ABSTRACT OF Ph. D. THESIS
Exploring the Self: A Critical Study of J. M. Coetzee’s Fictions

This present research work is a study of the ‘Exploring the Self’ in the novels of J. M. Coetzee. He is an award winning writer, novelist, essayist, linguist and a translator. He won a prestigious Nobel Prize for literature in 2003, and he twice won the Man Booker prize for his two novels.

This research work has examined the theme of ‘Exploring the Self’ in Coetzee’s selected six novels and it is an attempt to analyze Coetzee’s contribution to English literature. This research work has traced the effects of Coetzee’s point of view in each of his works as well as how it relate to the subject matter and characters.

Much has been written on Coetzee’s fiction and no critics have fully analyzed this writer. This significant writer is unexplored and this theme seems completely virgin. Hence the present critical study has explored these areas which are closely related to Coetzee. J.M. Coetzee is a very significant name in Afro–American, and English literature. He is a well-known and world acclaimed novelist. He wrote about fourteen fictions, six non–fiction, four fictionalized autobiography, nine translations and introductions and several reviews. Three films were made on his three novels and some T.V. Programs as well.

In the Colonial and Post-colonial era man becomes unstable, unsatisfied and chaotic in nature. He does not have time for others; he lacks tolerance in his day to day life. He has become more hungry, greedy, isolated, sexual, as well as absurd. Hence he is living frustrated, devastated, purposeless life, like a life of an animal.
Post modernist asserts that twentieth century, in the resulting universe there are no absolutes or fixed points, so that the universe in which we are living in is ‘decentred’ or inherently relativistic. In present time, however these centres were destroyed or eroded. Sometimes this was caused by historical events, such as the way the first and Second World War destroyed the illusion of steady material progress or the way, the Holocaust destroyed the notion of Europe as the source and centre of human civilization. Sometimes it happened because of scientific, industrial, educational, technical discoveries and resolution.

According to Swami Vivekananda, ‘Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.’ Pandit Nehru also said as ‘University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth.’ But reality is somewhat different, there is no perfection in modern man, he has become more hungry, cruel and violent. He is losing his tolerance, compassion, benevolence, love great tenderness of heart. In short he has lost humanity.

Therefore the present research work is going to study the theme of Self exploration in J. M. Coetzee’s selected six novels.

The first chapter of the present thesis is Introduction. This chapter is about the Family life and literary career of Coetzee, J. M. Coetzee as a novelist, Identity crisis and J. M. Coetzee as well as aims, objectives, background and reviews of Afro-American literatures in English. Second Half of the chapter is brief life sketch of J. M. Coetzee and his literary characteristics. And the third half of the chapter deals with short definitions and exploration of Self identity.
The second chapter of the thesis is Exploring the Self: *Disgrace* and *Foe* deals with the concept of Self exploration. They show the central issue of exploring the ‘Self Identity’. As a novelist Coetzee has a sensual feeling about his characters. Coetzee’s fictions have vividly portrayed the main issue.

*Disgrace (1999):*-

Coetzee’s *Disgrace* depicted the theme of ‘Exploring the Self’ throughout the novel. David Lurie is a South African professor of English who loses everything his reputations, his job, his peace of mind, his good looks, and his dreams of artistic success & finally even his ability to protect his own daughter. His ‘disgrace’ comes when he almost forcibly seduces one of his more vulnerable students which thereafter revealed to the school & a committee is convened to pass judgment on his actions.

He is dismissed from his teaching position, after which he takes refuge on his daughter's farm in the Eastern Cape. Shortly after becoming comfortable with rural life he is forced to come to terms with the aftermath of an attack on the farm in which his daughter is raped and impregnated & he is violently assaulted. The novel mostly concerns David’s interaction with a few other characters as well as how David is searching his identity throughout the novel.

*Foe (1986):*-

This novel also dealt with the ‘Exploring the Self’ theme. *Foe* is written from the perspective of Susan Barton. The novel primarily focused on the main theme. The novel brings out the political crisis inherent in the representation of other culture.

Susan Barton a castaway is the main narrator of the novel. She has been searching for her daughter in Bahia but she fails. After the
ship wreck she swims through the sea, comes ashore and finds her on an island. She finds two persons there which are Cruso and Friday. In this novel all the characters Susan, Friday and Cruso are always searching their root, destiny and more importantly their identity.

The third chapter of this thesis is Exploring the Self: In The Heart of The Country and Age of Iron. These two novels clearly portray the main issue of Self identity.

In the Heart of the Country (1977):-

In this novel Magda is an instrumental and demonstrating character which shows Coetzee’s stance in developing his concept of the “Self identity”. She is desperately attempting to seek and construct a life for herself as the only means to resist her fate. She realized that in all forms of relationship and communication authenticity is needed. The novel took place on an isolated farm in South Africa and told through the perspective of an unmarried white woman who takes care of her father. But she made clashes with her father when he takes an African mistress. It makes a rift that leads towards vengeance, violence and muddling of her relationship with the farm workers. She is feeling alone when her father takes an African mistress. Throughout the novel she is always searching for her cause of life and self identity.

Age of Iron (1990):-

This novel also presents the vivid picture of the ‘Exploring the Self” theme which shows the apartheid South African society. It is among his most popular works and was the 1990 Sunday expresses Book of the year award winner. In it he paints a picture of the social and political tragedy unfolding in a country ravaged by racism and violence.
This novel vividly depicted the inward journey of Mrs. Curren; an old classics professor. She lives in the Cape Town, where she is slowly dying due to cancer. She has been philosophically opposed to the Apartheid regime throughout her entire life but she has never been taken an active stance against it. Now at the end of her life she finally comes in front of the horrors of the system. In *Age of Iron* Coetzee took challenge and explores the possibility of transcending the relations of power which define South African society.

The forth chapter of this thesis is Exploring the Self: *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Time of Michael K*. These novels are forceful investigation of the subject of selfhood. The characteristic of reflexive self-consciousness of his works did not merely emphasize the constitutive functions of language but it also informed the historical and political conditions that govern the writing of fiction in South Africa.

*Waiting for the Barbarians (1980):-

Magistrate, the central character has a peaceful existence in the town but it comes to an end because the declaration of emergency and arrival of the Third Bureau special forces of the Empire led by a sinister Colonel Joll in the state. There are rumours that the natives of the land called ‘barbarians’ are preparing to attack on the empire, so Colonel Joll and his men conduct an expedition to the land beyond the frontier & capture a number of barbarians.

The central character, the Magistrate throughout the novel is searching for the cause of his liveliness. He personally nursed a barbarian girl who was left crippled and partly blinded by the Third Bureau’s torturers. The Magistrate had an intimate yet ambiguous relationship with the girl. He decided to take her back to her people
and finally he succeeded in returning her and returned to his own town. But the Third Bureau soldiers have reappeared there and arrested the Magistrate for having deserted his post and consorting with the enemy. The Magistrate remained in a locked cellar for an indefinite period, experiencing for the first time a complete lack of basic freedoms. He finally acquired a key that allowed him to leave the Makeshift jail, but finds that he had no place to escape to and only spend his time outside the jail scavenging for scraps of food.

Throughout the novel Magistrate always wants to help others but in his adverse condition no one is there to help him. He is now feeling deserted, shaken by bad situations. Hence in this situation he only searches the cause of his life.

*Life & Times of Michael K (1983):*

The book itself won the booker prize in 1983. The novel is a story of simple gardener Michael K, who made an arduous journey from civil war-ridden urban South Africa to his mother's rural birthplace during the apartheid period. K becomes a gardener and from the starting point of his life he learnt to enjoy the isolation and the freedom. We saw K's isolation and freedom throughout the novel, starting at the Visages house where he first began to learn to cultivate the land. But when his freedom has encroached by police, then Michael K fled from the society, maintaining his free will, in the mountains. He understood how he wanted to live his life which involved only eating food he has grown from the Earth. Ultimately he returned to Cape Town to his mother's old apartment. Michael K, the central character of this novel shows the journey of a person from outer world to inner world for searching of peace and self identity.
The fifth chapter of this thesis is Conclusion. This chapter concludes the study based on the observations, interpretations of the research work about Exploring the Self: a Critical Study of J. M. Coetzee’s selected Fictions.

When I observed in detail the Exploring the Self aspect in J. M. Coetzee’s selected Fictions, I have found some fundamental aspects which has influenced on anyone’s identity such as birth, gender, cast, race, nation, alienation, education, surroundings, power, government, politics and social infrastructure, etc.

This chapter concludes the arguments made in the earlier four chapters. The crisis of identity, alienation, and rootlessness those of racial, linguistic, national and others arouse the crisis in the identity in Coetzee’s characters. Coetzee is a very significant name in Afro-American and English literature. Basically he is a remarkable, thought-provoking novelist with uncompromising prosperity towards the moral and the spiritual behaviour.

Hence this research is very significant and authentic attempt for searching ‘Self identity’ aspects in the writings of J.M. Coetzee. I hope this research will strengthen the knowledge of the scholars, researchers and students of English literature.

Message:

Lastly the message of this research work to entire human being is:
Message

All the Human beings are same and the children of same divine power. Though we have different skins, languages, religions, cultures, yet we all share the same home, Earth.

So for the sake of human being lets learn to progress together with love and peace.

Thank you.