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**Sufdar Hussain Bhat**  
Ph. D. Research Scholar,  
Bhagwant University Ajmer,  
Rajasthan, India

## **Racial deprivation and adversity in context of life and times of Michael K**

**Sufdar Hussain Bhat**

### **Abstract**

This research paper delves into the theme of racial deprivation and adversity as portrayed in the novel "Life and Times of Michael K" by J.M. Coetzee. The novel presents a poignant exploration of the struggles faced by the titular character, Michael K, who navigates a racially divided and socially unequal society. Through a close analysis of the novel's characters, plot, and setting, this paper examines the ways in which racial deprivation and adversity are depicted, and how these factors contribute to Michael K's journey and identity. Keeping in view, the investigator found that Deprivation and Hardship in the Life and Times of Michael K-1983 were legalised through the process of cheap labours, so-called treatment and rebellion approach. Besides, the investigator in the novel "Life and Times of Michael K" found that this indeed it is intellectual fictional narrative, which indicates the "political uncongenial role" existing in the South Africa and innocents were the victimised section of society, which is portrayed through the Life and Times of Michael K.

**Keywords:** Deprivation, hardship, life and times of Michael K

### **Introduction**

The novel "Life and Times of Michael K" is set against the backdrop of apartheid-era South Africa, a period marked by institutionalized racism and stark racial divisions. The narrative follows Michael K, a simple and unassuming man, as he attempts to navigate the oppressive societal norms and systemic racial inequalities that shape his life. This paper aims to explore the themes of racial deprivation and adversity that are central to Michael K's experiences and transformation. Apartheid South Africa provides the historical and societal context for the novel. The deeply entrenched racial hierarchy and segregation policies lead to a profound disparity in access to resources, education, and opportunities among different racial groups. These inequalities set the stage for Michael K's journey as he grapples with the effects of racial discrimination. Michael K's journey serves as a microcosm of the larger struggles faced by marginalized individuals during apartheid. His mixed-race background further complicates his identity and sense of belonging. Through his experiences, the novel illustrates the physical and psychological toll of racial deprivation, emphasizing the fragility of human life under oppressive conditions. The novel vividly portrays the contrast between urban and rural settings. Michael K's attempt to escape the city's turmoil and find solace in the countryside reflects the desire to escape the racial deprivation and adversity inherent in the urban landscape. The symbolism attached to these spaces underscores the disparities in societal treatment based on race. Despite the adversities he faces, Michael K's resilience is evident throughout the novel. His ability to adapt to various situations and make do with limited resources highlights the strength of character required to navigate a racially oppressive environment. His journey becomes a metaphor for the resilience of marginalized communities in the face of systemic racial inequalities. Michael K's experiences prompt a reflection on identity and belonging. The novel raises questions about how racial deprivation impacts one's understanding of self and connection to society. Michael K's journey towards self-sufficiency and his eventual return to the city underscore the complex interplay between individual identity and the external forces of racial adversity. Indeed, John Maxwell Coetzee is remarked as an eminent postmodern writer whose works is globally recognized, as masterpieces and are translated and analysed by different sects of intellectuals by their skilled-crafted analysis, heart touching dialogue and analytical brilliance. In his novel he

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Sufdar Hussain Bhat**  
Ph. D. Research Scholar,  
Bhagwant University, Ajmer,  
Rajasthan, India

gave ample space to South American social circumstance, representing the sufferings of Apartheid governing system and its harmful consequences on human and non-human entities. The novel "Life and Times of Michael K (1983) is the first Booker Prize winning novel of J.M. Coetzee. Title of the novel is contemptuous. The novel depicts the life and time of an innocent protagonists namely Michele K.

### Research problem

Coetzee emphasizes the most essential principle of the need to listen to the 'other.' His black characters are not considered as human beings by the whites. Apart from portraying the nightmare of violence, he questions the ultimate gain or validity of violence to the mankind. He dramatizes, analyses, and condemns it. His novels repeatedly ring a bell to ponder on the horrors of violence and learn lessons from the past. As reported above the novel Life and Times of Michael K-1983. is fertile in context of post-colonial analysis. According the investigator intended to explore "Deprivation and Hardship in John Maxwell Coetzee's Novel 'Life and Times of Michael K-1983'".

### Aim of the study:

Apart from the post-colonial perspectives present study was intended to explore the Post-Colonial Exploration In John Maxwell's Novel "Life And Times Of Michelle, K".

### Research Methodology:

The present study was intended to explore psychological and political analysis of John Maxwell Coetzee's novel Disgrace. Keeping in view, the present study has been carried in context of descriptive research method. Both primary and secondary sources have been adopted by the researcher.

### Rationale of the study

J.M. Coetzee's novel "Life and Times of Michael K" stands as a profound portrayal of the harrowing effects of racial deprivation and adversity within the tumultuous landscape of apartheid-era South Africa. Through the eyes of its titular character, Michael K, the novel unveils the stark realities faced by marginalized individuals within a society defined by institutionalized racism and social inequalities. Michael K is the central narrator protagonist of the novel around which whole novel congregate. He is an angel like human being cut off from all sorts of social relationships. The novel reveals that Michael has a harelip. His mind is not quick. He has no father Purgatory. He starts his complex, hard and exciting journey from South Africa to his mother's native Prince Albert in which he faces nothing more than oppression, brutality and subjugation. While observing the time of novel, one can easily observe that the Novel was the intellectual property of J.M. Coetzee in the (1983), it is the time when South Africa was trapped in civil war. Michael has a harelip naturally, and a gap at the left nostril as a result he is stock minded. His mind is not quick. He has no father, subsequently; he spends his childhood in the company of other children who are either unfortunate or his childhood as a parentally rejected child. At early age (fifteen years) he links the park and a little job in Cape Town as 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Gardner. Meanwhile, he stays there only for the period of three years, after three years, he leaves the park and gardens. After a wide gap of unemployment, he takes a job as night watchmen at the public lavatory on green market square.

One day he is ruthlessly beaten by two men who toured his clothes and inner garments. After this incident, he returns to the parks and gardens and becomes a gardener. But all these are the pat episodes of Michael's Life. The novel narrates:

"War is the father of all and king of all. Some he shows as gods, others as men. Some he makes slaves and other free." (Life And Times of Michael K-1983: P-1)

In the meantime, when Michael K was detained, he labelled himself as hosts (White people) and entitled parasites to non-white people.

"It was no longer obvious which was host and which parasite, camp or town. If the worm devoured the sheep, why did the sheep swallow the worm? What if the hosts were far outnumbered by the parasites. Could the parasites then still be called parasites? Parasites too had flesh and substance: parasites too could be preyed upon. Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared a parasite on the town or the town a parasite on the camp depended on no more than on who made his voice heard loudest. (Coetzee, 2004: Pp-116)

The intensity of the hardships was so cold that when Michael K was suspect of serving the guerrillas and was interrogated physically as well as psychologically. But very innocently rejected his allegations of being involved in the war.

"Tell us the truth, tell us the whole truth and you can go back to bed, we won't bother you anymore. The silence lengthened Noel did not speak, passing the whole burden to me. 'Come on Michaels,' I said 'we haven't got all day, there is a war on!' At last, he spoke: 'I am not in war'" (Coetzee, 2004: 138)

Despite having peace loving approach of Michael K Michele K, he is subjected to face hardship. Being unique Gardner made emotional connection with earth. He devotes his love towards pumpkins and melons. The novel reported; "The pumpkins grew. In the night K would creep about, stroking the smooth shells. As time passed he permitted the hope to grow up again in his breast that all would be well. He woke during the day and peered out over the acre. Among the seeds he had sown had been a melon seed. Now the two pale green melons were growing on the far side of the field. It seemed to him that he loved these, which he thought of as two sisters, even more than the pumpkins, which he thought of as a band of brothers. (Coetzee, 2004: p. 113)

Life And Times of Michael K-1983 portrays the civil and military violence in Cape Town. It explains that the innocent persons like Michael and Anna are uprooted from their ordinary village life. But in spite of the violence all around, Michael discovers bliss of life in cultivation. He speaks sparingly with people but he speaks much with seeds, melons, pumpkins, leaves, water, mountains, soil etc. These issues in the novel emphasize the importance of the bond between the natives and their land. The novel gives a call to allow the natives to be in love with their land and its environment. Through the silence of Michael, the medical officer insistently labels him with different allegation: "He is like stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding his own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand" (Coetzee, 2004: 135) The novel "Life and Times of Michael K" encapsulates the struggle of its titular character against the racial oppression entrenched in apartheid South Africa. The paper sets out to examine the racial deprivation

and adversity that shape Michael K's journey, highlighting how his experiences mirror the larger social injustices of his time. Michael revolts against this oppressive system and biological slavery organized in camp. The camp provides food, shelter and clothes but act like agency in making cheap labours prisoners forever. Michael was not satisfied with such prisoner life style. He wants to earn his bread as per his own discretion. While examining the whole context of the novel, it seems that deprivation hardship and social disintegration is all-pervasive and dominant in that time. So, the investigator think that the term "Time" used in the nomenclature of the novel, reflects the oppressive and dominant power of that time, which was destructive rather constrictive. Any way power was not helpful for common people rather it was a tool used by colonizers to exploit the colonized sections of the society especially in South Africa. With the help of camp life, Coetzee tried to make analogy of exploitation operated in "Time of war" in post-apartheid period. As Coetzee tried to highlight that the people in the camp are called a "nest of parasites". "Who eat substance, giving no nourishment back?" (P-3) There is a thin line of demarcation between a host and a parasite. The more powerful has an upper hand and can easily reverse the position. As navel delineates; "Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared parasite on the camp depended on no more than one who made his voice loudest." (Coetzee: "Life and Times Of Michael K-1983: p. 116) Michael K, a mixed-race man, embodies the intersectionality of racial deprivation. Through his journey, the paper examines how his racial identity exacerbates his struggles and frames his interactions with the oppressive society. His attempts at self-sufficiency reflect the resilience demanded by a system designed to marginalize him. Michael K's journey serves as a microcosm of the broader struggles that marked the apartheid era. As a mixed-race individual, he inhabits the liminal space between racial categories, making him particularly vulnerable to the systemic prejudices woven into the fabric of society. From the outset, the novel present Michael K as a quiet and unassuming figure, yet his existence becomes a canvas onto which the true colours of apartheid are painted. The historical and societal context in which Michael K's narrative unfolds is crucial to understanding the depth of his racial deprivation. Apartheid policies enforced segregation, economic disparities, and the subjugation of non-white populations. This context serves as the crucible within which Michael K's resilience is tested. His attempts to navigate this complex web of racial adversity mirror the wider challenges faced by individuals of his background during those tumultuous times. The novel's exploration of racial deprivation and adversity is poignantly reflected in Michael K's pursuit of a life outside the boundaries imposed by apartheid. His journey, marked by a relentless quest for self-sufficiency and a yearning for connection, highlights the dual nature of adversity: while it serves as a barrier, it also compels individuals to seek liberation from its constraints. Michael K's retreat to the rural landscape can be seen as an attempt to escape the suffocating grip of racial oppression, to forge a connection with the land that transcends the artificial divisions of society. As Michael K navigates his path, the novel delves into the intricate relationship between racial adversity and identity. His experiences force him to grapple with questions of belonging, self-worth, and the meaning of his existence within a society that systematically devalues his

humanity. The narrative exposes the psychological toll of racial deprivation, where personal identity becomes entangled with social constructs, and a sense of self is inextricably linked to the perception of others. Nature emerges as a powerful symbol within the novel, mirroring the dichotomy of racial adversity. The natural world offers Michael K a respite from the racial hierarchies of urban life, presenting a canvas upon which he can paint his own narrative. However, even within the embrace of nature, the echoes of adversity remain, illustrating how deeply systemic racism entrenched is within society's fabric. "Life and Times of Michael K" serves as a mirror to the societal inequities of its time, offering readers a glimpse into the lives of those navigating the labyrinth of racial deprivation. Through the lens of Michael K's journey, Coetzee paints a vivid picture of the profound consequences of systemic racism, while also celebrating the indomitable human spirit's ability to persevere amidst adversity. The novel's message resonates beyond its temporal and geographical confines, prompting reflection on the persistent struggles against racial adversity in societies across the globe.

### Conclusion

"Life and Times of Michael K" serves as a poignant exploration of racial deprivation and adversity within the framework of apartheid-era South Africa. The novel's portrayal of Michael K's struggle sheds light on the far-reaching consequences of systemic racism and inequality on individuals and communities. Through its nuanced depiction of resilience, adaptation and the quest for identity, the novel underscores the enduring impact of racial deprivation on human lives. "Life and Times of Michael K" serves as a testament to the endurance of the human spirit in the face of racial deprivation. By examining Michael K's experiences, this paper emphasizes the enduring relevance of the novel's themes, urging readers to reflect on the contemporary implications of systemic racism and the imperative of social change.

### Implications

The themes explored in the novel remain relevant today, as societies continue to grapple with issues of racial injustice and inequality. The story of Michael K prompts readers to reflect on the ways in which racial adversity shapes lives, fostering empathy and understanding for marginalized communities.

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