



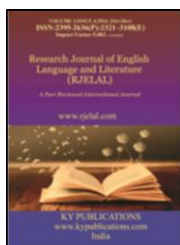
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AMBIVALENCE IN J.M. COETZEE'S *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*

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ABSTRACT

Waiting for the Barbarians highlights the colonial discourse and also projects the colonizer's ambivalence. Magistrate is a European in blood and colour but he wants to assimilate with the barbarians, his ambivalent possession leads him to mental agony.

Keywords: Ambivalence, colonizer, indigenous, feelings.

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Introduction

John Maxwell Coetzee is a South African writer. He is a Nobel laureate and two times winner of Booker Prize. His novel "*Waiting for the Barbarians*" is an allegory of South Africa's history. South Africa was under the control of two colonial powers, Dutch and the British for a long period. This novel portrays White's presence in the South African land.

Novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Coetzee's magnum opus "*Waiting for the Barbarians*" is narrated in the first person by the unnamed White magistrate of a small colonial town. There is a rumour that the indigenous people, called "barbarians" may attack the town. So there is a declaration of a state of emergency and with the deployment of the Third Bureau special forces of the Empire. Consequently, the Third Bureau captures a number of barbarians, brings them back to town, tortures them, and kills some of them. In the meantime, the Magistrate begins to question the legitimacy of imperialism and personally nurses a barbarian girl who was left crippled and partly blinded by the Third Bureau's torturers. The

Magistrate has an intimate yet uncertain relationship with the girl. The Third Bureau soldiers arrest the Magistrate for not being loyal to their own Empire and for helping the enemy. The Magistrate remains in a jail, experiencing for the first time a complete lack of basic freedoms. He finally escapes from the jail, but finds that he has no place to live; he spends his time outside the jail scavenging for scraps of food. After some days soldiers hastily left the town as winter approaches and their campaign against the barbarians collapses. The Magistrate helps the remaining town people to continue their lives.

The Concept of Ambivalence

The word "Ambivalence" means a state of having simultaneous conflicting reactions, beliefs, or feelings. The Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler first conceived of ambivalence as a fundamental symptom of schizophrenia. He used the metaphor of a "mental pendulum". The metaphor of a pendulum suggests an oscillation between bipolar opposites, the contradictory motivations, feelings or thoughts.

This concept was borrowed and used by Homi K. Bhabha in his postcolonial discourse. He

adapted the idea from psychoanalysis into postcolonial theory to denote a complex fluctuation of attraction and repulsion that marks the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Ambivalence in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

The Empire captured the town and guarding it against the barbarians; all the indigenous people are marginalized. All colonizers have the stereotypical assumptions that barbarians are illiterate, lazy, cruel, irrational, exotic and bizarre; the Empire is well-read, industrious, rational and sensible. They consider the natives as uncivilized other, barbarians and themselves as civilized self.

Colonizers torture the barbarians, they beat and kill them. Even though magistrate is working for the Colonial administration (Empire), he is different from other colonial administrators, he wants to help the barbarians. Tortures undergoing by the natives are heartrending. He is sickened by the torture and murder of the barbarian prisoners. He has the sympathy, he is in the place to control them but he is showing pity to them, thus coexistence of opposite feelings is started to haunt him.

Magistrate helps the barbarian girl who is made blind and crippled by the tortures, she is left all alone in the street, so Magistrate started to take care of her. Then gradually an ambiguous relationship develops between them. He wants to study her language and to know their ritual practices. But he is not able to learn it; it is a mysterious thing to him. He wants to learn and to be a part of it but he will never be a part of it, the dichotomy will exist.

For his betrayal to his own kingdom he is punished and arrested, after his return from the jail, he has no place to go. He helped the barbarians but they will not accept him, he is also not being acceptable by his own people for his betrayal so he is doubly alienated now. He wants to be a part of his culture and also he wants to mingle with the barbarians' culture, because of his double standard and dual mind setup he is alienated by both peoples. His contradictory thoughts and feelings lead him to mental agony. Magistrate says,

I am aware of the source of my elation: my alliance with the guardians of the Empire is

over, I have set myself in opposition, the bond is broken, I am a free man. Who would not smile? But what a dangerous joy! (Coetzee 1999, 76).

He is in a helpless state, estranged by both his own people and natives. He is in a position that he cannot go back to his own people, same time he cannot mingle with the barbarians so he feel alien in all sense. He is unwilling to be a part of his own people because of his ambivalent impulse he is ready to shed his own identity as the result he is "a part of neither here, nor there". His ambivalent impulse leads him to double alienation and makes him to live a life of in-betweenness.

Summation

As a colonizer, he is in a position to control and oppress the natives but because of his mental dilemma he doesn't want to do so, he is an unwilling colonizer. He is a loyal servant of the Empire but after witnessing a cruel and unjust defense of the Empire, he wants to prevent the persecution of the barbarians, for that act of rebelliousness he is branded as an enemy of the state. He leads a life with double alienation as a result of ambivalent possession. His complex fluctuation of attraction and repulsion marks the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

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