

PROGRESSION: A MISNOMER IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S HEART OF DARKNESS AND AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS

***DURJOY BHATTACHARJEE**

**Guest Lecturer Of English Dept, Kumarganj Collegekumarganj, Dakshindinajpur*

ABSTRACT

This present paper tries to find out the issue that how the idea of "Progression" has become a misnomer especially in the novella Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, followed by another short story "An Outpost of Progress" of the same author. In both cases we find that the progressive mission occurs towards the heart of darkness. By the name of civilization the colonial masters tried to colonize them and they treat these dark niggers just as a commodity, as if they are the 'museum pieces' and tried to represent these pieces according to their own wishes before the whole world. The colonial masters want to give them nothing better than a 'beast' like status.

KEY-WORD: Colonialism, Post colonial discourse, Racism

Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness presents before us a horror reality. The story progresses through the journey of Marlow, Conrad's protagonist. Conrad deals with the darkness of the human heart in this novella and in this perspective I want to mention Conrad's "An Outpost of Progress". Progressive mission was there, but as far as the novella develops we find that this mission becomes a misnomer. Behind the veneer there was a dark reality of colonialism.

Heart of Darkness tells us how the progressive mission of the so called civilized customers becomes a failure. On the surface level it seems that they explore the Dark Continent in order to spread civilization among the savages. But a profound reading of Heart of Darkness clears that by the name of civilization they begin to dominate or colonize them. They tried to show their superiority over these helpless people physically and psychologically. Both Marlow and Mr. Kurtz are the representative of the white civilization, because of their racial superiority they cannot treat these dark skinned in a positive way. So the progressive motif itself is a misnomer.

Marlow's fascination for river Congo progresses from his childhood. River Congo like an uncoiled snake charmed him. Throughout his journey Marlow experiences many unreal things and gathers knowledge. But this knowledge does not give him any merriment. At the last stage Marlow's lie to Kurtz's fiancé creates a question how much he is progressed.

Marlow's journey is a metaphorical journey to 'inferno' where the traders, the manager, the accountant, and the agents are the devils of this inferno and not only counting the resources of the land but also torturing the black shadow of disease and death. As far as he comes closure to Mr. Kurtz, deeper he goes down in his mind, nearer he goes to hell.

Throughout his narration Marlow focuses before us the character of Mr. Kurtz, 'a remarkable man'. We know him through the way Marlow wants to represent him before us. He is an agent and he went to Belgian Congo to make a report on the 'Suppression of savage customs'. He was not only sent for trade but for the philanthropic responsibility of the savage people also. But he became so much obsessed with ivory that he had completely neglected his philanthropic mission. Appetite for ivory makes him blind, Marlow describes him: "An animated image of death carved out of old ivory" who never hesitates to kill for trade, the image of the be-headed sculpt tells the dark psyche of Kurtz's mind. Thus he progresses towards a hollow region.

Kurtz is progressed culturally and physically, he was a great musician, a painter, a man of gigantic size. But he fails to progress his heart; His haphazard comment: "Exterminate all the brutes" arises questions, he himself is not clear who these brutes are. One of the most culminating points of Heart of Darkness is Kurtz's dying words: "The horror! The horror! Sums up his own heart of darkness, perhaps he is horrified to see his dark conscience and becomes a homo-duplex figure.

Conrad's another short story "An Outpost of Progress" reveals the dark side of human nature. The story takes place in a progressive outpost of Africa during the time it was colonized by the Europeans. Carlier and Kayerts, the two white men are so bound by their own culture that they cannot see the value and structure of the native culture. Here progression becomes misnomer in the case of the fore bearers of civilization. Both Kayerts and

Macola decided that commerce is more important than their fellow human beings. They want to be materially progressed and as far as they want to be materially progressed they became beast and their humanity is degenerated.

Macolasacrifices the lives of the natives in order to provide ivory to the traders of the station, while kayerts does not hesitate to shoot his fellow friend Carlier only for some sugar tubes: “If you don’t bring out the sugar, I will shoot you at sight like a dog. Now then one-two-three. You won’t? I will show you who’s the master?” –This speech of kayerts shows the brute insided him.

Later we find that, they don’t have any spiritual support. The ‘crooked’ cross on the grave symbolizes the lack of spirituality. Kayerts cannot choose religion as his mental support. After killing Carlier when he is suffering from mental restlessness, sense of guilt, he does not confess rather he commits suicide as the way of redemption and becomes double killer. He murders not only his fellow but also his own soul which is the ultimate point of degradation. Thus he is becoming another Kurtz.

Rabindranath Tagore, too, picks up this racial theme in his poem ‘Africa’. The only difference is that Conrad uses individuals as the representative like Kurtz, Marlow, Kayerts, Carlier, but.

Tagore has not used any representative to depict the ‘progressive’ mission of the colonizers. He metaphorically suggests that the whiteness of the colonizers make them blind, they cannot see their own heart of darkness. The poet describes the ferocity and viciousness of the colonial customers armed with manacles, with claws sharper than the African Wolves. The invaders are dark at heart; they cannot see the human side of the dark skinned niggers-

“Alas! O veiled one

Underneath the obscurity of your dark facade

Lay unknown your human identity

Degraded by the collective gaze of derision”.

[“Africa” by Rabindranath Tagore, Translated by Monish Chatterjee]

Thus, in each case we see that the progressive ideal of ‘civilizing mission’ is itself a misnomer; the pilgrims of that progress are corrupted before their own redemption that Kurtz’s dying words sum up aptly: “The horror! The horror!”

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