

## I. Apartheid as Cultural Trauma in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*

This study analyzes the protagonist Michael K's journey of disorder and surrounding afflicted by the Civil War. The reason behind the war is apartheid and black people stepping up in search for their identity in their own native land. This study concerns with how common man like Michael K is pushed into the war zone and is made to go across various stages of historical and cultural trauma. In the same way, this study shows how trauma is healed at last by displaying responsibility to others and narrativization.

The novel *Life and Times of Michael K* presents us both with the story of K and with a struggle for control over the meaning of his own story. Although the story has an elemental simplicity, it is true that the protagonist has no control over his own times and life. The novel in allegorical way demands political reading as well as deep contemplation over the time the character is living. Michael K, a municipal gardener who spent his childhood in a children's home, undertakes an improbable journey in the middle of a Civil War, wheeling his mother in a makeshift cart from Cape Town to Prince Albert in the Karoo. He intends to return her to the farm where she spent part of her youth in a family of servants; she dies on the route, but he continues the journey and scatters her ashes at what seems to be the farm. There he discovers the meaning of his vocation as a gardener and plants seeds.

Soon, debilitated by hunger and exhaustion, he is found and taken to Jakkalsdrif labor camp; he escapes, returns to the farm, replants, and spends a few blessed weeks tending his pumpkins and melons. Guerrillas pass through, but K decides not to join them; he is then captured, accused of supplying the enemy, taken back to Cape Town, and placed in a rehabilitation camp. He escapes again, however, and spends his last days as a vagrant in Sea Point, where his mother had worked as a domestic servant before they left. The story in itself is nothing so serious but the amount of passivity the character displays is more ironic and pathetic. The sympathy and responsibility shown by the others towards the protagonist Michael K is quite baffling.

Apartheid is a system of separation and domination. It was in practice in South Africa from late 1940s to 1990. It forced people to divide into three groups; white, colored and blacks. This system brought restriction on social and political movement and created many troubles for civilians. Actually the history of separation goes back to 1652 A.D. with the process of colonization from Dutch. The Boer War (1899) between Britishers and Afrikaners resulted the crevice among the two races. In the same way from 1948 racist discourse started with the institutionalization of apartheid policy. As a

revolt against the policy from 1976 Soweto War or Civil War started and took lives of many people. And finally the policy came to end with the era of Nelson Mandela.

The novel *Life and Times of Michael K* was published in 1983. And the 1980s South Africa was marked by the political unrest and violence. Trapping this social and political scenario, the novel has shown the consequences of the state's spectacular failure to address the essentials of the crisis it was facing through the character Michael K.

The novel encompasses violations that were committed both in the name of apartheid and in the struggle against it. The novel, in other words, can be seen as the mouthpiece of searching for the hidden truths of state violence as well as armed resistance by the liberation group. The novel has directly or indirectly encouraged common man to be involved in the process to come to terms with these truths. In the same way, through the narrativization of the story of Michael K the novel wished to create a clean break free from the past and establish common future.

From the birth of the protagonist he is left to face the shock and irony. The novel starts with the statement of pity and helplessness of the character like "The first thing the midwife noticed about the midwife Michael K when she helped him out of his mother world was that he had a hare lip" (1). The very physical deformity and slowness sets lots of trouble for baby K and mother for feeding milk and separation from the peers which Jane Kilby in her article explains "to speak improperly about trauma and violence also ,which to my mind will always have to be the case if we are to accept without equivocation that violence is an unbearable reality in fact" (12). The protagonist from his childhood to the adulthood can never speak properly and always accepts the suffering as part of life.

The protagonist Michael K is read as a figure for black South Africa, a reading that raises the ambiguous non-inscription of race in the narrative, and then he appears as a model of passive suffering rather than active struggle and resistance. He is a representation that causes a certain degree of bewilderment. Though he is aloof from worldly concerns, he is inevitably involved in the social situation around him, and he is soon put into a camp by the police. He is at the mercy of political authorities that impose identity and stories on him - he is misunderstood to be a servant, an alcoholic, a guerrilla and so on. He loses his self belief and identity. The allegorical reading of Michael K into many characters shows us the harshness of trauma.

This novel is set in South Africa afflicted with a Civil War and social disorder. After his mother dies of illness, the intellectually handicapped Michael K starts a journey

to her hometown with her ashes, losing his possessions on the way. In the second part, a doctor struggles to elicit a story from Michael K who eludes such an attempt like "a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand" (135). In this way, the violence inherent in storytelling is questioned both ethically (in the one-to-one relation between the doctor and Michael K) and politically (in the political authorities' high-handed assumptions about his identity). The political and cultural scenario both are deeply affected by the policy of apartheid. The way Michael K's story is narrated shows the shock inherent in the character's mind which takes so many years to be healed.

As K is completely dispossessed and powerless, he can function effectively as a kind of mirror to reveal the violence of storytelling. We are struck by the narrativization. The novel uses a character that has developed vagabondness and aloofness from society for the critique of whole scenario. Michael K appears to focus sharply on the political critique of storytelling. While narrating the story He uses a third-person narrative except in the short second part consisting of the doctor's first-person account of K. The even shorter third part continues with the third person narrative to recount K's return to his mother's room. In my view, this is because if things were narrated from K's limited view point, the efficacy of the political critique of storytelling would be seriously undermined.

After the publication of book in 1983, the book has brought breakthrough both in writing career of J.M. Coetzee as well as narratives of South African people. Inspiration and criticism both have been created out of it. Some critics regard it as manifestation of postcolonial assertion, whereas some critics have commented it as an exaggeration of African Civil War and independence from slavery and injustice. However the concern of this study is to analyze the character Michael K from the perspective of cultural and historical trauma. As the novel has utilized the historical elements as well as non-fictional narrative, the character and book can be read as a political memoir. In this sense, Dominic Head in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee* writes:

The problem of how the individual should be situated in relation to history becomes the driving concern in *Life and Times of Michael K*. The title calls up narrative tradition which embraces non-fictional modes such as political memoir as well as the novel, in which individual engagement with social and historical events is the principal point of interest. (55)

In the way, how Head has commented upon the novel is true in a sense. Looking through the novel, one can study the scenario of common people in post-Civil War and

their suffering in a clear way. In other words, we can say that novel portrays common man's deep relation to history. Through the story and narrative modes of Michael K, Coetzee is re-writing history of South Africa. Here apartheid becomes bridge for common man's engagement to social and historical scenario which is interest of this study.

Michael K suffers the predicament of his life due to lack of broad knowledge and inability to comprehend the ongoing socio- political reality exposed before him. Clearly the novel raises the communitarian values versus the apartheid policy. The common civilian like the protagonist K has no option either he has to go in the lap of community or he has to be exposed to apartheid policy. Dana Dragunoiu writes in her article:

Coetzee's quarrel with communitarianism and qualified endorsement of liberal values are traced back to the complicity he sees between communitarian discourse and the theoretical underpinnings of apartheid. *Life and times of Michael K* exposes the alliance between communitarian and consequentialist ethical principles, and reveals the ways in which these principles, and reveals the ways in which these principles abet oppression and exploitation by prioritizing the maximization of good outcomes over the claims of freedom. (69)

This comment hints on the ethics which novelist time and again raises the concern throughout the novel. Although there is pain and agony in the story the protagonist meets some people who help him or his mother out of nowhere. The ethics shown by the various characters provide energy to K to bear the pain and undergo the panic of suffering in his total expedition. The ethical principal shown by the character is display of how the trauma is healed in post war scenario.

Coetzee has created Michael K out of his underlying belief in philosophy of the strength of humanist culture which would be manifested in terms of human relation and struggle. Michael K in the longer term can be regarded as hero who is in fact infatuated with his indigenous culture and try to maintain his status by the philosophy of negation. The novel creates the feeling of other and us while reading the life story of Michael K. One tends to be amazed by the Michael K passivity and his philosophy of negation whereas other people are always in another side and are very active. Mike Marais in his article writes:

J.M. Coetzee's *Life and times of Michael K* is preoccupied with the way in which social relation are founded on a struggle for recognition in which the self constitutes and then maintains itself as a subject by negating the

otherness of other existents. Indeed the novel consists of a series of replicated episodes each of which brings Michael K into contact with a character who attempts to assert him by negation.

Exposing the bitter reality of contestation between the encroachment of the colonial and imperial sort of forces against the attachment of common people towards their country and culture, the novel has raised the question over resistance and ethics displayed by the characters. The story exposes the same citizen to other citizen where one is armed and working for power whereas other is weak yet united. Dick Penner in his writes:

My own view is, perhaps it is possible, that there is a condition or place in which one is in both a state of being and becoming, either concurrently or alternately: a state in which one is aware of who one is, the stone in the desert, and at the same time, a stone moving among stones in a world of event and change. (100)

Though the novel is complex and disorienting it has captured the essence and time of South Africa. The historical and brutal reminiscence of imperial power in the form of apartheid haunts the reader as well as the characters.

Coetzee, through the story of Michael K, wants to demythologize and decode the historical and contemporary myths rooted in the South African life. Michael K through his passivity and negation resists the power in a simple way. Similarly, the protagonist's condition of helplessness and passivity is the inherent trauma in the blood of people. The narrativization and the responsibility shown by the other characters to Michael K are worthy and story of hope. Mike Marais in his article writes:

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 there is hope and there is ethics still left in the heart of people surrounding the Michael K.

Trauma refers to a person's emotional responses to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society. Trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity and that is called traumatic experience. Traumatic experience produces a temporal gap and dissolution of self. Traumatic experience precludes knowledge and hence representation. The idea that traumatic experience pathologically divides identity is employed by the literary scholars as a metaphor to describe the degree of damage done to individual's coherent sense of self and the change of consciousness caused by experience. In the novel the protagonist Michael K loses his identity, self-worth and interest in life due to traumatic experience

Traumatic events become more serious and affective because of their nature of abrupt presence. Such events which unexpectedly denying the victim of any preparation cope with become traumatic. Cathy Caruth writes in her essay "Trauma Exploration in Memory", "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event"(2-3) the violence going around and brutal which treatment of civilians traumatizes Michael K and disrupts his well-being.

Trauma can be defined in simplest terms as a psychological shock that torments the victim time and again. This shock can come to the an individual, community, particular groups or particular culture because of the painful and shocking experiences caused by wars, natural disasters, genocide or so on. By nature, trauma is overwhelming psychological condition. Jon G. Allen clarifies trauma and its nature as he writes:

By definition, traumatic experience overwhelms us when it occurs. Sadly, trauma does not necessarily end when the traumatic situation is long past. Many traumatized persons continue to reexperience the trauma whenever memories of the event are evoked. Along with the memories come painful emotions and the sense of helplessness. (79)

According to Allen trauma has long-lasting impact on the individual and a culture if it has been experienced in distant past. It can repeat again and again when the similar events occur and torment the victim. When trauma repeats, the victim experiences the sharp pain, suffers and the sense of helplessness comes to overcome them. Traumatic events are everywhere according to Allen because nowhere is free from the terrible events that can shock the people affecting their life, family, culture and so on. He asserts further, "Trauma happens. Traumatic events are ubiquitous. Just turn on the news. A typical day's fare may include floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, fires, car crashes, plane crashes, train wrecks, rapes, kidnappings, assaults, murders, school shootings, terrorist attacks, and war-related mayhem" (5). To highlight the pervasiveness of trauma and trauma-

related incidents, Allen suggests us to listen to the news. There are many instances of floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, fire, rapes, murders, attacks and wars that could affect the psychology of the victims very badly. The trauma persists after the lapse of time haunting the victims through its recurrence in the memory of the past. Since trauma is basically a psychological phenomenon, the root of trauma theory lies in the psychoanalytic theories. Citing Caruth and LaCapra, Kali Tal discusses the nature and stages of trauma:

In Cathy Caruth's psychoanalytic theory of trauma, it is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of it. In her account there is always a time lapse, a period of "latency" in which forgetting is characteristic, between an event and the experience of trauma. (3)

Tal refers to the observation of Caruth which shows that the horrible experiences the victim bears in war, natural disasters, attacks or rapes do not produce the traumatic experience instantly at the time of experience. There is the need of lapse in time and the remembrance of the event. The time lapse that develops the horrible experiences in to traumatic experiences is called latency phase that continues along with the forgetting of the experience. Trauma thus, is a reflective process that comes with the reflection of the horrible experiences of the past from past. Tal clarifies this with the citation of LaCapra:

As reflective process, trauma links past to present through representations and imagination. In psychological accounts, this can lead to a distorted identity-formation, where "certain subject-positions may become especially prominent or even overwhelming, for example, those of victim or perpetrator . . . wherein one is possessed by the past and tends to repeat it compulsively as if it were fully present". (3)

Tal clarifies the nature and process of trauma in the analysis. According to Tal, trauma is a reflective process, a reflection of past through the representations and imaginations from the present time. The identity-formation of the traumatized person might be distorted due to this reflection because the traumatic experiences can bring hopelessness, despair, uncertainty and frustration in the overwhelmed victim. Past becomes more pervasive than present for them and the painful experience of the past repeats again and again.

The term trauma novel refers to work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. The trauma novel demonstrates how a

traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self ignited by an external often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and the world. The external event that elicits an extreme response from the protagonist is not necessarily bound to a collective human or natural disaster such as war or earthquake. To the most English – speaking people, the word 'trauma' is no stranger, especially if one happens to live in a country riddled with random, unpredictable instances of violent criminal activity. It is probably safe to say that in common parlance the term is associated with something which disrupts one's life so severely that it is difficult, if not possible to pull oneself together any time soon after the traumatic, traumatizing event, such as a car hijacking, a robbery or mugging, an assault, a rape and so on. The novel in a nutshell holds these features and can be termed as trauma novel. The present researcher will analyze *Life And Times of Michael K* in the framework of trauma studies.

The *Life And Times of Michael K* displays how a community and family can torture a person who resides under it thinking it as safest place. One of the good aspect of the novel, Michael K who has been traumatized by own people and community comes out of it and find new meaning of own life which was buried on himself. The present researcher applies the theoretical framework of trauma theorist like Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Jeffrey C. Alexander and so on to describe traumatic experience enliven by the protagonist, Michael K. Similarly, the novel also gives significance to the attitude of the ethical responsibility and total forgiveness. The researcher uses the theoretical tool of Avishai Margalit and Emmanuel Levinas to draw upon the ethical acts.

The present research work has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter fundamentally deals with introductory outline of the present study. It introduces critical review and the K in relation to his memory, painful losses, their social standing and position. The second chapter encompasses the methodology and analysis, aiming at providing the theoretical methodological reading of the text briefly with both the textual and theoretical evidences. It examines how memory operates in varied circumstances the characters involve in it. This chapter further sorts out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the research. This part serves as the core of the present research. The final chapter concludes the ideas put forward in the earlier chapter, focusing on the outcome of the entire research.



## II. Narrativization of Historico-Cultural Trauma in Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*

This research is an exploration into war and cultural trauma in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Life & Times of Michael K*. The notable point in this exploration is to examine the historicity of the trauma in the novel. Ron Eyerman, the pioneer theorist of cultural trauma studies points out that trauma can have cultural connotation and impacts, Caruth points to its historicity while notable critics of the novel, at the same time, Nadine Gordimer, charges that the central character K of the Coetzee's novel ignores the history. This debate on the cultural dimension and historicity is very important as it lets the readers look into the violence in the war-torn South African history and the trauma it generates upon the poor South African victims.

Eyerman points to the large, cultural impacts caused by trauma threatening the cultural identity while Caruth locates the historicity of even the personal and psychological trauma while Ron. In his book *Cultural Trauma*, Eyerman defines cultural trauma:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all, while it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant "cause," its traumatic

meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as meditation and representation. (2)

The particular cultural group may experience the traumatic loss in particular historical time is clearly pointed in Eyerman's quote. Cultural group has a kind of cohesion and the trauma spreads to the cultural group by their collective memory of some loss through their meditation in particular historical time of shock. In Coetzee's novel, K can be read as attached to the colored and helpless cultural group at the historical point of apartheid and the loss he has to bear in terms of his identity and significance of the life carries the wound that haunts the poor, colored cultural group of South Africa of the time.

Michael K, the protagonist of the novel, is deformed by birth by a physical abnormality, a hare-lip: "The lip curled like a snail's foot, the left nostril gape" (1). This deformity has impact on his speech functioning. The physical deformity makes the mid-wife obscure him for a moment from his mother. Nadine Gordimer describes Michael K's disability briefly as: "He is marked out, from birth, by a harelip indelibly described as curled like a snail's foot. His deformity distorts his speech and his actual and self-image shrinks from the difficulty of communication through words and the repugnance he sees holding him off in people's eyes (140). His major problem is that he could not suck the breast of his mother because of the deformed lip and later in his life, his speech and communication to the people. It gives him a torture and traumatic suffering. Because of his struggling personality in front of the people, he wants to avoid them as the people mostly hate him and want him off their sight.

K's problems are complex and numerous. He is disabled; he belongs to the black race; he is fatherless, and he does not have a good economic background either. He is

thus subject of torture in multiple ways. He is born into a world of oppression, deprivation, homelessness, chaos and never ending wars. All these and many other painful backgrounds, including curfews and the debilitating health of his mother conspire to make life unbearable for K. From the very outset of his life, he is victimized helplessly for one and other reasons. He has to avoid the society that ignores him and the history that tortures him.

Patrick Hayes discusses Coetzee's characters as those who ignore the history with reference to Gordimer's review.

Gordimer's review of *Life & Times of Michael K* accused Coetzee of making a false portrayal of black heroic identity: in choosing as the hero of the novel a man who opts out of a revolutionary role in troubled times and elects instead to concern himself with the cultivation of the land, Gordimer felt that the text made a clear statement that 'Coetzee's heroes are those who ignore history, not make it.' (74)

Gordimer's charge is strong and apparently justifiable. Michael K, the protagonist of the novel is the passive victim and recipient of the hardship the violent history of South Africa and his poor and socially alienated state. He opts out of any role on revolutionary politics of the troubled time but chooses to escape the politics and take up a role as a gardener. The heroes of Coetzee, as Gordimer charges, ignore the history rather than make it with active participation in the politics. Let alone the involvement in the politics to correct the history, K even does not try to correct his physical deformity:

In the morning a nurse fetched him and led him to a bench in the main building, where he waited an hour till it was his turn. 'How are you feeling

today?' asked the doctor. K hesitated, not knowing what to say, and the doctor stopped listening. He told K to breathe and listened to his chest. He examined him for venereal infection. In two minutes it was over. He wrote something in the brown folder on his desk. 'Have you ever seen a doctor about your mouth?' he asked while he wrote. 'No,' said K. 'You could get it corrected, you know,' said the doctor, but did not offer to correct it. (42)

It is ridiculous passivity in Coetzee's hero K. He does not try to correct himself and there is no chance and even a single thought that he could at least correct the history of the time. When he escapes from Visagie's farm to avoid the ill-treatment of the young grandson of the owner of the farm, wanders hungry and weak and enters to the town Prince Albert, the police takes him to custody and he is taken to hospital.

In the hospital, doctor asks him about the correction of his hare-lip that is the deformity he acquires by birth. He is not heroic at all; the heroism Coetzee presents is lie according to Gordimer. Hayes clarifies Gordimer's charge of the false heroism in Coetzee's heroes as rooted to the Coetzee's own revulsion against political solutions:

The reason Coetzee is telling such lies about black heroic identity is because of his own 'stately fastidiousness': the 'revulsion against all political and revolutionary solutions' that *Life & Times* expresses is emphatically Coetzee's 'own revulsion' towards a revolutionary identity politics. His own definition of freedom, Gordimer claims, refuses any role for a properly political form of heroism rooted in 'the energy of the will', for Coetzeean freedom is merely 'to be "out of all the camps at the same time"'. Unlike most novels, which merely 'explore questions', 'this book,'

Gordimer believes, 'is unusual in positing its answer', and the 'answer' Coetzee gives is this: 'Beyond all creeds and moralities, this work of art asserts, there is only one: to keep the earth alive, and only one salvation, the survival that comes from her'. (75)

Coetzee himself hates the revolutionary identity politics. So, he denies his hero the political heroism. Gordimer objects to the way Coetzee presents the answer or solutions to his false hero but Hayes argues from Coetzee's line of thought itself that Coetzee goes beyond the creeds and morality and seeks salvation in the survival of the earth. Coetzee, thus, has no interest in history making through his character or his character's revolutionary political identity. It is clear that the character K escapes the history rather than makes it. Despite escaping the history, Michael K's desire to live as he wants is the source of his strength. This forms the core of his peculiar kind of resistance. Michael K is "out of the war" (138) because his whole being is engaged in existing on his own terms. He is simply not responsive to being determined by anything outside of them. Those conditions, however, make him vulnerable to others, particularly to those involved in and subject to the history of the regime.

Coetzee's character, the escaper of the history and politics, has to be studied with reference to his traumatic experience that is historic. It is noteworthy to state that the trauma, as Cathy Caruth points has its historicity:

The trauma of the accident, its very unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure. It is a departure which, in the full force of its historicity, remains at the same time in some sense absolutely opaque, both to the one

who leaves, and also to the theoretician, linked to the sufferer in his attempt to bring the experience to light. (190)

As Caruth claims that the trauma of the accident is born by an act of departure. Such trauma remains in unconscious of the victim of trauma with its historicity, the time frame during which it occurs. Actually, there is no physical death in the novel as the originator of the trauma. There is a psychological death rather than the physical death – the death of the mother's love due to the accidental deformity in K by his birth. The accident and K's trauma is evident. He is born accidentally as a deformed body, with a hare lip and endures his mother's contempt from his very childhood. The burden of taking care of hating mother hangs over him till her death. The nurse tries to revert or lessen the hatred of K's mother Anna without any effect:

To the mother she said: 'You should be happy, they bring luck to the household.' But from the first Anna K did not like the mouth that would not close and the living pink flesh it bared to her. She shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months. The child could not suck from the breast and cried with hunger. She tried a bottle; when it could not suck from the bottle she fed it with a teaspoon, fretting with impatience when it coughed and spluttered and cried. (1)

The nurse tries to convince K's mother that she should be happy despite the deformed baby who cannot suck milk from her breast. But she continues to hate and discriminate him giving him minimum chance of socialization. The baby cried with hunger by his birth, hated by his mother and regarded as an alienated being, he remains so throughout his life. It is one of the major reasons of his trauma, a result of segregation, bias and lack

of socialization. His mother took him “with her to work and continued to take it when it was no longer a baby. Because their smiles and whispers hurt her, she kept it away from other children. Year after year Michael K sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people’s floors, learning to be quiet” (2). To remain silent watching the proceedings around him helplessly and turning his back to the ongoing actions become his way of life later on. So, it is no surprise that he feels no social and political responsibility in the ongoing history.

His socialization goes on with alienated and helpless way where he is unable to grow as a responsible and sociable man like other normal men:

Because of his disfigurement and because his mind was not quick, Michael was taken out of school after a short trial and committed to the protection of Huis Norenus in Faure, where at the expense of the state he spent the rest of his childhood in the company of other variously afflicted and unfortunate children learning the elements of reading, writing, counting, - sweeping, scrubbing, bedmaking, dishwashing, basketweaving, woodwork and digging. (2)

This poor socialization draws comparison with the apartheid and racial segregation of South African history and can be studied as a historical allegory and K’s trauma as the traumatic South African history itself. The progress of mental development of K is very slow and he is kept under the protection in Huis Norenus and is prepared for the normal chores so that he could run his life easily. K’s inability to behave properly with children and women Jakkalsdrif Relocation Camp when he gets caught is apparent:

There was one little boy in particular who pursued him wherever he sat, clutching at his face. The child's mother, embarrassed, would fetch him away, whereupon he would wriggle and whine to be let loose till K did not know what to do or where to look. He suspected that the older girls laughed at him behind his back. He had never known how to behave with women. (49)

His troubled and poor socialization is clearly seen here. He does not know what to do or where to look as the children trouble him. He is unable to understand the women and their reactions. The older girls laugh at him because he does not know how to behave with women. Instead of being socialized K desperately longs for alienated places where he could run his life freely without the interference of others:

It was better in the mountains, K thought. It was better on the farm, it was better on the road. It was better in Cape Town. He thought of the hot dark hut, of strangers lying packed about him on their bunks, of air thick with derision. It is like going back to childhood, he thought: it is like a nightmare. (45)

Alienation and segregation have become K's habit and the society is a bunch of strangers for K. It is similar to the history that has taught segregation to the black and poor people of South Africa. Being in a society is difficult for him and he regards his troubled social life as the outcome of his troubled childhood life and lack of socialization in Huis Norenius. The memory constantly leads him to his past, his childhood, in which he is traumatized by the treatment that he is estranged, disabled and unable to enter into social



sphere. He thinks the alienated life in mountain, farm, road or Cape Town as better one than in the dark hut in the Relocation Camp.

Trauma has been defined by many of the scholars. Jon G. Allen in *Coping with Trauma: Hope through Understanding* elaborates overwhelming experience of trauma:

By definition, traumatic experience overwhelms us when it occurs. Sadly, trauma does not necessarily end when the traumatic situation is long past. Many traumatized persons continue to re-experience the trauma whenever memories of the event are evoked. Along with the memories come painful emotions and the sense of helplessness. (79)

Traumatic situation of long past as the overwhelming force is justified by Allen. Along with this characteristic of the overwhelming nature of trauma, Allen points to the other characters like recurrence and re-experience of the traumatic experiences and the painful memories and sense of helplessness coming out of the memories. K experiences the trauma that is rooted in his troubled socialization in his childhood and is suffocated by the social life let alone his political life. The person unable to enter the social sphere is unable to make the political identity and make the history but he can be the passive recipient of the traumatic history with apartheid and segregation in his habit as enforced to him by the time. K is overwhelmed by the torment the history brings to his experience.

Trauma theorists believe that there may not have been direct access to the history in the novel but the textualist approach to a novel certainly gives the readers unique access into the history. As Stef Craps and Gert Buelens discuss the way how the readers get access into the history though there is no apparent involvement of the characters in the history making process:

Cathy Caruth . . . counters . . . that, rather than leading us away from history and into "political and ethical paralysis" (*Unclaimed* 10), a textualist approach can afford us unique access to history. Indeed, it makes possible a "rethinking of reference," which aims not at "eliminating history" but at "resituating it in our understanding, that is, at permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (11). By bringing the insights of deconstructive and psychoanalytic scholarship to the analysis of cultural artifacts that bear witness to traumatic histories, critics can gain access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation. (1)

Caruth favors the textual reading of trauma literature as opposed to the post-structuralist intertextual reading and for her the textualist approach gives unique access to the history even though the text is leading the readers away from history. The textualist reading, according to Caruth, makes it possible for a reader rethinking reference and resituating the understanding of the characters and the movement of the text as the factors that let the history to arise whatever be the immediate understanding of the text. Caruth favors the analysis of the cultural trauma writings from deconstructive and psychoanalytic scholarship to establish the historicity of the novel.

Recurrent memories of painful experiences of the past are responsible to overwhelm a person. The recurrent suffering because of painful memory is one's trauma that is seen in Michael K. K is traumatized by the poverty ridden, and unwanted circumstances throughout his life. The sick mother living in a very small room in Côte d'Azur is his burden; he hates her physical intimacy but the sense of duty presses him:

Michael K did not like the physical intimacy that the long evenings in the tiny room forced upon the two of them. He found the sight of his mother's swollen legs disturbing and turned his eyes away when he had to help her out of bed. Her thighs and arms were covered with scratch marks (for a while she even wore gloves at night). But he did not shirk any aspect of what he saw as his duty. The problem that had exercised him years ago behind the bicycle shed at Huis Norenius, namely why he had been brought into the world, had received its answer: he had been brought into the world to look after his mother. (3)

It is clear that K hates the physical intimacy with his mother but poverty forces him to stay with her. The sight of the swollen legs of his mother is disgusting to him. But K has a strong sense of duty and the belief that he is born to the world to take care of his mother. This sense of responsibility had been instilled in him when he was in Huis Norenius, a charity organization for the orphaned and helpless children in which he spent his childhood. Huis Norenius reminds him of the realization that he is 'other' to the society. His presence is hated by the people of the society and he avoids any affiliation to them too. This troubled socialization of Huis Norenius haunts him as the painful memory and traumatizes him. He frequently remembers Huis Norenius and the sufferings he had undergone there:

He remembered Huis Norenius and the classroom. Numb with terror he stared at the problem before him while the teacher stalked the rows counting off the minutes till it should be time for them to lay down their pencils and be divided, the sheep from the goats. Twelve men eat six bags

of potatoes. Each bag holds six kilograms of potatoes. What is the quotient? He saw himself write down 12, he saw himself write down 6. He did not know what to do with the numbers. He crossed both out. He stared at the word *quotient*. It did not change, it did not dissolve, it did not yield its mystery. I will die, he thought, still not knowing what the quotient is.

(64)

K remembers the terror of the classroom in Huis Norenius that actually teaches him unnecessary digits and mathematical calculations. The learning is unnecessary and forced because mathematics has nothing to do to run the life. He feels Huis Norenius has forced a mystery and unnecessary predicament upon his life and terrorized him. After the death of his mother he remembers Huis Norenius again and regards it to be his father:

My mother was the one whose ashes I brought back, he thought, and my father was Huis Norenius. My father was the list of rules on the door of the dormitory, the twenty-one rules of which the first was 'There will be silence in dormitories at all times,' and the woodwork teacher with the missing fingers who twisted my ear when the line was not straight, and the Sunday mornings when we put on our khaki shirts and our khaki shorts and our black socks and our black shoes and marched two abreast to the church on Papegaai Street to be forgiven. They were my father, and my mother is buried and not yet risen. That is why it is a good thing that I, who have nothing to pass on, should be spending my time here where I am out of the way. (61)

Huis Norenus tries to impose social rules and order upon K and prepares him for the society to which he does not belong. There is an Oedipal tension between him and Huis Norenus because his mother is possessed by the father, the norms to exist in family and society. The proof of this is the very act of her admitting her son to Huis Norenus and trying to teach him fatherly regulations separating from her. Huis Norenus comes between him and his mother. His Oedipal tension with Huis Norenus has been imprinted in his unconscious; it tries to impose a subjectivity to K who has multiple or no subjectivity at all. He has no religion except freedom as we see his escape from the camp avoiding its foods and shelter but it is Huis Norenus that attempts to mold him to a Christian subject sending them to Church every Sunday. Remembering this all and attempt to locate himself and his inability to gain a subjective position keeps traumatizing him.

Based on discoveries into trauma's inner workings, Laurie Vickory asserts that the goal of much recently published literature is to "help readers to access traumatic experiences," particularly through the use of fictional trauma narratives (3). However, Vickory also points out that the authors of such narratives do more than simply write about trauma: "They [also] internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures" (3). In her analysis, Vickory establishes several broad aims and characteristics of trauma narratives. The most crucial of these is that they "raise important questions and responsibilities associated with the writing and reading trauma as they position their readers in ethical dilemmas analogous to those of trauma survivors" (1).

In their readings, both the readers and writers should be conscious of the traumatized characters ethically because they are in the ethical dilemma. The actions of characters in the novel may lead us to questions to address ethically. The narrative structure imitates intrusive trauma symptoms and the childlike perceptions represent the nature of pre-narrative, unintegrated traumatic memories. Additionally, victims of trauma “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (5). So first part of the story is narrated by omniscient non-participant narrator, and because this is the only sort of narrator who would have access to those specific memories from which trauma has disconnected the characters, as well as the historical perspective and implications of the trauma.

Flashbacks of K are used so that the troubled past could be seen in the novel. Whenever there is a monotonous and joyless situation K goes back to Huis Norenius, to his childhood days, losing the touch with present reality. In the bed of the camp, he looks out of the window, sees the vineyards that have no leaf because of winter and everything is dull, the flashback of his childhood play appears:

Leafless vineyards stretched before and behind. A flock of sparrows materialized out of the sky, settled for a moment on the bushes all around them, then flitted off. Across the fields they heard church bells. Memories came to K of Huis Norenius, of sitting up in bed in the infirmary, slapping his pillow and watching the play of dust in a beam of sunlight. (14)

In Jon G. Allen’s observation of flashbacks, “Like other memories, flashbacks vary in historical accuracy and may blend memory, emotion, imagery, and fantasy. At worst, in a full-blown flashback, you may lose contact with current reality, superimposing traumatic

images on the current situation” (84). The flashbacks may blend memory, emotion, imagery, and fantasy but they connect the narrative to the past and present.

As a child K had been hungry, like all the children of Huis Norenius. Hunger had turned them into animals who stole from one another's plates and climbed the kitchen enclosure to rifle the garbage cans for bones and peelings. Then he had grown older and stopped wanting. Whatever the nature of the beast that had howled inside him, it was starved into stillness. His last years at Huis Norenius were the best, when there were no big boys to torment him, when he could slip off to his place behind the shed and be left alone. (40)

Hunger of the present time leads K to the hunger of the childhood at Huis Norenius. Helplessness, hunger and sufferings from the beginning of life became his habit and he grows masochist and trauma becomes the truth about his life. Since he cannot cheat others, he cannot infiltrate others' life, he cannot torment and dominate others to live a prosperous life, he turns to himself, to the nature from where he is born in quest for freedom and bears the suffering the society and history lay before him. His fate is the fate of colored people of the time. That points that to the large extent K's trauma is culturally shaped. That also points to the historicity of trauma. According to Geoffrey Alexander:

Cultural trauma is first of all an empirical, scientific concept, suggesting new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions. But this new scientific concept also illuminates an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action. It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national

societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but “take on board” some significant responsibility for it. Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma, and thereby assume such moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidary relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the sufferings of others. (85)

How hard it is to be an orphan, black, poor and disable has been given K’s trauma the cultural dimension. The people who are categorized on such the social labels distinguish them having the identity similar to their cultural group regard their sufferings as common.

K continues to remember Huis Norenius and its painstaking schooling when he is in freedom of cave away from Visagie’s farm:

One of the teachers used to make his class sit with their hands on their heads, their lips pressed tightly together and their eyes closed, while he patrolled the rows with his long ruler. In time, to K, the posture grew to lose its meaning as punishment and became an avenue of reverie; he remembered sitting, hands on head, through hot afternoons with doves cooing in the gum trees and the chant of the tables coming from other classrooms, struggling with a delicious drowsiness. Now, in front of his cave, he sometimes locked his fingers behind his head, closed his eyes, and emptied his mind, wanting nothing, looking forward to nothing. (40)

The punishment of the teacher is traumatic and haunts K. It is allegorical reference of history, the apartheid, racial segregation and the colonial domination. K closes his eyes



and tries to empty his mind; he wants to forget the trauma he has to bear by birth and the tyranny of the school.

Pioneer of trauma studies, Caruth, in her interview with Aimee L. Pozorski defines trauma that trauma has the historicity and it has different symptoms like appearing, disappearing, returning and so on:

Trauma . . . has a history, that it appears on the scene, disappears, returns, etc.– and perhaps changes in nature – is important to think about and raises the question of which conceptual framework would be able to account for such a history. Since the notion of trauma, as a delayed experience, is itself a rethinking of the relation between history and temporality, it is quite possible that we could not understand the concept's own vicissitudes without at the very least taking into account the framework provided by trauma theory itself. (78)

Basically, Caruth focuses of the historicity, changing nature and delayed experience of trauma. It is rethinking of a relationship between history and temporality and the need of its own methodology to understand it.

She clarifies the methodology of the inquiry into the trauma in the interview further:

This inquiry would involve examining the history of trauma in (at least) two somewhat different ways: on the one hand, in the context of various empirical, cultural, and ideological events . . . and, on the other hand, as a conceptual event in itself, the shock to thinking occasioned by the

introduction of this strange notion of temporality that does not seem integratable into traditional philosophical . . . conceptions of time. (78)

The historicity of trauma could be seen, according to Caruth in two ways: the first, according to their cultural, ideological significance and the second the philosophical conception of time.

To reveal the historicity and attitude of people towards the colored and disabled in society, K's mother, Anna K, "from the first, did not like the mouth that would not close and the living pink flesh it bared to her. She shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months" (30). Even K's peers do not see him as a worthy member of their age-group. They make jest of him, and "because their smiles and whispers hurt her, she kept it away from other children" (4). The disabled child is repulsive to his mother' (3). There is therefore a contrast between K's depiction as an "eyesore", a child that should be concealed or thrown away, and a being that is a harbinger of good luck. From this unwanted status of K, he is able to disentangle him from any identity and gain a kind of freedom, a salvation that is reflected in the medical officer who takes charge of K in a camp, let alone his painstaking existence and trauma:

Extraordinary, though, that you should have survived thirty years in the shadows of the city, followed by a season footloose in the war zone (if one is to believe your story), and come out intact, when keeping you alive is like keeping the weakest pet duckling alive, or the runt of the cat's litter, or a fledgling expelled from the nest. No papers, no money; no family, no friends, no sense of who you are. The obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy. (82)

K treads into the war zone, takes up the defense to the challenges that come before him, defies the authorities times and again that are his attempts to come out of the trauma and gain complete freedom. He obscures himself, he leaves no traces of his being, identity. He has no papers, no money, no family, no friends and the sense of who himself is.

In his essay "Trauma, Absence, Loss" Dominick LaCapra has talked about the historical trauma with reference to postapartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany that helps to understand the situation of Michael K in better way:

Postapartheid South Africa and post-Nazi Germany face the problem of acknowledging and working through historical losses in ways that affect different groups differently. Indeed, the problem for beneficiaries of earlier oppression in both countries is how to recognize and mourn the losses of former victims and simultaneously to find a legitimate way to represent and mourn for their own losses without having a self-directed process occlude victims' losses or enter into an objectionable balancing of accounts (for example, in such statements as "Don't talk to us about the Holocaust unless you are going to talk about the pillage, rape, and dislocation on the eastern front caused by the Russian invasion toward the end of the war" or "Don't talk to us about the horrors of apartheid if you say nothing about the killing of civilians and police by antiapartheid agitators and activists"). (697)

According to LaCapra, there is a problem in acknowledging and working through the historical losses as different cultural groups are affected differently by those losses.

There is also confusion how to react and mourn the losses and find a legitimate ways in

which they could be appropriately mourned without the objections towards the losses. Michael K in the novel is seen exactly in this difficult situation. He represents the South African history in allegorical way, he has physical loss as well as the severed connection to the social life and he is affected because of his race, poverty, helplessness, deformity and loss in greater magnitude than other cultural groups or the characters in different condition.

The process of coping up with the trauma in Michael K can be studied under the processes of working through and acting out of trauma as discussed by Dominick LaCapra. LaCapra discusses these two terms as the processes, not the binary oppositions to each other, but they are different in the approaches while facing the traumatic condition. Interviewer Amos Goldberg wants the clarification from LaCapra himself regarding the differences between these two stages that are generally misunderstood as the binary opposition but actually they are not:

In all your writings on the Holocaust, you distinguish between two forms of remembering trauma (and historical writings on it). The first, which you consider the desirable one, results in the process of “working-through”; the other is based on denial and results in “acting-out.” Can you characterize these two different kinds of memory? (1)

Basically, the interviewer believes that the working through and acting out of trauma used by Dominick LaCapra to discuss Holocaust, two kinds of memory that differ in the approach of the trauma victims, working through is related to the process of remembering the traumatic event of the past and acting out is the process of denial to the past. LaCapra

clarifies the distinction between these two in the answer to the interviewer's question and distinguishes these terms:

Acting-out is related to repetition, and even the repetition-compulsion -- the tendency to repeat something compulsively. This is very clear in the case of people who undergo a trauma. They have a tendency to relive the past, to exist in the present as if they were still fully in the past, with no distance from it. They tend to relive occurrences, or at least find that those occurrences intrude on their present existence, for example, in flashbacks; or in nightmares; or in words that are compulsively repeated, and that don't seem to have their ordinary meaning, because they're taking on different connotations from another situation, in another place. (2)

LaCapra clearly characterizes acting out with repetition of the traumatic memory of trauma victim in this phase of process. The victims tend to relive in past; Michael k frequently relives in the memory of Huis Norenius and the memory of his mother in this phase in Coetzee's novel. He has a lot of flashbacks and nightmares while thinking about the past. While working through is not opposite to acting out but a kind of counter force to the psychological process of acting out as LaCapra clarifies it:

I see working-through as a kind of countervailing force (not a totally different process, not even something leading to a cure), because I tend to disavow, or take my distance from, therapeutic conceptions of psychoanalysis, and try to take psychoanalysis in more ethical and political directions. In the working through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem, to be able to distinguish between past, present and

future. For the victim, this means his ability to say to himself, “Yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can't entirely disengage myself from it, but I'm existing here and now, and this is different from back then.” There may be other possibilities, but it's via the working-through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical agent. (2-3)

LaCapra does not have the belief on the therapeutic belief on psychoanalysis, he maintains distance with it and does not associate working through to the healing of trauma rather he focuses on the political and ethical change brought to the position of trauma victim by working through. The position of Michael K changes as he comes to the touch with the human beings of the society and he practically disobeys their ways of treatment upon him. He disengages himself from Visagie's grandson and even the doctor of the camp who takes care of him and he starts looking for other possibilities.

K's trauma is intensified because of the society's segregation and the presence of the people of the society and their command over him makes him overwhelmed. He can no longer be used by the society because the society has made him to be alienated and the very alienation has become his own life. His way how to take the people who expect a favor from the society is highlighted when the grandson of the farm owner expects him to do a favor:

'I want you to go to Prince Albert for me, Michael,' said the grandson, I will give you a list of things I want, and money. I will give you something for yourself too. Just don't talk to anyone. Don't say you have seen me,

don't say who you are getting the things for. Don't say you are getting them for anyone. Don't get everything at the same shop. Get half at Van Rhyn's and half at the café. Don't stop and talk — pretend you are in a hurry. Do you understand?' Let me not lose my way, K thought. He nodded. The grandson went on. (38)

This shows K's working out of trauma with the steadfast resolution while behaving with the people from the society. He thinks 'let me not lose my way' when the farm owner's grandson wants him to run an errand for him. He has got the idea of his loss clearly and his reaction is already defined. He is trying to work through of his trauma; by separating himself from the society that first taught him what it means to be separate; an absence of society is responded by his absence in other people's ways of life.

There is huge absence in his life that is converted to loss which shapes his reaction to the trauma he has to suffer. So, the intensity in which Michael K reacts to the traumatic condition:

Absence at a "foundational" level cannot simply be derived from particular historical losses, however much it may be suggested or its recognition prompted by their magnitude and the intensity of one's response to them. When absence is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community. When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and

interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted. (698)

K's absence of society has turned to loss over the time. The social interaction and any kind of social help is absent in him since his childhood that turns him to believe that the society is always a loss; his sole remaining company, his mother also dies and he is in complete loss. K's trauma is well expressed in LaCapra's words in the quote.

LaCapra's observation on the consequences of blurring the boundary between absence and loss is further elaborated with the symptoms of such an act:

To blur the distinction between . . . absence and loss may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the posttraumatic, which create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling. The very conflation attests to the way one remains possessed or haunted by the past, whose ghosts and shrouds resist distinctions . . . . Indeed, in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realize one is living in the here and now with future possibilities. (699)

Michael K is in the state of confusion and agitation but his working out of the trauma is clearly seeing the future possibilities as LaCapra suggests. K wants to be a gardener, returning to Cape Town severing all the possible people who try to help him back the camp and wants for more seeds to plant at the garden.



Remembering and forgetting both are ethically correct and forgetting is even more helpful for the recovery of trauma but K cannot help remembering. Talking about the ethics of memory Margalit underscores:

Remembering names is a clear case of memory. It is also clear that forgetting names can be very annoying. But I shall ask, how can our forgetting of personal names be morally or ethically wrong? I do not want to add insult to injury about not being able to remember names, but I do want to draw some implications from our not remembering the names of persons who, in some important sense, we should have remembered. (15)

Margalit gives forgetting as ethically correct position as remembering itself. Only in the times of complete forgetfulness, K feels free and normal, untraumatized self. It is seen in his idle life in the mountains over the Prince Albert; “He lived by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time. Cape Town and the war and his passage to the farm slipped further and further into forgetfulness” (35). K’s desperate attempt to overcome trauma gives him even more idleness and only in the bout of forgetfulness, he feels free from his sufferings, the Cape Town and the war.

Trauma is pervasive and the forgetting plays crucial role for the recovery of the victim from the traumatic memory. Sharing traumatized people’s sufferings, Margalit shares with readers the importance and the ethically correct edge of forgetting. Jon G. Allen points to the pervasiveness of trauma around the world:

Trauma happens. Traumatic events are ubiquitous. Just turn on the news. A typical day’s fare may include floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, fires, car

crashes, plane crashes, train wrecks, rapes, kidnappings, assaults, murders, school shootings, terrorist attacks, and war-related mayhem. (5)

K virtually suffers from the war-related mayhem in terms of Allen as the attack in Cote d'Azur prompts his mother to long to return to Prince Albert as it shocks both the mother and son. They want to escape the war but the desperate condition of his sick mother and her longing to return to her birthplace, Prince Albert, her death on the way, the troubles the authorities create are equally affect his traumatization. His frequent memory of the Huis Norenius returns times and again in his difficulties as acting out and later he reacts to the human beings of present as working through the trauma in his own way.

K works through of trauma accepting his traumatized self in the society and his nothingness, meaninglessness in the history that helps him to internalize and soak up the trauma. Acceptance makes him stronger though he is physically weak and able to cope with trauma and torturous time. His acceptance of his nothingness and trauma is reflected in the conversation between the medical officer and K in the camp; "This morning when I tried to be friendly he shook me off. 'Do you think if you leave me alone I am going to die?' he said. 'Why do you want to make me fat? Why fuss over me, why am I so important?'" (77). As an acceptance of his unimportance, insignificance in the society and history he chooses loneliness and lets him to be his own. He refuses the friendliness and terms may of the tortures he gets in the life as his cages and he never tells his pathetic stories of the cages before the authorities. Rather he terms the incidents of his torture as the charity of the people:

Against his will the memory returned of the casque of silver hair bent over his sex, and the grunting of the girl as she laboured on him. I have become

an object of charity, he thought. Everywhere I go there are people waiting to exercise their forms of charity on me. All these years, and still I carry the look of an orphan. They treat me like the children of Jakkalsdrif, whom they were prepared to feed because they were still too young to be guilty of anything. From the children they expected only a stammer of thanks in return. From me they want more, because I have been in the world longer. They want me to open my heart and tell them the story of a life lived in cages. They want to hear about all the cages I have lived in, as if I were a budgie or a white mouse or a monkey. (102)

As he returns to Cape Town naked fleeing the camp, he is exploited for sex by a woman in the beach. That time he regards himself as an object of charity. Charity is basically provided for orphans and helpless. That is why, people treat him as if he is a child.

He is similar to a caged object, an animal, mouse or monkey. Finally, his sense of identity returns, he sees why he exists in the earth. He exists to be a gardener. This acceptance leads him to self realization and cope with the traumatic history though he is not recovered properly till the end of the novel. K finds himself as useful to others at the end of the novel. He is at least seen able to have something to give to the people as a charity though he is poor. A woman enjoying sex with his body points to that observation. This helps him to develop his responsibility to the world. John Llewelyn points to Levinas' notion of ethics in *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*:

Ethics is an optics only in so far as optics is operation, praxis or, where Levinas's 'fundamental ethics' is concerned, proto-praxis, prior to the opposition between knowledge and action, optics without option. That is

to say, and Levinas approves of Marx for saying it, ethics has a base in economics. But Levinas's endorsement of this aspect of Marx's materialism goes along with a more complex conception of materialism and of what constitutes a base. (59)

Ethics, or the responsibility towards others has an economics, a certain give and take though the Marxist notion of economics too narrow and Levinas' notion is wider. There is a certain give and take, the relation of economics of transaction to the world that helps one to accept the responsibility towards the others and come out of the traumatic condition to the meaning of life. K wants to form certain give and take to the earth and society with his gardening at the end of the novel and thus, he traces out the ethical position that helps him to work through his trauma.

The ethical position of Coetzee is also evident in the novel as Jane Poyner points out that the Third World contexts are represented in his novels unmediated by the Eurocentric lens for looking at them:

Coetzee, in his deployment of the writing practices of the West and white South African genres, adequately – that is to say, ethically and politically – accommodates the contexts he chooses to address: do the novels, for instance, inadvertently read the “Third World” contexts through a misappropriated “Western” or Eurocentric lens. . . (6)

It is because of Coetzee's ethical position that lets the “Third World” emerge in its unbiased way. This unbiased and misappropriated Eurocentric lens to the poor and colored has been presented in Coetzee's novel Michael K is evident in his novel in which

Michael K works through his trauma and determines his ethical responsibility and meaning in his life

### **III. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* as a Trauma Novel**

This research has analyzed war and cultural trauma in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Life & Times of Michael K* and the traumatic self of the protagonist K in the post-apartheid South Africa. The writer has narrativized traumatic South African history in the novel. In the course of the analysis, this exploration testified the historicity and cultural dimension of the trauma K has to suffer and his unique way, unlike other heroes, to cope up with trauma. The protagonist, at the beginning, seemingly takes no part in making history and is not a progressive hero rather he is a faulty, black hero with physical deformity. His physical deformity, the hare lip by birth, difficulty in speaking and making friends, draws parallel to the history itself in allegorical way. The history of South Africa itself is full of deformities; it has the deformity of the discrimination of the socially marginalized and it creates the alienated, asocial beings is evident that justifies the protagonist as a hero.

Trauma of the protagonist is shaped by various factors in the novel. Departure or the death of the mother of K gives him great shock as she dies during treatment in the journey to Prince Albert from Cape Town. The physical death of the mother is multiplied with the psychological death he has to experience dates back to his birth time. At the very time of his birth there is the death of the mother's love due to the accidental deformity in K brings with him. This psychological death of the mother in childhood is aided by the physical death of his mother and traumatizing K. The trauma of K is aided also by his poor socialization that draws comparison with the apartheid and racial segregation of

South African history. The people around him avoid him since his childhood because of his ugliness and he avoids people to avoid their derision. This gives him social alienation that can be studied as an allegory of the history that stands as the history of the racial segregation and discrimination. Besides the trauma of death and socialization, the close observation and narrow escape from deadly attack in Cape Town and perpetual hunger become the further factors that affect K's trauma.

K acts out of trauma with the continual flashbacks towards past, nostalgia; he relives to his childhood time in Huis Norenius and experiences the sufferings of childhood and tries to internalize them. In the course of this traumatic suffering, he reaches to the resolution that he will no longer lose his way, he will not be dictated by anybody of the society as he is ordered do some works by Visagie's grandson in the farm. This is his way of working through trauma that helps him to remain contented in his own sufferings without letting perpetual outsiders of the society enter into his world. This finally leads him to accept his role as a gardener and the ethics to work for others.

K is virtually unhealed till the end of the novel. The working through concept of trauma, as professed by LaCapra, does not believe on the therapeutic side of trauma and does not accept that the complete recovery of the trauma victim is possible. Virtually, not totally recovered out of his trauma, K escapes the doctor's care in the camp, is considered as dead by the doctor taking care of him and the history disowns him to avoid the legal harassment when he escapes the camp treatment. Only solace in his life and a little window for his healing opens – he gains the sense of meaning in his life and recognizes the reason for which he is living. He concludes that he is born to become a gardener. He is made a complete man with a freedom and sexual realization as a woman has a sex with

him in the beach in Cape Town. He is the donor of the seed to the feminine earth from which he is born. The novel becomes the landmark trauma novel with K's unique working through trauma with gain of some meaning of life and ethical responsibility to others in the society.

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