

Conrad's "The Lagoon" A Document of an Individual in Existential Dilemmas

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ABSTRACT

"The Lagoon" by Joseph Conrad, as some asserts, conglomerates some of the aspects of theoretical philosophy that invokes in us the wonder and questions and the readers' long for an endeavouring to acquire a theological and spiritual perceptions. It also ranks as one of the finest specimen of short story. A note of eeriness and mystery mellowed by a sense of sadness runs through the entire story. It is a narrative story. Conrad invests the world of vegetation all along the lagoon with an atmosphere of pervasive silence and motionless. The description of the natural setting with word music and word picture has been happily blended finely attuned with the theme of the story. The elfin and gossamer like description of the lagoon as a weird aspect and ghastly reputation of "a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battlefield of phantoms, a terrible and charming, august and ignoble, struggling ardently for the passion of our helpless hearts", (The Lagoon, pp.63) is finely attuned to the perpetual queries of the entire human as well as individual existence.

Keyword: - Lagoon, Vegetation, Shadowy, Atmosphere, Natural.

INTRODUCTION

After a careful going through the tragedy of Arsat the readers will be astounded to the utter helplessness of human predicament that is inevitable an unavoidable. The inscrutable fate waits for all of us. The tragic hero, Arsat, once a sword bearer of the king together with his brother he fought for the Rajas. They were both awarded. But after the elopement with Diamelen, the revenge thirsty king's men changed fiercely after him, and consequently results in the dire collapse of his brother who was fated to receive death at the hand of the Rajas's men. In the last phrase of the story when the hero Arsat emerged as a bald-headed man, we could not find in him the same courage, heroism and a person with a distinct moral dignity as had been seemed before. In the encounter with the Raja's men Arsat's brother after an intrepid fight earned a courageous and heroic death, but he himself escaped with Diamelen. The whole description of such action teaches upon the remorse, betrayal, retribution and at the time imbibed in us a sense of utter helplessness of human life and human digester.

According to cosmopolitan outlook Conrad upheld a basic value and principle: That all people are created equal and should be treated so. Through his works he bore no malice towards those who had disagreed with him. In "The Lagoon" Conrad portrayed the character of Arsat who harboured no such attitude. He did not let the past bitterness impact the future.

As for the Aristotelian tragic qualities, it, however, hardly satisfied all the requirements it needs. In spite of his lacuna needed to fulfil Arsat as a tragic figure. We cannot but call him a tragic hero because presenting Arsat against the Aristotelian concept of tragic character, Conrad's in his short stories "The Lagoon" gives us an inevitable clear picture of the human beings in general of the whole cosmos to show how inevitably it goes through the dire and grim fact. There were numerous factors that would certainly evoke the thought of on Arsat who was known for his quick thinking and ability to improvise, which had helped him overcome numerous obstacles.

The inevitable Destiny that cannot be surmounted:

Tragedies tend to create new markers in time, the "before" and the "after." Further, suppressing emotions doesn't contribute to our psychological well-being. In fact, a toxic positive attitude towards life can lead to compromised mental and physical prowess with ability that feeds one succumbed to the fate with elixir of eternal peace.

Despair and the fading of illusion took Arsat down an uncertain future, but hope allowed him to believe that he could find his way to secure himself in his dream. He could make meaning of the path his life had taken. Actually, he believed in tragic optimism that allowed him to turn his suffering into a sense of achievement and accomplishment. He at last also felt that tragedy awoke in him an awareness of the transitory nature of life, this awareness in turn spurs us to engage in responsible actions for his brother's demise.

The predicament and plight of human is eternal that cannot be avoided. Human mind is always in search of knowing itself transcending all the prevalent established sects and dogmas. Different types of socio – economic structures enable man to think variably. In this age of science and progress the people turns out to be mechanized tools, citizens become denizens; the identity of an individual is often denied. An individual loses his identity on the thorns of moral dilemma.

Here Conrad is trying to speaking about the inability of Arsat to transform his dream, desire into reality and he loses his identity and individual existence. It is, as though, despair keeps coming in between his conception and action. It always thwarts his will power.

Because of his ravishing indomitable spirit, remarkable power in his early life he was once drawing the readers' attention seemed to surmount all the impediments human beings have been facing.

There is a typical narrative in the short story. The readers accept each narrative as neither shocking nor mysterious. The readers come to know about the past of Arsat.

Our survival instincts vary from one perspective to another. Human beings have been found struggling for their existence. They often times have been bewildered about what to do because there was no pattern for what to do.

The more the readers are observing and understanding the life of Arsat the more they will be immersed and obsessed in the ultimate destiny the human beings face at the end. Arsat struggled with his efforts and dedication. He was not able to cope with the fate. He didn't really realize how much he had to struggle because he lived in a society that is constructed otherwise.

The betrayal could be Arsat's pre-destined shadow he hardly perceived. He felt betrayed in his brother's crucial moment. He hardly defended himself in his argument with himself.

Feeling betrayal led him to a flurry of complex emotions and he might feel difficult to manage. This article discusses on the betrayal, remorse and retribution.

Arsta's Affinity towards Illusory World:

In spite of his fear and failure which he never thought of, he wanted to look forward. But he shrank at the shudder of his deeds committed in the past. Now he is devoid of emotion but falls of remorse and perceptibility to avenge upon his brother's killers. But Diamelen died. His last ray of hope diminished. He had no connection or relation, no way to life, no money in life and he had no power to convince others. This is the grim reality he is in now. The reality of segregation- the conflict the haves and the have nots, the Raja's and the subjects, and the white and the black, the believers and the infidel, and the natives and the emigrants Conrad presents the Malayan landscape with the desolate and claustrophobic atmosphere of the orient. It was in the circumstances that the small canoe headed towards Arsat's clearing- his resident.

The Lagoon" is one of the earliest short stories of Joseph Conrad, the reading of which is chiefly based on the precariousness and helplessness of human existence resulting from the philosophy existentialism by Soren Kierkegaard.

The character of Arsat can be interpreted variably through the context of psychological and sociological perspective the socio-economic and political dominance that result in a strong aversion towards the plaintiffs and at the same time his butyral and the death of Diamelen entangle his life of perpetual derision. The central character Arsat is bleed failed on the tear of life emerged in the failure of pillars. But he bore the afflict ant silently.

When the Whiteman entered Arsat's dwelling where he saw a woman lying covered with a broad sheet of red cotton cloth on a bamboo coach. It was Diamelen, Arsat's beloved. She was in her last pangs. The ghostly looking of one going to die was written large on her face. After Diamelen's death Arsat realized the verity and futility of his desire to live in a world of love and peace, far away from the fear of death was but an illusion. His light and low were gone. He was a mere creature driven and derided by illusory world. His story is the story of darkness, the story of fear and frustration –

“The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wander of death-of death near, unavoidable, an unseen, soothed the unrest of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. The ever -ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him – into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appears untrustworthy and infamous like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth enfolded in the straight peace become a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battlefield of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling

ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.” (The Lagoon, J. Conrad)

The predicament and plight of human is eternal that cannot be avoided. Human mind is always in search of knowing itself transcending all the prevalent established sects and dogmas. Different types of socio – economic structures enable man to think variably. In this age of science and progress the people turns out to be a mechanized tools, citizens become denizens; the identity of an individual is often denied. An individual loses his identity on the thorns of moral dilemma. Here Conrad is trying to speaking about the inability of Arsat to transform his dream, desire into reality and he loses his identity and individual existence. It is, as though, despair keeps coming in between his conception and action. It always thwarts his will power.

Because of his ravishing indomitable spirit, remarkable power in his early life he was once drawing the readers’ attention as

He left his brother in danger. His brother was his greatest benefactor who had lain down his life in his valiant bid to enable Arsat to elope with Diamrelen, his sweet heart. This kind of inglorious acts Arsat himself confessed to the Whiteman haunts him every moment in his life –

“There’s no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, Tuan, for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil. I loved my brother. I went to him and told him that I could see nothing but one face, hear nothing but one voice. He told me “Open your heart so that she what was in it - and wait”. (The Lagoon, J. Conrad))

On expressing his deep remorse and repentance he had been further cogitating ----

“I heard yells behind me, and I saw my brother run across the glade. Many men were bounding after him; I took her in my arms and threw her into the boat then leaped in myself. When I looked back, I saw that my brother had fallen. He fell and was up again, but the men were closing rounding him. He shouted, “I am coming”. The men were close to him. I looked many men. Then I looked at her. Tuan, I pushed the canoe! I pushed it into deep water. She was kneeling forward looking at me, and I said “Take your paddle” While I struck the water with mine, Tuan, I heard him cry I heard him cry my twice; and I heard voices shouting, “Kill! Strike!” I never turned back. I heard him calling my name again with a great shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice – and I never turned my head. My own name!... My brother! Three times he called – but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten – where death is unknown!”(The Lagoon, J. Conrad)

A Paranormal Contexture of Arsat’s Psychology:

Arsat refused to acknowledge that everything in the external world is transitory, subject to destruction and decay—including our own body and mind and it prevents him from searching within for the eternal, stable core of our existence. In his initial stage Arsat believe his power, resistance and labour. He hardly sees the approaching of the old age and the youth, vigour, and beauty will certainly slip away. He will be once frightened and demoralized. He attempted to escape by distracting himself with the help of illusory elixirs, but nothing can stop is conception being declined.

The story and the dilemma remind us that in the final analysis the world is illusory because it is impermanent and inherently unstable. It emphasizes this fact to inspire all human being to drop his exclusive focus on the external world and instead direct our attention inward to the centre of consciousness, which is pristine, radiant, and immutable. It tells us that every human being subject to death, decay, and destruction and his concept of eternal happiness, free from wrath, malice and ailment, infirmity and death. Arsat’s life is mixed with successes and failures, his losses and gains, but at the end he led a painful, upsetting, or frightening life.

It is painful to see the entire course of Arsat’s life. His action likely makes the readers feel vulnerability as they counted on that person like Arsat who experienced a betrayal of which common reactions include lashing out in anger, self-blaming, a loss of confidence and withdrawal.

CONCLUSION

The word illusion itself evokes stark images of Arsat’s life like an accident, assaults, human predicaments —acute moral dilemma stored in the mind of the protagonist and he suffered from it for a lifetime. This, however, is a kind of understanding of the concept of his problem.

After ruminating on the issues of Arsat in the midst of his moral crisis, we shall be able to understand how much traumatized situation he had been going through and it remained ongoing, long-lasting, and perhaps not always identifiable as trauma while human beings living it. A persistent trauma, such as organized calamity of human beings.

As natural as the revenge instinct may be, it still seems to make Arsat restless and apathetic. Actually, revenge is embedded in the deeper recess of his heart as an instinctive response. He strongly believes the "need for vengeance" as the single greatest motivational tool.

All the while, Arsat was fantasizing about making him suffer. He intended to pursue this mission. Even if Arsat would accomplish his mission, he would not find comforts.

The story of Arsat's life contains a kind of adventure game. The explorative part Arsat had gone through confused and bewildered the readers that would make them understand the core objectives and missions required to complete the game. Arsat failed to escape the haunted mansion as one who performs an exorcism to achieve his targets.

Arsat is devoid of moral faith to contact of eyes with his enemies he wanted to revenge upon. He failed a sense of poignant shame. He hides only a thrusted cry in the deeper recesses of his heart and he could not overcome these painful feelings of guilt and remorse. Thus, in a sense he is kind of representative of 'hollow man', denizen of a spiritually, barren, modern wasteland, who utters on only a whimper of defeat, a thrusted cry of the hollow man, a cry that we generally associate with helpless infancy.

The human beings have to wait a long tedious moments as Arsat did and he has nothing to do but ponder over the gossamer jaws that brought him to this dilemmas and the consequence of those actions. Now his reaction is of a sombre, uniformed man appeared on his doorstep- collapsing from reality.

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