



THE IMPACT OF OPPRESSION IN J.M. COETZEE'S WAITING FOR BARBARIANS AND LIFE AND TIMES OF MICHEL K

S. Deepika

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English (DDE), Madurai Kamaraj University,
Madurai, Tamilnadu

Cite This Article: S. Deepika, "The Impact of Oppression in J. M. Coetzee's Waiting for Barbarians and Life and Times of Michel K", International Journal of Applied and Advanced Scientific Research, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page Number 331-332, 2018.

Abstract:

J. M. Coetzee, a white South African writer in most of his novels discussed "Oppression" as a major theme. "Oppression" is the exercise of authority or power in burdensome, cruel or unjust manner. It can also be defined as an act or instance of oppressing, the state of being oppressed and the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically by troubles, adverse condition and anxiety. Apartheid was a system of racial segregation enforced through legislation by the national party Governments of South Africa. The most oppressed among the victims of the apartheid regime were peasants and women. Especially, during the civil war nobody felt safe. The brutal experiences of the civil war and racial discrimination loomed large over South Africa during the apartheid regime. *Waiting for the barbarians* is a critique of contemporary South Africa society. It is set in an unnamed place where an unnamed character, the magistrate has the responsibility to safe guard the boundaries of the empire from the threat of the barbarians. The normal and tribal talk are suspected of harming the empire and tortured in captivity. J. M. Coetzee is one of the important contemporary writers who explores the effects of western imperialism on native culture. He examines the effects of racism and colonial oppression in his works. Moreover, Coetzee writes from an apolitical view point that extends beyond geographic and social boundaries to achieve universal significance.

Key Words: Burdensome, Apartheid, Legislation, Tortured, Racism & Oppression

J. M. Coetzee, a white South Africa writer in most of his novels discussed "Oppression" as a major theme. "Oppression" is the exercise of authority or power in burdensome, cruel or unjust manner. It can also be defined as an act or instance of oppressing, the state of being oppressed and the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically by troubles, adverse condition and anxiety. "Oppression" is customarily experienced as a consequence of and expressed in the form of a prevailing. If unconscious, assumption that the given target is some way interior, "Oppression" is rarely limited solely to formal Government action. An individual may be the particular focus to oppression or persecution and in such circumstances there is no group membership in which to share and they may mitigate, the burden of as traction (was a procedure under the Athenian democracy in which any citizen could be expelled from the city – state of Athens for ten years.)

Apartheid was a system of racial segregation enforced through legislation by the national party Governments of South Africa. The most oppressed among the victims of the apartheid regime were peasants and women. Especially, during the civil war nobody felt safe. The brutal experiences of the civil war and racial discrimination that loomed large over South Africa during the apartheid regime. This paper focuses on the impact of oppression in J. M. Coetzee's novels *Waiting for Barbarians* and *The Life and Times of Michael K*.

There was a curfew everywhere because of this civil war. There was no free movement of the people. Michael K struggled a lot during this time because he did not have correct permit by which he could take his mother to her ancestral house in "Prince Albert". The real meaning of oppression comes in the life of Michael K, who sets first humiliated by the soldier on the way thinking that there was a thief and he was stealing something, but actually all these things belonged to his mother. His life in concentration camps and the way Visagie's grandson treated him like "Servant" highlight Michael K's subjugation.

K's problems are multi-dimensional and complex. He is handicapped. He belongs to the colonized race: he is father less, and he is from a very poor background. He is born into the world of oppression, deprivation, homelessness chaos and raging unceasing war. When K escapes from attentiveness camps, he reaches the mountain, there also he suffers a lot. He does not have anything to each but after sometime he does not have any choice than to eat 'insects' and 'roots' without thinking about its poison. Due to this war, he is forced to withdraw from the main society and started living in a "burrow". The life led by Michael K in burrow reminds the readers of the primitive man who lives in such places.

K's relationship with the doctor is a unique one. The relationship between them closely resembles the relationship between the "magistrate" and the "Barbarian girl" in the novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The magistrate's urgent need to understand who the girl really is and to know her story leads him to her mind in much the same way her for Turners previously did while reaching for the 'truth'. "The combinations of imploring and commanding in medical officer's plea appeal to you Michaels: yield" (208) reveals a similar ambiguity. Though the Doctor belongs to the oppressor class, he sympathizes with Michael. His thought about Michael makes him to become emotional but he could not think why he has been thinking so much for K. Many

patients are like K but what is special in K. who was not able to understand. How over, here the distance between oppressor and oppressed become less. Oppression comes to its full potential during war time.

Waiting for the Barbarians is a critique of contemporary South African society. It is set in an unnamed place where an unnamed character, the magistrate has the responsibility to safe guard the boundaries of the empire from the threat of the barbarians. The normal and tribal talk are suspected of harming the empire and tortured in captivity. The magistrate finds the difficulty to insulate himself from the scenes of brutality and this sets him on to a path of ethical transformation.

It is empire's greed and power whose main motive is to oppress the natives through Colonel Joll who unleashes a hell on the barbarians through his methods of torture. The worst affected by the torture is the barbarian girl who has lost her visions and also not able to walk properly as was hit by the hammer. A part from this, Colonel Joll humiliates the natives by beating them in front of the other people and makes it public spectacle.

Colonel Joll doesn't stop with this, he also tortures and humiliates the magistrate because he has a soft corner for the natives. He gets imprisoned and humiliated when Joll asks magistrate to dress like a woman and dance in front of them. So, throughout this novel, the empire shows his oppressive nature on natives through colonel Joll, particularly on the barbarian girl. Even the loyal servants like magistrate gets oppressed by the Empire. In this chapter, both Colonized and colonizer get oppressed by the some political entity called "the empire" furthermore the magistrate's.

"Torture by the third Bureau indicates the empire tearing at itself, collapsing from within not from the pressure of outside fore". (107)

The narrative technique incorporated by J.M.Coetzee makes him unique from South African writers. In his novel, Susan Van Zanten Gallagher states, "Michael K is set in future South Africa but contains Coetzee's first fictional use of the post tense". Dusklands, in the heart of the Country and waiting for the barbarians, all three are introduced in first person narration. The same is equally time of close to a quarter of life and times of Michael K itself.

The novel captures the horrendous plight of the whites after the succession of democracy dominated by the native blacks in South Africa. In the changed political context, the white had to struggle to save their racial identity. Unfortunately Lucy became the victim of this worst political turmoil as native blacks were deliberately mating the white girls to being anthropological transformation in Africa. A new concept of democracy has emerged dominated by the native blacks where white people had to struggle for their honor. The rape on Lucy is a disgrace to her. The disgrace of Professor Lurie was beyond endurance. He lost his job, his identity, his honor and his entire only daughter in the hands of black.

Coetzee puts the question mark on this emerging democracy. Is this democracy? Democracy is not mere the counting of heads. It is not limited to the number game. Democracy advocates the rules of law. It is not the license for the majority to exploit minority on the insignificant issues of race, religion, language and ethnicity. Often these days particularly in today's growing democracy, in different parts of the globe and even inside nation, the minority have to continue their life on the mercy or majority. They are forced to live in fear psychosis. The novelist is an eye opener to the leaders of political establishment and the preacher of democratic discourse who become blind and deaf by underestimating the basic tenants of human rights.

After waiting for the barbarians the quest for self and concomitant reliance on first person present tense narration take a new turn in *Life and Times of Michael K* a story of South Africa in a state of civil war. So for the first time in Coetzee's fiction, the narration is in the third person and for only the second time in the past tense, more important than that Michael cannot tell his own story, however, is that he does not read to Coetzee himself speaks of Michael as an example of being rather than becoming.

To conclude, impacts of oppression in most of Coetzee's novels are different in time, as in the case of these two select novels. The fiction Coetzee has created; repeatedly presents the conflicts of oppressed versus oppressor which is definitely, a Universal struggle. His novels can be related to the oppressed /oppressor of most countries at different points of time in history but when considering a South African writer writing about victimization, the reader is inclined to think of presentation implicit in the system of apartheid in South Africa.

Many commentators praised Coetzee's commitment to giving marginalized people a voice in his fiction rather than telling his stories from the expected point of view. He is one of the important contemporary writers exploring the effects of western imperialism on native culture. He examines the effects of racism and colonial oppression in his works. Moreover, Coetzee writes from an apolitical view point that extends beyond geographic and social boundaries to achieve universal significance.

References:

1. Coetzee, J.M. *Waiting for Barbarians*. England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1998. Print
2. Coetzee, J.M. *The Life and Times of Michel K*. England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1998. Print
3. Van Zanten Gallagher, Susan. *A Story of South Africa: J.M.Coetzee's Fiction in context*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.270pp. Print