

## Chapter : 7

# Joseph Conrad : Lord Jim

### *Introduction to Joseph Conrad, his background and career*

*Joseph Conrad was born Teodor Jozef Konrad Korzeniowski in 1857, the only child of a patriotic Polish couple living in southern Poland. His father was a poet and a man of letters in Poland and mother was a gentle well-born lady with a keen mind but frail health. When he was five his father was arrested because he was suspected of taking part in revolutionary plots against the Russians and was exiled to northern Russia. Conrad and his mother went with him. His mother died from the hardships of prison life three years later when she was only thirty-four. Conrad's father sent him back to his mother's brother for his education, and Conrad was never to see him again. The poet patriot lived only four more years. Conrad was eleven years old, but the emotional bond between him and his father was so strong that a deep melancholy settled within the young boy and much of his writing as an adult is marked by melancholy under currents. Conrad received a good education in Poland but decided on a different career viz, he chose the sea as his vocation. Since the age of seventeen, he sailed almost continually, working on ships that traveled all over the world. This is why most of his novels and short stories have the sea as a background for the action. In 1886, when he was twenty-nine, he became a British subject. He published his first novel *Aimaver's Folly* in 1895. He published his *The Nigger of the Narcissus* in 1897, *Heart of Darkness* in 1899, *Lord Jim* in 1900, *The Secret Agent* in 1907, and *Under Western Eyes* in 1911. He was offered Knighthood in 1924 and died soon after.*

### *Summary of Lord Jim*

*The reader is introduced to Jim (later Lord Jim) at a time when he was working as a water clerk for shipping firm in the Far East. It was not a very good job but Jim was happy and everyone liked him. Jim was born and raised in an Englishman's home and when he was still a young boy,*

*he decided to make the sea his career. He enrolled on a training ship for officers of the merchant marine. He did well and while still aboard the training ship, met his first test of courage when he was called to assist a vessel injured in a fierce storm. Afterwards he justified himself by saying that he was not really afraid but only waiting for a challenge that would be equal to his heroism. He then began to work as first mate on the ship Patna. This was an old steamer bound for holy places with eight hundred Muslim pilgrims. On a calm dark night in the Arabian Sea, the Patna ran over some floating wreckage and got badly damaged. Water entered the bulkhead where hundreds of the pilgrims were asleep. Jim was convinced that soon the sea water would in and the pilgrims would all be drowned. As there were few lifeboats and no time, it would not be possible to save everybody on board. Meanwhile the skipper and other officers struggled to lower a lifeboat. Jim hated their cowardice and refused to help them. The officers got the lifeboat over the side and jumped in. Jim also jumped into the lifeboat. The next few hours were full of horror. The other officers resented Jim's presence in the lifeboat. They watched as the lights of the Patna seemed to go out, and Jim imagined that he could hear the screams of the helpless passengers. The next day a ship picked up the four men and ten days later it delivered them to an Eastern port. The story which the Patna skipper invented to excuse their desertion was useless because they heard the news that a French warship had discovered the Patna deserted by the officers and towed it into Aden. At this news, the skipper vanished and the two engineers drank until they were hospitalised. Jim had to face the official inquiry panel alone. He defended himself and insisted that there had not been a chance to save the Patna. At the inquiry, a man named Marlow entered the scene and throughout most of the novel, the reader sees Jim through Marlow's sympathetic eyes. Deeply interested in the young good-looking Englishman, Marlow attended the inquiry and tried to discover why Jim had deserted the Patna. Jim thinks that Marlow is calling him a wretched dog and has a low opinion of him. On the other hand Marlow finds himself drawn to Jim and invites the young man to have dinner with him at Malabar House. There Jim relates the story of what happened that night on the Patna, and Marlow realises that Jim is a tormented soul. The inquiry ends with Jim losing his naval certificate.*

*Marlow finds a job for Jim and the young man does well and pleases his employer. But suddenly Jim disappears because someone mentions the*

*Patna and Jim cannot endure it. In this way Jim leaves job after job until many people in the Orient know his story. Marlow finally confides his story to Herr Stein, a philosophical old trader who has a wonderful butterfly collection. He suggests that Jim should go to Patusan, an isolated island community in a Malay state where three warring groups are fighting for supremacy. In Patusan Stein had an unprofitable trading post under the direction of a cunning Portuguese named Cornelius. Jim could take over the trading post and begin new life because no one would know him in Patusan. Stein's offer delighted Jim. He felt that he could now bury his past completely and no one would ever find out about it. Stein also gave Jim a silver ring which was a symbol of friendship between Stein and Doramin, chief of the Malays in Patusan. Alone Jim traveled to Patusan but was soon captured by Rajah Allang's men. However, he manages to escape to Doramin's village where he shows him Stein's silver ring and is warmly welcomed and protected. Doramin's son, a strong intelligent young man named Dain Waris, and Jim become good friends walk together to bring Rajah Allang under control. Jim felt secure in the love and trust of all the people. He falls in love with a girl named Jewel who now shares his life. After two years Marlow visits Jim at Patusan, but he feels that he has intruded into Jim's life and decides never again to visit Patusan. An Australian named Gentleman Brown and his band of desperate seamen steal a ship and travel up river to Patusan intending to plunder their settlement. When the bandits arrive Jim is away but the villagers drive the invaders away. When Jim returns Doramin, Dain Waris and all the villagers ask Jim to destroy the robbers but Jim decides to talk to Brown. Brown does not know Jim's past but he judges Jim and sees that Jim has a guilty conscience about something. Jim did not want bloodshed so he promised Brown and his men safe conduct down the river. Brown, advised and guided by the cunning Cornelius, left as planned, but treacherously ambushed a group of villagers under Dain Waris who was killed. Survivors bring the body of Dain Waris to his father Doramin. On his hand is the silver ring which Jim had sent as a pledge of Brown's good faith. Meanwhile the terrible news reaches Jim. His new life has been ruined. The Malays will never trust him again. He had three choices - he could run, he could fight, or he could give himself up. But Jim went to Doramin's village, alone and unarmed, he faced Doramin. Doramin shoots Jim through the chest and he falls at his feet, a hero in death.*

<b>7.0</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>introduction</b>
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Conrad's treatment of characters in Lord Jim</b>
<b>7.3</b>	<b>The structure and narrative method in Lord Jim</b>
<b>7.4</b>	<b>Prominent themes in Lord Jim</b>
<b>7.5</b>	<b>Symbolism in Lord Jim</b>
<b>7.6</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>7.7</b>	<b>Summary</b>
	<b>- Check Your Progress - Answers</b>
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## **7.0 Objectives**

Friends, a study of this chapter will enable you to :-

- a) Analyse the characters in Lord Jim
- b) Analyse the structure and narrative method in the novel
- c) Discuss the prominent themes in the novel
- d) Discuss the use of symbolism in the novel

## **7.1 Introduction**

George Eliot's Middlemarch is more a sociological novel though her approach to characterization is psychological. Conrad's Lord Jim also displays the writer's psychological approach, but the difference is that the latter delves deeper into the recesses of his protagonist's mind. Conrad used the technique of a multi-dimensional view which was made possible by his narrative technique in which we see Jim through his own eyes and the eyes of Marlow. This, as we shall see, makes the novel a very complex one.

## **7.2 Conrad's treatment of characters in Lord Jim**

Jim is a tall well-built young man with blue eyes and a deep voice. On his assignment on the Patna, Jim abandons eight hundred Muslim

pilgrims because he thinks that the ship is going to sink. The ship is rescued and Jim feels terribly ashamed of his cowardly act. He is unable to live a normal life because he fears that his terrible cowardice will be revealed and follow him throughout his life. Jim is a very idealistic person who is ashamed because he cannot live up to his own idealised image that he has built up. His sense of guilt haunts him and makes him incapable of achieving anything in life. Conrad has tried to present Jim as a heroic character who has been misunderstood but who has become a failure because of his own guilt complex. Jim is a fine example of the psychological portrait of a man who could have been a hero but has become a neurotic.

Marlow is a sea-captain by profession and twenty-years older than Jim. He has deep sympathy for Jim and tries to help him in every possible way. Marlow's role in the novel is that of the narrator who gives shape and order to the story and also who comments and performs the function of a chorus. He understands Jim's problem because he belongs to the same profession and also because he is very sensitive by nature. He tries to help Jim but the flaws in Jim's own character bring about his tragedy.

All the other characters in the novel are minor characters like Jewel, the white girl who loves Jim and tries to protect him as much as possible; Doramin the native chieftain; Dain Waris the chief's son and Jim's best friend; Stein the wealthy businessman and collector of butterflies; Cornelius, Jewel's stepfather who betrays Jim; Brown the pirate who wants to rob the village; etc.

### **7.2 Check Your Progress.**

**Answer in one sentence:-**

What makes Jim incapable of achieving anything in life ?

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### **7.3 The structure and narrative method in Lord Jim**

When one studies the structure of Lord Jim, one notices that once Marlow begins to speak, the novel proceeds according to his information and his ability to present that information. His presentation

is in three parts. The first is his meeting with Jim and the long interview on the verandah of Malabar House. The second is his visit to Patusan many years later. And the third is the long written report which he sends to a friend. The incidents in between are merely links between the sequences, and also serve as parallels and contrasts to them. Thus the reader is presented with a cluster of ideas and incidents rather than a single, simple action.

In *Lord Jim*, there are two voices at work -the voice of the author and the voice of Marlow. For structural reasons, Conrad chooses to place an intermediary between the plot and the reader. Marlow is that intermediary and his arrangement of incidents is the structure of the novel. The voice of the author (in Chapter I) first tells the reader about Marlow on a verandah in England. Thereafter, Marlow relates events, but the voice of the author re-enters story many more times (e.g. in Chapters IV, VIII, X, XXI, XXXIV, XXXVI). Each time, the author pulls the reader back to what Marlow is relating on the verandah, from the place and time of the incident that he is relating.

The manner in which the events of the tale are related to the reader, i.e., through the omniscient author or through the first person "I", indicates that Conrad wanted to combine the advantages of both the methods. (At the same time, only the former would have been too diffuse, and only the latter would have been too limited). Brief narratives are included in earlier ones (eg, Marlowe's narrative accommodates the narratives of others). This frame-narrative involves narration within narration, which allows the reader to be at once inside and outside the narrator, and it is possible for the reader to have a many-sided point of view and complexity of vision. The shifting narrative makes possible the vividness of first-hand accounts, and the presence of Marlowe, dominant throughout the novel, makes for cohesion.

The story does not follow the linear method of narration. E.g. in Chapter XIV, we are taken back to the court of inquiry and its verdict. This zig-zag narrative method makes heavy demands on the patience and understanding of the reader. The mystery and glamour of Jim, and the interest he holds for the reader, are heightened by the narrative technique, which does not give a consecutive narrative of his adventures, but only occasional glimpses of his strange career, separated by long intervals.

### **7.3 Check Your Progress.**

**Fill in the blanks :-**

The two voices at work in Lord Jim are the voice of \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_ .

### **7.4 Prominent themes in Lord Jim**

One of the themes in Lord Jim is the conflict between the individual's ideals and the harsher aspects of reality. Conrad explores the idealistic side of human nature in conflict with darker psychic forces and with an indifferent or hostile society. The novel is also the story of a quest, or rather two quests. One is Jim's search for adventure and self-fulfilment, and the other is Marlow's psychological quest as he struggles towards an understanding of Jim. In one sense, Jim's quest is also a futile quest for anonymity and respectability as well as status. It is also the eternal human quest for peace, which is also a futile one.

### **7.4 Check Your Progress.**

**Answer in two sentences :-**

Mention two quests which form the themes of Lord Jim

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### **7.5 Symbolism in Lord Jim**

The major symbol in Lord Jim is light, and by contrast, darkness. The calm voyage of the Patna in sunlight and moonlight symbolises the absence of threatening circumstances. But after the collision, the Patna is swept by rain and darkness, and Jim jumps into the darkness in a moment of confusion. Marlow always mentions how dark and savage the jungle is, and to contrast Jim, always dressed in impeccable white, to the darkness around him. When Stein shows the delicacy and beauty of the butterfly, he contrasts the perfection of nature against the imperfections of man.

Nature becomes an active participant in Lord Jim. Rather than showing man living in harmony with nature, Conrad shows the

constant struggle in nature which reflects the conflict in man's affairs. Man's will to survive unmasks every desire for decency and propriety. The sea becomes a natural ground for treachery and hate when man's natural fears are touched. The jungle symbolises man's hopeless struggle to keep afloat in life. Conrad's symbols thus endlessly suggest new levels of meaning.

## 7.6 Conclusion

As we have seen, Conrad is a writer who strives for perfection in all aspects of writing. This is why very often his style, including the language used, seems to be rather self-conscious and contrived. Undoubtedly, he depicts the moral dilemma of his characters in vivid detail. Another novelist, D. H. Lawrence, whose novel we will study in the next chapter, also shows the inner working of his protagonist's mind.

## 7.7 Summary

We have seen in this chapter how Conrad's background and experience of sea life influenced his writing, as in *Lord Jim*, which concerns life of sailors. The synopsis of the novel tells us about Jim's childhood and youth, when he aspires to be courageous but fails. The incident of the *Patna*, when he and the other officers desert the sinking ship, leave him with a persistent feeling of guilt which haunts him throughout his life and he is incapable of achieving anything in life. He finally takes refuge in Patusan, where he finds a good friend in Dain Waris, a wife in Jewel, and wins the admiration of the natives. But this is short-lived because he is betrayed by Cornelius and Brown, and Dain Waris is killed. He knows Doramin will kill him, but goes to him unarmed, and dies a heroic death. Conrad gives a multi-dimensional view of his protagonist, Jim, but merely touches upon other characters. He gives the reader this insight through his narrative technique of multiple narrators, including Jim himself, Marlow, letters, etc. Various themes like Jim's quest for self-fulfilment, Marlow's quest for an understanding of Jim, man's quest for eternal peace, etc., are depicted in the novel. Conrad also makes use of various symbols, like light and darkness, and nature to give depth of meaning to his novel.



## Check Your Progress - Answers

### 7.2

Jim's sense of guilt makes him incapable of achieving anything in life.

### 7.3

The two voices at work in Lord Jim are those of the author and Marlow.

### 7.4

A quest which forms one of the themes is Jim's quest for self-fulfilment. Another quest is Marlow's quest for an understanding of Jim.

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#### **Field Work :**

Read the novel Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad.



