

The Structure of the Human Mind- The Cultural Consciousness and the Idea of Marginality Inherent in the Human Brain

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ABSTRACT:

Coetzee plays a major role in the development of the twentieth Century literature and his writings are well acknowledged world widely.His writings focus on the insensitive administration of the political parties in South African land and the chaos faced by the people is discussed vividly. Even though the novel is written in an oblique style still it manages to get a distressing effect on the readers. This paper focuses on the consciousness part in each character where they encounter the idea of marginality by the dominant group. It mainly concentrates on the shifting of power relations and how it is the reflected on the lives of the marginalized other. In this paper, *Age of Iron and Waiting for the Barbarian* is analyzed. This paper emphasizes on the idea of the consciousness, cultural consciousness and the idea of marginality in the character of Coetzee and these three terms are interconnected with each other and it gets varied based on the cultural constraints.

Keywords:Consciousness, Cultural Consciousness, Marginality and power, Otherness, apartheid.

J M Coetzee is one of the most successful writers of our time and he is known as a linguist, novelist, translator, and critic, occasionally he gives lectures to various universities. He was born in Cape Town still his mother taught him to speak in English along with the African's language and that made him to take English seriously for life. He moved to Australia and lives there permanently and occasionally he gives lectures to various universities in United States.His act of shifting from South Africa to Australia had broughtmany criticisms to his career. Especially they believed that through his novels, he had intent to give a wrong message to the people by making the black as villains andin his novels, he had portrayed black opt to seek revenge on the colonizers. Even though he had received criticism for his writings still his writing had won many notable awards. He is one of the few writers to be awarded with the booker prize twice. While accepting the Jerusalem Prize, he gave an acceptance speech where he expressed his opinion that "someone who...lives in no notably unfree a countryis honored with a prize for freedom." Through his speech, it is predictable of his love for the country as well as the state of people in South Africa.When compared with the other South African writers, he is an exceptional because he didn't write about patriotism and romance instead he wrote about the problems faced by the people in the colonial land like authorship and power, sovereignty and determination.

As a part of South African land, he was able to describe the idea of marginality from his personal experience as well as from the history. Being a white, settler in the South Africa it is unchallenging for him to understand the concept of marginality and it is described in a convincing manner in his novels. He focused on the power hierarchy as well the constraints of the society plays a major role in the characters, where they end up in a situation of being a

victimizer or victimized. This paper is about the idea of marginality and the role played by the society. The idea of power is to make someone to do a work through compulsion and force. It didn't require the willingness of the self which is evident in the characters of Coetzee.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault had mentioned that, "where there is power, there is resistance." He believed that if there is confrontation then it leads to the lack of power relation. He had narrated in his text that belief system is the cause for the power in the society which leads to pressure in an individual. Certain belief system in the society makes us to do things which are unimaginable. In Coetzee's novel, where the characters feel either powerless or powerful which leads to the questioning of the identity of a self. Through his text, he had tried to narrate the disenfranchisement of the Afro-American people.

Age of Iron is narrated from the South African background and it is realistic in perspective whereas *Waiting for the Barbarians* is narrated in an allegorical manner still these two texts have many similarities. In both these texts, characters get degraded by the authority eventually leads to political consciousness. As a writer, Coetzee had narrated the events instead of taking any stands. He had narrated incidents where there is emotional disputes between power and powerless and he didn't make an effort to defend any particular character still he manages to bring guilt in the dominating characters.

Age of Iron describes the life experience of a retired professor Mrs Curren in an apartheid land, where she witnesses many political restraints. Mrs Curren is in the final stage of a deadly sickness and she wants to write letters to her daughter about her illness, and this story is narrated in the form of letters and in the hope that it will be delivered after her death. Her daughter stays in a foreign land so she befriends a homeless person called Verduyn in order to deliver the letter to her daughter. Initially both of them didn't have any liking for each other but in the latter half of the novel, their trust got increased. This particular novel got some traces from the history where the writer tried to narrate an incident from the past. In 1986 the black people revolted against the political parties and it continued till 1989 where many black people had lost their lives in order to get equality and equity. Especially children had boycotted to attend schools and they started taking part in the political struggle for their freedom. This particular incident is viewed from the perspective of Bheki and his friends who bunk classes in order to protest for their cause of the black. According to Bheki, through education black people are set to conventions by the political parties, "to make us fit into the apartheid system" (76) Bheki, even though he stayed in Curren house still he failed to listen to her as she belongs to the dominating class. In nature, Mrs Curren is against to the idea of power and the hierarchy which is imposed in the society and she wants to protect the children from the cruelty of the apartheid. Mrs Curren gives shelter to them but she is against to the idea of rebel as she wants them to get educated and she feels that they are too young to fight against the odds in the society.

Mrs Curren feels aggravated on seeing the media because the government had oppressed them so much and they are not ready to go against it which leads to telecasting news in the favor of government. "Of troubles in the school, the radio says nothing, the television says nothing, and the newspapers say nothing. In the world they project all the children of the land are sitting happily at their desks learning about the square on the hypotenuse and the parrots of the Amazonian jungle." (39) Mrs Curren feels that the dissoluteness of life under the apartheid had hardened the children's heart which resulted to the stoic children eventually they are not attached with any relationships. Even they are detached with their parent because of the harsh treatment in

the society. According to MrsCurren, children depict persistence of life and soul but she witnesses them with gun, which brings emotional turmoil in the self of Curren. “Children scorning childhood, the time of wonder, the growing time of the soul. Their souls, their organs of wonder, stunted, petrified. And on the other side of the great divide their white cousins soul-stunted too, spinning themselves tighter and tighter into their sleepy cocoons.” (7) s

In this novel, MrsCurren, entirely differ from the attitude of Florence, house maid of her as she is against to the idea of children taking part in the political struggle whereas Florence feels proud on seeing her son, Bheki taking part in the freedom struggle. MrsCurren feels pity for the children in losing their innocence in the political struggle and curses their parents for not stopping them. Occasionally, MrsCurren ends up in a friendly debate with Florence on this particular topic and she tries to convince her but fails miserably. Curren feels that the black children are losing their human values and emotions along with their life in the South African land. Bheki even though he tried to act like an adult by taking part in the fight; the anti-apartheid resist but deep down he is still a child. “When he died he was a child again. The mask must have dropped in sheer childish surprise when it broke upon him in that last instance that the stone throwing and shooting was not a game after all.” (125)

MrsCurren is desperate to help the children of the black and wants to stop the political dispute. When she was attacked by the same group of children on the streets and this incident makes her to feel helpless as there is no way to save and protect the children from the agony of injustice. Here in this novel, Curren symbolizes the aspiration for the future and a thirst for the future is witnessed as she wants to communicate about her illness with her daughter after her death through letter simultaneously she had narrated about the suffering of children in the letter. In the beginning of the novel, MrsCurren shares her fear of dying but at the end of the novel, there is no fear as she is ready to die at any moment and this transformation happened because she had witnessed the worst which leads to the hardening of the heart.

Waiting for the Barbarian, is narrated about the unnamed place where the Magistrate tries to support the Barbarians but the frontier is against to it so they send Colonel Joll in order to impose restraints on the barbarian people. Presence of Colonel Joll didn't solve the problem of the frontier instead it increased the intensity and had brought chaos which resulted in the battle by the barbarians. The Magistrate brings a barbarian girl to his place and provides shelter as she had lost her vision. Even though the Magistrate belongs to the oppressing group still he acts humanly by taking care of the barbarian girl and the barbarian community. At the end of the novel, the barbarians turn against the frontier and chase Colonel Joll from their place.

The marginalized in this novel tries to oppose the dominant force but their silence is not explained through words. Here Coetzee had highlighted the methods of tortures as well as he had given importance to the victim of complexity. Colonel Joll tortures the fisher folks and injures them badly. Even the magistrate becomes the victim where he was humiliated badly and locked up in a room. He was denied with basic necessities as well as he was hooked upside down for the onlookers to mock at him. He is left with no option other than breaking the punishment which is imposed on him. During his stay in prison, he took solace by imaging the barbarian girl. In his work, *Doubling the point*, Coetzee had mentioned, “Behind the so-called suicides and accidental deaths...behind the cursory post mortems by government functionaries, the bland, unlikely inquest findings, lie the realities of fear, exhaustion, pain, cruelty.” (361)

In the beginning of the novel, the magistrate tries to be a good person by serving the wishes of the frontier. He didn't disrespect Colonel Joll in the beginning but in the latter half of the novel, his conscience makes him to revolt against Joll as he mistreats the barbarians. On seeing the harsh treatment undergone by the barbarians leads Magistrate to revolt against the frontier and he forgets his position in the Fortier. He starts helping the barbarians without any fear. In *Into the Dark Chamber: the Novelist and South Africa*, Coetzee had mentioned about the magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* as, "I find myself wondering too whether he has a private ritual of purification, carried out behind the closed doors, to enable him to return and break bread with other man. Does he wash his hands carefullyhas the Bureau created new men who can pass without disquiet between the clean and the unclean." (13)

Both the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Mrs Curren from *Age of Iron* has many similarities where they tried to risk their life for the welfare of others. Both these characters undergo many traumatic experiences in order to get a confidential place in the society. Magistrate as well as Curren is haunted by the guilt and they want redemption so they start violating the constraint of the government by helping the oppressed class. Whenever Magistrate feels guilty he goes to the inn where he tries to forget it with the company of women. "Terrible things go on in the night while you and I are asleep. The jackal rips out the hare's bowels but the world rolls on."(24) The magistrate's attitude towards the barbarian girl changes constantly. He is so occupied with guilt which leads him to rescue the barbarian girl. He washes her feet and applies ointment to her wound and tries to protect her from the hands of the frontier people especially from Colonel Joll. When he was not able to protect her he drops her in the forest and makes her to stay with the barbarian community and he is unaware of his feeling for the girl till the end. "The distance between myself and her tortures, I realize, is negligible; I shudder." (29)

In *Discipline and punish*, Foucault had argued that the aim of the torture is to reach the soul. Here in the novel, the magistrate is tortured till his soul reaches its climax which leads to the revolt similarly it happened to the barbarian community. When the violation is at peak, the barbarian community started protesting against the government. The barbarian girl is silent till the end, where she didn't share her feelings and opinions to the magistrate. This Silent nature of the barbarian girl is compared with the nature of vercueil, where both these characters undergo the traces of marginality in a different manner still the soul remains the same till the end. They remained passive and supportive till the end. The barbarian girl belongs to the marginalized community and was disfigured mentally as well as physically. She was tortured, beaten brutally, lost her vision and her legs were broken by Colonel Joll still she remained passive. Even after undergoing these tortures still she remained quite, which is surprising to the Magistrate so he wants to save her from the harms of the society. When the magistrate tried to get answers for his query but she remained silent. Whereas vercueil's thought was narrated to the reader by Coetzee and it is found that he barely served an existence. His significance is not remarkable and there is no explanation is given about his experience on seeing the children's death. He didn't have a proper house to stay until he meets Curren and he is not ready to make a distinguished life after meeting her and is not ready to make any commitments to her. He didn't assure her that he will act as a messenger by delivering the letter neither he tried to console her during the time of pain and sickness. This shows that he didn't acknowledge his presence remarkably.

The idea of otherness is deconstructed in the text of Coetzee, where the oppressor tried to act consciously to the oppressed. His text brought enlightenment to the concept of otherness and

his text tried to explain that all human being are intent to do crime. In both these text, the protagonist thirst for ethical element is seen in different layers. “Conscious experience is at once the most familiar thing in the world and the most mysterious. There is nothing we know about more directly than consciousness, but it is far from clear how to reconcile it with everything else we know. We know consciousness far more intimately than we know the rest of the world, but we understand the rest of the world far better than we understand consciousness.” (3 Chalmers) Coetzee in his text concentrates on the apartheid and its effect on the people brought personal and psychological deprivation instead of the material aspect. Through his narration it is understood, the concept of race brought changes with the power politics and eventually it is resulted with gender politics.

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