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Reflection of human suffering and torture in John Maxwell Coetzee's novel waiting for barbarians

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Abstract

The division and hunt of supremacy has remained dominant since the beginning of the human civilisation. However, it got strength since the beginning of post-colonial era. Post-colonialism consists of the composite culture of torture, vandalism, rape, assassination killing, brutality. In connection to same, the novel "Waiting for the Barbarians" opens the intellectual window in the same post-colonial brutality. By using fictional approach, the investigator revealed that in the novel "Waiting for the Barbarians", Coetzee by using his master art justified that colonial powers are intentionally using torture on so-called barbarians, by justifying that torture as the tool by which they can achieve truth. Coetzee argued that torture in colonial powers was most effective mechanism for acquiring the truth. The investigator argued that the post-colonial discourses were based on the fundamental ideology that "torture creates pain and pain leads towards truth".

Keywords: Human sufferings, torture, waiting for Barbarians (1980)

Introduction

Preamble

Among the world renowned post-colonial writers, the name of John Maxwell Coetzee is enumerated with golden words. The master piece of John Maxwell Coetzee "Waiting for the Barbarians" was published in 1980. The novel is reflex of the post-colonial ethos within the framework of brutal torture. The examination of the critiques raised in the book will be discussed through interpreting the characters as victims of the Empire. The first victim is the barbarian girl in which will be examined in relation to her "otherness" as an outsider and as an enemy of the Empire. Thematically speaking the novel, provide insights useful for unpacking the narratives produced in the two cases. However, J. M. Coetzee's deliberate kept the ambiguity in depicting abode and time in the novel. The ambiguity of the time and place in the novel, gives the novel a highly allegorical dimension. The novel focuses allegorically on the South African circumstance although it does not overtly refer to it. Because according to Coetzee, it can happen anywhere in the world. The practical implications of the novel are the universal message for all colonizers and colonized states of the world. Though, the contradictions of white and black, civilized and barbarism seem to be embedded so deeply in the Western mind which reflects "people and actions" of apartheid South Africa. Coetzee, a writer who has been examined under the light of post-colonial and various other theories, is a writer how is in fact beyond all theories. Coetzee is a writer who has not just examined, observed reported and penned the pain of subalterns but felt it and expressed it very subtly in a format which is often called 'loose baggy monster'. Novel, the popular most form that literature has cherished since one and a half century, has memorably played under the lexicons, felt and designed equally by J.M. Coetzee

Identification of the research gap

The novel actually depicts the mental self-journey of a man. His mind is like the history of the town. Magistrate's hobby is to excavate the timber skeletons of ancient houses and ruins. He tries to understand the characters on wooden slips he found. Throughout the novel, his pre-symbolic writings are always a mystery for him likewise his unconscious is a mystery. One can read this act of digging and finding ancient unknown elements as a representation of his self-discovery through his own history and mind.

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The old ancient civilization can signify his unconscious and the surface; yet the realm he is living can symbolize his consciousness. Postcolonial research studies have been carried out in length and breadth. Large number of the studies has been explored in the domain of post-colonialism in context of John Maxwell Coetzee. However, these studies were analysed on different issues like violence, brutality, racial decimation, sexual exploitation and power hunt etc. The notable research studies have been conducted by; Ahamd, A. (2012) ^[1], Attwell, D. (1992) ^[2], Boletsi, Maria. (2007) ^[4], Bonnici, T. (2004) ^[5], Carine M. M. (2011) ^[6], David, A. (1990) ^[9] and Imran, A. (2011) ^[12]. Least research studies have been conducted in the domain of torture. So, investigator considers an ample opportunity to explore the below mentioned research problem:

Statement of the research problem

The statement of the research problem for the present study is reported as under:

Reflection of human suffering and torture in John Maxwell Coetzee's Novel *Waiting for Barbarians*.

- **Objectives of the study:** "Torture on unconsents" was the fundamental constituent of post-colonialism. The common nation behind post-colonialism was that torture is an intersegment for revealing truth. Infact J. M. Coetzee observed the torture of post-colonialism through his own eyes. According he made fictional revolt against it. Keeping in view, the aim of the present study was to explore the exceptional torture in John Maxwell Coetzee's Novel *Waiting for Barbarians* (1980).
- **Methodology and procedure:** In the domain of English research, we observe that postcolonial research studies are empirical loaded. However, the existing researcher study has been carried in consonance to descriptive research method.
- **Data collection:** The researcher has collected both primary as well as secondary data for generalising the results of the study.
- **Rationale of the study:** Post-colonialism was characterized by torture, vandalism, rape, assassination and killing. The novel "*Waiting for the Barbarians*" opens the intellectual window in the same element. The novel "*Waiting for the Barbarians*" portrays the image of the brutal torture operated on oppressed by oppressors under the shade of post-colonialism. The physical and psychological torture on innocent on the basses of fabricated rumours and propagandas are given fundamental place in the novel. In connection to same, Stephen Biko (1997) observed that "*torture and detention in the apartheid system was the fundamental tool behind colonizer, which they use on the basis of power*". The investigator after exploring the relevant literature of the novel observes that there "exists cohesive analogy between the torture in the novel and the torture of political prisoners in South Africa". Coetzee in his novel "*Waiting for the Barbarians*" has envisaged not only multifaceted but virtual relationships between power and knowledge production, along with the relationships among torture, language and political agency. In the novel, it is "torture", by which colonial powers are justifying their behaviour. It shows how colonial power and discourse authorize torture and how torture in turn produces

'knowledge' that legitimizes the means employed to sustain colonial power. The illegitimate apprehensions are being converted into legitimate actions by using the torture as tool on so called barbarians. As a work representation of the post-colonial literature, the novel "*waiting for the Barbarians*" highlights the challenges of ascertaining 'truth' in (post) colonial discourse, using the 'truth acquired through torture as a harrowing example of the softness of the 'truth'. Coetzee novel "*Waiting for Barbarians* (1980)" is uttered on the lips and tongue of each and every critique, because he got success in interrogating "power, brutality, barbarism, savagery, and torture", as a matter of fact these were the consequences, which world has yielded through colonialism writer. The novel is sketched in a post-colonial blood in which a Magistrate, the protagonist of the novel is posted in the Outpost of the "Empire". The Magistrate was assigned a duty to collect rent and levy taxes from the public. The nexus between the Magistrate who is the representative of the Empire and the natives are trouble free as both exist in peace and calm and are obeying and respecting relations with each other. So Magistrate is governing intellectually and there seems no any scope for any kind of misery or tension. The empire and the natives are consequently contributing towards each other smoothly. Accordingly, no any kind of complaint is expressing on behalf of empire or native. No one can dare to convince them that everything was well and harmonious in the outpost. As intentionally they are deputed to cause unrest anyway. They cannot believe or accept this fact that that everything is going smoothly. They act on their own fabricated rumour's that the barbarians (Common people of empire) are planning an attack. Colonel Joll Just acts on suspicion and rumour as from his actions it seems that he had received authentic proof regarding attack on behalf of so-called Barbarians. Thus, the origin of the rumour and the reasons for suspicion are not obvious. It is just to give birth to intentional unrest of any cost. It seems to be his urge and intention to be the torturer who would get the 'truth' out of the natives. He fabricated some illegitimate reason to workout violence on the natives. How looking on another side it may be his fear, confusion and insecurity that he behaves so. Even though there is no reason, rumour or suspicion, he plans to attack them. There is nothing else for him to fear the natives. The speculative threat is only perceived by Colonel Joll and his men. Colonel Joll insists that there is a threat even when the Magistrate tries to convince him that there is no threat as such from the so called barbarians. The magistrate narrates the behavioural characteristics of so-called Barbarians and ensured to Joll that they maintain peace and harmony; they are harmless and have no plans of an attack on anybody. Subsequently, the Magistrate left no stone unturned in justifying the innocence of so-called Barbarians. However, all resulted in vain when Joll is not convinced with the justification of the Magistrate. Infact, he does not want anyone to convince him as he has intentionally come with the purpose of destroying the barbarians and he will do that and leave only after this mission is accomplished. However, in spite of the Magistrate's sympathy for the natives, throughout the novel, he too refers to them as 'the barbarians'. The

Magistrate becomes a witness to the acts of cruelty of Colonel Joll. He does not remain a passive witness. In spite of his attempts to convince Joll, he is not successful. Colonel Joll thus started his intentional mission, which was to torture natives by hunting the search of so-called attack. The mission “to bring unrest” was intentional in nature. Meanwhile, an old man and a young boy how visited for medical check-up are rounded up by the soldiers and alter on Colonel Joll interrogates them fully convinced that they are barbarians. The torture that the old man and the boy are subject consists of terrible spells physical and psychological ailments. However, nothing can stop Colonel Joll who finds pleasure in imposing pain on the two. Indeed, is the fact that they are not guilty? But nay way he wants to operate heavy torture on them. Obviously speaking, the torture was brutal, because Joll want to give warning with the help of his violent torture that reaming natives can be subjected to same torment. Meanwhile, when the Magistrate asks the Colonel about removing the truth from the “enemy” Colonel Joll States that:

“There is a certain tone. A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth... First I get lies; you see- this is what happens – first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth”.

.....John Maxwell Coetzee:
Waiting for barbarians Pp-7

Thus, Joll claims that “*pain is truth*”. Accordingly, the intensity of the torture was brutal. It initial torture of the Joll ended with tragedy, subsequently, the torture leads to the death of the old man. The second victim involved in the first spell is an innocent boy. He has been ordered sleep next to the dead body. Indeed, it is shameful torture performed by Joll; however, ironically, there is no regret on the part of Joll or his men. Thus, the life reaming native has no any worth in front of Joll and his men. They cruelly deal with the natives to satisfy their desire to oppress them for no obvious reason as such. Thus, the sin of natives is in the hands of Joll. He can prove anyone guilty on the basis of his fabricated justifications. In displaying violence they give opening to their innate need to subjugate the natives. In connection to same, Coetzee in an article “*Into the Dark Chamber*” which was later published in “*Doubling the Point*” argues that, “In the torture room unlimited force in exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purposes, if not of destroying him, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him.” “John Maxwell Coetzee: Into the Dark Chamber: Pp-8.

Conclusion

While concluding the research can argue that in the novel “Waiting for the Barbarians”, Coetzee justified that he Empire is intentionally using torture on so-called barbarians, by justifying that torture is the tool by which they can achieve truth. Human sufferings as per Coetzee are fabricated in nature. The innocent so-called Barbarians are usually facing suffering to supress their voice in brutal apartheid system in South Africa. He proclaimed that torture is most effective mechanism for acquiring the truth. Joll

claimed that “*pain is truth*”. However, here it seems that information obtained from torture may not be reliable

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