

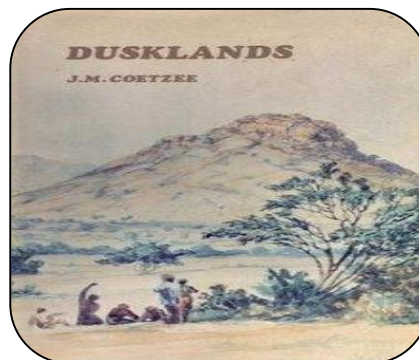
## WAR VIOLENCE AND ANXIETY IN J. M. COETZEE'S *DUSKLANDS*

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### ABSTRACT

War violence has proved that it has major and everlasting impact on the psychology of the people and the nation. War also gives birth to many assumptions and misunderstandings. Human being has reached to its prosperous life only due to peace and suppression of the sources of instability, especially violence. But the greed and competitive ego in human lead entire race to the war violence. That is why we find human history full of the evidences of war violence. This paper is an attempt to spot the effects of war violence on human psyche as presented in J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands*.



**Keywords:** - Vietnam War, war-violence, spectacular violence, barbarians, sexual-violence, torture, psychological impact, social context, political context.

### INTRODUCTION :

J. M. Coetzee's novel *Dusklands* (1974) contains two narratives. The first is *The Project* and the second is *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*. *The Vietnam Project* is a story of Eugene Dawn, the narrator who depicts his crushed mind under his project report on Vietnam War. War violence pervades all over the narrative. It also shows the psychological impact on the characters due to the stress created by the report work on violence.

At the beginning of the narrative, J.M. Coetzee focuses on the failure of intellectual thinking against the violence. The mentality of the violent person causes inability to discuss and solve the problems with intellectual discussion or debate. Mostly, this is found in terrorist-psychology and also in military people who are:

"...slow thinking, suspicious, and conservative. Convincing them of something new is never easy....Take my word, you will not succeed if you speak over their heads. Nor will you succeed if you approach them in the spirit of absoluteness, of intellectual ferocity, that you find in your internal debate here at Kennedy. We understand the conventions of intellectual duel, they don't: they feel an attack is an attack, probably an attack on their whole class."(DL-3)

The men dealing with violence get influenced by the physical aggressiveness. They rarely believe in speech. Discussions never work at the battlefield. This is the only philosophy they believe. Reasoning and aftereffects are not their concerns. They understand only the language of violence.

The Vietnam project deals with violence. "Vietnam represented the most important social and political context in which Coetzee found himself during his early years as a writer. Media gave an extensive coverage of Vietnam and the Television coverage was governed by some common assumptions about the value of war. It is the national endeavour; war has been American tradition, harking back to the frontier days; war has been almost characteristic of the country, have given them the chance to show their mettle, their toughness and professionalism, since winning is what counts." The narrator Eugene Dawn gets involved completely in the Vietnam project work that he neglects his family. According to him, his wife Marilyn is

'conformist' and due to his negligence, she fears of separation from him. She fears of the wilderness in the open world in which she may be thrown to suffer. She realizes that her husband's 'moral balance' is shifted from her to his work on Vietnam. His detachment and devotion to a project on violence compels her to think that his 'human sympathies have been coarsened', and he confesses that he has 'become addicted to violent and pervasive fantasies'. These thoughts reflect the results of the impact of violence.

Eugene Dawn's dealing with the war and its brutality affects his psyche and sex relations. Marilyn expects to restore the disturbed things between Eugene Dawn and her. It is natural expectation of a wife to live a safe and happy life. The thoughts and acts of violence do not easily occur in any sober person. Eugene Dawn says:

"Marilyn and her friends believe that everyone who approaches the innermost mechanism of the war suffers a vision of horror which depraves him utterly." (DL-10)

Being a conformist, Marilyn depends on her husband for the livelihood. She wants her husband to rescue from the clutches of the violent thoughts. She discusses about it with her friends and 'lives in the hope that what her friends call my psychic brutalization will end of the war.' (DL-9) All of her worries and fears come due to the efforts taken to rescue her husband from the wretched situation in which he is being slowly trapped.

Eugene Dawn selects photographs of Vietnam War for his report. Through the description of selected second picture, J. M. Coetzee simultaneously presents the war violence and spectacular violence. The picture is named after Berry and Wilson, two Special Force sergeants in the photograph, who are celebrating victory over the massacre of the natives. The description of the picture reads as:

"Wilson holds the severed head of a man. Berry has two, which he holds by the hair. The heads are Vietnamese, taken from corpses or near corpses. They are trophies: the Annamese tiger having been exterminated, there remain only men and certain hardy lesser mammals.... They have died well. (Nevertheless, I find something ridiculous about the severed head. One's heartstrings may be tugged by photographs of weeping women come to claim the bodies of their slain;...a mother with her son's head in a sack, carrying it off like a small purchase from the supermarket?...." (DL-15-16)

The photograph conveys the cruelty of war. The bloodshed and the carnage are heightened with the nasty demonstration of the celebration of violence. The sergeants rejoice holding cut-heads of the enemies as the gift of victory. It is a hideous humiliation of the dead, which cannot be expected from any responsible person. Along with it is portrayed an agonizing picture of the relatives of the dead people. The narrator's imagination about the relatives of the dead claiming and searching the corpses and the cut-heads is heart-rending. For the civilians it is inconceivable horror of the violence. The interrogation and torture are parts of the war violence. While interrogation the interrogators exercise all means of violence to get the information they required. The person who shuts up his mouth meets the death. Drugs are also used as means of torture to break them down.

Susan Van Zanten Gallagher is of the view that the theme of violence survives in contemporary world and seems to be the major in third world countries. She focuses the problem of the writers from South America and African countries who have to face the difficulty of portraying the incomprehensible act of violence. J. M. Coetzee not only presents the war violence but also the great loss of the nation. In this novel, through the Vietnam War, he shows how the young generation is destroyed. The wars affect both the victorious and the defeated nations. But the defeated nation has to suffer much. They lose their stout people, economy and also their freedom. Above all they lose their souls and live frustrated. As usual the victorious nations justify the war violence laid by them. The explanation given below shows the same:

"These poisoned bodies, mad floating people of the camps, who had been –let me say it– the finest of their generation, courageous, fraternal– it is they who are the occasion of all my woe! Why could they not accept us? We could have loved them: our hatred for them grew only out of broken hopes. We brought them our pitiable selves, trembling on the edge of inexistence and asked only that they acknowledge us. We brought with us weapons, the gun and its metaphors, the only copulas we knew of between ourselves and our objects. From this tragic ignorance we sought deliverance." (DL-17)

After the devastation, the triumphant nation pretends that they have given chance of resolution and excuses to the rivals. They try to rationalize their act of torture, bloodbath and violence under the name of non-cooperation from the opponents.

Another example of the War Violence is described at the end of the first chapter. It narrates about how the captives are burned alive without mercy. The act of burning is done so smoothly that the living people are gradually turned to ashes. The narrator's fear is not about violence but about the non-violent protest. J. M. Coetzee indirectly highlights the possibility of facing the violence of the war, what it needs is the sacrifice and non-violent protest. It reminds of the path of non-violent protest laid by Mahatma Gandhi for the freedom from the British Rule in India. The narrator accepts that soldiers have to kneel down before the courageous non-violent protest, but it doesn't happen. Once again through such incident bloodshed and cruel assassination are depicted in its naked form. J. M. Coetzee also presents how the human culture and customs are blown away in the war violence. Soldiers just burn the people alive and bury the dead bodies in the ditches as if they are wild animals. Wars kill the enemies, but the question arises about the burial customs, rites and rituals. During the war violence not only the living and wounded but also the dead are humiliated.

J.M. Coetzee explains the core-content of war violence through Eugene Dawn's violent thoughts. The conflict is between the powerful violence and intellectual thinking. The spirit behind martyrdom, purgatory, treachery, disobedience, sufferings, humiliation and intellect are discussed in a different way. Eugene Dawn speaks on the intellectual basis about the pains caused in the war:

"I distinguish between obedience and humiliation, and under the fire of my distinguishing intellect mountains crumble. I am the embodiment of the patient struggle of the intellect against blood and anarchy. I am a story not of emotion and violence—the illusory war-story of television—but of life itself...." (DL-27)

Pains of death in war are welcomed by both the martyrs and treacherous. It emerges either out of obedience or out of hatred. The war violence destroys the both, but it causes different impacts. The person who protests with the cause of obedience and prepares to suffer becomes a martyr. But the treacherous man prepares to harm and causes sufferings to others. On the intellectual basis the protest with obedience is considered as mighty and the protest with ego as mere revolt. Thus, the reasons of war and violence can be traced in the obedience and disobedience.

The relationship between Eugene Dawn and Marilyn becomes worse. Marilyn believes that Eugene has gone wild because of the psychological impact of Vietnam project. She thinks that she has lost her husband and the person in front of her is a man transformed with violent thoughts. Eugene Dawn assumes the climax that his wife now does not rest upon him. She finds the options for her physical and mental satisfaction. Martin's departure from him strikes Eugene much as he is the only son. He cannot bear the thought of separation and resists to handover Martin to Marilyn. The worst thing is that psychic Eugene unexpectedly stabs Martin while the men from court come to take away Martin from him. Through this tragic episode, J.M. Coetzee projects the worst effects of war violence upon well settled person. Psychologically disturbed Eugene thinks:

"....when the police broke in I panicked. I am after all not used to dealing with force. Panic is a natural first reaction. That is what happened to me. I no longer knew what I was doing. How else can one explain injuring one's own child, one's own flesh and blood? I was not myself. In the profoundest of senses, it was not the real I who stabbed Martin." (DL-44)

Eugene loses his senses and goes out of control. He is unable to remember and believe what he has done to his son. Through Eugene's dilemma, J. M. Coetzee shows the burdened feelings in human mind with which a person tries to erase or escape away from the worst memories of violent thoughts. Eugene justifies his act of cruelty on basis of the pressure he has to bear under the work of Vietnam project. But it is shameful that he feels only sorry for killing his son. His psychological condition and merciless thoughts are similar to the war violence – killing, giving excuses and at last not feeling guilty for the shameful violent acts.

*The Narratives of Jacobus Coetzee* brings forth the aspects of human and animal behavioural. These tendencies are brought forth at the beginning of the narrative. The contrast is between the cultured and the non-cultured people. One of the South African tribes, the Bushman community's behaviour is compared with

the wild animal baboon. The Bushmen is not recognized as human beings but as different creatures – a wild human body having an animal's soul. Their behaviour is compared with baboons which attack cattle and lambs to please their hunger. Apart from it, they savagely kill the interfering dogs. They kill and eat a few cattle, but mercilessly injure as many as possible. The owner helplessly has to kill the injured and infected cattle. Jacobus tells about the same nature of the Bushman:

"Bushmen have the same nature. If they have a grudge against a farmer they come in the night, drive off as many heads as they can eat, and mutilate the rest, cut pieces out their flesh, stab their eyes, cut the tendons of their legs. Heartless as baboons as they are, and the only way to treat them is like beasts." (DL-58)

J.M. Coetzee focuses on the violence during the conflict between the invaders and natives and the colonizers and colonized. During the invasion, the non- cultured tribes or the natives are dragged out of their own land. The colonizers attack savagely on the primitive people and the natives also counter-attack in return. It is the violence for existence.

Bushman's robbery to steal tobacco and the conflict in fighting back are influenced with the battle for belongings. Attraction for intoxicating products is a common string for the cultured and the non-cultured communities. The fields of tobacco are looted by the Bushman. Bushman are aware of the results of the resistance by the field owners. They know that they may lose their lives. The violence on the fields turns into a hunting episode. Many times the Bushman, either man or woman, young or old are chased and hunted down:

"Early next morning, over the hills, he heard the explosion. The gun had blown itself to pieces, but it had also blown the face off a male Bushman and wounded a female so badly that she could not move; there was even a third blood spoor leading off in to the hills which he did not follow for fear of ambush. He strung a male up from a tree and mounted the female on a pole and left them as warnings." (DL-58)

The field owners know that the tobacco is a dire need of the Bushman. So, field owners prepare their arms to shoot them. The cruelty reaches its apexes when the dead male and female Bushman are hanged as cross crow to create fear of violence among the other Bushman.

Through the Bushman's life, J. M. Coetzee explains the wild customs of the barbarians and compels the readers to compare it with the modern culture. The Bushman tribes keep on traveling and shifting from place to place. Their hunting nature requires the physical energy and capability to keep them away from the range of guns. It is very difficult to capture a young and healthy Bushman. But in the combat within the range of gun it is possible. It is not possible to hunt the Bushman chasing on feet. Their survival solely depends on their physical power. Once the physical power demolishes they get hunted. Jacobus Coetzee tells about an old woman from the Bushman tribe who is left to die. It is what they do with the elders who lose their physical strength. About the Bushman's culture, Jacobus says:

"I found her in the rocks abandoned by her people, too old and sick to walk. For they are not like us, they don't look after their aged, when you cannot keep up with the troop they put down a little food and water and abandon you to the animals." (DL-59)

The quote focuses on the attitude of the cultured people towards the old people. J.M. Coetzee's novels recurrently contain such senior characters who are deported from their family or do not have family at all. Old and weak, they are left to live and suffer alone. Comparing the acts of abandoned old people, the civilized society seems to be artificial and not less violent than the barbaric Bushman. On the contrary the Bushman's inhuman act of abandoning elders is out of safety and survival. Thus, the violent act Bushman seems to be natural but for the cultured people of Jacobus' race it seems to be simply unnatural.

There is an episode of hunting the Bushman troop. The farmers' crops, cattle and lambs come under danger due to the attacks by the Bushman. The farmers also prepare to chase and shoot the Bushman. The Bushman carry only light weighted bow with the arrows poisoned at the tip. Jacobus describes their methods of hunting the Bushman as hunting jackals. He describes one of such big hunts when twenty farmers and more than hundred Hottentots men gather for the hunt. The Hottentots spread in a two-mile-long line and start to march from the one side of the hill. The farmers with their guns ride on horses and wait on the plains at the other side of the hill. The Bushman are expert in hiding in the rocks and the ditches. So,

the farmers wait until the Hottentots roll them out from the hill to the plains. Then the farmers come out of the hidden places, fix their targets, chase them and shoot them down. While describing his hunt, Jacobus says:

"My Bushman never had a chance to let an arrow off that day in the end he simply gave up and stood waiting and I killed him with a ball through the throat. Some of the others kept running until they were shot ..." (DL 60)

The violence described here is the violence for existence. The Bushman are hunted down by the armed farmers like wild animals. Jacobus thinks that the Bushman deserve to be hunted down:

"A bullet is too good for a Bushman. They took one alive once after a herder had been killed and tied him over a fire and roasted him." (DL 60)

There is violence from the both sides. "Yet the brutalisation is often mutual and Jacobus Coetzee has no qualms in narrating a piece of cannibalistic imposition....indicating a pre-existing cannibalistic tradition." Through this reciprocal violence, J. M. Coetzee indirectly raises the question about animal violence in human. He also points out the question that whether the Bushman or the Whites are real violent race. The episode shows the act of violence against violence.

J.M. Coetzee presents gun as a symbol power and violence. The farmers and invaders like Jacobus feel safe and powerful as they have gun with them. A gun is turns from the symbol of safety to the symbol of violence and power. Jacobus believes that to exist in the place like South Africa they have to reside on the gun. He says: "The gun stands for the hope that there exists that which is other than oneself. The gun is our last defense against isolation within the travelling sphere.... The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us. It does so by laying at our feet all the evidence we need of a dying and therefore a living world. I move through the wilderness with my gun at the shoulder of my eye...." (DL 79) The Gun also stands as a symbol of the power laid by violence. It is a useful means to protect them and hunt animals as well as the Bushman. Through the thoughts of Jacobus about the gun, J. M. Coetzee reminds about the colonizers ruling over the colonized. He puts forth the conflict of intellectual thinking against the violence, physical aggressiveness and negligence to family. The narratives show how war and its brutality affect his psyche and sex relations. J. M. Coetzee also presents powerfully the issues like spectacular violence, interrogation and torture, the war violence and loss of the nation, aspects of human and animal behavioural, addiction and violence.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES:

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