CHAPTER ONE
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“I want to write a novel about silence … the things people don’t say.”

~Virginia Woolf

“Powerlessness and silence go together.”

~Margaret Atwood

To associate silence with powerlessness is a common universal phenomenon. However, silence is actually not so silent a thing as it generally appears. It is much more comprehensive than words can ever be and can afford more numerous meanings as such. Silence as a physical phenomenon has been interpreted in a variety of connotations – sometimes as something threatening, menacing, an indication of some danger, and sometimes as an indication of peace and calm. As a human phenomenon, at linguistic level, it has often been treated as an integral part of speech, comprising gaps between the words uttered in order to emphasize the meaning through intonation. However, with the coming up of Feminist, Subaltern, and Postcolonial studies, silence has been given a political dimension having associated with the suppression and powerlessness in a powerful-powerless nexus organized along any discriminatory theme: race, gender, class, caste, religion, region, nation, etc. Since the history of Colonialism is a dark spot in the history of mankind, spreading over centuries of oppression, exploitation, suppression, violence, and subjugation, it has gained exclusive attention by people keen on probing the political silences, leading to become a part of postcolonial studies.

Since time immemorial, Silence as a linguistic tool has been serving the rhetorical function of giving more nuances and meaning to words through comprising gaps in between a speech to give proper tone and intonation to it. Silence and speech are inseparable as Picard says in The World of Silence (1948): “there is something silent in every word, as an abiding token of the origin of speech. And in every silence
there is something of the spoken word, as an abiding token of the power of silence to create speech” (24). Silence is an integral part of any verbal interaction both because words need to be distinguished from one another, and because interaction is a two-way process, a dialogue, that requires not only a speaker but a listener also who needs to be silent in order to listen. Thus, words are always accompanied by silence – the silence of others. Persons involved in such an interaction need to take turns to be silent in order to hear the other. As long as this process goes so, silence remains too normal a thing to be noticed. Problem arises only when this process gets disrupted by one side taking up and monopolizing the power to speak while rendering the other one silent for a prolonged time, or giving very little or no space to the other to raise his/her voice.

That is how and when silence gets associated with powerlessness – not having equal opportunity to speak with the result that one voice gets prevailed over while the other is suppressed, sometimes to the extent of becoming non-existent. This disequilibrium, once created, is perpetuated with the help of several hypothetically discriminating terms in order to justify the resulting inequality and oppression. Since humans are born with a tendency to justify whatever they do, they look for apparent differences among themselves to provide a cover for the hypothetical differences to be attributed to the "other" in order to convince them of their inferiority or of one's superiority so that the status quo created to serve the human selfishness can be maintained. That is how and when things like race, religion, gender, class, ethnicity, etc. are called and invoked to serve the abominable role of justifying the oppression and exploitation of fellow beings by dividing people into dichotomous groups like black-versus-white, oriental-versus-occidental, man-versus-woman, savage-versus-civilized, all coming down to only one pattern of categorization i.e. powerful-versus-powerless, with one set of people having power over the other. This phenomenon of power operating in the name of race, class, or gender is well explained by Caleb Rosado in his article “The Undergirding factor is POWER: Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism”, where, with the example of a piece of cloth, he explains how we relegate some people as handkerchiefs (with the help of ‘blaming the victim’ theory) of life while others are cherished as national flags, keeping more others in between (5).
However, though some silences can be termed as powerless, unproductive, or passive, it does not hold true for all. As Kennon Ferguson in his article entitled “Silence: A Politics” comments: “Active and reactive silence does not fit well into the predominant model of silence as powerlessness.” (57). Ferguson in his article explains how silence is a multidimensional phenomenon, and therefore should be discussed or understood as such, and not within a single context. But whether it is a tactical choice or an imposed position, it is always charged with meaning and emotions, just as words do. Silence, according to Cheryl Glenn is “Like the zero in mathematics,” that is “an absence with a function” (263). Ratcliffe also reminds us that “Silences need not be read as simple passivity. [They] take many forms and serve many functions…” (122). Although feminist studies about silence started with assuming it as the lack of power and agency, reclaiming the losses suffered by the women being kept silent on all fronts throughout the ages, they have eventually turned to regard silence as a powerful tool to depict resistance and unwillingness, or as power to hold one’s discretion but, as Glenn says:

The question is not whether speech or silence is more productive, more effective, more appropriate; rather, it is one of a rhetoricity of purposeful silence when it is self-selected or when it is imposed. When silence is our rhetorical choice, we can use it purposefully and productively – but when it is not our choice, but someone else’s for us, it can be insidious, particularly when someone else’s choice for us comes in the shape of institutional structure. (263-264)

Silence as a rhetorical choice has long been a part of Rhetoric and Communication studies that undertake to investigate the relationship between silence and voice. Scholars of Communication studies question the equation of silence with absence, Robin Clair and Kris Acheson being at the forefront of this approach. Clair in her book Organizing Silence: A World of Possibilities (1998) argues that silence is both an aesthetic and political practice. Her work looks at the ways in which silence is structured into language, and by extension, interests, issues, and identities of marginalized people who are silenced, and how those silenced voices can be heard. Other disciplines that treat silence as a subject include Anthropology, Postcolonial
Studies, and Feminist Studies at large. In the field of Anthropology, silence is taken up as a marker or manifestation of cultural difference and as a category deployed to challenge power relations. Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb’s edited volume titled *Silence: The Currency of Power* (2005) argues that studying silence is central to understanding the more elusive aspects of power and identity within anthropological contexts (Rowe and Malhotra 6).

Postcolonial studies emphasize the need to dig out and decode the silences and the silencing processes on the part of those who hold power or who are responsible, remotely or immediately, to create such zones of silence, with regard particularly to the colonial practices of silencing the “Other” – to discover the lost histories of silences and silencing of histories. This approach asks those in positions of privilege to speak up for the underprivileged and for those who are powerless to speak or to make them speak for themselves. However, this approach is also under scrutiny as J. Maggio in his article “Can the Subaltern be Heard?” says: “the Western approach to the subaltern is either to speak for or to silently let them speak for themselves. Both strategies silence the subaltern because they ignore the positional relations of the dominant to the subaltern.” (422). Therefore, the approach is now shifting from trying to give voice to the silenced people to making efforts to read their silences instead.

Feminist studies, on the other hand, focus more on cultural and literary silencing of women under the age old patriarchy. Feminist communication studies scholars such as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1989), Lana F. Rakow and Laura A. Wackwitz (2005), and Karen and Sonja Foss (1991) have undertaken important work to uncover women’s silences and the patriarchal conditions that produce them. Early second-wave feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich and Tillie Olsen have been associated with the literary silencing of women, with Olsen being one of the first feminist writers to highlight the relationship between silence and power. Rich’s work also explores the complex relationship between voice, gender and silence (Rowe and Malhotra). Both postcolonial and feminist approaches to silence undertake the task of re-writing or writing-back in order to reclaim the lost voices.

Silence has thus become a complex phenomenon, a riddle that can be solved in many ways but still can remain unsolved. It is more likely to be misinterpreted or
misunderstood than words and just as a blurted-out statement or an alleged misstatement can reveal us positively or negatively, so can our silence, whether controlled, instinctive, or imposed. Silence emerges in multiple manifestations in relation to voice and power. There are instances also, however, when silence can neither be power nor powerlessness because every silence has not necessarily a political dimension just as every act of speech is not political, such as the silence administered as discipline, or as a token of respect. It comes to hold political connotations more in the context of groups, particularly those which are in perpetual clash with each other, than in the individual contexts, and with political dimension added to it, it always involves the power systems.

**Power** is inherent in every human interaction – between parents and children, between siblings, between husband and wife, between employer and employee, between teacher and student, between state and its subjects, or between any possible set of human relations. In fact, it is a part of our day to day life and plays an important role in assigning responsibilities and organizing the different walks of our life and our behavior towards others. Just as people speak a language that has a structure of rules and syntax, even if they do not know a thing about syntax and rules of grammar, so do they exercise power without having any idea of its workings or even of its presence. However, the roots of power as a concept are grounded in political theory and political philosophy. Modern thinking about power first appeared in Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince* in early 16th century (a book sometimes claimed to be one of the first works of modern political philosophy) and in Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (mid-17th century), a classic western work on statecraft comparable to Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. While Machiavelli represents the strategic and decentralized thinking about power and organization, Hobbes represents the casual thinking about power as hegemony. Machiavelli sees power as a means, not a resource, and seeks strategic advantages such as military ones, whereas the concept of power in Hobbes is centralized and focused on sovereignty (Sadan 33-34).

Power had generally been the subject matter of political sciences since it is in the field of politics that power registers apparently the most powerful presence. But after the Second World War, social sciences also started taking a keen interest in the workings of Power starting with the writings of Max Weber (1947), one of the three
founders of sociology along with Émile Durkheim and Karl Marx. Weber’s approach to power examines the connection between the power and the concepts of authority and rule. He was interested in power as a factor of domination, based on economic or authoritarian interests. It was with the writings of Michael Foucault (1979, 1980, 1990), however, that the discussion of the concept of power came to be extended from sociology to all other fields of social sciences as well as the humanities. Decentralization of the position of power is one of the great innovations of his thinking. According to him, power is not a commodity or a position, and thus not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, or something that one holds, but is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations., and that “where there is power, there is resistance” (History of Sexuality 95).

Power today is an interdisciplinary subject, may be owing to Foucault’s contention again that “Power is everywhere” (History of Sexuality 93). Interest in power exists in a variety of fields of thought: Karl Marx influenced the conceptualization of power in all the social sciences; Alfred Adler, following Marx, opened a discussion on power in psychology; Friedrich Nietzsche influenced thought about power in philosophy (Sadan 34). Keeping in line with Michael Foucault’s suggestion, contemporary studies focus on the workings of power systems or power relations taking into account the theory of cultural hegemony also, propounded by Antonio Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks (first translated in English in 1970’s) which describes how states use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies. No discussion of power, however, can be complete without the mention of Noam Chomsky, an American philosopher, historian and political activist, who can be regarded as the contemporary authority on Power. He explains how governments or any system of power maintains its status quo and ensures the loyalty of its subjects or eliminates the chances of resistance against it. According to him, the standard way of protecting power is to

make it look mysterious and secret, above the ordinary person – otherwise why should anybody accept it? Well, they are willing to accept it out of fear that some great enemies are about to destroy them, and because of that they’ll cede their authority to the Lord, or the King, or the President or something,
just to protect themselves. That’s the way government’s work – that’s the way any system of power works. (*Understanding Power* 11)

Chomsky also shows how propaganda works as a tool of the powerful to mislead the masses and get their obedience without letting them know that the power is using them for its own benefit and vested interests because, in his words: “A decent propaganda system does not announce its principles or intentions… If you tell people, “This is what you have to think,” then they understand: this is what power wants us to think. And then may find a way out of it. It’s harder to extricate yourself from a system of unstated presuppositions than it is from explicitly stated doctrine.” (*Power Systems* 102). Stewart Clegg’s book *Frameworks of Power* (1989) gives an elaborate and extensive analysis of the emergence and development of the concept of power along with its different models and circuits showing how it works. To contain all its theories in a nutshell, the gist of the concept lies in the fact that “From its genesis in Hobbes to its maturation in Lukes, the concept of power is primarily of something which denies, forestalls, represses, prevents.” (Clegg 156).

Thus power is not a material possession. It is a dynamic force that emanates from the relative positions or condition of people and keeps changing as per the changes in the condition, hence there exists nothing like absolute power or powerlessness. It is a relative phenomenon at a given point of time in a given society. Since it is related to agency, voice, privilege, and will, powerlessness just implies its opposite i.e. a lack of all these making those who are powerless vulnerable to the whims and designs of those who have power. It is in the context of this powerful versus powerless nexus that silence comes to hold special meanings and connotations and it is this kind of silence that the present thesis endeavors to explore. Such are the silences that come under the purview of postcolonial studies and have been the subject of scrutiny for the postcolonial writers, including **John Maxwell Coetzee** whose works are the focus of interest in this thesis. However, the concept of silence in Coetzee is treated very much differently than how it is generally treated as a postcolonial subject. Silence in Coetzee is rarely an expression of powerlessness as it is generally assumed to be, but an expression of defiance on the part of those unwilling to interact with and to surrender to the will of their oppressors. It is mostly
employed as a tool of resistance against the powerful by the powerless that gives an impenetrable power rather than making them powerless.

“Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored” (Trinh 373), so this thesis undertakes to explore it as such, since the silence in Coetzee emerges as a threshold between presence and absence, and as intimately tied to agency and resistance. His characters “fenced themselves in with miles and miles of silence” (Michael K 47). Coetzee’s works mostly deal with the apartheid and post-apartheid turmoil on South African land, not with explicitly South African settings always as Coetzee sometimes employ unknown/anonymou landscapes to lend an allegorical and thus a universal character to his writings, but one can always identify the generating force behind them, i.e. the tragedy of being a South African. Because “Coetzee’s work”, as said by Lars Engle in his essay titled “Outrageous Meaning: The Fiction of J. M. Coetzee”, “while not representing contemporary life in white South Africa, recurs obsessively to its central problems: the inheritance of violent relations (racial, familial, or sexual), individual complicity in public wrongs, and the difficulty of an innocent or even a private relation to experience.” (6). But the fact of his being a “white” South African makes the postcolonial aspect of his writings somewhat complicated to be assessed, because his ‘postcolonialism’ stands a bit apart from the general postcolonial approach and does not lie in the normal realm of the genre.

In order to assess Coetzee’s position as a postcolonial or as a typical South African writer, we first need to understand what postcolonial South African literature is all about, how it emerged and developed or how (postcolonial) writers responded to the changing South African scenarios, what have been their concerns and approaches, as well as the modes of depicting them. Emmanuel Obiechina has made a succinct survey of the South African postcolonial literature in his article “Parables of Power and Powerlessness: Exploration in Anglophone African Fiction Today” whereby he divides it into three identifiable phases though not much distinct. As per his observations, the first phase is characterized by the drive to explain the past and to relate it to the present in anticipation of the future. The phase grew out of the euphoria of independence and the need to restore African identity and remove the final psychological block in the way of true freedom. The intention was to restore
wholeness to a truncated consciousness and to help Africans put back their roots into the soil of their native cultures. The phase has included the re-writing of colonial history and sociology in Africa. Typical novels of this phase are Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964), William Conton’s *The African* (1960), Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965), Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1969), Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine* (1966), Nkem Nwankwo’s *Danda* (1965), John Munonye’s *The Only Son* (1966) and *Obi* (1969), Gabriel Ruhumbika’s *Village in Uhuru* (1969), and Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1978).

In the second phase, the search for roots and the promotion of cultural nationalism ended and social criticism began. It was discovered, with a shocking realization that the so much sought after independence had not solved all the problems of the continent as per people’s expectations. Instead, it was disappointing to see that it had rather given rise to some new problems had to compound the old ones. In the words of Antonio Gramsci, it was that phase of morbidity when “the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (275-276). Alarmed by the suddenness of the collapse of optimism and morale, the writers used their works to attack the abuses that were nullifying the efforts of the people to make progress and improve their standard of living. The major impulse in the novels at this stage was towards satire, with such works as Gabriel Okara’s *The Voice* (1964), Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* (1965), Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966), T. M. Aluko’s *Kinsman and Foreman* (1966), Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Amu Djoleto’s *Money Galore* (1975), Meja Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road* (1976), Dae Mude’s *The Hills Are Falling* (1979), Chukwuemeka Ike’s *The Chicken Chasers* (1980), and Ben Okri’s *Flowers and Shadows* (1980).

But satire had no effect on the callous politicians and their cronies, the freewheeling, and freebooting national bourgeoisie that were the object of much of the attack. On the contrary, corruption escalated, political repression increased and violence which was spasmodic at the time of independence became institutionalized in private armies of thugs recruited by political parties for the sole purpose of terrorizing opponents and driving other parties out of the field of political competition. Instability became pervasive. Military dictatorships and totalitarian one-
party regimes seized political power in most African countries and swept away the budding, multi-party democratic experiments in the new states. This reality pushed African fiction to its third phase, within which it is no longer enough only to criticize those in power, but to demand change emerged as the need of the hour. This phase embodies a revolutionary impulse that not only demands but also ascribes action for the sake of saving the people. Major African writers are well represented in this phase through works like Wole Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy* (1973), Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood* (1983), *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and *Matigari* (1987), Chinua Achebe’s *Antihills of the Savannah* (1987), Festus Iyayi’s *Heroes* (1986) and novels by such feminist-women writers as Buchi Emecheta and Rebeka Njau.

In the novels of the third phase, power is often negatively and obsessively pursued and, when, had, employed criminally. All the flawed characters in the novels are steadfast in their pursuit of power; they are megalomaniacal and self-centric, and they all use power for evil and corrupt purposes. In the allegorical structures which carry these stories, every man of power is portrayed as a devil and every man or woman who resists this exercise of power is a good angel. The world of the power maniacs and their resisters is Manichean, built on polarities, very often with almost no middle ground to offer any choices. If you are not of the people of power, then you are of the victims and those who fight to protect the victims. In a sense, the choices have already been made by the configuration of events and the dynamics of a chaotic world. If you are not a contributor to the making of modern chaos in Africa, then you are either its victim or one of those attempting to pick up the pieces. (Obiechina 18-19)

To assign Coetzee’s works to any of these phases of the African fiction is a difficult task. Coetzee’s works, no doubt, depict the racial tension in a critical way, focusing on the workings of power, but they are far from being a direct critique of the South African situation, owing to his indirect or the “apolitical” stance. His evasiveness to be a direct commentator is what makes his works to stand apart from other typical or representative postcolonial African writers like Nadine Gordimer, Wole Soyinka, Andre Brink, etc. The settings of novels adopted by him also at times distance his writings from the South African reality such as the imaginary frontier town in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) or the fictional Cruso’s island in *Foe*
(1986), as well as his polished and heavy diction owing to his being a linguist first, and a novelist second. His mode of narration also lends him aloofness from the actuality, helping him to evade the responsibility for the views expressed therein, as the third person narrative in his fictional autobiography trio as well as in his other works. His women narrators, or the ‘white’ women narrators, also provide him with a way out to maintain a distance as well as to depict his ambiguous position pertaining to the power structures and hierarchies, his sense of guilt and complicity for being a ‘white’ – the colonizer’s creed – along with shaking off the sense of responsibility for the crimes committed in their name. But all his efforts to distance himself and his writings from the South African reality went futile because, consciously or unconsciously, South Africa always lurks in the background though not very explicitly often.

**J. M. Coetzee** was born on 9 February 1940 in Cape Town, to an attorney father Zacharias Coetzee, and a primary-school teacher mother Vera Hildred Wehmeyer. His forefathers came to the Cape Town from the Netherlands and settled there. His early childhood life had been highly unsettled, his mother shifting from place to place in search of employment as well as cheap accommodation. Because of this unsettled existence as well as because of being an Afrikaner, a white South African among the black majority with an acute sense of observation about the injustices and crimes perpetrated by white minority against them, thus causing him to develop a dislike towards his own community, Coetzee nurtured the feelings of loneliness and marginalization from a very early age as he could feel no sense of belonging to either side. The political turmoil in South Africa made him grow impatient towards it and he decided to get rid of South Africa, the “albatross around his neck”.

Thus, in 1962, at the age of twenty one, he left for London to shake the African soil off his feet, and took up as a computer programmer there. But to his dismay, London did not turn out to be the land of his utopia – peaceful, free of politics, as he describes in *Doubling the Point* (1992): “From the frying-pan into the fire! What an irony! Having escaped the Afrikaners who want to press-gang him into their army and the blacks who want to drive him into the sea, to find himself on an island that is shortly to be turned into ciders! What kind of world is this in which he

[11]
lives? Where can one turn to be free of the fury of politics?” (57). Being a restless soul that he was, Coetzee left Britain for United States of America in 1965, after getting selected for the Fulbright scholarship at the University of Texas at Austin. In 1971, as the conditions of Fulbright scholarship require a person to return to his own land to impart the learning acquired therein, Coetzee had to return, much against his will, to South Africa – the country that he had wanted to leave for ever.

There he started his writing career, well acquainted with European modernism and modern linguistics after having stayed for more than eight years in foreign lands, first in Britain and then in the US, where he got the material for his debut novel – *Dusklands* (1974) – that consists of two separate novellas, separated by nearly two hundred years in chronology, but echoing each other as parallel stories of colonial aggression and atrocities. First one is an account of the US-Vietnam war, the tactics employed to win the war by US, and its effects on the psyche of even those who were not directly exposed to it which he had closely observed during his stay in the US. The second part gives an account of the early colonial settlers’ wanderings into South Africa, the violence perpetrated by them against the aboriginals, the natives, inspired by the accounts of early travellers in the Cape that he came across and explored in the British museum. The book received a warm welcome and introduced Coetzee as a difficult but a novel writer.

In 1977 came his second novel *In the Heart of the Country*, the story of a white lonely spinster living on a settler farm, written in the form of a journal, whose loneliness or lack of reciprocal or equal human relationships owing to her colonial status derives her to madness towards the end of the novel. The novel can vaguely be put in the category of African farm novel, though it does not strictly follow its conventions. It sometimes draws parallels with Daniel Defoe’s famous text *Robinson Crusoe* (1925) but in a contradictory manner, such as when Magda, the protagonist, compares his lonely existence on the farm with that of the shipwrecked Crusoe’s on the island, pointing out not the similarities but the dissimilarities between them in an indirect way. The novel introduces the theme of master-slave dialectics in Coetzee’s writing as well as that of reversal of power relations in a society where colonialism is dying, themes that keep recurring in his later works too, and was well received by the readers.
But it was his third novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) that established Coetzee as a writer of substance and repute, not only at national but international level. The narrative revolves around the ups and downs in the life of an unnamed Magistrate of a frontier town whose location is not specified, a white man who stood against the atrocities committed upon the black natives, that is against his own ‘Empire’ and thus suffered heavily at the hands of his own people. Plot is circular one with the Magistrate first holding power, then losing it, and again regaining his status towards the end of the novel after the people from the ‘Third Bureau’ left the town after doing a witch-hunting for ‘the barbarians’ to prevent their anticipated uprising ‘rumoured’ by the Empire. The novel is an attempt to explore the prohibited sights of the torture chamber, and shows who the real barbarians are. The novel was highly praised in the literary world and helped Coetzee get international recognition.

Coetzee’s fourth novel *Life and Times of Michael K* came out in 1983 and is often explored for connection with Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) because of the use of letter ‘K’ in the name of the protagonists of both the novels, Michael K and Joseph K respectively. Novel is set, though not explicitly, in the post Soweto Uprising (1976) period and depicts the resulting social disintegration in the South African society. The novel expresses Coetzee’s wish to live “out of all the camps” embodied in the Michel K who refused to join in with either side of the struggle. It is the book that earned Coetzee his first Booker prize the same year i.e. in 1983, and made Coetzee stand as a celebrated writer, a new and different voice emerging from the South African literary scenario that world has started taking interest in.

Then comes his fifth book *Foe* (1986), a re-writing of Daniel Defoe’s famous colonial work *Robinson Crusoe* (1925). The book defies the master-slave narrative of Defoe’s original book by concentrating on the efforts put by Susan Barton (female addition by Coetzee) to tell the story from the slave’s (Friday’s) point of view, disregarding the master’s (Cruso’s) version. But since Friday has lost his tongue, the story never completes. Book makes a strong case for the study of lost histories, at the same time emphasizing that it is next to impossible to recover the losses suffered due to long history of colonial exploitation and oppression. It also takes up the crucial questions of authority as to who has the authority to write, who can write and who cannot. It also seems an attempt to escape the South African reality on the part of the
author and is criticized for the same in the South African literary circles for its political irrelevance to the conditions in the country at the time of its release.

His sixth novel *Age of Iron* (1990) is clearly set in the Cape Town of South Africa of apartheid era, with a backdrop of violent clashes between the blacks and the whites. The novel is an expression of Coetzee’s acute sense of guilt and complicity, a permanent theme of his writings, expressed by white female narrator and protagonist Mrs. Curren, a cancer patient. The book is written in the form of a letter by Mrs. Curren intended to be delivered to her daughter abroad after her death. The title *Age of Iron* refers to the toughness of times she and others are living in as well as the consequent toughness, hardness, and ruthlessness of the people devoid of any soft feelings towards each other, in pursuit of power. According to Derek Attridge, “What is enacted in this novel is the acute ethico-political trauma of the post-colonial world, where no general rule applies, where a conflict of values is endemic, and where every code of moral conduct has to be tested and justified afresh in terms of the specific context in which it is being invoked.” (110).

Next comes *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), a fictional work deriving on the life of the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky who is the protagonist of the novel. Novel is a nice blend of reality and fiction, weaving some real incidents too into its fictional fabric and also said to contain some strong autobiographical elements relating to the mysterious accidental death of Coetzee’s son at a young age paralleled with the death of Dostoyevsky’s stepson Pavel in the novel. Autobiographical elements, however, occur in most of his books or in any writer’s works since one’s writing is always the reflection of one’s experiences – good or bad. Coetzee himself in *Doubling the Point* (1992) says: “in a larger sense, all writing is autobiography: everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it.” (17).

In 1999 came his most famous novel – *Disgrace*– “an allegory about what is happening to the human race in the post-colonial era” (Gerald Kaufman, quoted in Sarah Lyall), the novel that won him his second Booker Prize. The novel portrays the South African society in a state of transition, the old colonial system dying but not yet replaced by a new system, where power equations are changing considerably, yielding
to a state of chaos and uncertainty. In Gordimer’s words it is a state of “interregnum”, a state where the previous system in a country is dying and the new has not yet born. It tries to depict that evil is not the monopoly of a certain race but is purely a matter of power by showing how in a postcolonial society things are going to be the other way round, though it also tries to justify it as revenge, a backlash for the past crimes of colonial era. However, being accused of casting a negative image of the post-apartheid South Africa, and of heating up the racial tensions, the novel generated a huge outrage and dispute, so much so that it is believed to be the reason for Coetzee’s leaving South Africa and taking up residence in Australia thereafter, after retiring from the University of Cape Town in 2002 where he had served since 1972.

The phase of Coetzee’s writing in Australia started in 2003 with the publication of Elizabeth Costello, having an eponymous protagonist, an aging celebrated Australian writer, a mouthpiece for Coetzee to express his views regarding a number of issues, most importantly on vegetarianism, without taking up direct responsibility for them. Coetzee, after having the bitter experience of Disgrace’s critical reception, seems to have distanced himself more from his writings with the help of characters like Elizabeth Costello who take up all the responsibility for their views, thus leaving him free of any such burden. Costello seems to be Coetzee’s alter ego, appearing in his other works too. The novel derives a lot from Franz Kafka’s stories and novels, Kafka being a significant influence on Coetzee, particularly the last part of the novel “At the Gate”.

In 2005 came his second Australian novel Slow Man, the first novel after him having won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003. The book can be read as a metafictional discourse on the inter-relationship between the literary author and the characters, and with reality, as well as about physical fragility and ageing. The word ‘slow’ here has many connotations as per Coetzee himself such as ‘slow on the uptake’, ‘slow to get the message’, slow as a euphemism for not very clever, stupid, the virtuous side of slowness as in Nietzsche, etc. (Kennemeyer 584). It may have connotations to protagonist Paul Rayment’s slow life due to his amputated leg. The novel is criticized for Elizabeth Costello’s intrusion into it that, according to critics, “suspended the gripping realism of the opening and got the novel bogged down in philosophical speculation” (Kennemeyer 586).
Coetzee’s next novel, *Diary of a Bad Year*, appeared in 2007. Like his certain other books, it also has certain autobiographical elements, more prominently the fact that the central figure of the novel is an internationally recognized, much awarded writer, born in South Africa, but settled in Australia for years, known by his initials J. C. who is writing a series of essays as a contribution to a collection ‘strong opinions’ to which six eminent writers from all over the world will contribute their views on controversial topics of their choice, lamenting about all that is wrong with the modern world. J. C. essays are comprised on a variety of contemporary issues such as the origin of state, democracy, terrorism, particularly the ‘Islamist Terrorism’ and US and Britain’s war against it. Novel is inspired by the reports of brutality at the controversial detention camp of Guantanamo Bay. Coetzee’s most common theme of guilt and complicity for the past colonial crimes continues here as well, as is evident by his words: “The generation of white South Africans to which I belong, and the next generation, and perhaps the generation after that too, will go bowed under the shame of the crimes that were committed in their names.” (*Diary of a Bad Year* 44).

In 2013 came his latest novel *The Childhood of Jesus*. The conflict between the private world of individual and the larger, public, impersonal world that demands conformity of all citizens seems to be a predominant theme of the novel. It is difficult to decide whether the novel is a socialist utopia or a parody of it for it occurs in an imaginary setting where people’s needs are taken care of by some benign authorities, but nobody is either happy or unhappy. Novel has nothing to do with the childhood or the life of Jesus but tells the story of two refugees Simon and David who by boat arrive at a city called Novilla where the inhabitants seem to be all refugees with no feelings of hatred, envy or anger towards each other but neither they know anything like love or passion, or even close friendship. Novel appears to be an existential work inspired by Coetzee’s masters like Beckett and Kafka.

Coetzee has also written a fictional autobiographical trio consisting of *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997), *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* (2002), and *Summertime* (2009). However, each of these can be read as a separate book and can be enjoyed as such. *Boyhood* contains a captivating account of the author’s childhood days and helps us find the roots of the sense of marginalization
that is so much a part of Coetzee’s oeuvre. *Youth* covers the period of Coetzee’s stay in the United States and Britain and depicts the anxiety of a youth who wants to be an artist. It gives an account of the author’s unsuccessful love affairs owing to his own peculiar nature. *Summertime* reinstates Coetzee back to South Africa – the albatross around his neck – that he wanted to get rid of but could not. It is in the form of interviews conducted posthumously where the story of his stay in Cape Town is told by a number of characters – all women – with whom author has had some relation who recollect their memories of him and tell the interviewer about what kind of man he was.


However, since the present thesis is a study of Coetzee’s select works, it focuses particularly on his five novels namely *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Foe* (1986), and, last but not the least, *Disgrace* (1999), highlighting the zones of silence and powerlessness i.e. how silence speaks in Coetzee and the dynamics of power relations and power hierarchies that keep changing with any change in political or social fabric. The thesis tries to capture the multifaceted nuances of silence employed by Coetzee, analyzing whether it is an expression of power or powerlessness, and the shifting allegiances of power marking the fact that power or powerlessness is a situational phenomenon at any given point of time in a society, and there are no water tight compartments to separate
the powerful and the powerless since we all possess a little portion of each irrespective of the side of power spectrum we lie on.

Since the thesis is a postcolonial study of Coetzee’s works, it is inevitable to compare Coetzee’s postcolonialism with the postcolonialism in general to assess the extent to which Coetzee’s works can be called postcolonial and in what sense. Coetzee is often hailed as a postcolonial writer though much against his will to be labeled as such, and it sometimes appear difficult to justify Coetzee as a postcolonial writer as the main components of such writings at times seem missing in him. Postcolonial writings are identified by their drive to write back, to reclaim the losses suffered during colonialism, and to resurrect what is lost under colonialism with a view to undo the harms perpetrated therein. It aims to dig out the buried voices and to give back voice to those who had been marginalized, stunted and silenced in the process.

The term ‘postcolonial’ first appeared in its composite form in the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 1959 and without hyphen in the *American Heritage Dictionary* of 1959. It refers to the field of study which came into being by enlarging the field of English studies to include American studies and more contemporary national and regional literatures such as Australian, Canadian or Caribbean literatures. The epithet “postcolonial” much like the terms “third world” and “Commonwealth” presupposes an imperial and metropolitan territory from which the critic speaks and which gives legitimacy to his or her discourse. As observed by Geetha Ganapathy-Dore in her book *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English* (2011):

Edward Said’s denunciation of the construction of the Orient as Europe’s alterity, Gayatri Spivak’s creative use of Antonio Gramsci’s term subaltern to connote “everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism … a space of difference” and Homi Bhabha’s theorization of the third space of enunciation arising out of the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures are seminal ideas that marked the beginnings of postcolonial studies. (4)
Though the postcolonial studies may be said to have emerged with the writings such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (1989), it was things like the Algerian and Vietnam wars, the Black Power Movement in the United States of America, the rise of the Women’s movement, and anti-war radicalism etc. that set the social agenda for it.

In its temporal sense, the “post” in post colonialism denotes the end of colonialism (generally written with a hyphen), whereas in its ideological sense, post colonialism, as put by Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge is “an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systemic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power. … This form of “post colonialism” is not “post” something or other but is already implicit in the discourses of colonialism themselves.” (284). On the contrary, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, view post colonialism as “a continuous process of resistance and reconstruction” and consider the prefix “post” as “more logical than chronological.” (2). The least that can be said about the term “postcolonial” is that it is “a definition in progress” as John Yang suggests (1999), defined sometimes with regard to history, sometimes with regard to ideology, sometimes with regard to geography, sometimes with regard to writing, sometimes with regard to reading and at other times with regard to teaching. Critics like Ania Loomba had already envisaged a critical horizon beyond post colonialism that can be situated in translinguistic, transhistorical, transnational, transsexual approaches.

Theoretically, Postcolonialism is the textual form of ‘resistance’ that emerged after the Second World War in what is known as the ‘third world’ countries, the countries that were largely under the European imperial domination. As Elleke Boehmer (1995) puts it: “resistance to imperial domination – especially on the part of those who lacked guns or money – frequently assumed textual form” (14). This textual resistance in the literary world came to be called variously as Commonwealth literature, New English literatures, Literatures in English, Third World Literature or Postcolonial Literature, with other cognate terms also used, such as World Fiction, World Literature written in English, multicultural literature, minority literature,
resistance literature, etc. However, temporality is not what characterizes postcolonial literature as Deepika Bahri in “Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?” remarks that “it is used not merely to characterize that which succeeds the colonial, but also the chapter of history following the Second World War, whether or not such a period accommodates the still-colonized, the neo-colonized, or the always colonized” (55). She observes that the present moment in ‘postcolonial’ nations is not “post”: the “colonial” in any genuine, or even cursory sense, as covert mercantile neo-colonialism, potent successor to modern colonialism, continues its virtually unchallenged march across the face of the earth, ensuring that the wretched will remain so, colluding in, as they did before, but now also embracing, the process of economic and cultural annexation, this time well-disguised under the name of modernization. (59).

Thus it is more relevant to characterize postcolonialism in the theoretical or ideological sense of the term.

John McLeod attempts to define post colonialism as a reading mode that undertakes to fulfill the following three functions or three ways of interpretation:

Reading texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism, primarily those texts concerned with the workings and legacy of colonialism in either the past or the present.

Reading texts produced by those that have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism, or those descended from migrant families, which deal in the main with diaspora experience and its many consequences.

In the light of theories of colonial discourses, re-reading texts produced during colonialism; both those that directly address the experiences of Empire, and those that seem not to. (33)

One of the characteristics of postcolonial literature is the abundance of parallel theories on postcolonialism that mark out its dislocated space and its sinuous path. As per Leong Yew, there are at least seven categories of theoreticians who somewhat can
be grouped under the umbrella term postcolonialism on theoretical grounds: anti-colonial revolutionaries, the Subaltern studies group, feminists, Marxists, discourse analysts, major theoreticians and general theoreticians who study ethnicity, race, society, culture, nation, geography, non-anglophone worlds and globalization.

Post colonialism, like feminism or socialism, is not a theory in the strict sense of the term. It is better to call it 'postcolonial politics' rather than 'postcolonial theory' since it is comprised of related perspectives and addresses the issues of a varied range of disciplines particularly the issues of gender, racial, and social hierarchies, the lopsided developments, the environment and ecology, the power and privileges. Above all it attempts to dissect the power structures and status quos — western as well as non-western. Its radical agenda, as outlined by Robert J. C. Young in as brief as possible is “to demand equality and well-being for all human beings on earth.” (7). Young gives a complete overview of the varied subjects that can be dealt under postcolonialism. According to him:

Postcolonialism as a political philosophy means first and foremost the right to autonomous self-government of those who still find themselves in a situation of being controlled politically and administratively by a foreign power. With sovereignty achieved, postcolonialism seeks to change the basis of the state itself, actively transforming the restrictive, centralizing hegemony of the cultural nationalism that may have been required for the struggle against colonialism. It stands for empowering the poor, the dispossessed, and the disadvantaged, for tolerance of difference and diversity, for the establishment of minorities’ rights, women’s rights, and cultural rights within a broad framework of democratic egalitarianism that refuses to impose alienating western ways of thinking on tricontinental societies. It resists all forms of exploitation (environmental as well as human) and all oppressive conditions that have been developed solely for the interests of corporate capitalism. It challenges corporate capitalism’s commodification of social relations and the
doctrine of individualism that functions as the means through which it is achieved. It resists all exploitation that results from comparative poverty or powerlessness. (113)

Postcolonialism’s fundamental sympathies lie with the outcastes of all kinds trapped in any sort of power hierarchy – the poor, the subaltern, the women, the colonized, the refugees, the migrants, the diasporas. It deals with the problems of slavery, suppression and representation. In short, its interests and sympathies lie with those who are forced to live on the margins of the society and who are powerless to fight for themselves. It aims to transform the societies with a view to bring in more equitable distribution of wealth and power, to eliminate social, racial, cultural and gendered hierarchies wherever they exist and in whatever form they are. Since postcolonial conditions vary according to location and situation, there cannot be a single form of postcolonial politics. Thus anything can fall under the purview of postcolonialism from the appropriation of natural resources, to unjust prices for commodities and crops, to the international sex trade, to the provision of basic amenities – security, sanitation, health care, food, and education – to all irrespective of their race, class, caste, religion, gender, or ethnicity. It unearths and gives value and attention to subaltern, marginalized cultures and fields of knowledge which have historically been considered to be of little or no value, and make efforts to restore the histories lost under long European colonization and occupation. As put by Young, “It looks at and experiences the world from below rather than from above.” (114).

Postcolonial studies brought periphery to the centre and turned subjects into objects and vice versa, as Sartre in his Colonialism and Neocolonialism (first published in 1964 in French, translated in English in 2001) comments talking about the emergence of postcolonial writers like Fanon: “The author often talks about you, but never to you. … What a decline: for the fathers, we were the sole interlocuters; the sons no longer even consider us as qualified interlocuters: we are the object of their discourse.” (76) Although Sartre’s contribution in the development of postcolonial theory has been overlooked by the critics of postcolonial studies, he has been a great influence on writers and thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Albert Memmi, etc. who are considered the leading figures in the field of postcolonial studies. As Robert J. C. Young observes in the Preface to Sartre’s Colonialism and
Neocolonialism, it was “the cosmopolitan, international structure of the anti-colonial movements helped to construct a formation of intellectual and cultural resistance, a huge production of philosophical and cultural knowledge, that flourished alongside anti-colonial political practice and material forms of resistance.” (VII), thus making Postcolonial theory fundamentally the outcome of that anti-colonial, anti-eurocentric political knowledge and experience that helped create the tricontinental modernity. Postcolonialism, as per Young, “represents a name for the intrusion of this radically different epistemology into the academy, the institutional site of knowledge, globally dominated, hitherto, by the knowledge criteria and positionality of the West.” (Preface, Colonialism and Neocolonialism, VII). Sartre, as an anti-colonial thinker, was preoccupied with the question of abusive power relations, a theme that Coetzee is preoccupied with all over his oeuvre. Sartre held that power was a dialectical phenomenon, that torturer and tortured, racist and victim, colonizer and colonized, the empowered and disempowered, were locked in a symbiotic relation in which the first could not escape the consequences of his relations with the second. Coetzee seems to be influenced very much by him in this regard. It is also important to mention Sartre in the context of Coetzee because, like him, Coetzee can be labeled as “anti-colonial” more comfortably than “postcolonial”.

Coetzee’s ‘apolitical’ instance makes it difficult to assess his works as direct postcolonial representations since they lack the directness and urgency of such writings. Postcolonial writings in general are characterized by their ‘realism’ in depicting the structures and workings of colonial power as well as their directness to speak against and condemn such power tactics along with their attempt to restore the humanity and dignity of the colonized, the oppressed, the marginalized – the victims of power hierarchies. But Coetzee’s texts employ nonrealistic devices unveiling the ‘politics’ behind his apparently or assumingly ‘apolitical’ agenda. According to Michael Vaughan:

Realism implies that there is an immediate, effective relation between individual experience and objective reality. The medium of this relation is always some form of practice. With Coetzee, the relation between individual experience and reality – and hence also practice, as a mediating link between
the two terms – is highly problematic. Hence his anti-realist aesthetics. (qtd. in Watson 384)

For Gordimer, the essence of the writer’s role lies in her social responsibility, and responsibility is treated primarily as a form of witness that in turn requires to have a clear political stand in order to condemn the one and support the other. Life under apartheid seemingly demands the realistic documentation of the oppression. That is why the political and ethical evasion in Coetzee cast doubts upon his ‘postcolonial’ consciousness. His political choices lie behind his choice of allegorical medium that showcases his “attempt in the novels to hold South Africa at arm’s length, by means of strategically nonspecific settings or socially improbable protagonists” (Attwell 3), thus making his fiction stand apart from the conventional postcolonial South African writings. Allegory is employed by Coetzee also as an attempt to hold stance with and against the forces maneuvering in South African culture to free himself of being polarized into a particular (South African) identity in order to lend a universal character to himself and his writings. Stephen Watson rightly comments that “By loosening the bonds of historical verisimilitude imposed and indeed demanded by the conventions of realism, Coetzee allows his fiction to float literally free of time and place even in the act of seeming to allude to a time and place which is specifically South African.” (374).

This thesis is an attempt to grasp the postcolonial essence of Coetzee’s writings though his postcolonialism does not confirm to the conventions of postcolonial writings in general, and of South African postcolonial writings in particular. His postcolonial consciousness lie in exposing the power structures and tactics operating in a society with highly polarized power relations mostly in the context of the whites and the blacks, i.e. the powerful and the powerless or the colonizer and the colonized such as in In the Heart of the Country; in his mapping of the silences of the oppressed and the subjugated ones such as in Foe; in his attempts to recover the lost histories such as in Dusklands; in his documentation of the violence and torture suffered by the powerless at the hands of powerful such as in Waiting for the Barbarians; and in his showcasing of the changing power relations and structures such as in Disgrace. Despite all his efforts to keep at a distance with the South
African reality, South Africa is what always lurks in the background, providing an inevitable backdrop to most of his writings.

Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak in her immensely famous article that is regarded as one of the founding texts of Postcolonialism seeks to ask: “Can the Subaltern Speak?” But the more important and urgent question that should be asked is “Can the Subaltern be Heard?” as introduced by J. Maggio in his article with the same title. It is this notion of getting heard rather than being able to speak that Coetzee tries to emphasize through his writings all over his oeuvre. If we are keen to listen, we can listen even to silences, but if we decide not to listen, then even the shouts and screams can be ignored comfortably (or may be not so comfortably as Coetzee also seeks to probe the conscience of such people). The answer to Spivak’s question i.e. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” can comprise both the possibilities – “Yes” or “No” – depending upon the particular circumstances of a subaltern subject, but the answer to Maggio’s question i.e. “Can the Subaltern be Heard” can only be “Yes” as it depends more on us than on the subaltern itself.

Coetzee makes silence speak for itself rather than replacing it with words stuffed into the mouths of the silent subjects as is the postcolonial tradition in general, thus shifting the responsibility of breaking the silence from the oppressed ones to others by changing it from being the necessity “to speak” to the necessity “to hear”. He makes silence a presence in itself against the notion of it being an “absence”. He does not believe in giving voice to the silenced ones since they are powerless to change their condition and cannot speak at their own, and speaking on their behalf further traumatizes the situation. In Coetzee, silence is related to power rather than being an expression of powerlessness – a tool against the powerful if employed willfully and strategically, since Coetzee’s works are obsessed above all with “Power” – social, cultural, lingual, political, familial, racial, colonial – actual or latent, manifesting in hierarchical structures of human relations and interaction, mostly in a master-slave or colonizer-colonized dialectic. This is what occupies Coetzee most as Stephen Watson puts it:

If colonialism, at its very simplest, equals the conquest and subjugation of a territory by an alien people, then the human relationship that is basic to it is
likewise one of power and powerlessness: the relationship between master and servant, overlord and slave. It is this aspect of colonialism that receives the most extensive treatment in Coetzee’s fiction (370).
WORKS CITED


