Abstract

The African literature in English has added a new dimension to the world literature today. It represents the colonial and post-colonial crisis within Africa. Colonialism debilitated the natives on different levels: psychological, social, physical, economical, political, sexual etc. The echoes of various upheavals in Africa can be noted in the African literature. J. M. Coetzee is one of the white African writers who have dominated English writing with all its distinguished tradition of liberalism. He occupies a prominent place in the African literature, particularly in South African literature.

The present work comprises five chapters with details as follows:

Chapter I: This chapter is the introduction which includes a survey of the violence in the African novel in English and the position of Coetzee. It also includes a brief review of the literature on Coetzee’s novels. One of the recurring subjects in the African novels is violence. This chapter draws attention toward the violence in its diverse forms. The African literature mainly reflects the traditional culture and the colonial ethos. Although traditional culture differs from region to region, the colonial ethos is almost the same in all the regions of Africa. For the sake of the convenience of the study a brief regionwise survey is undertaken like the West African, Central and East African and Southern African novel. It helps to understand the colonial and post-colonial African life.

Chapter II: The second chapter is the study of the novels which give a call to all the human beings to be human. It includes Dusklands, Foe, and Age of Iron.

Two novellas in Dusklands offer a critique of war. The violence of the Vietnam War and the massacre of the Namaqua villagers demonstrate that the power exploits the natives brutally. The protagonists of Dusklands confirm the futility of violence and give a call to all the human beings to be human with equal rights and privileges for all.

Foe depicts an encounter between colonizers and the colonized. Friday’s silence is a kind of eloquence and device to voice protest. He emphasizes silently that the colonizers must respect the identity of the Negroes and return them their dignity. Friday’s silence does not keep him as an oppressed African but makes him stand for
all the oppressed and the silenced in the world. His silence claims to bring the brutality to an end and gives a call to be human and understand the silence of the exploited, the tyrannized, the victimized, and the silenced.

*Age of Iron* has the background of the violence committed by both the whites and the blacks. Mrs. Curren with her compassionate approach toward disparity in her society wants to propose to the whites to learn to love the blacks. The new South Africa is to be built on the same principle. For her Vercueil is no more ‘rubbish’ or ‘good-for-nothing.’ In her feeling of ‘all people together’ lies the answer and hope of the future of South Africa. This view of Mrs. Curren is a call to humanity to be human for the well-being of the whole of our race.

**Chapter III:** The third chapter is the study of the novels which give a call to all the human beings to allow the natives to be in love with their land, its people, and environment. It includes *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life and Times of Michael K*, and *Disgrace*.

*In the Heart of the Country* brings to light the edgy relations between the colonizers and the colonized. Magda is an example of despair, neglect, stupidity, emptiness, loneliness, and alienation brought by the colonization. Through the struggle of Magda, her father, Hendrik, and Klein-Anna; the novel gives a call to allow the natives to be in love with their land, its people, and its environment.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* portrays the oppressive regime’s policies to dominate the natives and destroy their land. In spite of their exploitation, the natives do not use violence against the Empire. The Magistrate imagines that one day the barbarians will return riding with the barbarian girl and then everything will be on a new footing. It indicates that the barbarian girl will be the saviour of her own people. She will create the paradise on her land. Everything that is broken and destroyed by the Empire will be managed well by the natives. The novel gives a call to allow the natives to be in love with their land, its people, and its environment.

*Life and Times of Michael K* portrays the civil and military violence in Cape Town. It explains that the innocent persons like Michael and Anna are uprooted from their ordinary village life. But in spite of the violence all around, Michael discovers bliss of life in cultivation. He speaks sparingly with people but he speaks much with seeds, melons, pumpkins, leaves, water, mountains, soil etc. These issues in the novel
emphasize the importance of the bond between the natives and their land. The novel gives a call to allow the natives to be in love with their land and its environment.

_Disgrace_ explores the post-apartheid climate in South Africa. Lucy comprehends the post-apartheid violence very visibly. The decision of Lucy to live on the farm emphasizes her bond with the land of South Africa. Lucy’s child will be the child of new South Africa. The whites and the blacks have to live together in South Africa. The novel gives a call to allow the natives to be love with their land so that they do not demonstrate antagonism towards the whites and the whites also accept their share on the land of Africa.

**Chapter IV:** The fourth chapter studies the violence in _The Master of Petersburg, Elizabeth Costello, Slow Man, _and _Diary of a Bad Year_.

_The Master of Petersburg_ highlights the evil in the pre-revolutionary Russia. Dostoevsky is an artist, a master. His authorial position makes him master in one sense and he is a master in other sense because he exploits others. He does not remain a Russian but turns out to be a universal figure of an oppressor. Though Nechaev’s activities are not concerned with the situation of Africa or South Africa; such activities are not impossible in the political state of affairs in Africa. The novel condemns violence.

_Elizabeth Costello_ includes various subjects. The social and sexual violence along with the violence towards animals seems to be present all over the world irrespective of the racial differences. The novel condemns the violence.

_Slow Man_ draws attention to universal subjects of immigration, ageing, and posterity. It deals with human suffering and the interaction between persons and changing society. It stresses the value of hearty relations.

Though _Diary of a Bad Year_ does not directly deal with violence there are references in the essays in the novel to violence and apartheid. It refers to many countries and many subjects. The references to various countries and the violence in them give a global touch to the novel.

**Chapter V:** The fifth chapter presents the Conclusions as arising from the study.

The keynote in Coetzee’s novels is violence in its varied forms. Coetzee’s novels are his rational observation of the Africans as well as the other weak and
victimized people in the world. White imperialism and its upshot apartheid are still the chief threats vitiating the social structure of Africa. The blacks are as helpless as ever against the damage intentionally unleashed by the whites in power. They still suffer the effects of colonization. This situation has prompted Coetzee to give a voice to the suffering of those who witnessed the trauma of geographical displacement, alienation, crushing of personal relationships, and loss of national identity.

Coetzee remains optimistic in his approach for he gives importance to the aspirations of the Africans in their struggle for liberty and human dignity by exposing the atrocities inflicted on them. At the same time he also focuses on the trauma and stress that injured the whites. He rationally observes the Africans as well as the other weak and victimized people in the world.

The violence in Coetzee’s novels reflects the psychological responses of the human beings. A distressed and revengeful individual revolts and resorts to violence. In the same way the greediness for power and superiority makes people violent. The examples of violence inflicted on the blacks for power and the violence inflicted on the whites for revenge explain the nature and extent of violence in which humans can indulge mindlessly.

Silence in Coetzee’s novels is a strategy to underline the awful effects of violence. He does the hard task of expressing these effects through his silent characters. Friday, Vercueil, Michael, and the barbarian girl symbolize the voiceless sufferers and silenced voices. Their silence is their tool to resist oppression. Though Vercueil, Michael, and the barbarian girl speak, they speak very less but become the exponents of the non-violent resistance to oppression. Even Petrus speaks less but strongly expresses his views. Magda, Mrs. Curren, Lucy, David, the Magistrate, the white characters also silently submit themselves to the situation around them. It is their acceptance of dependence on the black power. They prove that peace will be achieved only by enlightening themselves to behave in a decent manner.

There is a vast difference between Coetzee’s white and black characters. All his black characters and even the exploited Vietnamese depicted by him are very poor and helpless. On the contrary, all his white characters are rich and powerful. His novels confirm that the poor and the weak are always the easy victims to be exploited by the dominant.

Coetzee emphasizes the most essential principle of the need to listen to the ‘other.’ His black characters are not considered as human beings by the whites. Apart
from portraying the nightmare of violence, he questions the ultimate gain or validity of violence to the mankind. He dramatizes, analyses, and condemns it. His novels repeatedly ring a bell to ponder on the horrors of violence and learn lessons from the past.

Coetze’s novels imply that violence is the outcome of political power which pressed humanity into the jaws of death. The political philosophy that emerges from his novels is that politics must guard and groom one’s humanity for a happy, healthy, and honourable human existence. It will be achieved by learning to love those offended by authority.

Coetze’s interest in metaphysical issues is an interesting topic for investigation. He refers repeatedly to paradise, purgatory, deliverance, guilt, and salvation. Coetze does not refer to Christ or Christianity. However, if thought from the point of view of Christianity, it is observed that Coetze’s characters want their deliverance and are ready to suffer in purgatory in order to enter into paradise. Dawn wants his deliverance by casting away the crime of his involvement in the exploitation of the Vietnamese. Dawn, in a way, symbolically becomes the deliverer of his people by confessing the guilt of the Imperial power. Jacobus confesses that all are guilty including himself. Mrs. Curren thinks of her Nirvana and says that after death people like her will surely be not allowed in paradise. She wants her salvation but confesses that she will get her salvation only if she loves children like John and people like Vercueil. Magda wants to acknowledge her own guilt and also her people’s sins. She accepts that she has to pass through a purgatory of fire and ice to a land of milk and honey. The Magistrate understands that it is not so easy to attain salvation. He dreams of the barbarian girl as a ‘saviour.’ It means that the whites should be forgiven by her for their crimes against the barbarians. She will then grant them a second chance to build the earthly paradise again on her land. Anna suffers so much in the hospital that when she is discharged, it is as if she is ‘escaping this purgatory.’ Michael’s ‘Garden of Paradise’ is destroyed by the cruel and powerful military world. David goes to take shelter at Lucy’s home and she becomes his ‘second salvation’ in his disgrace. Lucy is ready to admit her rape as a penalty and obtain salvation. Elizabeth wishes to save her soul through her practice of vegetarianism. Coetze’s metaphysical thinking on these issues suggests the need to understand the human suffering spiritually and find out the ways to reduce it.
Coetzee’s characters are his spokesmen and women who manifest his approach to solve the racial problems. Confessor Dawn, guilty Jacobus, silent Friday, motherly Mrs. Curren, compromiser Magda, the compassionate Magistrate, cultivator Michael, and insightful Lucy symbolize Coetzee’s subtle answers to the violence. Contradictory Dostoevsky, novelist Elizabeth, dependent Paul, and strong opinion maker C symbolize meditations on the writing as an art along with other subjects.

It is very remarkable to observe that Coetzee shows the presence of children in almost all the novels except *Diary of a Bad Year*. Dawn’s child is made to witness the violence brought in his life by the war. The children who make fun of Jacobus learn the lesson of racial conflict. The children enjoy to the sight of Friday in his cellar as if he is a real cannibal. The little boy who comes to deliver a letter to Magda is horrified to see Magda’s sexual obsession and depression. Bheki, John and other black children are the victims of racial violence. The unnamed innocent boy is victimized by Colonel Joll. The Magistrate is worried about the children’s psychology when they witness the inhuman punishment given to him by the Empire’s officials. Children make fun of Michael’s disfigurement. Dostoevsky’s sexual feelings for the child Matroyosha and the example of the starving kids of one prostitute reflect children’s exploitation. The grand children of Elizabeth are not allowed by their parents to have a supper with her because she is a vegetarian. Marijana’s children feel the interference of Paul in their family. But a completely new child is to be born in *Disgrace*. Through the exploited and nervous children, Coetzee strongly announces that if the elders do not behave sensibly and decently their posterity will take the paths of sterility of mind and heart. He warns that with the moral apathy the children will be the new social cannibals in the terror-stricken world.

Like the world of children Coetzee’s world of women is also a promising area of study. All the major women characters like Susan, Mrs. Curren, Magda, Lucy, and the barbarian girl are very sensitive and loving. They handle and understand the violent racial situations very keenly. It is interesting to critically examine the white women narrators namely Susan, Mrs. Curren, and Magda. The character of the barbarian girl can be a special focus of study. It is possible to study the language used by women narrators. Even the role of a mother in Coetzee’s novels can be a subject of study. The other characters like Marilyn, Florence, Michael’s mother, Bev, Melanie, Rosalind, Anna, Matryosha, and Anya give the picture of women in various roles, all quite interesting and significant as well.
Coetzee feels repeatedly drawn to the role of the writer and the art of story telling. It shows his interest in and study of the creative process. Foe’s commercial views toward the art of writing, Dostoevsky’s responsibility as a writer, Elizabeth’s evaluation of Paul West’s writing, and C’s responsibility of writing on various topics are thoughts on a writer’s duties.

Post-colonial literature mainly focuses on colonial tendencies, racism, apartheid, genocides, protest, displacement, exile, identity crisis, slavery, possession of land, mass executions of the natives, and other subjects. Coetzee’s novels can be studied as post-colonial novels because almost all the features of post-colonial literature are found in them. They sustain Coetzee’s emphasis on ethnicity as an indisputable post-colonial area of dialogue. Though this study does not wholly concentrate on Coetzee as a post-colonial novelist, such an approach can offer substantial evidence in the critical study of his novels.

It is promising to read Coetzee’s novels from the Marxist point of view though not intended by him and not overtly present. His novels focus on the clash between the dominant and repressed classes in the given age. The society in the novels mirrors its social, political, and ideological systems and institutions.

Coetzee shows a great talent in experimenting with the language and techniques of narrating his stories. There is considerable innovation in the narrative techniques employed by him. For instance, an extended letter, use of three horizontal parts for story, diary entries, lessons, and randomly structured paragraphs throw interesting challenges before the reader and hence are a promising material for a separate study. His novels can also be studied as allegories of political, social, psychological, and sexual oppression of the weak.

Although sometimes Coetzee’s novels pose formal and stylistic difficulties in understanding the sequence of ideas and plot, he skilfully discusses the complexity of experiences of people caught in the savagery of violence.

Along with most of the African writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ezekiel Mphalele, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Breyten Bretenbach, Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Olive Shreiner, and Peter Abrahams, Coetzee occupies a vital position as a writer of protest literature. His novels manifest that he is motivated by radical humanism for all the victimized.

Good literature transcends temporal boundaries. Coetzee’s novels remain immeasurably relevant today as they vibrantly and vehemently expose and analyze
primeval instincts of power structures. It would be narrowing down their suggestion if they are seen to mirror the violence in only a certain group secluded from the world. They tell human stories. His desire to adore the human race universalizes his novels and elevates them as good works of art. The most striking feature of Coetzee is that without becoming a propagandist and without fracturing the aesthetic, thematic or structural magnificence of the novels, he portrays the seamy side of people’s lives.

Coetzee encourages love and hope for human happiness. Only such ethics can heal the scars of violence. This is to be achieved by becoming truly human. He is a promoter of tolerance and fundamental freedoms that nature has granted to humanity. This message is not only for South Africa but for the whole world which is still vitiated with exploitation, power thirst, and violence.

Violence is a fact all over the world. It exists in multiple forms. Every kind of violence is damaging. Though it is impossible to eliminate violence thoroughly from the human mind, it is necessary to find means to avoid it. The best way is to expose its futility and emphasize the significance of humane survival of the mankind. Coetzee advocates this principle and proclaims that one’s happiness should never be other’s sorrow.

A good writer is often inexhaustible in one attempt. Therefore the Conclusions also try to point out a few other areas in Coetzee’s works that have a strong potential for full length studies by other scholars.