



## JOSEPH CONRAD'S *LORD JIM*: A STUDY IN COLONIAL AND IMPERIAL ENTERPRISE

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### Abstract

*Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim* is a powerful commentary on two important issues – colonialism and imperialism. The novel is named after the hero, Jim. The journey of Jim's life is divided into two parts: the Patna episode and his life at Patusan. Abandoning Patna ship along with the captain and other crew is an act of cowardice and moral dilapidation. In contrast to this, Jim's settlement at Patusan marks the courageous and self-sacrificing traits of his nature. He understands that it is an opportunity to prove his ability and regain his lost self-esteem. The white man finds himself in the brown alien world. The second part of the story is about Jim getting a grip on his life and the new land. Jim is not a typical coloniser. He is a coloniser, but the protector, Lord Jim.

Key words: *Imperialism, Colonialism, Civilization, Culture, materialism* .

Wikipedia describes Colonialism as a practice or policy of control by one people or power over other people or areas, often by establishing economic dominance. While colonizing a place or people, colonizers may impose their religion, language, economics, and other cultural practices. The foreign administrators rule over the territory in pursuit of their interests, seeking to benefit from the colonized region's people and resources. Imperialism is a system of spreading a country's power and control through colonization, the exercise of aggressive force, or other means.

Conrad's settlement in English society offered him an ideal analysis of the conflicting ideological imperatives. Robert Hampson's 'Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay

Fiction' also considers Conrad and the colonial world, but his emphasis is on the Malay writings. Hampson suggests these works come out of Conrad's personal experience and out of a historical pattern of Western construct of the Malay world. He further contends that Conrad was aware of this construct and routinely deconstructed it (Peters 199). Joseph Conrad wrote what he had experienced. He was probably the only author who was both - a colonised and a colonizer. Therefore, his experiences made him an authentic practitioner of the colonial discourse. The novel, *Lord Jim*, is divided into two settings – Patna and Patusan. The former episode creates sufficient foundation for the second.

*The Patna incident transforms Jim's entire life. The Patna, an iron steamer, is carrying about*

*eight hundred Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. The ship is moving steadily, but suddenly at night, when the passengers are sleeping, it meets with an accident. The bulkhead hits the stone. The captain and the crew think that the ship will sink very soon. Jim, seeing himself amidst a crowd of resting travellers, realizes that there is not enough room in the lifeboats for everyone. The insufficiency of the lifeboats makes him worried about the lives of the pilgrims. The officers strive hard to launch a lifeboat. They ask him for his assistance and scold him when Jim questions their strategies for repairing the ship. It was impossible to repair the failing bulkhead.*

*The officers rebuke him as they struggle to launch the boat. Jim finally understands the urgency. They believe the approaching squall from the horizon will surely engulf the wrecked vessel. Nonetheless, Jim finds himself helpless with the lifeboat in saving the lives of the pilgrims sleeping below. Finally, the liferaft cuts free of the ship, waking many of the passengers below. Several upheavals occur; somehow, Jim finds himself in the boat. He, too, has abandoned the ship. The ship is carried to the shore by the French Navy. The conduct of the ship-men is not as per the code of the sea. The authorities cancel their certificates, and they are put to trial. Jim feels a sense of guilt for his cowardice. He wishes to do something heroic – like saving people either in the natural calamity or from some ruffian. He desperately craves for an opportunity, and Marlow gives him the chance. The task of taking care of the settlement at Patusan is a god sent opportunity for Jim to redeem himself. In the alien land of Patusan, Jim establishes his empire or colony. But he is not a stereotypical coloniser. He colonises, but not with the stereotyped way of exploitation of the natives; he, on the other hand, establishes his empire on great ideals. Still, the novel consists of several colonial crises.*

*The ship, Patna, in Lord Jim is unique and in a way symbolises globalisation and expansion. Marlow's description of the Patna ship proves it: "She was owned by a Chinaman, chartered by an Arab, and commanded by a sort of renegade New South Wales German, very anxious to curse publicly the native country" (Conrad's Lord Jim 9). Patusan,*

being a crucial location in *Lord Jim*, remains an eye-witness of all kinds of colonial activities.

McClure rightly remarks, "Conrad's whole perspective on imperialism differed fundamentally from that of other English authors [...] Kipling, Haggard, Henley, and Stevenson, Conrad lived as a native of a colonized country and as a member of colonizing community." (qtd. in Moosavinia 91). Conrad's *Lord Jim* illustrates specific cultural elements, language, narratives, and colonial culture. He does it to express the sufferings of the colonised people. We can explore these issues when Jim makes a second literal 'jump' of his life. He leaps over the stockade to save the people of Patusan from Sherif Ali, a fanatic Muslim bandit. Marlow's narration before this incident reveals the period of Jim's uneasiness. Jim's past haunted him wherever he went. Marlow had introduced him to his friend Stein, the German owner of the trading post in a distant settlement in northwest Sumatra. Stein gives Jim his second chance – to start again as his manager in Patusan. This time Jim successfully 'jumps', grasping this new opportunity with both hands. By virtue of his qualities of head and heart, he gains the respect of the native population, the local ruler Doarmin and his son Dain Waris, and settles with a Eurasian woman, Jewel. Jim and Dain Waris bring the vandalism of Sherif Ali and Rajah Allang under control. He seems, at last, to be adopting the role of protector, virtual ruler of Patusan, fulfilling his image, his dream of heroism, until he makes one further tactical mistake (XII).

Language plays a very crucial role in the development of any nation. It is a medium of expression or communication, a requirement of culture, a system of thinking and a bond between yesterday, today and tomorrow. If a community loses its language, its foundation is shaken. Language has always been applied as a weapon of cultural intrusion. As the native language declines, it interrupts the development of civilization. Colonialists from the British Empire ensured that the colonised were taught the English. Macaulay, in his now (in)famous Minutes on Education, offered definitive reasons for the East India Company and the British government to spend money on English language education, as well as the promotion of

European learning. The colonizers have always used their language for establishing and maintaining on their domination on the colonised. The colonized are influenced by the etiquettes and lifestyle of the colonisers. Guided by this new way of life, local people accept the language and build an association with the colonisers. During this transition, the sense of nationalism, self-respect and pride loosen. The invaders teach native people English intending to control them easily. In *Lord Jim*, Rajah Allang, the leader of Patusan, and Doramin, one of the leading characters, both can speak English fluently. They start believing that people who want to become powerful should be able to communicate in English, or they cannot survive. Jewel too "learned a good bit of English from Jim" (177). These characters are admired in the novel for acquiring the skill of communication in an alien or colonizer's language.

*Lord Jim* presents cultural hybridity at Patusan, its colonial setting. The postcolonial discourse of hybridity rejects its unified subjectivity. Therefore, it leads to the loss of identity. The fascination of western modern civilization makes the original indigenes suffer gradually. They fail to preserve their own customs and traditions - not even a part of them. Local leaders or chieftains also find themselves helpless in convincing their people to sustain their own practices. They surrender themselves to the wishes of the Colonizers. In *Lord Jim*, Jim builds a fort where all settings and rules satisfy his own will. The white, the Bugies, and the natives gather at one place - Patusan. It becomes a melting pot of cultures. In this regard, Edward Said writes: "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic". (Said XXIV).

**The concept of "One of Us" and "One of them" highlight the colonial crises between the white and the indigenous people.** Marlow, the narrator and a very close friend of Jim, observes Jim as "One of us". Jim, Captain Gustav and two other sailors go to the harbour master's office to report the *Patna* incident. Marlow recognises the other untidy and unsavoury men who might be suited to the shameful tale of *Patna's* escape. But, Jim is "clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet" (26),

and seems to be a promising boy. He is viewed by traditional European ideals of trust, bravery, honesty, and morality. Marlow gives him a clean chit from his side initially because he looks "One of us".

Jim's beloved, Jewel, marks the darker side of colonialism. She loves Jim but always lives in the threat that he will leave her one day. Her fear is not artificial; She has seen it happening with her mother. Jewel's father left her mother; therefore, she had to marry Cornelius, "the awful little Malacca Portuguese". It was not a mutual separation between husband and wife as speculated by Marlow. The narrative tells us that her father was a white man:

I am convinced that she was no ordinary woman. Her own father had been a white; a high official; one of the brilliantly endowed men who are not dull enough to nurse a success, and whose careers so often end under a cloud. I suppose she too must have lacked the saving dullness - and her career ended in Patusan [...] our common fate fastens upon the woman with peculiar cruelty. (173)

There is a perception that Jim, a white man, will leave her just as a white man left her mother, a non-white woman. When Marlow seeks to convince her that Jim will stay with her forever, she replies "They always leave us" (193). Jewel's maternal grandfather was also a white while her grandmother was not a white. This relationship, too, seems to have ended unhappily. Both her mother and maternal grandmother had suffered in mixed-race relationships. So when she begs Jim to go away before he has gotten himself firmly established in Patusan, she seeks not only to save his life but also to save herself from what must become a doomed, heart-breaking relationship with a white man. (Ruppel 51)

Generally, the colonisers consider themselves as rulers or masters, and others as slaves; sometimes, they treat the local people as animals. Conrad's *Lord Jim* does not present such a picture; on the contrary, the hero sacrifices his life for the colonized people. He protects them from the

anti-social elements and tries to establish peace and happiness at the place.

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