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Thematic Multiplicity in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness***Mukesh Kumar Maurya**Research Scholar,
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Akbarpur, Ambedkar Nagar (UP)**Abstract**

Multiple thematicity in a literary text is an outstanding art aiming to give valuable importance to literary work. Multiple thematic structures try to maximum output through a single text. While explaining something to another person, whether in speech or writing, we try to organize what we say in a way that makes it easier for the reader to understand but more than one thematic structures of the text become hard to crack. This article aims to examine the multiple theme Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In 'Heart of Darkness' Joseph Conrad has masterly and very skillfully intermingled various important themes. These themes are so subtly interwoven that they produce an artistic unity in the novel. These themes seem to get dissolved into each other; they have lost their separate identity in the course of the novel. Sometimes, we find it strange that such a thin book possesses so many themes like theme of evil, theme of imperialism, theme of self-restraint, theme of isolation, theme of reality and appearance, theme of exploring the sub-conscious etc. The novel is characterized as the multiplicity of theme and synthesis of unified ideas.

Keywords: Cultural identity, race, culture, civilization, Western Casteism

A great paradox of English fiction is that one of its supreme masters was born in the Ukraine, of Polish parents, and was totally ignorant of the English language until Joseph Conrad was born on December 3, 1857. His father was a poet, revolutionary philosopher and translator who ended his life as a political prisoner in Russia. The young Conrad was brought up by his conventional and extraordinary adventures. In 1894, he settled in England and became a struggling author. His writing was always difficult for him because English was not his mother tongue. Once he said "I wrote in English, thought in French, and dreamed in Polish". He authored three political novels that had nothing to do with adventures afloat: *Nostramo* (1904), his longest work about South American politics, *The Secret Agent* (1907), a completely ironic tale about anarchists in London; and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), a bitter at Russian psychology. On the basis of attractive Polish-British writing, he was regarded as one of the greatest novelist and a master prose stylist who brought a non-English sensibility into English literature. His most remarkable autobiographical novella is *Heart of Darkness* (1899). It is most controversial short novel about a long voyage into the depths of the Congo. As it leads a journey in depth of Congo as it creates a depth of thought of human existence.

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Simply, it tells the story of Charles Marlowe, a sailor who takes on an assignment as a boat captain in the African interior. As a boy, Marlow had always been fascinated by maps, especially those of unexplored continents. The map of Africa particularly intrigued him, with its gaps of uncharted land deep in the Congo. After growing up to be a sailor and spending some six years in the East, Marlow one day decides to take a job aboard a steamer headed for the Congo River. He visits an aunt in Brussels who has influence with one of the continental trading companies that are exploiting Africa and need brave men to sail their fresh-water steamers.

Finally, Marlow ships aboard a French steamer which follows the forbidding African coast. Landing finally at the company's seaboard station after a long journey in Congo River, Marlow sees wretched Negroes engaged in slave labor. There is general apathy among the whites, and everything is going to ruin in the implacable grip of the jungle. In the jungle, Marlow also begins to hear rumors of the great Mr. Kurtz who operates the company's inner station deep in the heart of the Congo. Mr. Kurtz is renowned, even on the coast, for the vast quantities of ivory he sends back. Nobody quite knows how he gets it, but they are all pleased that their agent is so efficient. Hearing the art and skill of Mr. Kurtz, Marlow desires to meet him urgently. As he approaches the Kurtz's station, he hears the rumor that Kurtz is seriously ill. He decides to bring the sick man (Kurtz) and his accumulated ivory. The news delivered by Russian officer to Marlow that great ivory merchant, Kurtz is mortally ill. Marlowe looks around highly polished wooden balls decorating the picket fence surrounding the compound. But when he looks more closely he realizes they are native heads impaled on poles and grinning hideously. He begins to learn the truth about the remarkable Mr. Kurtz, Entering the jungle as an idealist who thought that European commercial exploitation would bring culture and civilization to the natives. Marlowe claims thus:

"It is the Africans who are the fittest to survive in their native land. In similar fashion, the work ethic that he (Kurtz) seems to embrace, praising its effectiveness in keeping his mind free of undesirable thoughts is in fact instrumental in blinding him to the events around him" (Heart of Darkness 90).

Kurtz had eventually succumbed to the savage lure of the jungle where he became all-powerful. He has a fiancée in Brussels, whom he loftily refers as "my intended,". Marlow sees a savage native girl wailing on the shore. She is obviously Kurtz's mistress. As the jungle has taken its inexorable toll of Kurtz, he has allowed rites to be performed in his honor and has ruthlessly slain anyone who has stood in the way of his single-minded pursuit of ivory. Marlow finally meets the Kurtz who is filled with ambivalent feelings about him. On the one hand he detests him for being a hollow egomaniac. Marlow realizes that at one time Kurtz had elements of genuine greatness in him. He was many cuts above the tawdry merchants of the central station. At least he started out his career in Africa with some ideals, even if they did ultimately disintegrate. It is too late to any kind of justice because he (Kurtz) was dying. Marlow placed him on his own steamer and try to take back down river. Soon after the return journey has begun, a native suddenly comes to Marlow with the news that

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Kurtz has died and the last words he had heard were "The horror! The horror". The darkness of the jungle, death, and his knowledge of terrible sin had closed in on him. He was physically and mentally shaken with unique mingling of thought.

This simple tale has the multiple themes behind this adventurous voyage into the depth of Congo River and African trade station. The novella intermingled with various important themes. The first important theme "deception" or "hypocrisy" is a central theme of the novel and is explored on many levels. In the disguise of a noble cause, the Belgians have exploited the Congo. Actions taken in the name of philanthropy are merely covers for greed. Belgians were claiming to educate the natives to bring them prosperous and better way of life. European colonizers remained to starve, mutilate and murder the indigenous population for profit. Marlow has even obtained his captaincy through deception, for his aunt misrepresented him as an exceptional and gifted creature. At the end of the book, Marlow engages in his own deception when he tells Kurtz's fiancé the lie that dying Kurtz was taking her name on his lips. In the larger context, the Company attends to the details of sending agents into the interior to trade with the natives and collect ivory while remaining oblivious to the devastation such acts have caused. Yet on a closer look, the Company's Manager has no talent for order or organization. His station is in a deplorable state and Marlow can see no reason for the Manager to have his position other than the fact that he is never ill. On the other hand, the chief clerk is so impeccably dressed that when Marlow first meets him he thinks he is a vision. This man, who has been in country three years and witnessed all its attendant horrors, manages to keep his clothes and books in excellent order. He even speaks with confidence of a Council of Europe, which intended Kurtz to go far in "the administration," as if there is some overall rational principle guiding their lives.

Another important thematic concept of the novella is Sense of Alienation or Loneliness. The novella *Heart of Darkness* tells of a journey into the heart of the Belgian Congo and out again, the themes of alienation, loneliness, silence and solitude. The book begins and ends in silence waiting for a tale to begin and then left to its thoughts after it has concluded. Marlow's head prior to his departure for Africa warns him of changes to his personality that may be produced by a long stay in-country. Prolonged silence and solitude are seen to have damaging effects on many characters in the book. The whole story of Kurtz was transformed from a gentle soul into a man of violence. The Russian, who was alone on the River for two years, chatters constantly. His loneliness and alienation have taken their greatest toll on Kurtz who cut off from all humanizing influence, has forfeited the restraints of reason and conscience and given free rein to his most base and brutal instincts. The frustration of loneliness and the sense of alienation is beautifully expressed in the tale through the attack of native Africans:

They were all dying slowly - it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals... black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish glooms.....fed on unfamiliar food, their sickened.... moribund...shapes were free as air.(Conrad 15)

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Another thematic concept of novella is "Sanity and Insanity". In the tale madness is given prolonged exposure to the isolation of the wilderness and inevitable extension of chaos. The atmospheric influences at the heart of the African continent: its heat, the incessant drums, the whispering bush, the mysterious light all play havoc with the European mind and insanity of thinking. As in Kurtz's case the literal madness is presented as a man who has gone mad with power and greed. No restraints were placed on him-either from above, from a rule of law, or from within, from his own conscience. In the wilderness, he came to believe he was free to do whatever he liked, and the freedom drove him mad. Small acts of madness line Marlow's path to Kurtz: that fires into the bush for no apparent reason, is suddenly danced, the immense hole dug for no discernible purpose. All these events ultimately lead to a row of impaled severed human heads and Kurtz, a man who, in his insanity, has conferred a godlike status on himself and has ritual human sacrifices performed for him. The previously mentioned themes of solitude and silence have here achieved their most powerful effect: they have driven Kurtz mad. He is presented as a voice, a disembodied head, a mouth that opens as if to devour everything before him. The description of a hostile animistic nature suggests resistance rather than obstinate racism. Nature seems to have a mind of its own, perceiving and reacting to invade aggression. The message that it sends is a leitmotiv often employed in world literature. The true horror of the story lies not in Kurtz's degeneration but in Marlowe's growing realization of truth of colonial exploitation, alienated anguish of native people, insanity in action and a revolutionary idea of racism.

Another thematic concept of novella is "Duty and Responsibility". Here in the tale, Joseph Conrad seems to present the British devotion of duty and efficiency which led to systematic colonization of large parts of the globe. On an individual level, Conrad weaves the themes of duty and responsibility through Marlow's job as captain, a position that make him responsible for his crew and bound to his duties as the boat's commander. There are also the jobs of those with whom Marlow comes into contact on his journey. In *Heart of Darkness*, duty and responsibility revolve most often about how one does one's work. A job well done is respected; simply doing the work one is responsible for is an honorable act. Yet Conrad does not believe in romanticizing the worker. Workers can often be engaged in meaningless tasks, as illustrated in the scene where the Africans blast away at the rock face in order to build a railway, but the rock is not altered by the blasts and the cliff is not at all in the way. The Company's Manager would seem to have a duty to run his business efficiently, but he cannot keep order and although he is obeyed, he is not respected. The Foreman, however, earns Marlow's respect for being a good worker. The chapter I of the novel ends with Marlow speculating on how Kurtz would do his work. But there is a larger sense in which the themes of work and responsibility figure. Marlow says, "I don't like work- no man does-but I like what is in the work-the chance to find you." It is through the work Kurtz does in Africa that his moral bankruptcy is revealed. For himself, Marlow emerges with the devotion of duty to remain loyal to Kurtz, and it is this responsibility, which finally forces him to lie to Kurtz's fiancé.

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Another thematic concept of novella is "Race and Racism". The subject of racism is not really treated by Conrad as a theme in *Heart of Darkness* as much as it is simply shown to be the prevailing attitude of the day. The African natives are referred to as "cannibals," "criminals," and "savages." European colonizers see them as a subordinate species and chain, starve, rob, mutilate, and murder them without fear of punishment. The book presents a damning account of imperialism as it illustrates the white man's belief in his innate right to come into a country inhabited by people of a different race and pillage to his heart's content. Kurtz is writing a treatise for something called the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs." This implies the existence of a worldwide movement to subjugate all non-white races. Kurtz bestows a kind of childlike quality upon the Africans by saying that white people appear to them as supernatural beings. The natives do, indeed, seem to have worshipped Kurtz as a god and to have offered up human sacrifices to him. This innocence proceeds, in Kurtz's view, from an inferior intelligence and does not prevent him from concluding that the way to deal with the natives is to exterminate them all. Early in his journey, Marlow sees a group of black men paddling boats. He admires their naturalness, strength, and vitality, and senses that they want nothing from the land but to coexist with it. This notion prompts him to believe that he still belongs to a world of reason. Marlow, too, comes to see the Africans as some subhuman form of life and to use the language of his day in referring to them as "creatures," "niggers," "cannibals," and "savages." He does not protest or try to interfere when he sees six Africans forced to work with chains about their necks. He calls what he sees in their eyes the "deathlike indifference of unhappy savages." Marlow exhibits some humanity in offering a dying young African one of the ship's biscuits, and although he regrets the death of his helmsman, he says he was "a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara." It is not the man he misses so much as his function as steersman. Marlow refers to the "savage who was fireman" as "an improved specimen." He compares him, standing before his vertical boiler, to "a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs." Chinua Achebe (1930- 2013), a well-known Nigerian novelist and critic, gives his brief inference of *Heart of Darkness* that:

"Conrad presents a Congo River as posing a danger to the white man, who could fall victim to the avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy. It is an analytical outcome imperial power and exploited native" (Conrad 237).

In *Heart of Darkness* Joseph Conrad has masterly and very skillfully intermingled various important themes. These themes are so subtly interwoven that they produce an artistic unity in the novel. These themes seem to get dissolved into each other; they have lost their separate identity in the course of the novel. Sometimes, we find it strange that such a thin book possesses so many themes like theme of evil, imperialism, self-restraint, isolation, realization of truth and appearance and exploring the sub-conscious etc. Thus this novel can not be characterized as an organic whole because of the multiplicity of theme but a unified design emerges out of the excellent synthesis of the theme.

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