



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2020; 6(9): 174-177
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 15-06-2020
Accepted: 02-08-2020

Naseer Ahmad Sheikh
Ph.D., Research Scholar,
Department of English,
J. S. University, Shikohabad-
Utter Pradesh, India

A psychological and political analysis of John Maxwell Coetzee's Novel *Disgrace*

Naseer Ahmad Sheikh

Abstract

Indeed John Maxwell has earned the international excellence in the domain of post-colonialism. J. M. Coetzee is concerned with important moral issues including disappointment of the post-apartheid and race relations in his native land. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee involves us in the struggle of a discredited university professor. Lurie's disgrace metonymies disheartening insight and disappointment of the post-apartheid era of South Africa. Comparatively, from ethical perspective, Lurie as a seducer is responsible for his disgrace, as on virtual grounds he is rapist and he deserves the heavy spells of disgrace. The psychological justification exists but too weak as it is based on sexual hunts. Consequently, the equilibrium between psychological and ethical grounds is more skewed towards ethics. Indeed Lurie may have dire need to gratify sexual gratification, but he should gratify it on legitimate grounds. However, the political aspects signify the heavy domination of post-apartheid system, which facilitates all the rape happening in the novel. Besides, as the title implies, this postcolonial fiction deals with the racial revenge on the whites which seems to emerge as a neo-racism by the blacks from the political, ethical and psychological point of view.

Keywords: Psychological analysis, political analysis, disgrace

Introduction

The African literature in English has added a new dimension to the contemporary world literature. It represents the colonial and postcolonial crisis within Africa. Colonialism debilitated the natives on different levels: psychological, social, physical, economical, political, sexual etc. However, the name of the John Maxwell Coetzee is on front line. He occupies a prominent place in the African literature, particularly in South African. Like his other novels, his novel *Disgrace* has gained international repute. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee involves us in the struggle of a discredited university professor namely David Lurie to defend his own and his daughter Lucy's honor in the new circumstances that have arisen in South Africa after the collapse of white supremacy. Here, he has been concerned with important moral issues including post-apartheid and race relations in his native South Africa, human rights, animal rights and social and political injustice. The novel holds rich background in the domain of political and psychological analysis. Keeping in view the investigator explored the below mentioned research problem:

Research problem: As reported above the novel *Disgrace* is fertile in context of political and psychological domain. According to the investigator intended to explore the psychological and political analysis of John Maxwell Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*.

Objectives: Apart from the post-colonial perspectives presents study was intended to explore the psychological and political analysis of the novel *Disgrace*.

Methodology: The presents study was intended to explore psychological and political analysis of John Maxwell Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. Keeping in view, the presents study has been carried in context of descriptive research method.

Rationale of the study: Sketched in black and white clour, the novel *Disgrace* unfolds with the sexually haunted professor. The title of *Disgrace* refers to the fall from grace, which the main character David Lurie experiences in his professional life as a university professor, who

Corresponding Author:
Naseer Ahmad Sheikh
Ph.D., Research Scholar,
Department of English,
J. S. University, Shikohabad-
Utter Pradesh, India

has been left with nothing, neither romance nor vocational recourse and his subsequent falling from his position and status in South African society.

Psychological Justification (SJ): Right from the beginning of the novel it has discredited the university professor namely David Lurie by supplying: *"For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well"*. From psychological point of view he is searching the abode for his sexual desire. But from ethical point of view, his seduction of a student named Melanie is not acceptable; though according to him, she had a silent consent because she did not resist his approach: *"She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes"* (25). The relationship starts off because of Lurie's extreme eagerness and devil-may-care attitude. Again, since it takes two to make a quarrel, we cannot spare Melanie either, because she has not lodged any complaint against Lurie after her first seduction. From psychological perspective, as the divorced Lurie cannot establish any emotional relationship with women, he seems to be an outcast. Perhaps because of such outlook, Melanie lets Lurie use her body and conceals her private disgrace from people. But excess of anything is very bad. Lurie makes love with Melanie in some more instances without her willingness. Besides, first's "impression is lost impression". The Melanie on the first sexual romance has not withdrawn her sexual support from Lurie. So psychologically the investigator justified the behaviour of the Melanie with Thorndike's "law of practice", which revolves round that practice makes a man perfect. So at the first impression Melanie has abode the abode for sexual desire of Lurie which makes Lurie more confident to express the view point that *"the duty of the women is to share their beauty"* (Disgrace Pp-16) Melanie reveals everything to her boyfriend and father, both of whom rudely challenge Lurie and chastise him. Melanie's boyfriend visits Lurie unexpectedly in his office one afternoon and threatens him with disclosure of the illegal relationship. Thus starts the disgraceful incidents in Lurie's life. Subsequently, that night his car is vandalized, tires are deflated, glue is injected into door locks, newspaper is pasted over and windscreen, paintwork is scratched. However, again it is psychologically justified, as the boyfriend of Melanie for the sake of his own sexual desire is disgracing Lurie, but psychologically speaking who will gratify the sexual instincts of Lurie? As he is divorced. From psychological view point there should be anyone who will fulfill the sexual desire of Lurie. As Sigmund Freud argues that *"earth revolves round to axis's Life revolves round to sexes"* so to some extent the investigator can argue that the psychological justification of David Lurie is to some extent correct. Besides, society should shoulder the responsibilities of Divorced persons in a legitimate way so that illegitimate may not happen. It should be noticed that up to his resignation, his disgrace revolves around the white world and his psychological implication is 'carelessness' to whatever others think about him; for instance, the scathing article that has been written in the local paper *argues* regarding the affair. In fact, this is Lurie's 'defense mechanism' to justify his unjustifiable behaviour, which sometimes is useful in the domain of psychology.

Political Justification (PJ): In fact, politically his personal story is interwoven with the national predicament of post-

apartheid South African whites. Now, Lurie's relationship with Melanie epitomizes his brazen disregard for the law, societal rules, or ethics. In Melanie's father's words—

"We put our children in the hands of you people because we think we can trust you. If we can't trust the university, who can we trust? We never thought we were sending our daughter into a nest of vipers. No, Professor Lurie, you may be high and mighty and have all kinds of degrees, but if I was you I'd be very ashamed of myself. (Disgrace Pp-36)

Hearing these reproachful words, Lurie is visibly embarrassed and disgraced in front of the staff and students; and rushes out of the office. Here, from the angle of a father's concern for his daughter, such humiliation of Lurie is justifiable; because ethically he has made fault in behaviour regarding his stature. Furthermore, Melanie even goes on to lodge a formal complaint against Lurie. Thenceforth his persecution and public disgrace begin. The Student Affairs Office contacts Lurie informing him that a sexual harassment complaint has been filed against him and includes a copy of the corresponding section of the code of conduct he has been accused of violating, Article 3: the victimization or harassment on grounds of race, ethnic group, religion, gender, sexual preference, or physical disability; and Article 3.1: the victimization or harassment of students by teachers. Indeed, Lurie has violated ethical code. So he is told by the university administration to apologize and enter into counseling if he wishes to save his career. Besides, instead of having a proper trial, the authority wants him to be publicly humiliated by his formal apology. Taken as a generic trial, the account of the investigation suggests that the underlying motive of a public trial is not to enact justice, but rather to instill guilt and shame in the accused.

From political perspective, one can draw parallels between university's sexual harassment investigation and post-apartheid South Africa's 'Truth and Reconciliation' hearings. There the accused were given amnesty as long as they told the entire truth. In that sense, Lurie's disgrace is a political allegory. However, seeing himself as being a scapegoat by the forces of political correctness, he pleads guilty to the charge of sexual harassment but refuses to apologize or be repentant. He says—*"Frankly, what you want from me is not a response but a confession. Well, I make no confession. I put forward a plea. As is my guilt. Guilty as charged. That is my plea. That is as far as I am willing to go"* (Disgrace: 51). Thus, he refers to mix or conflate the committee's judgment of guilt with a public exposure of shame. But he is disgraced anyway. And he clearly should be ashamed. That he is not psychologically unsound, as he later expresses to the press that he was enriched by the experience, emphasizes his hubristic, haughty attitude toward the world. Not only that, the manner in which he haughtily uses his status and gender to get what/whom he wants—Melanie—is analogous to white South Africans' attitude during apartheid. Lurie, like an embodiment of the white supremacist element in South Africa, refuses to apologize like Meursault of Camus' *Outsider* for his abuse of power. This does not stop him, just as it did not stop the 'Truth and Reconciliation Committee' from rooting out vestiges of apartheid, from being removed from power. It should be noticed that up to his resignation, his disgrace revolves around the white world and his

psychological implication is 'carelessness' to whatever others think about him; for instance, the scathing article that has been written in the local paper *Argus* regarding the affair. In fact, this is Lurie's 'defense mechanism' (Freud's psychoanalytic theory) to disgrace.

Meanwhile, as for the procedure of trial, it is modeled after the criminal justice system, not having any scope in the modern democratic setup. Here, justice becomes a public act that is driven by guilt and shame. As a result, Lurie starts receiving punishment even before he is tried. Later, for crossing both the departmental and generational boundaries, Lurie is publicly censured when Melanie's boyfriend throws spit balls at him and commands him to "stick to your own kind". Even from Lucy's perspective, men should not be able to act upon desires simply because they have them. Thereby, *Disgrace* dramatizes Lurie's confrontation with change—his effort at first to avoid it and then to amend not only his life but his temperament, one of the 'hardest part of the body', as he hardly observes. His challenge seems clear: change or accept extinction. In this way, *Disgrace* explores the pain involved both in accommodating the past apartheid and surviving the preset post-apartheid South Africa. Again, *Disgrace* is related to the socio-political shifts underway in post-apartheid South Africa. In other words, *Disgrace* draws an anxious, comfortless picture of post-apartheid South Africa. Now Lurie finds himself—as Coetzee's heroes often do—adrift in a society variously hostile, inscrutable, painful and unpredictable. Coetzee engages the complex social relations of the 'new' South Africa through sexuality as a code for or vocabulary of change. My aim here is to trace the operations of that code in the novel, noting its inflection of personal metamorphosis in the prospect of political reversal in South Africa and considering its implications for social change more broadly. Rape, the ethical lapse enabled by interpretive strategies, returns to haunt Lurie after his removal to Lucy's farm. Now her farmhouse is robbed by three blacks who also rape her and try to kill Lurie by burning.

As Michel Foucault says that power corrupts and circulates, this incident implies the reversal of racial power-play in the new South African context which psychologically affects the whites unbearably, especially Lurie. After his daughter Lucy is raped, Lurie also confronts her refusal to explain to him what has happened to her. Moreover, faced with an implied parallel between his sexual coercion of Melanie and Lucy's violation, humiliated by his inability to help his daughter, Lurie feels rebuked as a man, a father, and intellectually as an interpreter or controller of experience.

In Lurie's passage from scholar to dog-handler, Coetzee also articulates change largely as tribulation the chastisement of a certain model of white manhood under South Africa's emerging dispensation. Politically, it implies that South Africa is shedding the slain of both colonial and hybrid neo-colonialism of the apartheid era. Subsequently, as the ransacking of his Cape Town house and his eviction from his campus office and his not getting a warm welcome from one time's intimate Elanie Winter imply, Lurie becomes displaced and exiled in his own land. He is politically hurt and estranged because the status of white power is declining in South Africa. And psychologically he has to watch his daughter going through the aftermath of fear and depression, unable to offer any comfort or solace.

Meanwhile, Coetzee brings the reversed racial relationship to the surface when Lurie arrives in Salem. In the back of

Lucy's property lives an African named Petrus who is at first in a subservient position. The racial dynamic becomes strained when Petrus is implicated in indirectly facilitating a robbery, raping Lucy, ransacking her house, shooting her dogs and setting Lurie afire, a further divestment of Lurie's former self. Since Petrus disappears during this disgraceful incident and comes back with building supplies to renovate his house, Lurie confronts him by which the racial division becomes clear. Here the political implication is that the racial history is repeating itself like Yeats' theory of gyre. However, Lurie wants Lucy to report the crime and bring the culprits to justice. But Lucy decides that it would be impossible for her to continue living in such a remote and lawless area if she calls the police. And she would be open to future attack and it will widen her disgrace. Besides, no verbal testimony or justification will ever be adequate reparation for the crime committed. So, far from seeking justice, she decides to bear the child she is carrying as a result of rape.

As the power-play has been inverted after the abolition of apartheid, Lucy realizes the helplessness of the whites in this black world and psychologically accepts her predicament, knowing well that she would not get justice. But Lurie cannot accept the racial fate anyway. As a result, the psychological tension and the gap between father and daughter increases. Thus Coetzee has dug deeply into the ground of the human condition which is cruelty and loneliness. However, both father and daughter survive the ordeal. Eventually, in order to protect herself and her simple way of life, Lucy consents to become the third wife in Petrus' polygamous family, even though he might have arranged the attack on her in order to gain control of her property. This is the ultimate disgrace for a white father who earlier saw his son-in-law as his daughter's servant. And here again, Lurie is psychologically alienated from his only family-member, which he confronted earlier from others.

In *Disgrace*, cross-race rape materializes the ghost of this obsolete dream as another kind of tragic burden: the legacy of shattered race relations which the embryonic South African subject must bear. So, Lurie recognizes his position in this new world: "his mind has become a refuge for old thought, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go". Still it is Lurie who is both victim and agent of destruction. However, in this dystopian novel, Lurie does not achieve creativity and freedom until, stripped of all dignity, he is afflicted by his own shame and history's disgrace. In other words, the only possible aspect of disgrace is that it has decreased Lurie's racial ego. He decides "(h)e would not mind hearing Petrus' story one day". Besides, disgrace has made Lurie more concerned about his daughter. A significant aspect is that while Lucy is disgraced only by the blacks, Lurie is disgraced by both blacks and whites. A political implication of their disgrace is that Lucy represents one approach—complete capitulation to cultural determinations of justice. Lurie represents another insistence upon personal vindication. Each character recognizes the other's position, which only increases the poignancy of their growing separation. Overall, the ostracism truly hurts Lurie and he seems to be unable to repair it in any way. It is tied up, with enormous issues race, gender, status that Lurie cannot simply wish away. Meanwhile, as for the procedure of trial, it is modeled and fabricated after the criminal justice system, not having any scope in the modern democratic setup. Indeed, Professor David Lurie was rapist, but at least

he should receive an ample opportunity of hearing thought the process of trial, so that truth may reveal. But the truth and reconciliation committee has done adverse.

Conclusion

To conclude, Lurie's disgrace metonymies disheartening insight and disappointment of the post-apartheid era of South Africa. Comparatively, from ethical perspective, Lurie as a seducer is responsible for his disgrace, as on virtual grounds he is rapist and he deserves the heavy spells of disgrace. The psychological justification exists but too weak as it is based on sexual hunts. Consequently, the equilibrium between psychological and ethical grounds is more inclined towards ethics. Indeed Lurie may have dire need to gratify sexual gratification, but he should gratify it on legitimate grounds. Besides, his desire has ample scope in major religions epically in Islam, where everyone is subjected to fulfill sexual instincts till last moments of death, but only through itemized ways. However, the political aspects signify the heavy domination of post-apartheid system, which facilitates all the rape happening in the novel.

References

1. Attwell D. *Doubling The Point: Essays And Interviews* By J. M. Coetzee. Newtown: Harvard University Press, 1992.
2. Barry Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*.
3. Bonnici T. The Contemporary Post-Colonial Novel in English'. *Acta Scientiarum. Human and Social Sciences*. Maringa. 2004; 26(1):1-22.
4. Carine MM. Rape and The Violence of Representation In J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace: Research In African Literatures*. 2011; 42(4):1-3.
5. Coetzee JM. *Disgrace*. London: Vintage, Print, 2000.
6. David A. The Problem of History In The Fiction of J. M. Coetzee's Poetics Today. *International Journal of English Literature*. 1990; 11(3):596.
7. Gayle R. *Thinking Sex: Notes For A Radical Theory of The Politics of Sexuality, Pleasure & Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Ed. Carole Vance. London: Pandora, 1984, 267-268.
8. Jan Mohamed, Abdul R. *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature In Colonial Africa*, Amherst: The University Of Massachusetts Press, 1983.
9. Jihan M, Zakarriya M. *Deconstruction of Different Forms of Apartheid In The Works of Edward Said, J. M. Coetzee & Jabra Ibrahim Jabra: A Comparative Study of Violence, Resistance and Alienation*. Published Dissertation Department of English Literature. Cardiff University, 2014.
10. Kailash C, Baral E. *Introduction to J. M. Coetzee Critical Perspectives*: New Delhi: Pencraft International Publishers, 2008, 11-12.
11. *Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2nd Revised edition, 2002. Print*.
12. Marais M. J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and The Task of The Imagination. *Journal of Modern Literature*. 2007; 29(9):75-93.
13. Morrell R. *The Psychology of oppressed Black Men: Changing Men In Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001, 21-23.
14. Morrell R. *Changing Men In Southern Africa: Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press. 2001, 21-27*.
15. Paul F. *Life and Times of Michael K: University College Utrecht, Utrecht, 2011*.
16. Rita Barnard, 'Coetzee's Country Ways *International Journal Of Postcolonial Studies*. 2002; 4(3):384-394.
17. Said E. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, 73-81.
18. Said E. *Culture and Imperialism: London: Vintage Books, 1993, 18-21*.
19. Stephen W. *Colonialism and The Novels of J. M. Coetzee. Research In African Literatures*. 1986; 17(3):370-392.
20. Stolarek J. *Problems of Multiculturalism and Multi-Ethnicity In The Republic of South Africa In John Maxwell Coetzee's Selected Works*. Published Ph. D. Thesis. Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Poland, 2013.
21. Thoker, Aashiq. *Sigmund Freud and Sex*. *International Journal of Analytical research*. 2010; 12(10):22-28.
22. Tove A, Jenny B. *In Control or In Despair: Protagonist Analysis of David Lurie In Disgrace and Okonkwo In Things Fall Apart*. Published Ph. D. Thesis Södertörns University College. C-Essay English Department Södertörns, 2007.
23. Van D. *Guilt, Reconciliation and Redemption: Disgrace and Its South African Context. A Universe of (Hi) Stories: Essays on J.M. Coetzee*. Ed. Liliana Sikorska. Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang, 2006, 39-44.