

**Tribhuvan University**

**Strength of Culture in J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K***

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## Abstract

J. M. Coetzee's widely circulated and highly acclaimed novel *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) deals with the severe imposition of restrictions and confinements undergone by the central persona Michael K in the backdrop of civil strife due to the apartheid and its terrific persecution in South Africa. Whatever the situation may be, Michael K is firmly determined to continue the life of a normal gardener which is his traditional occupation and the culture. He never surrenders before any type of suppression and imposition, and struggles to revive his culture which is great strength that energizes him to be creatively rebellious. That is why he frequently escapes away from the captivation in the hostile situation even though he is never deserted by the war.

Despite the restrictions and confinements by the colonial imposition, Michael K continues, reinvigorating his cultural awareness and passion for blooming the wilderness which enables him to resist for the freedom or independence.

Finally, Michael K becomes able to retain his lost identity of a successful gardener by escaping from the confinement or the detention. The mystery behind his success to escape from the captivation is very comprehensive for the strength of the culture that does relate to him. This is because J. M. Coetzee examines the strength of culture on which Michael K is entirely rooted for the resistance of all the opposing forces and indoctrinates the sense of liability or responsibility towards his native culture and its unavoidable significance.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Culture, Novelist and the Text Issue

The term 'Culture', a multi disciplinary word, comprises of various dimensions. Indeed, the very term seems to have been derived in English language from the Latin word "Cultura" stemming from colere, which means "to cultivate" in the soil (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). It generally refers to patterns of human activities and the symbolic structures that give such activity significance. Different definitions of "Culture" reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity.

In general, the term "Culture" denotes whole product of an individual, group or society of intelligent beings. It includes technology, art, science, as well as systems and characteristic behaviors and habits of the selected intelligent entities. In particular, it has specific and more detailed meanings in human activities. We may notice that different human societies have different cultures, and the personal culture of one individual can be different from others. It is also the totality of human existence and way of living with some special social traits e.g. customs, social institutions, art, literature, philosophy, music, economy etc. People, in order to survive follow the act of cultivating rather than other means of acts. Though, they can be employed at any work except cultivating but they don't get enjoyable and leave for seeking their right location for cultivating. Ultimately, nothing comes to be the best alternative than the act of cultivating which is so sweet and full of light by resisting all the colonial opposing forces.

Similarly, the New Encyclopedia Britannica has defined culture as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior. Culture, thus, defined

consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies, and other related components; and the development of culture depends upon man's capacity to learn and to transmit knowledge to succeeding generations.

Sociologists and anthropologists have offered a number of definitions of human culture, reflecting various schools of thought. Edward Burnett Taylor, in his *Primitive* (1871), provided what has been termed the classic definition, according to which culture includes as capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Every human society has its own particular culture, or social cultural systems is attributable to physical habits and resources, to the ranges of possibilities inherent in various areas of activity, such as language, rituals and customs, and the manufacture and use of tools; and to the degree of social development. The attitudes, values, ideas, and beliefs of the individual are greatly influenced by the culture in which he lives, and an individual may, of course, live in or travel among several different cultures. In comparing cultures, ethnocentrism is the tendency to interpret or evaluate other cultures in terms of one's own. Cultural relativism, on the other hand, is a comparative approach that derives from an understanding and appreciation of cultures different from one's own. Adaptation and change take place within and among cultures by means of ecological and environmental changes; diffusion of advantageous cultural traits among societies at approximately equivalent stages of cultural development; acculturation, or the acquisition of a foreign culture by a relatively subject people; or evolution of cultural elements over a period of time.

Culture may be viewed in terms of component patterns (cultural traits, cultural areas, and cultural types) and in terms institutional structure and functions (social organization, economic systems, education, religion and belief, and customs and law).

Human culture may also be subdivided for study into non urban culture as compared with modern urban culture, and into feudal, peasant, or tribal societies as distinct from modern industrial society, also called mass society.

J.(ohn) M.(axwell) Coetzee, one of the prominent Afro-American novelists, was born in Cape Town, in 1940 and educated in South-Africa and the United States. He is the best regarded post-colonial author, who often depicts the vivid socio-cultural influences through the fictional fabrications in which the certain characteristics of the people are shown to be embroiled by the turmoil of civil strife in South-Africa. He is the receiver of Nobel prize of 2003 for literature and Booker prize of 1983. Coetzee has been living in the U.S.A. and making cultural studies. Some of the successful works that he has ever issued by now are *Dusklands* his first work. Immediately after he wrote *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which was awarded Geoffrey Fabour Memorial prize and the James Tait Black Memorial prize. This very novel, *Life and Times of Michael K* is the winner of Booker prize of 1983. Coetzee's other works include translation, linguistic studies and literary criticism.

Coetzee's widely circulated and highly acclaimed novel, *Life and Times of Michael K* penetrates to dig up the cultural issues which merely stand as the 'strength of culture' and the germ of hope to subsist of those who are the migrants and they are entirely in the verge of whereabouts circumstances that is jeopardized due to the oppression, exploitation and inconvenient situation created by the civil strife. So far, all the aspirations of livelihood are endangered by the unwanted colonial oppression and subjugation of whole way of life style of South-African migrants from countryside to the metropolis. Whereas seeing no way out to subsist in the turmoiled situation, the migrants follow the way back to their root or the birth place of their



ancestors so that they can live their unobstructed joyful life following their typical act of cultivation which is so sweet and comprehensive.

The utmost desire for retrieving own culture has no limitation. And it is so intrinsic and profound. One can never consent and compromise to live a life devoid of the actual realm of own culture. The acute thirst of own culture ever encourages to succeed for leading up to the destination intended. Innumerable obstructions may appear on the way of an adventurous journey but they are nominal and easily overcome. That is what exactly the main characters Michael K and Anna K are endowed some special characteristics in the novel. While the usual life style is obstructed due to the turmoil of civil strife in the Cape Town, Michael K and his mother, Anna K who is severely afflicted from dropsy, a gross swelling sees no way out to stay and continue their life style any longer in Cape Town and so make the decision to go back their birth place Prince Albert where they could bloom the wilderness with full swing of own cultural test.

Though, the unquenched as well acute thirst pushes up them towards their culture or the birth place but the unjust and adverse colonial imposition and ban on traveling stand as the vital obstructions before their pious intention of going back to their birth place (which is often termed the cultural place). Michael K though, gathers the courage and commences the trip pushing his feeble mother in a wheelbarrow but the mother dies en-route in the hospital. He bears the ash of the mother and vows to reach up to Prince Albert. He is caught and captivated in the camps but he, time and again escapes away from the camps and makes an effort to march to Prince Albert despite of the several obstructions imposed under the colonial regime.

J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. deals with the lived experience of the central character Michael K. He expresses the ideas regarding his incessant

struggle throughout his life in order to maintain the glory of his livelihood in his own ancestral location e.g. Prince Albert with some certain traits of cultural aspects. It does not depict only the civil strife due to the unjust apartheid in South Africa but also reflects the hostile socio-economic, political, and cultural circumstances prevailing in the life of Michael K. Whence he is entirely embroiled in the turmoil of restrictions and confinements in pseudo colonial camps. He has to undergo several metamorphosis as well transitional phases of his experience in suppression, persecution, and exploitation in times of his cultural dislocation. However, he keeps on escaping from the confinement of the detention of colonial power and rest of the opposing forces that persistently follow him. Taking an adventure to escape from the clutch of colonial forces in order to be stationed in the realm of his ancestral cultural location, the notion of the strength of culture that is inherent in Michael K. can be discerned as the centripetal concern of the novel.

The central characters of this novel, Anna K. in general and Michael K. in particular, are South African and therefore they typically and duly represent the entire Pan-African lifestyle including all of the ways of South African lifestyle. They are deeply accustomed and rooted in their cultural act of cultivation. However, they are culturally dislocated as well as politically dominated, suppressed, and exploited under the imperial subjugation. Nevertheless they consistently continue their struggle to resist the encroachment of all the unjust and cruel opposing forces by having their belongingness. Though, Anna K unfortunately departs en route to her origin because of her deteriorating and pathetic health condition, yet the spirit of her aspired aptitude for the revival of departed culture is inherited by her successor Michael K after all strong determination. He carries out the inevitable desire of his mother to revive own culture and inhabit there in full of joy with own cultural root and its sweetness.

Exposing the bitter reality of the condition between the encroachment of the colonial and imperial types of forces and the resistance against it through the conscientious attachment to the own culture in an artistic manner in this novel *Life and Times of Michael K.*, J. M. Coetzee examines the strength of culture in which Michael K and his mother Anna K. are deeply rooted in order to resist the intrusion and violence of all the opposing forces and to imbibe the sense of responsibility towards their native cultural existence. Commenting on Coetzee's emphasis on the assertion of the strength of South African culture to resist the forces of hegemony, Helen Tiffin has termed Coetzee's novels as 'counter-discourse' in his 'Post-colonial Literature and Counter-discourse.' As he says that the impulse of counter-discourse is seen behind Coetzee's masterpiece *Foe*, the same type of impulse underlying the strength of Michael K's perseverance for the revival of own ancestral or traditional culture in *Life and Times of Michael K* cannot be denied. By presenting this novel in the totality of Coetzee's novels, Tiffin further highlights it as the post-colonial novel that resists the colonial and imperial type of hegemony in an allegorical manner. To speak in his words:

Though complex and disorienting, Coetzee's novels are brilliant allegories (or quasi allegories to use George Lemming's term), fables where South African roots demythologize and decode the historical myths of imperialisms. (197)

Considering *Life and Times of Michael K* as an allegory, Tiffin also highlights the realm of native culture in South Africa where the roots of this allegory lie in to demythologize and decode the historical and contemporary myths of imperialism. It is in this sense that J. M. Coetzee's novel *Life and Times of Michael K* highlights the strength of vital vigour of culture.

## 1.2 Critical Overview on *Life and Times of Michael K*

*Life and Times of Michael K* is one of J. M. Coetzee's most acclaimed and comprehensive novels which secured Booker prize in 1983. After the publication of this novel in 1983, many critics have paid their critical attention to it. Some of the critics have commented in it as Coetzee's way of presenting the artistic writing. Some others have commented on this novel as the manifestation of post-colonial assertion for the independence and freedom from the slavery and injustice. However, the prime concern of this novel is the strength of South African culture to resist the encroachment of colonialism, imperialism and all the opposing forces in South African cultural paradigms.

*Life and Times of Michael K* shares the varied characteristics common in the totality of J. M. Coetzee's novels. The socio-political and economic sphere of life in South Africa is aptly depicted even in the novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. It is a novel which depicts a man's life and his times embroiled in a hostile political and social conditions. In this novel, Coetzee draws the picture of the destitute and common folk lower baffled by unpredictable suffering and crisis in life. H M Tiffin criticizes on this novel from the perspectives of post-colonialism as a counter-discursive text. He further remarks that it is a rewriting of the archetypal myth of Robinson Crusoe. In order to comment in the nature of imperialism and colonialism, Tiffin argues, Coetzee has restructured the earlier myth typically in a different manner especially to expose the conquest of the virgin territory, the persecution of 'the other' and the nature of the totalitarian regime. In Tiffin's words:

Only for Michael K of *Life and Times of Michael K* does the desert briefly bloom. More a persecuted Friday than a Crusoe imperialist, he has little time; however, to enjoy the fruits of his isolation before

society attacks his peace. Coetzee rewrites the archetypal myths of Robinson Crusoe to comment on the nature of imperialism and colonialism, the conquest of the virgin territory, the persecution of 'the other', and the nature of the totalitarian regimes. For Coetzee, too the desert image has special relevance for South-Africa in terms of lack of shared culture, a feeling of anomie, a feeling of solitariness, a feeling of not having human ties with the people around one.(198)

As Tiffin has commented from the perspective of Counter-discourse, it is quite obvious that he is trying to pin-point the vital issue of Pan-African culture that functions as a means of resistance. Tiffin magnifies counter-discourse as a resistance in Coetzee's novel but he does not become straight forward to opine what gives the strength to produce the counter-discourse.

In spite of Tiffin's indirect reference to the strength of culture that is both the means and goal of Michael K's life in the text, his oblique reference to the resistance of colonialism and imperialism is suggestive of the strength of the culture that Coetzee in fact probes in the text. Commenting further he writes:

If the earlier narratives are recounted from the perspective of those who are implicated in the imperial purpose, most of *Life and Times of Michael K* is told from the perspective of those it controls. Michael K attempts, in his highly political novel to live outside of politics and history. As it is clear in Coetzee's earlier works, the 'real heroes' are those who attempt to escape, history, not those who connive in its making. (198)

Though Tiffin presents his elaborate commentary about Michael K as a hero of Coetzee's underlying philosophy of escaping from history and politics, yet he does

not mention what gives Michael K the strength to succeed to escape from them. What he does not directly come to the point is that the strength of culture emboldens Michael K to succeed to escape from what he calls politics and its violence imposed upon him. It is the dominant point formed by this researcher. Nonetheless, Tiffin explores the sense of escapism dominant in the novel, *Life and Times of Michael K*.

Another criticism of this novel *Life and Times of Michael K* is remarkably highlighted in Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature. In this encyclopedia, Coetzee's novel *Life and Times of Michael K* has been mentioned as follows:

*Life and times of Michael K* (1983), which won the Booker prize, concerns the dilemma of a man of limited intelligence beset by conditions he can neither comprehend nor control during the civil war in an unnamed country. (255)

This comment hints at the trauma of a common man, Michael K, who suffers from the predicaments of his life due to the lack of broad knowledge and inability to comprehend the ongoing socio-political reality exposed suitable to him. But it does not expose total expedition of the hero who struggles to maintain gardening as his traditional culture. It is the utmost strength of the culture of Michael K that fuels the energy to undergo the pain and bear the panic suffering in his total expedition. It is in this particular idea that the research of the present researcher will revolve around to opine the conclusion that Michael K inherently deserves the strength of his culture which is typically shown as gardening.

There are some other critics who have analyzed the text in terms of their massive research. Specially, pertaining to the central character of the novel Michael K, Mike from Raleigh, NC USA, has stated that the whole novel concentrates on the issue of an individual versus society. He also says that Coetzee's philosophical

attitude towards an individual struggle for independence from belligerently poignant forces is dominant in the text. To speak in his words:

Written at a time that apartheid was very strong, Coetzee gave a philosophical to life in the environment, which in this case is a surreal post-civil war South Africa with all the horrors that come with the aftermath of a civil war, especially an African civil war. However, Michael K makes the effort to shield himself from the harshness of his environments or situations where society makes it difficult for a private person to live a personal life that is independent of the forces of the environment. (April 6, 2005)

Indeed, Mike does address the harsh environment of the society in which Michael K suffers, and therefore, attempts to protect himself from the social harshness. But Mike does not pin-point the influence of culture that is inherent in Michael K, which enables him to continue his attempts during the prolonging incarceration and succeed to retain gardening as his cultural existence. The present researcher finds the strength of pan-African culture dominantly inherent in Michael K, and therefore, he intends to highlight it.

Similarly, another reviewer, Hilde Bygdevoll from London, United Kingdom, has referred to the motto of life-long struggle of the central character Michael K in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. He states: "K continues to flee from the camp where he is held. We follow his struggle to live his life the way he wants to free and as one to nature" (August 27, 2002). What Bygdevoll intends to say is that Michael K continues his struggle through his life in order to achieve the glory of his culture. The motto of K's life is to lead a free and independent life from restrictions and

confinements. Therefore, the vigour of his cultural passion makes him succeed to achieve his targeted goals of life.

Michael K is an imaginative figure of Coetzee's fundamental concern with the strength of a native culture. He has created this sort of character so that his underlying philosophy of the strength of culture would be manifested in terms of human struggle. However, some critics have regarded Michael K as the anti-hero of the novel. For instance, Jennifer Braun from Santa Rosa, CA United States, has conceived Michael K to be an anti-hero who is the voice of sanity in a world full of voice of hatred and confusion.

Each sentence uttered by Michael K, the anti-hero of this book, is the voice of sanity, understanding, compassion and truth in a book full of voices of hate and confusion. Of course, it's Michael K who is alleged to be the idiot, the simpleton. He's the only one who has chosen to listen to the voice inside each of us that says, 'This is poison, avoid it, that is paradise, experience it now and stay here'. (January 9, 2003)

Jennifer Braun doesn't penetrate the obscure fact that Michael K has an insight that compels him to search for his ultimate goal of life as a free man involved in gardening. So, he calls him an anti-hero. But, K is in fact infatuated with his culture and therefore keeps on struggling to maintain it. Therefore, he is the hero in his journey to carry out the responsibility towards his native cultural existence.

Michael K has been compared and contrasted with Kafka's character too. Kafka's characters are generally perceived as the victims of circumstances. Comparing and contrasting Michael K with a character from Kafka, Thomas M. Say from New York, California, United States writes:



Like a character from Kafka, we never learn Michael K's last name. However, unlike Kafka's characters he chooses a different response to the oppressive society in which he finds himself. He chooses dissertation. Rather than take on the system, he flees it and tries to construct a life of dignity. (September 30, 2002)

It is obvious in the text that Michael K struggles very hard (like Kafka's character) to live a life of his own and (unlike Kafka's character). He succeeds to escape each and every obstacle to achieve the goal. In this sense, M Seay also doesn't refer to the very idea of the culture in which the basic impetus of Michael K to continue his struggle to desirable goal of his choice of living a life of a gardener is deeply rooted.

In addition, some critics have raised an existential issue in this text. They are of the opinion that Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* does have some serious connection with human existence and its crisis due to unprecedented war and violence. For instance, Joe Soler from Philadelphia, PA USA, says that this book namely *Life and Times of Michael K* makes us to think about our own existence. To speak in his own words:

This book perhaps the easier to read of Coetzee's but it is nonetheless not easy. This book captures so much of what it is to exist. His simple-minded main character's confusion and struggles are so well articulated that we see through his eyes and experience his feelings. Like all of Coetzee's work, this book makes you think about your own existence and makes as I read along questioning our purpose and place in the order of thing while capturing want to me seems to be a convincing sense of the unease of the whole nation of South Africa in these transitional times. (July 19, 2002)

Joe Soler has pointed out the serious concern of human existence in the novel. However, he doesn't imply the ground on which Coetzee has made his central character Michael K to stand. Therefore, the issue of the strength of the culture has to be properly settled in order to make a comprehension of the entire text.

In this way, J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* has been criticized from different angles or the perspectives. Therefore, the present researcher is going to analyze this text from the perspective of the cultural strength. The next chapter will highly elaborate about the concern with the culture and its relationship with human existence. It will also clarify what the actual strength of culture means and how J.M. Coetzee has probed to justify it duly in his novel *Life and Times of Michael K*.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Discussion of the Tools**

#### **2.1 Cultural Strength and Identity**

Regarding the cultural strength and identity, many critical thinkers and theorists have produced various opinions. Though their views differ from the major issue of culture, yet the very crux of their fundamental concern lies in the practical impulses potentially inherent within the culture and its identity. This inherent potentiality underlying the cultural vigour, efficacy, power, stamina, effectiveness and fortitude of a native place is properly understood as the strength of culture which is directly associated with the identity. Such strength is considered as truly inherited by those are mostly responsible towards their cultural existence with the identity. The inherited quality of such a cultural strength is manifested through the resistance to all the opposing forces that try to encroach in the cultural identity and ruin the very spirit of identity and existence. Apart from it, the strength of culture also means the influence of a particular culture and identity of a certain area upon those who are deeply rooted in it. Since the very strength of culture is deeply rooted in human conscience, people can never forget their responsibility towards their native cultural existence in order to protect their identity. And also they can never ignore the value and paramount significance of their own culture and its identity even at the last hour of their material extinction. This sort of awareness echoes frequently in the mentality of the people which ever intends to inculcate to the people with their cultural affinities and the sense of their responsibility towards their native cultural existence is triggered by the vigorous strength inherent within their culture upon they are deeply accustomed to construct and continue their identity and existence. Whenever we discuss culture to a wide range of the theoretical discussion, many critical thinkers

and theorists have generated different views. Though their views diverge from the major issue of culture, yet the locus of their fundamental concern lies in the pragmatic impulses potentially inherent within the culture. This inherent potential underlying within the cultural vigour, efficacy, stamina, effectiveness and fortitude of a native place is properly understood as the strength of culture. Such strength is considered as truly inherited by those who are mostly responsible towards their cultural existence. The inherited quality of such a cultural strength is manifested in the resistance to all the opposing forces that try to encroach in the territory of cultural premises and ruin the very spirit of existence. Not only this but also the strength of culture means the influence of and particular culture a certain arena upon those who are deeply rooted in it. Since the very strength of culture is deeply rooted in human conscience, people can never forget their duty and the responsibility towards their ancestral cultural existence. And also, they can never ignore the value and paramount importance of their own culture even at the last hour of their material extinction. This sort of awareness in the particular people to inculcate the sense of their responsibility towards their traditional cultural existence is triggered by the strength inherent within their culture upon which they are deeply rooted.

The strength of culture has also been conceived and construed as the passion that lies within the very spirit of culture. It is the vigorous and passionate zeal for becoming prosperous in the domain of own cultural horizon indeed. So believing in the cultural passion, Matthew Arnold has stated:

Culture [...] has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light. It has one event yet greater! - The passion for making them prevail. It is not satisfied till we all come to a perfect man; it knows that the

sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are sweetness and light. (8)

Arnold has rightly indicated the true idea of love and emotion that every culture possesses. This very idea of love and emotion towards the strength of culture is the notion of infatuation and fascination towards sweetness and light. Arnold states that peace and prosperity bloom in sweetness and light and therefore every one has the passion to maintain the glory. He, furthermore, questions, does any one not have the desire of sweetness and light? Where does that desire come from? Of course, it is the vigorous strength of the culture of traditional habit that triggers the desire in human conscience to possess sweetness and light, and therefore, it's not a disgrace for human being to strive for common goals. The passion for cultural heritage in human conscience always leads to the direction of sweetness and light. Those who are searching for the brightness and charm in their life are said as guided by the impulses of their cultural passion. Therefore, there is a symbiotic relationship between cultural identities and the people's existence those who are deeply rooted in it.

Because of having a penchant on sweetness and light, culture does have its attachment with power and authority. Since power and authority are inseparably intermingled and correlated with the passion for sweetness and light, civilization cannot be conferred without cultural vigour, its strength and identity. However, civilization in terms of construction and reformation of culture and identity has got its permuted relationship with the very notion of culture and identity as already defined. It is because of this reason why F. R. Leavis says civilization and culture to be antithetical terms. To speak his words:

Civilization and culture are coming to be antithetical terms. It is not merely that the power and the sense of authority are divorced from

culture, but that some of the most disinterested solicitude for civilization is an apt to be, consciously or unconsciously, hostile to culture. (18)

Here, Leavis aims to say that the lack of a thoughtful care for better progress in construction and reconstruction of cultural dimensions for civilization metaphor in advancement is belligerent: which is why the power and the sense of authority are completely and unanimously associated with the cultural vigour which seem to be divorced from culture. But in fact, the power and the sense of authority are unanimously associated with the cultural vigour-the strength of culture and identity. Since power is the construction of the cultural passion, it has the sense of authority. Therefore, power and authority are correlated in terms of cultural identity. In this way, F.R. Leavis also draws our attention towards the strength of culture and identity. The cultural identity makes people bold to acquire power and exercise it in the open and broad atmosphere of happiness and delight with the perfect sense of authority which functions independently to grasp the space of cultural identity.

Furthermore, the strength of cultural identity also helps to sustain cultural values, norms, and meanings in the sense of universality. The cultural values and norms as well as meanings of a particular tribe are always kept alive by social inheritance. Such social values and norms are represented by the individuals and the social institutions as well. Raymond Williams has clearly stated about this function of the strength of cultural identity. He says that an individual is enabled to enrich his life and sustain his progressive impulses in attaining the aspired achievements by the very strength of culture and its identity upon which s/he is deeply rooted. Williams states:

For it seems to me to be true that meanings and values, discovered in particular societies and by particular individuals, and kept alive by

social inheritance and by embodiment in particular type of work, have provided to be universal in the sense that when they are learned, in any particular situation, they can contribute radically to the growth of man's power to enrich his life, to regular his society and to control his environment. (49)

On the basis of this sense, every culture has its own significant stamina which is always inherited by generation after generation. This type of cultural stamina functions like an elixir to keep the culture alive. People, who are deeply rooted in their culture, are also enlightened by the very elixir they get from their culture with its identity. This sort of cultural elixir gets manifested in their actions, behavior and the very way of life they live in. Culture comes to appear the prime factor to push people to reach up to their culture what is their actual identity. People remain indulgent to vitalize and flourish their prior life-style. Here, to strengthen culture means to remain committed to achieving success in the fulfillment of common aspirations, desires and achievements in terms of cultural ties that bind people in a strong communal relationship. Even in this sense, the strength of culture and identity plays an outstanding role to succeed people to resist the encroachment of all the opposing forces that try to ruin their way of life-style.

## **2.2 Invasion and Defense**

Along with the emergence and dissemination of post-colonial criticism and the post-colonial theory of discourse, culture has been deciphered and perceived in different ways having divergent interpretations. Because of this reason culture by now has borrowed the terminologies of other fields of criticism as well. Often cited terminologies in the study of culture are 'Foucauldian notion of power and discourse' and Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony.'

Hegemony basically refers to domination which can be evidently seen everywhere even in cultural paradigm. This hegemony and domination among cultures give passage to the concept of invasion and resistance. Defence is an act of protecting from hegemony imposed by others. Post-colonial perspectives emerged from the colonial testimony of third world countries and the discourses of minorities within the geographical divisions of east and west, north and south. They create their critical revisions around issues of cultural differences, social authority and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent movements within the rationalization of mentality. Due to this region there is cultural clash and conflict in which culture functions as an agent of defender in the name of modernity, culture incorporates the colonial attitudes and encroaches as colonial force on the ground of traditional space and identity. On the other hand culture also functions as a means of defender to the colonial attitudes in order to preserve its identity and rationalize the existence.

Cultural hegemony necessarily throws light on Antonio Gramsci's term 'hegemony.' Gramsci has made an analytical distinction between civil and political society in which the former is made up of voluntary organizations like schools, families, the unions, the latter of state institutions like the army; the police etc., whose role in the polity is direct domination. Culture is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and other persons work not through domination but through what Gramsci calls consent. In society not totalitarian, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as 'hegemony'.



Gramsci studied and investigated how ruling class maintains its power in society by winning the consent of the ruled. His most widely accepted concept 'hegemony' describes how cultural and ideological domination of the minority by majority functions, and how that domination is accepted by both groups. In other words, a social class achieves predominant influence and power within the society, and that the subordinated classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression. Postcolonial critics Ashcrofts, Griffiths and Tiffin define Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' by describing it as, "the power of ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all" (66). The ruling class experiences power upon subordinated or ruled classes not through force and fraud but through shaping the 'common sense' of people. It shows that the colonized willingly accept to being ruled because they think the ruling class is superior to them.

Edward Said in his book *The World, The Text, and The Critic* uses the word 'culture' to suggest an environment, process and hegemony in which individuals and their works are embedded, as well as overseen at the top by a superstructure and at the base by a whole areas of methodological attitudes. He says, "It is in culture that we can seek out the range of meanings and ideas conveyed by the phrases belonging to or in a place" (8). Culture has been defined in various ways. It is used to signify not merely something to which one belongs, but something that one possesses as Said says, "culture also designates a boundary by which the concept of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture come into forceful play" (9). It shows that the idea of culture is used as possessing possession. Similarly, culture is also used as a power by the virtue of its elevated or superior position to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict and validate. In the words of Said, "the power of culture is to be an agent of and perhaps the main agency for, powerful differentiation within its domain and

beyond it too” (9). Culture tends to dominate not only within its boundary but beyond too.

If we turn off the pages of history, we find that culture has been involved in making hierarchies and binaries; it has separated the elite from the popular, the best from the less than best, and so forth. It has also made certain styles and modes of thought prevail over others. But its tendency always seems to move downward from the height of power in order to expand itself in the widest possible range. Said finds the discrimination in the nineteenth century European thought which he asserts in the following lines:

The entire history of nineteenth century European thought is filled with such discrimination as these, made between what is fitting for us and what is fitting for them, the former designated as inside, in place, common, belonging, in a word above, the later, who are designated as outside, excluded, aberrant, inferior, in a word below. From these distinctions, which were given their hegemony by the culture, no one could be free, not even Marx-as a reading of his articles on India and the orient will immediately reveal. (13-14)

We find that the large cultural national designation of Europe as the privileged norm carries with it other distinctions between ours and theirs, between proper and improper, Europe and non-Europe, higher and lower and we find them in all subjects like linguistics, history, race theory, philosophy anthropology and even in biology. In this way there is a continual process of reinforcement as Said says “There is no region to doubt that all cultures operate in this way or to doubt that on the whole they, to be successful in enforcing their hegemony” (14).

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said explains a more general relationship between imperial ideology and the workings of culture argues that even the small world drawn by the treasured literary icon Jane Austen is deeply imbricated in the material facts of European colonialism. Said argues that people conceive of culture as a refining and elevating element and it has been each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. He further clarifies by an example:

You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights. In time, culture comes to be associated often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates us from them almost always with some degree of xenophobia. (xxiv)

In other words, culture has been a source of pride and identity as well as a combative one. Culture is taken as a sort of theater where various political and ideological factors engage one another and it is even conceived as a battleground. Said believes that authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class or economic history.

"... very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure. Culture and the aesthetic it contains derive from historical experience..." (xxiv).

Though, there is the formal end of colonialism in these days, but still there is a mode of new colonial domination within the independent societies; independence has not solved the problem. So the process of resistance is a continuing process to erode the different forms of imperial exploitations. In this whole process postcolonial theory came into being. Stuart Hall, in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", says:

In the postcolonial societies, the rediscovery of this cultural identity is a passionate research... directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-dependent, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regarded to others. (111)

Post-colonial criticism bears witness to these unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest of political and social authority with in the modern world order. It focuses us to “engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of value and meaning often composed of incommensurable demands and practices produced in the act of social survival”. (23) as claimed by Saroj Sharma Ghimire. However, Foucauldian notion of power and Gramsci’s concept of hegemony clearly state that culture encroaches on the ground of traditional sphere and identity. However, when there is invasion of any kind of opposing forces, let it be colonial or cultural or any thing else, it is the same cultural spirit that unfolds the blaze of defense to the invasion in order to inculcate the sense of responsibility towards the cultural existence and to preserve it as already claimed by Arnold and Williams. Because of this sort of invasion as such in terms of representation and functions, culture has coined the notion of resistance in contrast to the notion of invasion as such.

Moreover, the transnational aspect of cultural transformation, migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. It is from the hybrid location of cultural value the transnational as the translation that the post colonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project. This sort of hybrid location is created due to the dualistic conception of invasion as a colonial force and defense as an anti colonial persistence

in cultural paradigms. In this regard, the subjugating and dominating colonial forces gave birth to the tendency of invasion. The invasion was in the field of society, economy, politics and after all culture and whole life style of the people which brought the awareness in common people to protect their culture from the brutal forces of colonization. Thus, instantly the concept of defense sprouted and started acting as force of preventing a cultural identity. In this way the concept of defense against invasion started.

Similarly, Edward Said's interest in studying the relationship between east and west having stood in a position of a cultural critic rather than radical political theories also magnifies the significance of invasion and resistance. On the other hand he sees the scope of orientalism as matching with the scope of empire, on the other hand he focuses on culture representing as well as functioning as a form of hegemony. In terms of representation culture embodies the spirit of hegemony and invades on the ground of autonomous identity and in terms of function it creates defense to any sort of invasion. As result, there is a hostile confrontation between culture as hegemony and culture as autonomy. In this connection Said finds Matthew Arnold as using culture as a powerful means of differentiation. Culture is an ideal construct for Arnold "but Said argues that culture with its superior position has the power to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, devote and validate in short i.e. the power of culture to be an agent of and perhaps, the main agent of powerful differentiation with in its domain and beyond it too"(9). In other words culture for Said is not only the positive doctrine of the test that is thought and known but also differentially negative doctrine of all that is not best. This double standard faceted view of culture makes one aspect of culture more powerful than the other. Culture thus becomes the powerful means of domination and appropriation.

However, it can be argued that culture also includes a refining and elevating element; each of the society is the reservoir of the best that has been known and thought as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1960. It comes to be associated often aggressively, with the nation or the state which brings difference from 'us' to 'them'. It distinguishes us in the name of resistance where as it differentiates other from us in the name of invader. Culture, having engaged with various political and ideological causes has therefore been very contested space of the invasion and its defense even in the study of cultural studies.

### **2.3 Pursuit of Origin**

Each culture does possess its own origin about which one may completely be passionate. One ever struggles persistently to revitalize own's own culture despite several challenges on one's way back to the origin. Own's culture is completely different from the others and it is always interconnected with the domain of its own and that is so sweet. The origins of such culture are exercised or sustained by the individuals as well as the society people who exercise its beliefs, norms and values. However such beliefs, norms and values are also endangered by the terrific and fatal encroachment of the opposing forces such as colonial and imperial suppression, oppression and subjugation. In such situation the strength of culture enhances or instigates to lead towards the origin and enables one to proceed for the pursuit of origin. And it is also the vital force to maintain the glory of existence of the culture.

For instance, cultural criticism treats culture as a process not as a product. Concerning culture to a lived experience of people or an individual, it suggests that every culture is constituted at any given moment in time by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, occupation and similar factors that contribute to the experience of its members. It thus encourages one to seek

for the sweetness of origin. It further suggests that each culture is always in interaction with various interactive cultures. Because of this reason domination of one culture upon another culture may take place and suppression, oppression and exploitation may come to the existence. This suppression and persecution creates the ditch and hierarchy among cultures. And the suppressed ones feel as if they are treated as an inferior and their culture is in danger. This sense of cultural identity impels one to oppose subjugating opposing forces and keen as well as intense fascination towards their origin and own cultural realm.

Therefore, it is in the case of this sort of domination, oppression and exploitation that the origins of a culture are revived by its strength in order to resist the violence upon its paradigms and to recover its originality. To support this argument, Lois Tyson says that cultural criticism analyzes the operations of suppression, oppression and exploitation by not viewing the oppressed people as helpless victims like political theories sometimes do. It signifies that culture provides strength of survival even for a poor person. This new stamina for survival is due to the pursuit of origin. In his opinion “like new historicism, cultural criticism views oppressed people as both victimized by the dominant power structure and capable of resisting or transforming that power structure [294]”. The dominant power structure is sometimes recognized as colonial and imperial force that causes violence in the ground of culture. Though people are dominated and exploited in the violence, yet they are capable for resisting or transforming that sort of suppression, oppression and exploitation by the means of the strength of their culture. The strength of their culture helps them revive the origin in which there lies the originality of their cultural existence. It is in this sense that the revival of the origin takes place to safeguard and maintain the existence of culture.

Here, it comes to be clear that the subjugating and suppressing opposing forces try to bring the situation of cultural hegemony of colonial and so called high culture up on low culture. This situation of hegemony brings the essential awareness about the need and necessity of the culture. This very awareness is the key to create the sense of pursuit for origin and its preservation.

#### **2.4 Sense of Belongingness**

Every one is naturally habituated to and attracted towards ownness which is entirely pure and pious and cannot be distracted and contaminated despite several attempts and go in vain. The sense of belongingness is an abstract idea which is acknowledged naturally or by birth. Indeed, a human being gets birth in a family with some particular way of life style and certain code of conduct. Also there are certain cultural influences that are far catchier as well as unforgettable. One is deeply rooted in the realm of ownness. It is acquired from the different sources but it is entirely intangible, unseen and full of attraction and motivation. There are several guiding principles which really become the prime factors of hope of subsistence. Various people can have different hopes and aspirations during their life time and on the basis of them they proceed with various activities. People in course of their civilization adopted varied way of systems and later on they developed as the convention of their way of life style. One is always hanging after a monolithic idea i.e. culture, which is an indispensable and multi-disciplinary word with a complex and still open history. The term 'culture' in English is derived from the Latin word 'cultura' which means the act of cultivating the soil. This very act of cultivating the soil is called the culture and it evokes the sense of belongingness. Later the term has been applied to any custom, art, social institution, literature, music etc. which is cultivated and practiced in society. Culture, therefore belongs to the realm of broader human consciousness



that is both developed and shaped by society, religion, history and geography. This system of inherited conceptions is expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men perpetuate and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life. It is in this sense that culture triggers the sense of belongingness. It also makes people to yield to acquire some stimulus concept that further contributes for shaping the size and strengthen their situation in the society. In due course, culture is the creation of the meaning in terms of which human beings obstruct their structure, the actual existing network of social ties. In this sense, culture and social structure are different aspects despite of the similar phenomena.

According to the anthropology, culture means the very part of the environment that is the creation of man. In general sense, a man of culture is s/he who can speak languages other than his own, who is familiar with history, literature philosophy, fine art of whose actions and behaviors are controlled and guided by wisdom and judgment. For the anthropologist, however, to be a human is to be cultured. There a number of cultures in the world i.e. American, British, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, Nepali, Russian, etc. They have different way of life style. Clyde Kluckhohn in his *Mirror for Man* opines:

A good deal of human behavior can be understood, and indeed predicted, if we know a people's design for living. We cannot explain acts solely in terms of people's biological properties, their individual past experience and the immediate situation. The experience of other men in the form of culture enters into almost every event. Each specific culture constitutes a kind of blueprint for all of life's activities.  
(qtd. in Ramji Gautam 13)

Similarly, Sir Edward Taylor in 1871 finds culture as taken in its wide ethnographic sense, “is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd. in Ramji Gautam 13).

The twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of more precise significances on culture and theories on it and literature. Matthew Arnold, one of the prominent theorists of the twentieth century, argues. “Culture is a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concerns us, the best which has been thought and said” (1). For Arnold, culture seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself freely-nourished and not bounded by them. Culture has certain strength in that sense. Arnold having stood in the conservative stance separates high and low culture and he has a deep reverence to the tradition. He opines that to impair the sacredness, to dislocate the customs inherited from the tradition is to take a step backwards into darkness and anarchy. In his opinion, culture has its roots in tradition. Therefore, to inherit culture means to inherit the tradition. Associating culture with the tradition, Arnold highlights the sense of belongingness. F. R. Leavis, taking these Arnoldian assumptions, develops them in actual accounts of, and encounters with, popular culture. Like Arnold, the Leavisites believe that culture has always been minority keeping. In this way, culture in the sense of belongingness is further highlighted.

The idea of culture as people’s ‘whole way of life’ first came in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the publication of works in culture and culturalism by Richard Hogart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Stuart Hall, the scope and function of culture

has achieved extension. Eventually, culturalism has become an approach that insists analyzing the culture of a society, the textual forms and documented practices of culture, it is possible to reconstitute the patterned behavior and constellation of ideas shared by the men and women who produce and consume the texts and practices of that society. William defines culture by distinguishing three ways of thinking about it:

First there is the 'ideal' in which culture is a state of process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values. Second, there is the 'documentary record'; the record texts and practices of culture. Third, there is the social definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institution and ordinary behavior. (58)

William's first definition of culture as 'Ideal' is essentially the discovery and description, in lives and works, of those values which can be seen to compose a timeless order, or to have permanent reference to the universal human condition. Having got the ideal of the state or process of human perfection in terms of certain absolute or universal values, culture as the sense of belongingness is clear. This sort of ideology of the process of human perfection belongs to certain absolute or universal values, a homogenous faith upon this sort of ideology. So, William's conception of ideal notion of cultural belongingness is a right assertion. In addressing the 'complex organization' of culture as a particular way of life, the purpose of cultural analysis, Williams argues, is "to understand what a culture is saying, what a culture is expressing: 'the actual experience through which a culture was lived'; the important common element; a particular community of experience" (41). This cultural

analysis as a method of reconstituting a particular way of life-establishes both the general perspective and the basic procedures of culturalism.

This perspective and this set of procedures are evident in E.P. Thompson's monumental 'The Making of the English Working Class' but differs with Williams and other writers in the insistence that culture always exists in conflict and struggle to establish particular ways of life rather than evolving to form a particular way of life. However, his exploration of culture in conflict and struggle does also rest upon the ground of belongingness.

By mid-twentieth century, notion or the concept of the cultural belongingness has undergone tremendous changes. Raymond Williams' normative meaning of culture of people's entire way of life contrasts the ethnographic concept of culture as the complex whole which accommodates knowledge, belief, morals, laws, custom, and any other capabilities and behaviors acquired by human-being. Though there is a contrast between the normative meanings of culture and ethnographic concept of culture, yet both of them share the common ground of belongingness. Indeed, in normative usage, culture still claims to represent the organic voice of people. Out of this conflict between culture in the ethnographical sense and culture in the normative sense, there arose a third way of using the term as that refers neither to a people's organic way of life nor to the normative values indoctrinated by leading intellectuals but to a battle ground of social conflicts and contradictions. It further intensifies the concern of belongingness in cultural horizon. This view of culture also emerged because of the conflict between the traditional impulse and progressive impulse. Such a potential of any type of cultural impulse is also understood as the strength of culture. Though there is conflict between the traditional impulse and progressive impulse, yet both of the impulses generate the sense of belongingness in terms of cultural

paradigms. Contrastive perspective regards culture as static and fixed but modern perspective emphasis on culture as an ongoing process of formation and reformation. From the theoretical perspective one cannot assume a single, central culture that renders individual experience coherent and meaningful, for it is inescapably different, divisive and dissonant. However, culture in the sense of belongingness is always rooted deeply in human conscience and because of these activities like conflict, struggle, encroachment and resistance keep in appearing in the sphere of cultural belongingness.

Culture is seen as indeterminate site of conflict that cannot be pinned to a single totalized meaning. Cultural studies are a multi or post-disciplinary field of inquiry which blurs the demarcations between it and other subjects. As intellectuals emphasized that the intellectual promise of cultural studies lies in its attempt to cut across diverse social and political interests and address many of the struggles within the current scene, Richard Johnson describes cultural studies as “a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge and codify it” (qtd. in Grossberg et al.).

In terms of Marxism cultural studies, defines it in two basic ways. Firstly, to understand the meaning (s) of culture we must analyze it in relation to the social structure and its history. Although it is constituted by a particular social structure with a specific history, it is not studied as a reflection of this structure with a specific history. On the contrary, cultural studies argue on the importance of culture which is derived from the fact that it helps to constitute the structure and shape the history. Because of this significance, culture does have its autonomous identity. Secondly, cultural studies assumes that capitalist societies are the societies which are divided unequally along, for example, ethnic, gender and class lines. It is argued that culture is one of the principles sites where these divisions are established and contested: Culture

is a terrain on which there takes place a continual struggle over meaning (s) in which subordinate groups attempt to resist the imposition of meaning which bear the interests of dominant groups. As Tony Bennett explains, cultural studies are committed “to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with and within, relations of power” (qtd. in Storey xii).

It is such a guiding principle, which develops culture as an ideology. The very ideology is the thematic aspect in cultural studies because it means the mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imageries, imagery of thought, and the system of representation which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works. While looking culture from this perspective, Karl Marx’s opinion “we make culture and we are made by culture, there is agency and there is structure” (qtd. in Storey xiv) is significant. And John Fiske maintains, “culture in cultural studies in neither aesthetic nor humanistic in emphasis, but political” (115). What he means by this is that the object of study in cultural studies is not culture defined in a parochial sense, as the object of supposed aesthetic excellence, nor as a particular way of life, whether of people a period or a group. Stuart Hall defines cultural studies as “a project that is always open to that which it does not yet know, to that which it can’t yet name” (278). Again he argues, “it can’t be just any old thing chooses to March under a particular banner. It is a serious enterprise, or project and that is inscribed in what is sometimes called the ‘political’ aspect of cultural studies” (278). And he treats culture as the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society as well as the contradictory forms of ‘common sense’, which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life.

The cultural studies transcends of a particular discipline such as literary criticism. It studies about the 'discursive formation' i.e. a cluster of ideas, images and practices which provide way of talking about the forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, Social activity, or institutional site in society. Thus, a good deal of cultural studies is centered on question of 'representation', that is on how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us. The central strand on cultural studies can be understood as the study of culture as the signifying practices of representation, which requires us look for the textual generation of meaning. It also demands investigation of the modes by which meaning is produced in a variety of contexts. Cultural representation and meaning have certain materiality since they are produced, enacted, used and understood in specific social context. Culture is articulated with moment's production but determined necessarily by that moment. The meaning of a text (a culture or set of practices is produced in the interplay between text and reader so that the moment of consumption is also a moment of meaningful production.

In this way, while the time passes on, many perspectives and theories regarding culture have emerged assimilating and disrupting the new concept and foundation of culture in cultural studies. But, it still remains difficult to pin down the boundaries of cultural studies as a coherent, unified, academic discipline with 'clear cut' sustentative topics, concept and methods which differentiate it from other disciplines. As such contradiction lies in culture since it is defined and interpreted differently by different scholars in different context. Some cultural theorists and scholars like Matthew Arnold, E. P. Thompson, F. R. Leavis define and theorize culture having the parochial sense of tradition. They treat culture as the preservation of the past customs and beliefs. Raymond Williams also, through the definition of

culture as an 'ideal state or process' holds the conservative stance, or to have permanent reference to the universal human condition. He has asserted dogmatism in the name of culture, however, he, somehow, believes that "culture is a signifying system through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, and explored" (55). The people guided by the 'traditional impulse' regard that the meaning of cultural form of cultural practice is inscribed inside its form. They conceive culture as static and fixed like the water of pound and this staticity and immobility is the dominant value of culture.

In opposition to this conventional or traditional belief on meaning of culture, some cultural theorists and scholars have delivered their opinion that culture is an ongoing process of formation and reformation. In this connection, Stuart Hall claims that culture cannot be one thing. He argues "cultural texts and practices are not inscribed with meaning, guaranteed once and for all by the intention of production, meaning is always the result of an act of 'articulation', because meaning has to be expressed, but it is always expressed in a specific context, a specific historical moment, within specific discourses" (Storey, xii) as stated in introduction.



## Chapter Three

### 3.1 Cultural Elements in *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee

Coetzee's one of the best and highly acclaimed novels *Life and Times of Michael K* is an artistic reflection of cultural elements deeply influencing in an individual's life. The rigorous manifestation of the cultural reality in the novel exposes the influence and impact of cultural elements in one's life. In the novel, Michael K and Anna K are directly influenced by culture. Basically husbandry, growing, cultivating and breeding grains with the use of agricultural apparatus are cultural elements in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. Indeed, culture is defined as the act of cultivation and the novel also has ample evidences of act of cultivation and husbandry.

In the novel, Coetzee makes Michael K his main character as the gardener. Coetzee magnifies the cultural passion inherent in Michael K. Michael K commences living the life of his own as a gardener in his native place. Gardening is the realm of his cultural paradigm in which he enjoys the super bliss and ecstasies with sweetness and light. Slowly and gradually there emerges the sense of cultural passion in Michael K. Thus, Coetzee narrates the cultural elements ruling and evolving in Michael K. For instance, he says:

This was the beginning of his life as a cultivator. On a shelf in the shed he had found a packet of pumpkin seeds, [...]. In the space of a week he cleared the land near the dam and restored the system of furrows that irrigated it. Then he planted a small patch of pumpkins and a small patch of mealies; and some distance away on the river bank, where he would have to carry water to it, he planted his been, so that if it grew it could climb into the thorn trees. (59)

Here, Coetzee has exposed the process of gaining identity and happiness through act of cultivation. Michael K starts the act of cultivation in his soil. As soon as he starts cultivation he feels the beginning of his life. He gets the meaning of his life. It shows that culture is so powerful in one's life that provides meaning, light and sweetness in one's life. Michael K found a packet of pumpkin seeds then he cleared the land near the dam starts the irrigation and then planted a small patch of pumpkins and a small patch of mealie. Wherever he engages in the act of cultivation he feels pleasure and sense of rejoicing. This extraction from the novel justifies the predominant cultural element in the novel. Basically the act of cultivation of Michael K and his satisfaction and happiness in the act of production proves that culture provides strength to an individual to construct and continue his identity and existence.

Similarly, there is another strong evidence of cultural element prevalent in the novel that is the dream and desire of Anna K to die under the blue skies and to reach her own native place. While defining culture, we come to know that culture is the totality of living standards in one's life. It comprises language, costumes, lifestyle, religion, rights, rituals etc. All these factors of life in one's life fall under the culture. In the novel Michael K and Anna K are from agrarian based village i.e. Prince Albert. Husbandry, cultivation, simplicity and calmness are their cultural aspects. But as they are far from their village to the city of Cape Town they often dream and desire for attaining their cultural realm. In the novel for instance, Anna K, Michael K's mother exclaims her desire and says:

Lying in bed in her airless room throughout the winter afternoons with rain dripping from the steps outside, she dreamed of escaping from the careless violence, the packed buses, the food queues, arrogant shopkeepers, thieves, and beggars, sirens in the night the curfew, the

cold and wet, and returning to a countryside where if she was going to die, she would at least die under blue skies. (8)

Here, the desire of Anna K to die at least under the blue skies carries dominant cultural element in the novel. In fact, one feels like blue crystal clear environment only in the realm of own culture. Anna K actually wants to remain and enjoy in own cultural realm. Furthermore, she shows the strong desire to release her last breathe in her own culture that means in own birth place where she was born in the agro based cultural family in Prince Albert.

This citation of novel also shows two types of culture in South-Africa. One is the culture of city of Cape Town which is full of careless violence, packed busses, the food queues, arrogant shopkeepers, thieves and beggars and sirens in the night. This is the heart shaking and horrible culture of city which is being modernized. But Anna K and Michael K cannot adopt and enjoy in such city culture. That is why their own culture of agrarian based attracted them to get back to the Prince Albert and die under the blue skies. This reference in the novel is really very dominant cultural strength on an individual's life.

In one instance in the novel Michael K compares himself with the worm. The worm is the creature which dwells, infertiles, unloosens, and increases as well enhances the fertility of the soil. It is also the preserver of the soil and its productivity. As an earthworm is important for the soil an individual is equally essential in a culture to its continuation and preservation. Here, by comparing Michael K with an earthworm J. M. Coetzee intends to expose the cultural elements and Michael K as a preserver and producer of such cultural elements. Michael K involves and enjoys the act of preserving culture. Michael K feels that he is common and insignificant but has

great role and influence in his culture. J. M. Coetzee has compared Michael K with an earthworm. It's stated:

K tossed restlessly on the cardboard. It excited him to sly recklessly,  
*the truth, the truth about me. 'I am a gardener,'* he said again, aloud.  
 On the other hand, was it not strange for a gardener to be sleeping in a  
 closet within sounds of the beating of the waves of sea?  
 I am more like an earthworm, he thought. Which is also a kind of  
 gardener. Or a mole, also a gardener, that does not tell stories because  
 it lives in silence. But a mole or an earthworm on a cement floor?  
 (182)

All these evidences show that Michael K is a gardener. He preserves the pristine and pure identity of his culture. He is the main source to preserve the sweetness and light of his culture which illuminates the life and its warmth. This very comparison with the worm justifies the influence of culture upon Michael K and the role of Michael K in culture. There is indispensable relationship between culture and individual life. One borns, grows up and dies in the culture. It is the strength that invigorates to confront any sort of challenges and difficulties of life and to continue the life. In the novel, *Life and Times of Michael K*, the major character Michael K is embroiled in the turmoil of civil strife. His life is full of difficulties but yet, he continues his life because he gets strength, vigour and vitality through culture. Though he stays in silence he is a worm loosening the soil and constantly involved in creativity and productivity. This instance in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Life and Times of Michael K* exposes vital cultural element and its strength.

In the novel, Michael K becomes excited whenever he sees the wide extending vines of pumpkin and melon. He feels pride and satisfaction when he becomes able to

produce pumpkin and melon. It shows that one becomes happy and satisfied when his or her culture extends, gleams far and wide and it gives warmth and light. So the passion and desire for cultural warmth is so strong and intense that cannot be expressed in terms of words. Michael K overwhelms with full of tear. His eyes start raining when for the first time tests the taste of pumpkin. He is also always afraid of the opposing the brutal forces upon his culture which can batter his culture. In the novel, donkey in garden is taken as the opposing brutal force for culture. In this regard, we can say that South-Africa was colonized by Europeans. As a result South-African culture was being battered by European industrialized and urban or city culture. So the sense of colonial effect upon native culture is also shown in the novel. J. M. Coetzee, in the novel states:

The donkeys did not come back, nor did the eleven men, nor did the helicopter. The pumpkins grow. In the night K would creep about, stroking the smooth shells. Every night they were palpably larger. As time passed the permitted the hope to grow up again in his breast that all would be well. He wake up during the day and peered out over the acre, from under the grass a shell here and there glinted quietly back at him. (113)

These lines show that Michael K is really conscious and careful to save his culture. There are of course, opposing forces which can intrude and smash the light of his culture but Michael K is always worried and careful upon such negative forces of culture and he feels pride and pleasure when his culture extends. Here, his hope is associated with the growth of pumpkin and preservation of them. It means our life and hope is also directly related to the preservation and continuation of our culture as Michael K feels. In another instance Michael K expresses over joy and excited to eat

the pumpkin grown by himself. He says “He chewed with tears of joy in his eyes. The best, he thought, the very best pumpkin I’ve tested. For the first time since he had arrived in the country he found pleasure in eating (113). This statement reveals intense passion in an individual to retrieve in his culture and cultural paradigm. In the novel Michael K weeps when he eats the product of his own toil. His eyes overflowed with the drip of tears when he tasted the product of his toil. It means one’s satisfaction and success is entirely influenced and determined by his culture. It is the cultural element and cultural strength that constantly inspires or instigates to seek the taste of life and meaning of existence. That’s why cultural element is dominant factor to provide strength in an individual which is clearly reflected in Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*.

The novel draws the intruding situation in one’s culture. It means Coetzee shows the impact of colonization upon South-Africa and its culture. This issue of colonization and decolonization is also cultural aspect. Coetzee reveals that South African non western agrarian based culture was invaded by western industrial and modernized culture. In this situation of cultural intrusion, Coetzee wants to preserve and continue South African culture. In the novel Coetzee’s hero Michael K requests hostile forces to handover their agricultural tools if they want to see their happiness. The tools in farming like ‘pikes’, ‘spade’, ‘sickle’, ‘shovel’ and the act of digging reinforced in the novel in order to save the culture and show the love for culture. Michael K suggests opposing forces to give back his cultural tools and says:

If they really want to forget us forever, they would have to give us picks and spade and shovels and command us to dig, then when we had exhausted ourselves digging, and had dug a great whole in the middle

of the camp, they would have to order us to climb in and lay ourselves down. (94)

Since South-African culture was confiscated by the vast empire of colonizer, Coetzee is making clever and conscious attempt to retrieve his own culture by requesting colonizers to give back his cultural tools. It is silent way of protesting colonization and easy way of getting back cultural warmth. He says if colonizers want to forget their colonized people and their sadness, they must handover their previous farming based tools like picks, spade, shovel, sickle etc. By using these tools, Michael K intends to extort and shock the sweet nectar of his culture. He wants to get the depth of his culture. He wants to dig the deep and safe hole where he can feel safe and warm. He wants to reach up the paramount of his culture. It means agricultural activities and rustic color of life is essence of his culture in which he wants to dwell and feel the warmth of life. This part of novel of course, reveals the cultural element and its influence in one's life. In this regard we can say that Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* consists of fabulous cultural elements that reinvigorate to find the strength and stamina in the life of hero Michael K.

### **3.2 Search for Identity**

An individual is always searching for one's own identity, what makes him/her to search self-identity persistently? And what does make him/her to retrieve or regain it? What are the mighty forces that oppose and create the obstructions to an individual from gaining it? Coetzee has tried to answer these questions by manifesting the very strength of the culture. Coetzee means to say that the strength of culture is tangible when someone makes a search for the identity. Coetzee treats the search for the origin in terms of belongingness. For instance, Anna K, Michael K's mother in the text *Life and Times of Michael K*, dreams of returning back to the origin.

Lying in bed in her airless room throughout the winter afternoons with rain dripping from the steps outside, she dreamed of escaping from the careless violence, the packed buses, the food queues, arrogant shopkeepers, thieves, and beggars, sirens in the night the curfew, the cold and wet, and returning to a countryside where if she was going to die, she would at least die under blue skies. (8)

Here, the imagery of 'careless' violence 'the packed buses', 'thieves and beggars,' 'sirens in night', 'the curfew', 'the cold and wet', is suggestive of unfavorable conditions in an alien place that compel in individual to search for the identity.

Coetzee intends to focus of the significance of the identity. By identities he means to state the native culture in which an individual as safe and secured form tumultuous condition and hostile. It is because of the same reason Coetzee has Anna K. dreaming of returning to countryside.

Anna K's desire to go back to the countryside has some connotative meaning. First of all, it connotes that one having strong desire can never forget the importance of his or her native place. And then, it conveys the meaning of the strength of culture that draws every individual's attention towards the root. The life in native place is in fact, rooted upon the native culture, and therefore, to have a desire to live in the native place means, no doubts, to possess what Matthew Arnold has rightly said the 'sweetness' and 'light' of culture. Referring to the strength of culture, Arnold states: "Culture [. . .] has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light. It has one even yet greater ! – the passion for making them prevail" (8). It is in this sense that the passion of Anna K's pious devotion to culture pulls her retrospective inclination mind and therefore, she tells her son Michael K. to take her to the countryside where she was born.



Moreover, the strength of Anna K's culture is identical with the reason behind her dream of running away from the hostile environment of Cape Town and sustaining her life in the sweet and bright atmosphere of Prince Albert. It does have the significant connection with what Stuart Hall states:

If you work on culture, if you have tried to work on some other really important back to culture, if culture happens to be what seizes hold of your soul, you have to recognize that you will always be working in an area of displacement. (284)

Here, Hall means to say is that cultural displacement and alienation making an individual search for the happiness of his or her original culture. In the same way, the sense of homelessness and rootlessness is also identical in Anna K's propositions because she is culturally displaced and alienated as well. She says, "What I don't understand is why they don't let me know anything. What must I do if someone knocks on the door and says I must clear out at once, he wants the room for his domestic? Where must I go? (17-18). Conspicuously, her concentration drawn towards her culture where she will at least not feel as alienated as in Cape Town. Here, Coetzee treats her as a victim of rootlessness and therefore compels her to research for her identity in order to examine the strength of culture.

Coetzee intends to prove the fact that there lies the strength of culture behind the search for the identity. That is why the search for the identity is very strong. For instance, Michael K. is firmly determined and confident enough to reach up to the destination of his mother's desire. Despite of several challenges, he shows his vitality to continue the search. Therefore, he says, "We'll try again but next time we'll go by the back roads. They can't block every road out" (23). The fact is quite discernible

about why he dares say so. He dares go by the back roads because he has been guided by the strong and vehement passion to exist in his native culture.

Furthermore, Coetzee makes quite clear about the origin of Anna K and her son, Michael K. By making it blatant he intends to lead the readers to a cultural paradigm. For instance, Anna K. knows that her health is worsening and may be she can't reach her destination. Therefore, she tells her son everything about her root. She says: "I forget the actual name of the farm, but we can ask people will know. There was a chicken-run and a pump up on the hill. We had a house on the hillside. There was prickly pear outside the back door. That is the place you must look for" (27). The house on the hillside, the farm, prickly pear outside the back door, a pump on the hill, are some of the images that characterize and vitalize the strength of the feature of culture. It is in this way that Coetzee valorizes the culture of husbandry in South African grain. Anna K's proposition, 'that is the place you must look for', is in fact Coetzee's assertion that everyone must look for what Arnold has already stated the sweetness and light that lies in everyone's culture.

In the very same way, Coetzee treats Michael K, the very persona of his novel, as an instrumental figure emboldened with the vigorous passion for the search of identity presents Michael K as an ambitious person. To fulfil his ambition of retaining own culture, Michael K continues his struggle carrying his mother's ashes, after her death, despite of the innumerable troubles he faces during the search. Coetzee shows the vigour of cultural passion in an artistic and mysterious way. For instance, he tells that Michael K perceives the super bliss of his native atmosphere. Coetzee presents the impact of cultural influence upon Michael K. clearly in the following lines. "I could live here for-ever, he thought, or till I die. Nothing would happen, every day would be the same, and there will be nothing to say. The anxiety that belonged to the

time on the road began to leave him" (47). Here, Coetzee means to state that when someone comes closer to the target during the search, the anxiety of success is almost over. It is the same in the case of Michael K. When he approaches to the territory of the rural area his anxiety to achieve the goal begins to creep.

Michael K's mission to search for the identity comes to an end when he succeeds to reach Prince Albert and identifies the shelter as stated by his mother. Coetzee narrates K's success in the following way. "He approached the house and circled. Its shutters were closed and rock-pigeon flew in at a hole where one of the gables had crumbled, leaving timbers exposed and galvanized roof-pates buckled [. . .]" (51). Coetzee shows the earlier of Michael K. (Anna K's as well) a deserted place because of their absence. However, he presents Michael K. in the same place to make it bloom. When Michael reaches up to the place which he had been searching as the identity. Now, the passion of culture galvanizes him.

### **3.3 Culture as the Vital Vigour**

Regarding the strength of the culture, Coetzee further presents an explicit idea inherent in Michael K. He means to say that even at extreme hour of war people can never desert their culture and its infatuation. The fact is that the strength of culture (like gardening for Michael K) is deeply rooted into their conscience. Those who have on strong belief upon their culture are the mere the victims of war. But those who have strong faith upon their culture the source of vital vigour for survival can easily oppose and resist the encroachment of all the opposing forces including even the devastating and terrific war. In other words, Michael K. is the pillar of the cultural strength. Coetzee is trying his best to justify the vital vigour of culture. Michael K. knows it very well that there is a civil war going on due to apartheid. Violence is pervaded almost everywhere. Therefore, he makes attempt to opposite it in his own

way in order to preserve his culture the vital vigour for survival which means gardening for him.

[. . .] because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. That was why. (109)

Of course, J.M. Coetzee examines the vital vigour of culture upon which Michael K, the central character, is deeply rooted. Michael K's affinity with occupation of gardening proves this fact. He leaves no stone unturned to protect his garden because it is the world where he lives in. Nonetheless, he undergoes the panic of suffering being stranded from the society. Even in such condition, he remains satisfied with his own lot. "All that remains is to live here quietly for the rest of my life, eating the food that my own labor has made the earth to yield. All that remains is to be a tender of the soil" (113). This sort of satisfaction by his feeling can be traced out that he is strong enough to continue his occupation of gardening. The sense of strength that activates him to embrace gardening as his occupation is the sense of the strength that lies within the culture the vigour for survival. He feels ecstasy when he succeeds to eat the food grown out of his own toil. "He chewed with tears of joy in his eyes. The best, he thought, the very best pumpkin I have tested. For the first time since he had arrived in the country he found pleasure in eating" (113). The pleasure that he gets while eating is the result of the savour prevailing in the food produced out of his own hard toil. It is also the product of his freedom and independence, contributed by the strength of his culture.

Reinvigorating the acute cultural thirst Coetzee magnifies his ideas. That cultural passion inherent in Michael K. When Michael K retains the stream of his origin, the passion for sweetness and light becomes blatant. K. begins to live a life of his own as a gardener in his native place. Gardening is the realm of his cultural vigour in which he enjoys the super bliss and ecstasy with sweetness and light. Gradually, sensation of culture as passion evolves there in him. In the lucid exposition, Coetzee explains the cultural thirst evolving in Michael K. For instance, he says:

This was the beginning of his life as a cultivator. On a shelf in the shed he had found a packet of pumpkin seeds, [. . .]. In the space of a week he cleared the land near the dam and restored the system of furrows that irrigated it. Then he planted a small patch of pumpkins and a small patch of mealies; and some distance away on the river bank, where he would have to carry water to it, he planted his been, so that if it grew, it could climb into the thorn trees. (59)

In the above propositions, Coetzee has reflected the process of gaining sweetness and light through cultivation. The act of Michael K's cultivation suggests the state of being led by vital vigour for survival.

Likewise, Coetzee stress to justify the strength of culture by exposing the varied materials in the novel that are quite catchy and relevant. While something comes to appear before us, that imparts some general impression in our mentality. There is at least something in the environment which befits in something. We can easily decipher or construe on something after all we generate our view on that. In the same way, Coetzee often highlights the 'packet of seed'. Why does Michael K bear the packet of seed frequently but not the next things? He bears the seed even in the extreme hour of trouble. Coetzee presents quite clear and blatant justification to

highlight or demonstrate the blatant significance of strength of culture. Coetzee states that:

The strange hand bruised his throat and fumbled with the button on the breast pocket of the overalls. The packet of seed emerged so noisily that K [...] Can I have my packet?' he considered, trying not to wake the others. A few yards distant K found the packet. Searching on hands and knees he recovered perhaps half of the scattered seeds. He buttoned then in his pocket, abandoning the rest, thinking: What a pity- in the shade of a pine tree nothing will grow. Then he picked up his way sown the zigzag track. (177)

Here, the imagery of acute allurement or the infatuation towards the seed packet reflects Michael K's strong desire to continue the act of cultivation. His seed packet was confiscated and scattered all over the ground. He requests to give back it. Michael K's trouble to collect the scattered seed on hands and knees and following the way down the zigzag track is very tangible and so clarifies the strong passion of going back to the native location and sow the seed and grow them there. The want of cultivation that lies in Michael K is very blatant and profound. None of the outer force can soothe him to remain away from the act of cultivation. Michael K is even very aware that the seed cannot be grown well or produced under the shade of the pine tree. This remark indicates that Michael K is highly matured cultivator. He exposes his well experience in the act of cultivation. One, in order to know such an idea should be well experienced for the act of cultivation and should have the knowledge of improved seeds, weather, soil, irrigation, insecticide, pesticide, and rest of the related ideas.

Indeed, Michael K follows the zigzag way to go and search the appropriate location for the seed where it could grow abundantly without any environmental obstruction. So, in nutshell, we can discern that J. M. Coetzee presents Michael K as an outstanding character who is attributed as the highly skilful and devoted cultivator or the gardener and that is known as the very traditionally developed as an unavoidable form of cultural occupation. Which is often termed the strength of culture.

Similarly, another vital as well striking instance for strength of culture vividly remarked by J. M. Coetzee in the novel can be traced out about is the 'vegetable'. Whenever Michael K is caught by the insurgents and interrogated several questions in front of the Major about his involvement in guerilla group. He uprightly denies his involvement. He is supposed to be the supplier of vegetables to those who were on war. Michael is tried to be persuaded by the insurgents to disclose about the guerilla those who were weighing the war against the colonizer in Prince Albert. Michael K is under the suspicion of being a culprit who might be playing a crucial or significant role against the colonizer.

He is often forced to disclose the reality about his involvement in the growing or producing the vegetable. To whom the vegetable were for? This striking question is often sheltered and deeply rooted in the mentality of the insurgents. So, they cannot desert the issue of the vegetable produced by Michael K. Coetzee further mentions in the novel:

Still crouching, ready to evade me if I should spring, he made his reply. 'I am not clever with words,' he said, nothing more. He moistened his lips with his lizard tongue. We don't [...] 'who were these vegetables for?' who did you give them to?' 'They weren't mine.

They came from the earth.’ ‘I asked, who did you give them to?’ ‘The soldiers took them.’ Did you mind it that the soldiers took your vegetables?’ He shrugged. ‘What grows is for all of us. We are all the children of the earth.’ (139)

Here, we can clearly sense that the questions inquired to Michael K about the vegetable can be the mightiest instance for the strength of culture. Michael K’s occupation i.e. gardening vegetable is quite enough to draw one’s attention. Even the colonizers or the insurgents seem to be convinced with his act of cultivation. They inquire to Michael K, ‘What did you grow there?’ It was a vegetable garden’. This answer of Michael K proves that he was renowned and well experienced agriculturist, who would produce the agro product. That means he would do the hard labor in order to cultivate.

Michael K’s idea as the answer ‘they weren’t mine. They came from the earth’ really touches everyone’s heart. As we can discern that Michael K was merely the gardener and he is toiling in the soil which he supposes or accepts it as his mere destiny. He feels pride to bloom the barren or exploited land. He, indeed, exposes the utmost degree of maturity and affinity to the nature. So far, he believes that the things that grow in the soil are equally related to everyone. He draws the principle of universality and naturalness. Indeed, the earth to the human being is equal and the products of it are also equally related to everyone. The demarcation of the territory and claiming on them as one’s own are merely the human construct custom and convention. According to Michael K’s belief these all are against the justice of the nature. Therefore, he remarks that the vegetables were grown in the soil so that, whoever could enjoy them for the subsistence. But he is in the notion that it is the virtuous duty of a devoted gardener to toil and produce at least something for the



continuation of the nature. His perspectives indicate that the things which grow in the soil are equal to everyone but not only to those who are so called superiors.

Furthermore, the novelist J. M. Coetzee artistically presents his notion through the fictional character Michael K that the gardeners who toil in the soil are not only the self-supporters but they also produce for the sake of others. So in nut shell, Coetzee intends to highlight the significance of the act of cultivating as very meaningful and quite relevant aspect to invigorate the strength of culture.

Furthermore, a conspicuous fact related to the cultural strength becomes more blatant. Coetzee mentions it in such a way that the hidden treasure of cultural strength becomes more obvious. For instance, he illustrates the cultural impulses inherent in Michael K. according to the following way. "The impulse to plant had been reawaken in him; now, in a matter of weeks, he found his waking life bound tightly to the patch of earth he had begun tightly to the patch of earth he had begun to cultivate and the seeds he had planted there" (59). The impulse that Michael K has referred to the impulse triggered by cultural passion. It is an impulse of plantation and vegetation that magnifies the inherent strength of culture in Michael K. Michael K is always guided by such impulses of cultivation and therefore he never surrenders before anything that encroaches on the ground of his cultural reality.

Michael K's strength to struggle against the opposing forces is triggered by such impulses of cultivation. It is in this way that Coetzee has referred the cultural impulses. He means to say that every culture has its own impulses. Such impulses are of course the characteristic features of the strength of culture. In this sense, Michael K. is an epitome of the strength of culture who succeeds to achieve his goal despite his hard struggle.

## Chapter IV

### Conclusion

J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* has been an outstanding classical manifesto in the sphere of literary history in South-Africa. The very novel was published and brought into the light in 1983 A.D. This novel has widely circulated the higher range of geographical, historical, socio-political and cultural issues rampantly burning and washing up the mentality of the people during the post-colonial movement taken place in South-Africa. In the novel, Coetzee has reflected quite much the site of the colonial and imperial attack in South-African grain on the one hand, and the counter-attack by the strength of the pan-African culture to resist not only the encroachment of colonial and imperial forces but also of all the opposing forces that try to ruin and demolish the south African culture, nationality and social identity on the other. By highlighting the victory of the strength of own culture after all the resistance the opposing forces such as colonial restrictions, confinements, suppression, domination, exploitation, subjugation and so on, Coetzee has successfully valorized and demonstrated the strength of South-African culture which stands as the formidable opposing strength against the colonial imposition.

For instance, the search for the origin, passion of culture, resistance to all the opposing forces and the originality of resistance are some of the characteristic features that highlight the strength of culture in the novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. Anna K's and her son Michael K's search for the origin paves the vision of the strength of culture. Though Anna K the mother of Michael K, who had been the victim of dropsy the gross swelling which was caused because of the unsuitable environment due to the imposition of colonial power. And so, she was left disordered even at the hospital. That is why she sees no alternative rather than going back to her own culture which

merely stands as the strength of culture. So that she could get the proper or suitable location to live happily and patiently. But she dies en route to Prince Albert. Anyway, her son Michael K. succeeds to reach there. K's success to reach up to the origin is suggestive of the glorious victory of the strength of culture over all the opposing forces.

Similarly, the resistance to the encroachment of all the opposing forces is also manifested vividly as the strength of culture. Michael K does never lose his confidence during the severe hard struggle. He accepts it as the penance becomes quite severe. It shows that the strength to continue the struggle against all the opposing forces is in fact, inherited from the strength of culture. Therefore, Coetzee presents Michael K as an epitome of success to escape all restrictions and confinements imposed upon him.

Likewise, the originality of resistance has been shown triggered by the passion of culture. Michael K. never surrenders before any sort of opposing forces that try not only to destroy his culture but also to ruin himself. He does never give up his desire to attain his goals even where he undergoes the metamorphosis of his experience during the struggle. This sort of originality of resistance in Michael K. has been stimulated by the strength of his culture. Therefore, K. succeeds to escape from the imposition and imprisonment of colonial restrictions and confinements and to maintain his self-centered or an autonomous identity as a successful gardener. Coetzee in this sense also highlights the symbiotic relations of human beings and their culture.

Moreover, in the context of counter-discourse, *Life and Times of Michael K.* also resists hegemony. But more than being simply a counter-discourse, it is a cultural manifesto that highlights the strength of the pan-African culture to resist the

encroachment of not only of colonialism and imperialism but also of all the opposing forces that try to ruin the native cultural existence.

Thus, J.M. Coetzee has illuminated the strength of culture of South-Africa throughout the text of *Life and Times of Michael K*. By showing the inheritance of the strength of culture in human beings in the text, Coetzee suggests that human beings are not only the victims of the opposing forces in the culture, but they are also capable to resist the encroachment of all the opposing forces with the strength of culture as a sole weapon. To illustrate this major ideology, Coetzee has explored an imaginative figure named Michael K. and presented him before us. He means to say that we should never neglect our culture in our life. To neglect our culture means to neglect our own identity and to destroy our own existence. As culture is the means and goal of Michael K's life, so is ours.

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