regard Jim as a colonizer at all because he has offered himself to the people of Patusan supporting the belief of “white man's burden”(Kipling) and ideas of progress and morality.

The following description of Jim constructs an impression that Jim had no motive except serving the people of Patusan thus ignoring his role as an agent of stain.

“In fact, Jim the leader was a captive in every sense. the land , the people the friendship, the love, were like the jealous guardians of his body” (Conrad 190).

A closer observation will show that there is little difference between privileged man and Jim. Like Jim, the privileged man is also “rushed into one or two places single handed and comes out cleverly without singeing (his) wings”. The only difference between the two is that the privileged man had a specific business in trade and colonization and Jim’s work is non-specific. Jim can also be seen as a younger version of Stein. We see a number of similarities between them. Stein had married a princess and his best friend was a Malay and he had an amicable relationship with the native people. Stein was successful and influential trader and for him Patusan is a place where anything “sin transgression or misfortune can be buried”(Conrad 159). Jim is shown as a probable heir to Stein's business enterprise. The novel may significantly share the attitude that all the like-minded people of Jim are oriented by a desire to expand his area. Again, Marlow is seeking response from the privileged man and Stein who are willing to know his life history.

Stein extends hand when Marlow senses Jim needs an opportunity. Stein discovers Jim’s urge. “he is romantic” (Conrad 155) and elaborates - “the way is to the destructive element submit yourself and with the exertion of your hand and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.(Conrad 154) To fulfil Jim’s dream a place like Patusan needs to be available. Jim’s Dream is very much related to empire and not connected seriously to the opportunities to earn his bread. A colonial world is handed over to Jim for realisation of his dream. The evils of imperialism are connected with Jim's desire. one who is leaving his ship to the care of fate is taking charge of a colonial world. We can deduce the result of such an enterprise Jim is interested and offered to. The material setting of Jim’s pointing at Conrad’s subconscious connection with colonial world. Jim’s romantic urge is thoroughly connected with Imperial mind. The privileged man also yearned to discover a new place. Like Ulysses he had yearned “to strive, to seek, to find, not to yield.”(Tennyson)

The character of Jim can be conceived through Imperial lens. The imperialist register make it clear that Jim’s stories are not shared with Malays and no response is taken from any Malay. Marlow speaks of jewel-” it was impossible to make her understand” (230) when she asks for some information about Jim’s past. Marlow, the narrator speaks to Jim about Malays “my dear Chap you shall always remain for them an insoluble mystery” (Conrad 222). it is clear that only Malow, stein and the privileged man are allowed to hear a complete story of Jim and others do not have the quality to be engaged in Jim’s full story.

Marlowe is also a dreamer in the sense he is following Jim and recalls his necessity to “go grabbing into the deplorable details”(Conrad 37) often of the Patna affair in terms of universal quest.

“I hope I wanted I would find that something some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse... I watch and no mistake looking for a miracle” (Conrad 38).

By repeating Jim’s story before listeners Marlow has been able to reinclude Jim into white community from which he was exiled.

Conrad talks of imperialists in *The Rescuers* “those unknown guides of Civilization who on the advancing edge of progress are administrator, warrior, creators ...they are like artist a mystery to the Mass, appreciated only by the uninfluential few”(Kipling and Conrad 89).

Again, in a personal record Conrad makes a direct comparison between imperialist and artist. To him an artist is “interior world where his thought and his emotions go seeking for the experience of imagined adventure, there are no policemen, no law, no progress of circumstances or dread of opinion to keep him within bounds” (The Personal Record).Padmini Mongia in her article “Narrative strategy and Imperialism” shares the opinion that Conrad’s narrative dimension projects “Marlow (i.e. the prime narrator of the novel) becomes something of an artist of imperial myth”

In this novel Marlow, the narrator acts as an artist defending and justifying the explicit jump of Jim from universal aspect to reintegrate Jim into the community of Merchant sailors. Marlowe is Projecting Jim from universal human condition and it is necessary for him to blur the historical specificity of colonial trade and administration in Patusan by an overdose of universal concerns. Jim is cast from a grand human condition rather than from its historical and specific involvement.

The Patusan part in the novel acquires Jim a lost stature and Marlow a sense of satisfaction. The first 3(three) Chapters of the novel give us a sense that Jim’s dream will remain just a dream. But the Patusan part gives a space where “his imaginary achievements”(Conrad 15) can be real. Jim as a dreaming hero has no evil design. But the entire shifting of focus from the culpability of the jump to projecting Jim in universal and mysterious condition certainly bear an evil colonial motive. The narrator is more attractive to highlight Jim’s dream and manifest his heroic feature and in doing so the narrator is only taking care of chosen remarks of some white man ignoring the comments of native people. Jim’s death is shown as a sacrifice to the altar of heroism and his role in colonial trade and administration is ignored. Thus, the narrative of Jim is connected to the promotion of colonial mind and imperial agenda. Marlow becomes a character who knows how to justify even the misdeeds of White man. The deep-rooted design of colonialism manifested through the narrative technique of Marlow.

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