

The Idea Of Individualism In Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*

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ABSTRACT

Individualism defines a sense of being independent and self-reliant. Through his works, James Elishama Smith popularized the term 'Individualism'. He believed and founded the idea of individualism as the original genius of an individual's creation. The novel *Lord Jim* by Joseph Conrad focuses on the theme of finding self-identity. *Lord Jim*, the protagonist shuttled himself in seeking a suitable place to live his happy life. His anonymity gave him restlessness, and eventually finding a place to settle that didn't give him peace and became his destiny's location. The novelist illuminates the psychological shift in the protagonist's mind which was struggling to establish his identity. This paper aims to illustrate the problems Lord Jim faces, and his struggle to create his identity.

Key Words:

Individualism, Self-Reliant, Genius, Self-Identity, Shuttled, Anonymity, Restlessness, Destiny, Illuminates, Struggle, Illustrate.

*"My great mistake, the fault for
Which I can't forgive myself, is
That one day I ceased my
Obstinate pursuit of my own
individuality". - Oscar Wilde*

Individualism is a feature of human interest and lifestyles. It is a propensity of self-creation and innovation in contrast to the social norms and traditional behaviour. This is a fundamental characteristic of an individual character seeking strangeness or

peculiarity. An individualist does not follow the current course; instead, pre-identified course offers a combination of several elements centered on personal interest. A common characteristic trait of an individualist is independent thought and forming self-opinions and ideas.

Initially the word 'Individualism' was used by French and British proto-socialists, adherents of Saint Simon (1760-1825), and Robert Owen (1771-1858), earlier in the late 1830s Owenites coined this word in English. James Elishama Smith has commonly used and popularized this word in his writings. He believed individualism to be a source of growth within the original intellect of an individual. Poland, Conrad's motherland, was a fragmented and defeated country in the year 1857; most of it was under Russian control. When his father died he left him as an orphan of eleven years, Conrad longed for liberty and faraway places. He completed his schooling listlessly as a ward of a good Uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski,

Conrad's fiction focuses on the theme of finding individual identity and alienation and loneliness. He brought a new dream to English literature. His novel's most characteristic feature centers on the sense of human alienation and the quest for individual identity. In 1900, *Lord Jim* was published which resembles the life of Conrad in several respects. Conrad's father, a Polish writer as well as a landowner, was a victim of the 1863 Russian rebellion. Joseph Conrad had been alone and suffered from isolation. Thus in most of his writings, he escapes from the reality and wants to establish his own identity through his chosen characters. In the novel *Lord Jim* he personifies himself as Jim. Unlike Jim who abandoned his sailing ship, the *Patna*, Conrad abandoned his Poland motherland too. Jim's settlement among the natives in Patusan as a hero reflects Conrad's emergence as a popular British writer, and Jim's surrender to Doramin and his subsequent death can be compared to Conrad's suicide attempts.

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The character Lord Jim is portrayed by Joseph Conrad as the son of an English country guy. He was given the education required and also qualified as a seaman. While he belonged to a middle-class family, he received training in navigational science. Jim was elected first mate of a sailing ship called the *Patna*. It was a journey from Bombay to one of Arabia's ports, carrying about 800 pilgrims destined for the Haj pilgrimage. It happened one day by an accident. The ship's officers realized the ship had come into collision with another vessel. Jim was trying to save the boat but was in vain.

The ship was fortunately picked up by another boat and safely reached another port. Jim did not run away, and was the *Patna*'s only crew member to stand trial. Jim knew how they were both victims of a ghastly error and he was willing to bear the punishment of having his license revoked as part of that error. His well-wisher, Marlow, suggests him to go to Patusan, an isolated village on the islands of Malaya. He gives a silver ring to Jim as a token of everlasting friendship between Stein and Doramin, the Patusan leader of the Bugis Malays.

Marlow met Jim at Patusan, after two years. Brown traveled to Patusan, who had robbed a ship and a band of poor seaman. Brown wanted Doramin and his son Dain Waris to rob and finish off but Jim interfered to help them survive. Jim met Brown but his subordinate Cornelius told Brown to attack the *Malaya* on the way out. Dain Waris was killed along with his villagers. The survivors brought Dain Waris's body to his father. Jim had before him three options to save his life, which is to run away; to battle Doramin and his men; or to abandon according to Malay tradition. But Jim intentionally climbed the hill unprotected to Doramin's house, and met Doramin who shot Jim through chest. Jim collapsed as a hero at the foot of Dormin, and died.

This novel portrays the aftermath of a shipwreck, and also in the narrator's words, Captain Marlow, "the struggles of a person trying to save his conception of what his individual identity would be from the fire..."(p.58) That person is a young seaman, Jim who operates as the *Patna*'s main mate and who also "springs" Jim's urge is to benefit the people in the ship when sinking but marginalizes his individual ideas of helping the people. Jim had worked in various Eastern Seaports as a water clerk.

Jim's culpable conscience makes him run away from other situations in order to find happiness in life. He travels from place to place in search of identity and wishes to show his individualism, but faces failure altogether.

Joseph Conrad portrays Jim's real image from various contexts, and his frivolity. Jim's license was revoked after ship wreck (Patna). Marlow, the well-wisher of Jim, gives him the work of a rice mill assistant run by a Marlow friend called Denver. Jim does his job outstandingly and receives a good reputation that makes Denver regard Jim as his son. But for a long time, that doesn't lead him. The Patna's assistant-engineer, who had fled from jail, came to Denver and was offered an engineering position in the factory. When Jim was reminded of the Patna incident by the assistant-engineer, Jim quit his job and left the location. It shows Jim being reminded of the history that gave him hurdle in establishing his individuality. So, Jim decides to quit, and Marlow found him an assistant's next role in a ship chandlers, named Egstrom and Bake. There his task was to drive business from ship landing crew and passengers at ports to the company. In this task Jim has also proved highly effective. On one occasion, one of the seafarers who came to his organization saying that he was captain O 'Brient related to the Patna incident and spoke out of contempt of the crew.

Marlow's third job won for Jim was in an eastern port timber-merchants company. The company was owned by brothers Yucker. Jim has shown his potential and initiative here, too. One day Jim had a fight at the hotel with an officer in the Siamese Navy where he had been putting up. Jim drops him down into the river from the window. As a quarrelsome man this gave Jim a bad name and he was forced to quit the job. Once again Marlow recommended Jim to another ship-chandler company called De Jough Brothers. Jim reminded us once again of the Patna incident which made him desert his work. The overriding query for Jim, "what could I do –what?" (88), gets the answer "Nothing!" The Patna, as the Arab Sea ploughs on its way to the Red Sea that Jim never forgets.

The fundamental mistake Jim makes is the power of his imagination, which always takes care of his action. Consequently, the very thing which ultimately results

in his downfall is his fatal sense of identity (Bloom, 2005: 217-218). Broadly speaking; the Conradian hero is a dreamer, a quest in possession of attributes that lift him beyond his ordinary peers. He is sweet, gentle, well-mannered, and cavalry, and he shows failure in action, not because of his lack of bravery, but because, as Conrad puts it, he “possess Ability in the abstract” (p.5) Jim is an honourable man according to Marlow, the writer. While Jim fled the ship, he feels remorse and hesitation. Jim speaks of the eight hundred pilgrims and he regrets all his life for them. Conrad portrays his protagonist to develop his individuality in many ways but Jim’s fate crushes him to fall down. His guilt continues to poke his brain like a pin and Jim feels guilty and embarrassed as the words of his father circulate inside his head, “resolve fixedly never, through any possible motives, do anything which you believe to be wrong” cultivating “in Jim an inflexible mindset of moralism” (Yang, Hasieh and Tien, 2013, p.106).

Jim's observations of different jobs explicitly derive from experience and from the 'Patna' incident his sense of escapism. He is struggling to deal with the new work because of the incident involving 'Patna.' This leaves him sad and has not been able to develop his individual identity. This also reveals the essence of human experience that their experiences (mistakes) are not known to others. Jim is suffering more to recover from the 'Patna' incident and he needs to apologize for it. As he is reminded of the Patna case he senses his inability in his carrier to face the loss. Eventually Marlow finds a new job for Jim in Patusan with the aid of his friend Stein who owned a huge trading firm with headquarters in Batavia and branches across the Archipelago of Malaya. One of those settlements was in Patusan Island and the agent there was Cornelius. Jim does his job well, encouraging the natives to recognize him as a major leader of Bugis ' people. In a short amount of time, Jim used his power to organize people's group life on principles of equity, fair play and equality. Jim thought he had done everything in his life to justify his earlier dreams of making a name for himself.

Jim's happy moment in life doesn't allow him to build himself for a long time. It didn't last long until he was satisfied, honored and absolutely contented in mind. Jim's destiny was very strong and proved to meet his demise in the most glorious

fashion. All these later developments begin to collapse with the arrival of an adventurer named Brown in Patusan. He was a pirate and devil in human shape. Once Brown had robbed the government ship and decided to flee into the Indian Ocean, enter some East African or Madagascar port, and then sell somebody his stolen ship. Brown knows the Dain Waris camp is at opposite poles.

At the same time Jim wanted to save Dain Waris and Brown, villagers wanted Brown to leave the village free. Jim asked Dain Waris not to attack Brown, because Brown would leave the place without harming the people in the village. Brown who was of evil intent ordered his men to assault the camp of Dain Waris. Dain Waris was struck by one of the Brown's bullets, and he dropped dead. Jim took blame for the death of the Dain Waris, and he came to Doramin, admitting his error that he was the cause of the death of his friend. Doramin looked at him and took his gun, shot at him and pierced Jim's heart, killing him on the spot. Therefore with his life he paid the highest cost, and therefore constancy and unblemished dignity. Jim took on blame for Dain Waris's death. Since, it was his advice Doramin allowed Brown and his men to leave untouched.

Jim establishes his individualism among the Bugis people at Patusan after a great struggle. When Jim's individualism was established when he lost his life. Jim's sense of escapism from the past occurrence means Jim runs away from reality. When Jim tries to stand in one place and create his individualism causes his soul to lose.

Conrad neither identifies Jim as a man of pure tender and cold thought, nor as a man of high flickering intellect. Conrad portrays common man by Jim, a man of ordinary living. Conrad reveals Jim's character and will through effective narrative techniques which make the readers feel the variety of identifications and distinctions everywhere.

And Joseph Conrad in his novel *Lord Jim* aptly reveals a sense of individualism. He also analyzes a psychological dimension of the book. This is a human nature nobody has the confidence to admit their failures. Jim shares nothing outright. Of course his predilection is psychologically fascinating. Within him, the feeling of shame is masochistic. His soul is trapped in its own self-torture. He is

hurting himself and not other men. The psychological focus is on his sense of guilt that makes him leave the ship, 'Patna.' It tortures him for punishing him. He hates life, and not death. Only when he is shot dead by Doramin, his mind gets calm and that at his own request. Jim's behavior shows his accepting dilemma which psychological tension prevails in any normal person. The psychological value is again in the sense of resistance to life. His sense of individualism compels him to face death in peace. In Jim there was a collision between imagination and action as well as idealism and reality. His conflict with inner vulnerability impedes him from facing reality. While Jim appears to readers a social enigma.

Lord Jim shows a personal understanding of Conrad by Jim. He talks of the inner vulnerability of man, of loneliness and also of how one escape from the past. This also shows how man is faced with creating his individualism. Jim was unable to establish his own personal identity. When Jim flees from the 'Patna' incident, he lives his life in peace. He immediately develops his identity, and destroys his career. So Joseph Conrad in his novel *Lord Jim* clearly depicts the concept of individualism.

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