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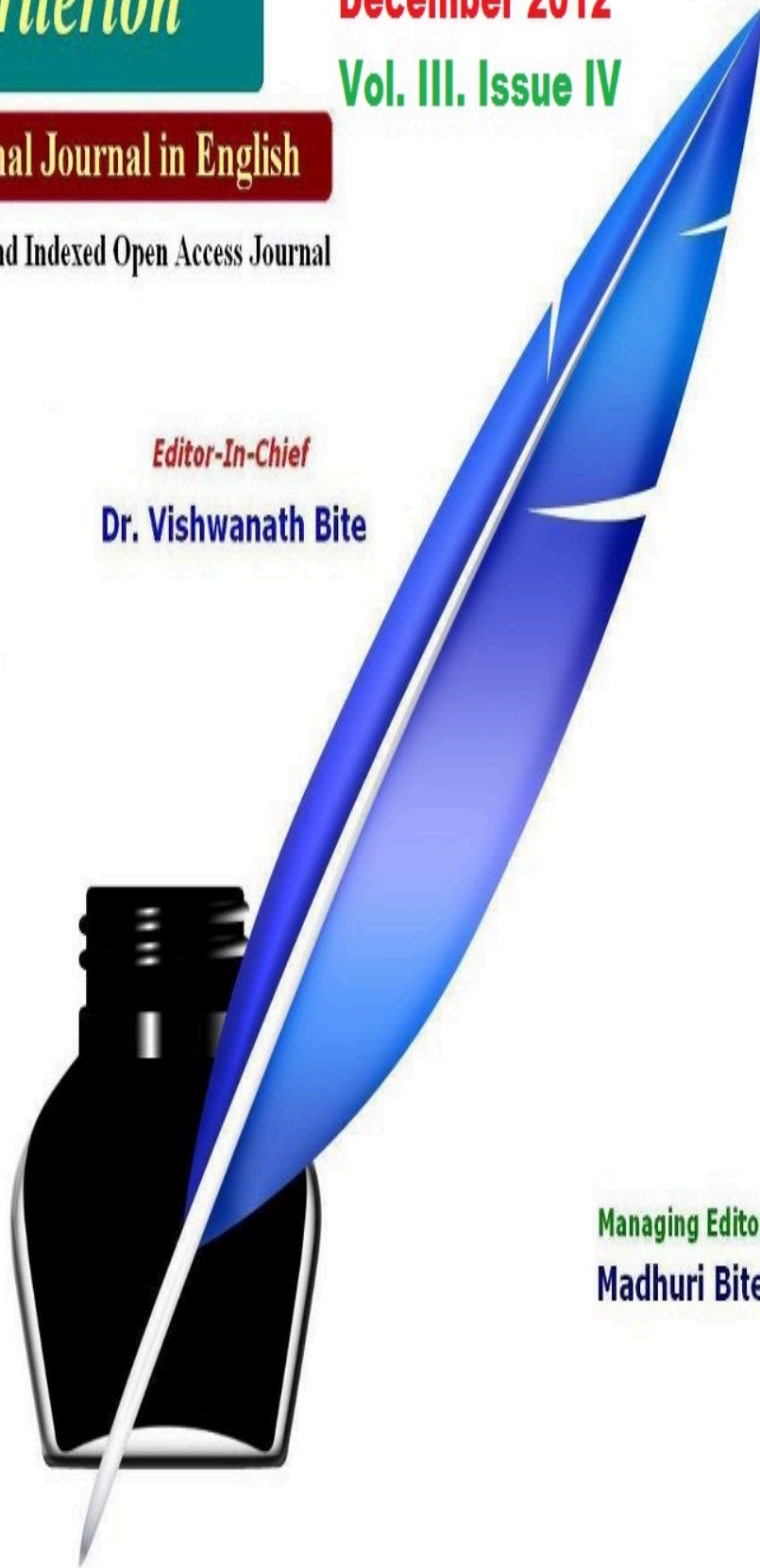
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Transnational Feminism in Post-Apartheid Africa: A Study of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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Transnational feminism attempts to create a common bond among women of different countries with a deep consideration about their respective society as well as their respective cultural background. The norm that categorizes human beings by making one group the majority, the group which is the powerful subject, and the other group the minority, the helpless dependent object, has also territorialized women by making them a divergent group. Both women and colored people have similar status in society, the status of being exploited, voiceless and vulnerable objects. But when we think about the condition of colored women we realize that they are two times more deprived and more exploited than colored men or white women. On the one hand they are women and on the other hand they are women of color. These two facts culminate in giving them a much different identity which does not justify the concept of homogeneity or collective consciousness that leads to the formation of universal sisterhood. Transnational feminism is that customized form of feminism which does not totally reject the idea of universal sisterhood but it reformulates the idea by giving equal respect towards different social and cultural background. In transnational feminism hegemonic power of unification is replaced by thoughtful consideration. The goal of transnational feminism can be defined as a way of finding homogeneity among the otherwise heterogeneous women of the world.

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* presents the picture of post-apartheid Africa where decentralization of power is taking place. In order to portray this major upheaval that is happening in African history with the upturning of the hierarchy system, Coetzee has rendered the two worlds, black and white with different cultural background and dissimilar educational qualification. But in spite of all these dissimilarities there is something common among these characters which lifts them above the petty politics of color and ties them in a universal feminine bond thus giving transnational feminism a chance to work. Decentralization of power always results in centralization of power shifting itself from one group to another. As in Africa it gets transferred from the whites to the blacks. Power always brings with itself a deliberate desire of execution and the only way of doing that is through oppression. Change in the hierarchy system culminates in the changing position of the oppressor and the oppressed. But it hardly makes any difference to the condition of women as they are always the helpless objects. Social hierarchy is turned down but gender hierarchy always stands erect. Though blacks are now enjoying the higher status in social hierarchy but even then the two wives of Petrus are only the helpless, voiceless, passive objects who have accepted their destiny without any negotiation and have decided to see the world only through the lens given by Petrus. The power shifting has only ensured them the security of being not violated by the whites though they might face domestic violence or rape several times, though they might be denied their freedom of expression. Here Lucy, the only daughter of Prof. Lurie is different. The step that Lucy takes to live an independent life under the benevolent shades of nature having farming as her means of livelihood is not so common in post-apartheid Africa. The only way by which women can protect themselves from patriarchy exploitation is by being financially independent which Lucy tries to be. She tries to be equal to

her male counterparts but the result of her desire costs her much. She is brutally gang raped. Rape and sexual harassment not only display men's desperate desire of sex but also symbolizes the demonstration of power of one group and the helplessness of the other. At the beginning of the book Prof. David Lurie is the powerful while Melanie Issacs is the helpless, fragile, vulnerable creature but later when power shifts and history repeats Lucy is the victim and she is violated by the three young black men who are the new oppressor, the new violators. Women are always the oppressed others in any society while the oppressor changes several times. David Lurie is also physically attacked by those three men but the act they have committed on Lucy is to break her from within, to remind her that the place women have in society, to punish her as she has dared to imagine her life in some other way than is decided by the male dominated society.

Petrus's young wife is a character who hardly has any identity of her own. Throughout the whole text we heard her name only one or two times. She is always mentioned as Petrus's young wife and her eyes never meet Prof. Lurie's eyes. She hardly dares to dream about her children's sex. She dreams what Petrus dreams, she pretends her thought to be exactly portrayed by Petrus's words. None of the black female characters of the book except Soraya has any individual identity. Soraya, though a prostitute and is the symbol of Prof. Lurie's sexual satisfaction but stops working for the agency when she feels like not continuing as a prostitute. Even then David Lurie tries to exploit her by calling up her but she strongly resists the exploitation. Lucy also, though the violation changes her totally as a person by making her much more like a dead person but she rejects the offer of security and protection which Prof. Lurie gives her by offering to send her to Holland, as the place Eastern Cape is no more safe for a lonely woman but she rejects the proposal and says:

...if I leave the farm now I will leave defeated, and will taste the defeat for the rest of my life. (P.161)

Lucy rejects to live a life of the defeated. The only way of making women subjugated objects is to do it by hindering their ways of being financially independent. The crime that was committed on Lucy also gives evidence of this practice. Now she needs Petrus's protection in order to live a secured and respectable life in the society. As Petrus says:

But here...it is dangerous, too dangerous. A woman must be marry. (P.202)

His words are reminder of the only status women have in our society, the status of being somebody's wife. Lucy and Petrus's two wives are from different cultural backgrounds. Whereas Lucy is white, educated, self-independent woman, Petrus's wife is black and nothing about her education has been mentioned by the author. But at the end both are forced to become dependent on a male. Their free life, their right of using their reason is denied by the dominating and subjugating power of the patriarchal society which has decided and prescribed only one status for women years ago and i.e. the status of being the wife to someone.

The incident of rape forces Lucy to abandon her independent life full of self respect and dignity and to become Petrus's subaltern third wife. In a society which is polygamy women are the worst sufferer. Lucy's condition shows the horrible effect of the desire of transcendence whereas the lives of Petrus's two wives show the tenuousness of not having any transcendent desire and the results of being always in the limits drawn by the patriarchal society. As Marais has said:

History's conditioning force is exposed when Lucy is reduced, despite her

intentions, to a term in a power relationship, an act which foregrounds the fragility and tenuousness of the desire for transcendence. (P.12)

Lucy rejects to abort the child from the rape. Her decision of miscegenation emerges out Lucy as the triumphant with all her benevolence and undiminishable courage against the odds of the male dominated society. She is ready to give her land to Petrus but her house will be her own only where no trespasser is allowed. As she says:

A bywoner. But the house remains mine, I repeat that. No one enters this house without my permission. Including him... (P.204)

All the women characters of the book are sufferers but Lucy at least is able to keep something as her own. Her house represents her world even in an otherwise alien land. She suffers, she compromises but she stands erect.

By presenting female characters from different backgrounds and by uniting them in a common bond by the means of articulating their pain of being oppressed and helpless; their agony for being the unimportant 'other', and their anguish over their subjugation, *Disgrace* has opened the door for transnational feminism. Whether the ending of the book is symptomatic of a new subjugation or symbolic of a new way of resistance is the reason of much of dispute. Lucy tries to bridge the gap between feminine tolerance and patriarchy dominance thus opens up a new way of resistance. The pain of all the female characters, their anguish, and their helplessness successfully create a common bond among them despite their so many dissimilarities. Women are the passive observer and the worst sufferer of any kind of hierarchy system, considering this transnational feminism tries to create a feminine solidarity. This feminine solidarity is created among the female characters of this work the moment Lucy decides to accept the status of being Petrus's subaltern third wife.

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