



NOTION OF “MAN JEETAY JAG JEET” IN *HEART OF DARKNESS*

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ABSTRACT

“Man Jeetey Jag Jeet” in Japji Sahib by Guru Nanak is a world famous teaching of controlling over the desires of mind lest one gets corrupted by them. It means, one can win the world but one cannot easily win over the mind/ desires. Therefore, a man who has controlled his mind is greater than the one who has conquered the world. The characters – Marlow and Kurtz – in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* display such contrast. The present study is aimed at understanding the symbolic darkness in the novella in the light of above given line by Guru Nanak.

Keywords: Heart of Darkness, Darkness in Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad, Darkness of Mind in Heart of Darkness

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The desire to win over others has always remained very intense in human beings from the beginning of the world. The different ages on the earth correspond to the victories of the dominant over the weak. For the satisfaction of ego, man makes a futile effort to fulfill his desire by ruling over the other, be it Alexander or Aurangzeb or a common man. In order to rule or dominate, one has to fight his opponent and win. Without winning, one cannot be called a king or emperor. Nonetheless, after winning the world, the greed and lust of mind never ends. The desire to get more and more defeats him badly. A man who gets defeated by his mind fills with remorse and regrets when death approaches. Therefore, Guru Nanak in Pauri 28 of Japji Sahib preaches

Munda santokh saram pat jholee dhiaan
kee karai bibhoot
Khinthaa kaal ku-aaree kaa-i-aa jugat
dandaa parteet

Aa-ee panthee sagal jamaatee man jeetai
jag jeet Aadays tisai aadays (Japji Sahib, Pauri
28)

Make contentment your earrings, humility
your begging bowl

And meditation your body ash/

Thought of death; aspiration of the
bride to be: and the faith in

The Lord be your yarding stick/

Come as a traveler; all are fellow students;
conquer your mind,

Conquer your world/

Salutation! My humble salutation to You.
(Trans. Hari Singh, Sikhiwiki 6)

Guru Nanak teaches his followers the futility of winning the world, because it does not lead to contentment. Only winning over mind leads to such a pious stage of soul. I propose to read/study the character of Marlow and his 'inconclusive experience' in the light of above given notion by Guru Nanak. The purpose of this study is not to

prove Marlow a saint like him, but actually to examine such questions as:

1. How does Marlow learn of inner darkness of mind by finding a touch stone in Kurtz?
2. How is this darkness articulated?
3. How does Marlow deal with the knowledge of this darkness?

These questions have a direct relation to the thematic issues of the text such as how the title of the text deals not with the geographical darkness rather the inner darkness of human mind and how it focuses on the futility of the very concept of imperialism. This research paper relies much on Sant Singh Maskeen's commentary of Japji Sahib as he is the most read commentator of it and his explanations of Gurbani meanings are widely accepted.

Marlow is a seaman who truly 'followed the sea' (Conrad 3). If he were to present only the critique of imperialism, he would have sufficed at the level of first few stations in the river Congo by showing the brutal treatment the natives are met with. He would not have gone the 'farthest point of navigation'(Conrad 6) and call it the 'culmination point of (his) experience' and share it with his fellow sailors in the meditative posture (Conrad 6). Moreover, in the third section of the novella, Marlow does not concentrate on depicting the plight of the African tribe rather he focuses on Kurtz' actions and his thoughts in relation to his own. Out of his thousand of experiences at sea, if he chooses to narrate the tale of Kurtz, it is because his actions throw light on the true working of human mind, taking Imperialism in its background. Outwardly, the novella is concerned with how people react under certain conditions, for example, how white men, in the absence of humanitarian laws; behave with the people of different complexion. All spring from the root evil in man – his desire to control and dominate others. Guru Nanak preaches in the pauri, by dominating others one can only win over others, but by winning over oneself one gets freedom, salvation. And the novella focuses on how men in the absence of a belief – a belief in goodness – fail to control evil designs of their mind, get fascinated to its darkness and become slave of it. Marlow calls it the 'fascination of the abomination'

(Conrad 5). At the very outset, the actual narrator informs the reader of Marlow's yarn: "to him the meaning of an episode was not inside the kernel but outside, enveloping the tale ..." Therefore, to think of *Heart of Darkness* just a critique of Imperialism is to undermine the core philosophy behind it.

It will be interesting to know how Marlow's character changes after this experience in the fresh waters of Congo with Kurtz. For a man, who 'had passions for maps" and "would look for hours at South America, Or Africa, or Australia and lose himself in the glories of exploration", "the glamor is off" now (Conrad 7). He has refused to be the part of a system which believes in hegemonizing other races by using "brute force" (Conrad 5). In his gurbani explanation on youtube video, Maskeen quotes Chanakya who made four qualities essential to win over others: *sham Daam Dhand Bhed*, which means dominating others by advising, offering, punishing and dividing. Marlow was a man who would loaf about and obstruct other people in their work or invade their homes by taking pleasure in the company of women, but now he is introduced in the pose of Buddha in European Clothes. Such a drastic change in personality from a desire to conquering the world to meditation evidently brings out how Marlow learns the futility of conquering the world when one has more worthy opponent – mind – to win over. And when he is back after rescuing Kurtz, he resents "the sight of people hurrying through streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams ..." (Conrad 86). He comes to know of the futility of worldly possessions in the progress of soul towards truth. He becomes aware that it is the darkness of mind that plays hindrance to the ultimate knowledge of truth. Therefore he says:

The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it...he must meet that truth with his own true self – with his own inborn strength, principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags – rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief.... (Conrad 42)

It is important to see where Marlow locates the darkness at end of his experience. Darkness has been referred to seven times in the first part, five times in the second part and eleven times in the last part of the novella. Initially, it takes its meaning in the geographical location such as Africa. For Marlow, a conqueror of the earth “were men enough to face the darkness” (Conrad 12) and imperialism was “very proper for those who tackle a darkness” (Conrad 14). As his journey begins to roll, his meanings change from the physical location of darkness to that of mind. Concluding Kurtz' life, Marlow says “His was impenetrable of darkness” (Conrad 99). But the transition in the meaning from geographical location to the mental one is a slow process in his experience.

During his journey up the Congo River, as he enters the areas where Europeans could easily flaunt their country Laws, he finds a presence in the dark wilderness of thick forests appealing to his psyche. According to Maskeen, this has been referred to as “Dooja Bhaav” in Gurbani, which means, man is controlled not by a single mind rather the doubleness of mind. One persuades him to taste the tempting evil and the other forbids him and appeals to his consciousness. Interestingly,

Marlow is able to defeat this menacing presence by taking refuge in his own inner strength – the goodness in him and here, he utters “how big, how confoundedly big was that thing that could not talk and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming from there and I had heard Mr. Kurtz was in there...” (Conrad 30). Seeds of curiosity to know more of Kurtz are sown though by others such as manager and accountant in the middle station, yet, association of Kurtz with the darkness is made in the very mind of Marlow.

The deeper he goes into the river, the more he gets aware of dark powers that seem to convey something to him about himself. While Marlow's ship crawls towards Kurtz in the 'high stillness of primeval forest', he could see the face of great dark immensity which makes him doubt if he 'could handle that dumb thing or it would handle him and corrupt his innate innocence and humanity'. But if the dark is dumb then how it will

convey itself to Marlow. Helmsman dies as if “in response to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear, he frowned heavily, and that frown gave to his black death- mask an inconceivably somber, brooding and menacing expression.”(Conrad 46)

Marlow has a trust in Kurtz and it is his belief in him that makes him penetrate the impenetrable darkness and he believes, Kurtz will be able to give a voice to what he experiences in the darkness and articulate what he sees in the inmost recesses of African forests. That's why, Marlow expects of Kurtz as a voice - voice sermoning, illuminating, bewildering ... “pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness” (Conrad 56). Hence, for Marlow, Kurtz is a voice from the dark – a kind of dark where no fear exists. No policeman, butcher, law, Government, or even a public opinion matters to that voice. Guru Nanak says in Stanza 28 of Japji Sahib, Remember death, it is only by remembering it, one can stick to one's inner innocence. In its remembrance is the acknowledgment of transient nature of all worldly things and beings. Now when there is no fear, will Kurtz control over himself by listening to his 'innate strength'? Until Marlow reaches the innermost station, Kurtz remains an enigma for him. He is a modern European man living in pre-historic conditions in its utter loneliness and desolation. Somehow, he has managed to live in such conditions. But what makes Marlow wonder is that Kurtz wants to stay back at the station. He hears from the manager and later on, from the young Russian that Kurtz “had apparently intended to return himself (to Europe), the station being by that time bare of goods and stores but after coming three hundred miles, had suddenly decided to go back...” (Conrad 37). He thinks of him as fine fellow just devoted to his back-breaking business.

But what Marlow finds in Kurtz in actual is altogether a different experience – different not to the level of just surprise but moral shock. He finds, unlike himself, Kurtz has lost himself and his heart in the dark forces. Kurtz, whom Marlow believes would exert his will power for “good practically unbound” (Conrad 59), has lost his natural

innocence (which Marlow sometimes refers to as 'innate strength') – a voice of God within - has indulged himself in devilish ceremonies. It is through Kurtz, he can see the “appalling face of glimpsed truth” and Moral depravity in man. This depravity is seen in his withered body also, as he addresses crowd of savage before leaving the inner station, Marlow comments, “...the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz – Kurtz – that means short in German – don't it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life – and death.”(Conrad 72)

Kurtz' soul 'by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts of the memory of gratified and monstrous passions' (Conrad 80) becomes mad and devilish. Like Dr. Faustus in Christopher Marlow, He is soul is sealed with the Satan. He becomes the reason for the wrath of the Wilderness – mute, primal and full of natural innocent animosity that inhabits the naturally innocent Africans, tries his life and draws him 'to the edge of forest, to the bush, towards gleam of fires, to the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations, this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations (Conrad 80).

The word “permitted Aspirations” are important as it stresses upon the idea of control over the desires and also the role of society as well as the self in making of a good being. Kurtz lets loose his libido and there is nothing which could 'prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased'. His lust knows no bounds and no contentment. His devilish self knows no humility. And Guru Nanak says Japji Sahib, one who has no contentment and humility becomes susceptible to evil designs of mind, hence he might be the conqueror of the world but at heart he remains a slave. Kurtz, though a winner in the European world but is actually a slave – slave of his desires and greed. It is here Marlow comments on Kurtz “‘My ivory.' oh yes, I heard him.'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my River, my - ' everything belonged to him... everything belonged to him – that was a trifle. The thing was to know whom he belonged to...” (Conrad 58). Kurtz is a slave and belongs to his master – his evil mind.

Further, it is the pure evil in him that makes him ornament fence with Negro heads hanging on the stakes, makes the native people crawl before him when approaching him; kill whom 'He jolly pleased'; snatch ivory by force; shot so called the rebels; and make the natives dance in frenzy in his honor. The evil that Marlow is searching in the outer world gets articulated itself in Kurtz' mind and for this, Marlow feels cheated in his belief. Kurtz is a pure terror. This is what Marlow feels when Kurtz escapes from the streamer, in it, he had to deal with a being whom “I could not appealed in the name of anything high or low. I had to, like the nigger; invoke himself - his own exalted and incredible degradation” (Conrad 80)

Finally Kurtz gets to see this evil in himself in the last moments of life, gives it a voice, and cries “Horror! Horror!!” Now the question remains – how does Marlow deal with the knowledge of it?

Marlow does not taste the knowledge of this darkness in the first hand experience, it is Kurtz who saw it in actual. That's the reason why Marlow could not articulate as intensely as Kurtz. He could feel it in his mind and body just as in a dream sensation. Perhaps this is the main reason why he referred to his experience in the fresh waters of Kongo River as a nightmare, time and again in his tale.

Therefore, it is apt to say that Kurtz is a nightmare that Marlow lives through – thoroughly. No sooner than Kurtz dies than Marlow is awoken – awoken to new depths of truth and sorrow. He sees the futility that Kurtz is engaged with – futility of conquering the black Negroes of Africa by invoking the animal nature in human being. By doing this, Kurtz loses his soul to the dark forces of wilderness. Now here, the wilderness reflects back what goes on in Kurtz' heart of darkness. All things might belong to him – ivory, his intended, station, river ...etc. But all his victory, though remarkable it might be for the world, Marlow sums up the best in his comments:

“... – but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the

reflection that made you creep all over.” (Conrad 58)

In conclusion, Kurtz' is the heart of darkness that beats in every man. The novella focuses on the inner darkness of mind, and its protagonist Marlow emphasizes on the victory of mind by sharing the tale of Kurtz not only with his fellow sailors but with the readers also.

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