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Representation of reciprocal and cultural conflict in J. M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*: A Study in Post-Colonial Context

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Abstract

This paper is proposed to throw light on reciprocal and cultural conflict in the novel *In the Heart of the Country*, particularly in post-colonial context. As Coetzee is a linguist and Nobel laureate who has done great efforts to present the concrete and condensed reality of colonial people of South Africa. He has raised issues of colonial oppression and conflict among colonizers and colonized. Coetzee has been recognised as writer of marginalized and apartheid as well as a curtain raiser for presenting the harsh reality of sufferings of colonized. We cannot ignore the fact that post-colonial era has brought great reforms and improvements in the socio-economic conditions of colonized, yet there are various obstacles and challenges which have been inherited in minds of African aboriginal people who were earlier colonized by "white people".

Keywords- Reciprocal, Culture, Post-Colonial, Linguist, Conflict, African, Apartheid

As Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967) argues that "there is some psychological effects of colonialism on both the sides, colonizers and the colonized. Colonialism has suppressed the identity of native because continuous presentation of native as evil, pagan and primitive compels them to accept their identity as described by the white people. As a result, the native loose their own identity and perceive themselves in eyes of "the white". Therefore they give value and importance to the white people's notions and begin to accept their own 'self ' as evil, primitive, alone, desolate and isolated. As their own selves come to clash with their personalities and leads to inner-conflict and paves ways for cultural conflict at outer level. There is always a quest for reciprocal conversations but cultural differences and feeling of alienation, sense of discrimination stop the natives to speak to the white and vice-versa. For the white man, the native is always the 'negative', 'primitive' and 'other'".

The novel has autobiographical elements in form of vivid descriptions of a family

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who lives in South Africa. The novel has diverse aspects of life which include harsh and pleasant experiences of the story-teller. These experiences are representative one that represent the whole colonized people's experiences in a colonial land. There is an urge for independent, for liberty and for own identity. The novel has important evidences to prove the idea of reciprocal and cultural conflicts that take place in a representative family in colonial land. In the novel post-colonial elements as lack of identity, lack of cordial relations, dissatisfaction, unfulfillment, sense of fear, colonial violence, humiliation, community segregation, social isolation, familial loneliness, anger, jealousy, confusion and murder etc. prevails in the centre of every events of story. Magda, the interpreter of the novel as well as desperate and disappointed daughter of a farmer, here, in South Africa, she always seeks her own people, culture and someone who can talk to her and can share her feelings but cultural segregation and outcast state in the country makes her to suffer in isolation as she speak, "to my father I have been an absence all my life. Therefore instead of being the womanly warmth at the heart of this house I have been a zero, null, a vacuum towards which all collapses inward, a turbulence, muffled, grey, like a chill draft eddying through the corridors, neglected, vengeful" (Coetzee, 3).

She suffers in isolation and surrounded by loneliness because of reciprocal conflict between her father and herself. She is ignorant of her culture, she has never met with people of her own culture and society therefore she realizes herself mere an object of the house located in a foreign country. At one side she is not familiar with customs ,cultural values and beliefs of this land at same time she is not permitted to neither she likes to be friendly with native people, while in other hand her father avoids, neglects and does not give importance to her choices. These experiences led to give birth to cultural as well as reciprocal conflicts which are directed towards her own step-mother, father and native people. She has harsh sexual exploitation too, "the land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history...wooded when we were little by our masterful fathers, we are bitter vestals, spoiled for life. The childhood rape... I suffer, I am here" (Coetzee 4).

Magda is a representative lady who presents the reality of a colonized land and she also tells naked truth of women suppression and exploitation behind double walls - colonial suffering and patriarchal system. Women of such land suffer much higher in the name of patriarchy, where males dominate their lives and they lack their own right of equality, liberty they live with discrimination in worst possible manners. In case of Magda, she also cries for her own rights as a daughter and a lady but she lacks everything what she wants to enjoy and experience. She accuses her father for being oppressed at mental and physical levels, 'who is behind my oppression? You and you, I say, crouching in the cinders, stabbing my finger at father and step-mother" (Coetzee 5).

There is conflict between the white and the black, between the colonizers and the colonized, between the father and the daughter, between the natives and the foreigners,

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between the step-mother and the daughter, and these conflicts are results of differences among different cultures and traditions at state level and differences among beliefs, experiences, views, ideas and thoughts at personal level. These differences at cultural and personal levels give birth to reciprocal conflict along with cultural one. Magda hates her step-mother as her mother replaces the attention of her father from Magda to herself. Her father does not realise her emotions of aloneness. He never speaks to her as a friend and never makes effort to understand her need as a girl. Instead of this he involves in sexual pleasure with his new bride. Magda feels desolate, neglected and avoided in his father's eyes therefore she says, "the wound in my chest slides open. If I am an emblem I am an emblem. I am incomplete, I am a being with a hole inside me, I signifying something, I do not know what, I am dumb...There is no act I know of that will bring the world into me" (Coetzee 11).

Magda inner "self" communicates with herself and she feels surrounded by her own images and shadows. She finds herself in helpless where no one is presents to hear her, therefore she imagines to kill her step-mother. Her father is only one man available for her to communicate. But new bride has made it impossible to reach at him. As Coetzee and Bennet have observed that "there is conflicts at reciprocal level between step-mother and the daughter and at cultural level- her mother belongs to Black folk of foreign land" (Coetzee & Bennet).

These conflicts give birth to cruel intentions in the mind of Magda. She wants to kill her step-mother to get attention of her father. She is in odds with native traditions, people and beliefs of a foreign land. There is "superiority complex" in her mind in context of colonizers and colonized. There is a sense of superiority feeling in the mind of Magda, she may assume herself as "white". She feels such because she is living in a post-colonial world. In context of Magda, we get that post-colonial attitudes about which Edward Said presents in his work *Orientalism* (1978). He makes effort to show the cultural imperialism, which is this mode of imperialism impose its power not by force but the effective means of disseminating in subjugated colonies a Eurocentric discourse that assumed the representations of the 'oriental' as an exotic and inferior other. The term 'Orientalism' means cultural imperialism by means of the control of discourse not only in the orient but anywhere in the world" (Abrams 245). Apart from these feelings, Magda is searching her place and identity in a foreign land, land of subaltern. This is the term which refers to the native people of colonized countries. The countries which were once colonies of the white," the 'subaltern' has become a standard way to designate the colonial subject that has been constructed by European discourse and internalized by colonial peoples who employ this discourse; "subaltern" is a British word for someone of inferior military rank, the term denotes someone "under" (sub), "other" (alter)"... (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*:307).

She has visions of a complete woman who has marital relation as well as care of someone, who may love and give respects to her emotions of love and affection and

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ultimately she wants to experience the practices of child rearing as a mother. Magda mourns on her condition, "he has murdered all the motherly in me and left me this brittle, hairy shell with the peas of dead words rattling in it" (Coetzee 46).

She wants womanly warmth and affection for herself in eyes of her father. But in this deplorable and neglected condition it is impossible to get enough attention and care of her father. Therefore, Magda thinks to kill her step-mother. Such thoughts are into her mind, she accepts these thoughts are products of feelings of "fear and jealousy" as her position and rights as a girl or to lost her dreams of a complete woman or fear to lost her father. Magda is so hopeless with her life that she calls bad names to herself and "insects" to natives and beliefs herself to be surrounded by these insects, "No one is ancestral to the stone desert, no one but the insects, among whom myself a thin black beetle with dummy wings who lays no eggs"(Baral 22).

Her aloneness is broken by Hendrik and his wife Anna. She accepts Anna as a girl bride or child- bride and likes to share her feelings with Anna, but her father is infatuated towards Hendrik's wife that causes uncomfortable to Magda. Her distorted relationships with her father and newly wedded mother are veered off course which paves ways for her alielation. Magda wants to enjoy a life full of vitality, joy, happiness, closeness and affection with her father but his attention is not towards her daughter and he is busy with his new wife. She observes that her father creates absence wherever he goes he leaves absence behind him. It leads Magda to the world of gloominess, hopelessness, into self-build deep darker world of hollowness. There is intense gloom with severe pain of negligence which arises in her mind thought of murder of her father and newly wed mother. Magda has faith in this fact that it was her grandfather's influence upon personality of her father that he has lost his heart upon this hearth and barren land,"it was not he but my grandfather...why did he pass on no humanity to my father but leave him a barbarian and me too after him?" (Coetzee 57).

She always mourns her state of alienation and lack of affection as well as her outcast state in a foreign land and ultimately accepts that her birth, at wrong time and wrong place, is also strong cause behind her sufferings, "I am afraid, there is no mercy for me, I will be punished and never consoled afterwards...now i am wrong again, wrong, wrong, wrong as I have been since i was born at the wrong time, in the wrong place, in wrong body" (Coetzee 63).

Her childhood has suffered in hands of her father, she has experienced fear and terror in male dominated world. She finds herself helpless in patriarchal guardianship and always behaves in doubts mixed with fear, hesitation and suspicion. After having killed her father, 'she involves in sexual intercourse with Hendrik"(Baral 48).

Who in place of his salary demands for her loss of virginity with him, on her resisting from doing so, he forcibly rapes her many times. Ultimately she comes to realize that it is the processes and sufferings though which every girl must have to go through in her life in order to be a woman. Magda questions to herself that, "Am I now a woman? Has this made me into

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a woman? So many tiny events, acts, movements one after another, muscles pulling bones this way and that, and their upshot is that I can say, I am finally a woman, or, Am I finally a woman?"(Baral 133).

It is result of her sense of fear and separation that she wants to live with Hendrik and his wife, Anna, at her own farmhouse. Magda is now alone and her father is no more in this world. She is afraid of neighbors and local people of the adjacent farmhouses therefore she urges to Hendrik and his wife to live with her, "I need people to talk to, brothers and sisters or fathers and mothers, I need a history and a culture, I need hopes and aspirations. What will become of me now that I am alone?" (Coetzee,149).

But due to cross cultural conflict between Magda and Hendrik, they fail to understand each other and due to the conflict Hendrik does not believe in Magda's words; when she says that she will pay him after some time because now she has no money; he rapes her when she fails to pay him his salary, "Hendrik you are so bitter that you are completely blinded. I am not simply one of Whites, I am I...What more do you want? Must I weep? Must I kneel? Are you waiting for the White woman to kneel to you? Are you waiting for me to become your White slave?"(Coetzee 146).

Hendrik has no sympathy on the condition of Magda, in spite of helping her, he takes advantages of her helpless condition and rapes her continuously every night on her bed and on the floor of her room. Magda mourns on her condition that God has forgotten us and we have forgotten God. It is representative statement of Magda which is voice of postmodern era where we find that there is no love from us toward God nor any wish that God should turn his mind to us because the flow has ceased, "There are , it seems, no angels in this part of sky, no God in this part of the world...this is a land made for insects who eat sand and lay eggs in each other's corpses and have no voices with which to scream when they die" (Coetzee 134). At the concluding stage we can say that with the failure of her attempts to establish an equal and reciprocal relation, "Magda discovers that the racial conflict underlying the master-servant relationship is more pronounced and consequential than she has imagined it to be"(Baral 37).

Therefore she realizes that in a colonial condition, all forms of relationship and communication-filial, societal, marital as well as the colonial structure of kinship, lack of authenticity and reciprocity. In such a situation, she realizes the need to create a new order of authenticity that is possible only by subverting the old racist regime of colonialism. Coetzee says that his failure of reciprocity, which he termed as "poetics of failure", is a form of self-reflexive writing that is suspicious of an unproblematic, romantic liberal notion of the self. It is a metafictional commentary on the fictionality of the self" (Baral 35).

The failure of equal and reciprocal relations between the two races has established a South African society where master-slave relations developed interdependently who are not free from each other. In the absence of reciprocity, Magda is compelled to resort to creating

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fictions of the self, "I have uttered my life in my own voice throughout, I have chosen at every moment my own destiny, which is to die here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father's bones..."(Coetzee 172).

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