

An Overview of Women Empowerment in India and Africa

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Abstract

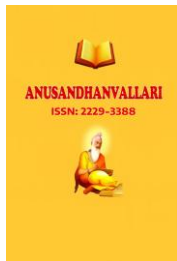
Women's empowerment and gender equality concepts are important in fostering heal and human development. Empowerment describes the process of change wherein an individual and prior inability to choose has the access and freedom to make choices. Gender equality is achieved when both men and women enjoy the same socio-economic rights and opportunities and have equal access to education, heal care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes. Gender equality can be effectively achieved through empowerment, comprising three broad categories, namely agency, resources, achievements, etc. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic at domestic or social levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence, institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance will be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry. For rehabilitation of victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence and for taking effective actions against the perpetrators of such violence. A special emphasis will also be laid on programmes and measure to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

Key words: resources, empower, customs, rehabilitation, trafficking

Women Empowerment in J.M. Coetzee's Novels

This article is based on Women empowerment. An Analysis of J.M Coetzee's '*In the Heart of the Country and Foe*' is aimed at unravelling the space of the woman narrator in the textual world of the South African writer J.M Coetzee. The first is an introduction through which the purpose and the impact of Coetzeean women narrators are analysed in general. *Foe* is an exclusive explication of J. M Coetzee's much acclaimed work *Foe*, the apprehension of Susan Barton as a powerful narrator and the multiple roles served by her in the trajectory of the story. *In the Heart of the Country* "which deals with Magda's role as the narrator in the median serving a demythologizing purpose shaking the foundations of patriarchy, colonialism and even unnerving the postcolonial premises.

The novels of Coetzee occupy a special place in South African literature. The analysis of the colonizing psyche, the emphasis on textual structures, the challenge to novelistic conventions, the self-critique and the position of holding the middle voice are certain characteristics of Coetzeean narratives. Coetzee is engaged primarily in exploring the potentialities and possibilities of fictional discourse. He very strategically locates himself in the "Complex historical past and in the fractured social present of Post-Apartheid South Africa" (Baral 12).



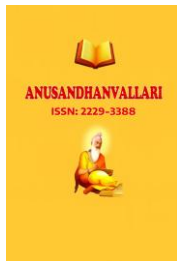
Coetzee's writing style and his themes exemplify the very art of writing which he tries to put forth through his fictional world. His informed understanding of the craft of writing and the self-reflexivity of Defoe and Lawrence Sterne, the art of writing of Kafka and other celebrated modernists along with vast exposure to the postmodern and post structural scenario of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and the negotiated location in South Africa where the postcolonial voices are primarily valid make him an able and effective wielder of strategic tools of writing. Coetzee's position in South Africa is in a complex relationship with the culture he partakes of. As a white South African writer Coetzee inhabits a very particular margin partly distanced from both African and English affiliations. This middle course- Noman's land- is where Coetzee is situated in a dubious position of non-affiliation and non-belonging. This complex issue of identity is highly essential in locating Coetzee as a postcolonial writer. Attwell uses the term "colonial postcolonialism" (Attwell112) for the middle -the median- position that Coetzee occupies in his response to the South African situation.

The woman narrator in Coetzee functions as the author as well. Magda's diary gets unravelled in *In the Heart of the Country*, while *Foe* develops through the progresses of Susan's journal and letters. *Age of Iron* deals with Elizabeth Curren's letter to her daughter living in exile in America. There is an element of uncertainty and self-doubt regarding the act of writing in the mind of the woman author and she self-consciously scrutinizes her authoring, making the process of writing as self-reflexive and dubious as possible. Susan is dubious about her prowess in the art and craft of writing and the way the writing happens easily surprises her as if she did not expect it to happen. She says, "Some people are born storytellers: I, it would seem am not" (*Foe* 81). Magda is also unsure about the authenticity and certainty of her writings when she says about "these words passing through my head on their route from nowhere to nowhere" (*In the Heart of the Country* 56).

Coetzee addresses the feminist issue in *Foe* through the character of Susan Barton, who gets to narrate the story of Cruso and his island episode. Susan Barton in Coetzee's *Foe* challenges the erasure and absence of women from the discourse of patriarchy. She is a symbolic representative of the feminist challenge and serves as a site for addressing other ideological issues connected with woman's discourse and Coetzee's location in it. Susan is a counter discursive figure in questioning the canonical text and the discursive universe associated with it. She serves as a space for the inculcation and stabilization of imperial ideologies by keeping a relationship of complicity with the dominant ideologies. Susan Barton also serves the role of the liberal feminist in her efforts to civilize Friday. She is also used as the vehicle for addressing the ambivalent position of Coetzee in South Africa. Susan Barton problematizes the question of authority and control in the narrative. Susan is the site of *Foe's* intersection with Roxana.

In the Heart of the Country dramatizes the location of Magda in a no man's land between the woes of settler colonialism and the anguish of the black natives. She is represented as trying to authenticate her existence through the undated journal that she writes without preambles or epilogues. The text is an intriguing one as Magda as a narrator is a beguiling one with several versions of the same event coexisting simultaneously in the space of the narrative. There are various levels in which Magda serves as a signifier for the narrative power of women. She is the subtle, yet powerful voice of the colonialist negotiating her in betweenness effectively and powerfully. She is a conspicuous symbol for the compromising, blunt locale of the settler woman representing a discourse lost and written off.

Magda has murdered her father repeatedly in several ways and patricide is a symbolic destruction of patriarchy and this gesture makes her the unequivocal feminist. The lyrical ending of Magda's narrative in a mood and tone of tranquillity in a contented harmony with her father upholds the female awakening in a lost saga of patriarchal colonialism and interrogating feminism. These novels of woman's power are Coetzee's voice from the median too where the interrogation of authority takes place without apparent authorial or authoritative garb, yet effective.



“Coetzee’s adoption of the feminine narrative voice constitutes both a strategic evasion of a lack of an adequate vantage point from which to speak and a strategic encoding of that lack of authority in the figure of the white woman” (Ransey 248).

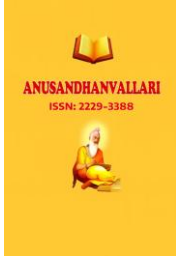
The figures of the white women narrators invest Coetzee with a power to criticize the dominant ideology without being overtly interrogative. They provide a space for being dialectical without being antagonistic. The white women narrators’ inability to carry the discourse to where they would want it, their inability to authorize, their incapacity to liberate and their inadequacy for toppling the narrative make them essentially significant in the Coetzeean scheme of narrative. They remain, “As vehicles patrolling the boundaries of the subject’s breakdown” (246).

Foe as an intertext of Robinson Crusoe problematizes the issue of women in all its diverse forms. But the finale of the novel suggests a “maze of doubting” (*Foe* 135) where the world of the feminine and the feminist conflate with the world of the postcolonial whose voices have been appropriated and manipulated by the same power structures albeit various ways. The contention here is that *Foe* celebrates the Other, the half colonized Other and the genuine Other and when their submerged voices emerge from the wreck or the abyss where the two discourses conflate in a rare but pertinent manner, it is the colonialist or the patriarch who takes a back stage, losing their dominant discourses among the uncertain infinity of ‘Omega’.

The fact that Susan Barton is given the role of the narrator indicates the thwarting of Crusoe story of Defoe. Crusoe of Defoe has been manipulated to be the Cruso of Barton’s story. Unlike Crusoe in Robinson Crusoe who is supposed to have kept journals that elaborately deal with his island adventures, Cruso in *Foe* is presented as a dull old man engaged in futile labour. It is Susan Barton who equals colonial Crusoe by being innovative and maintaining a journal. Cruso just remains at the periphery of Susan’s discourse. She proves herself to be spirited and practical with suggestions regarding ways to get out of the island. She defies the ideological expectation of patriarchy and is a representation of an enlightened woman. She does what men generally do, and what a woman is not expected to do. Coetzee’s use of Women narrators problematizes the issue of “Appropriation and colonialization” (Kossel 170).

The male author’s elaborate use of the woman narrators renders the location of the author as well as the narrations in a highly compromised position of ambivalent complicity from which both of them are not exempted. Robin Visel uses the term “half colonization” (Visel 39) for the predicament the white woman narrator and she argues that the white settler women narrators are as colonized and marginalized as their native sisters without the settler sisters ever being aware of it. “[The woman colonizer] too is oppressed by white men and patriarchal structures; she shares in the power and guilt of the colonists” (39). That is why Visel describes the position of the white woman narrator as half colonized rather than double colonized like their native counterparts.

This sums up Coetzee’s purpose and objective with regard to the deployment of women narrators in his textual space. Coetzee’s ambivalent stance in South Africa and its problematic politics have facilitated the effective narratorial presence of women narrators in his novels where he has a definite purpose of interrogation of the canons and challenge of authority. Though Coetzee has used women narrators in other novels, the project chose to look at the way the women have been hijacking the narratives in *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country*. As asserted above, in these texts he was trying to employ a kind of triumphant subversion in order to question centres of power from the vantage point of a non-position and the effective roles of women as narrators suited his plans very well. The project looked in to the diverse impact of women narrators in the textual space of the selected texts and came to certain conclusions regarding the use of women narrators and the conspicuous function which they serve in them.



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