

THE POSTCOLONIAL WOMEN IN NGUGI WA THIONGO'S NOVELS

Ms. Garima Dubey

Assistant Professor, Acropolis Institute of Technology & Research, Indore (M. P.)

ABSTRACT-This paper takes up a critical overview on the treatment of postcolonial women in Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiongo's work. The paper evaluates the increasingly important position assigned to African literature in general (and the novel in particular), the dominant roles played by Ngugi through a focus on the significant contributions of these two writers concerning the theme of women and transformation. Although the author puts a high premium on womanism, showing themselves as champions of especially sexual and racial freedom for all women, the novels indicate different trends in their portrayal of this theme. Ngugi tends to become increasingly politically biased in expressing his Marxist social, political and economic doctrines. The paper furthermore examines the ways in which Ngugi highlight different aspects of the discourse of female liberation, while also studying the dialogue of transformation and a sense of belonging. Finally, it remarks on Ngugi's aesthetic approaches to the discourse of women and transformation.

Keywords: Womanism, Female Consciousness, Postcolonial, Transformation.

Thiongo is an internationally acclaimed African writer and human rights activist. Kenyan Novelist, his novels particularly, seem to present a consistent revision of thought, style, content and characterization. He is a radical thinker and commentator, Ngugi wa Thiongo is a progressive and socially engaged intellectual. He has frequently been regarded as a likely candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. His works stand out for their unequivocal criticism of colonialism, the subjugation of African cultures by the imperial west and the oppression of the African masses by the ruling neo-colonialist elite. In postcolonial Africa people adopted the ways of the colonizers, including their religion and cultural practices. Ngugi considered these acts as the result of colonialism, and hence, renounced the practices of the colonizers as well as the trails of those practices from his life. Ngugi's works have made him distinct from other African writers, especially from the male African writers, as he does not follow the league. He neither writes from the male perspective nor overtly glorifies male domination over women. He is believed by critics to be a gynandrist who becomes one with the female African writers in raising his voice against the oppression of women. Being ahead of his times, Ngugi wittingly dissociated himself from the male African writers' jeopardy of being categorized as male-centric. He made a shift from the usual course followed by the male African writers in the past with regard to their approach towards the women of their nation. The novels of Ngugi are examples of his interest in women's affairs and their role in the society; his first major interest being colonialism and neo-colonialism. The central themes of female assertiveness and post-independence dilemma of the motherland permeate Ngugi's novels. It is quite obvious that African women have often been subjected to negative stereotypes and their contributions have been neglected or even omitted.

Weep Not, Child the very first novel of Ngugi, begins with the resoluteness of a mother (Nyokabi) to educate her son, Njoroge, against all odds. The central theme of the novel is Mau Mau Rebellion. The book is divided into two parts. The first part deals mostly with Njoroge's education whose aim is to become educated and provide for the welfare of his family. Ultimately, he is the only one left to look after his mothers. The second part of the novel has most of the incidents describing the natives fighting against the white settlers. By the end of the novel it is seen that Njoroge has suffered so much that he tries to commit suicide. The second novel of Ngugi, *The River Between*, was written before *Weep Not, Child* but it went into publication after it. This novel, too, has colonialism as its theme. The story revolves around the people of the two ridges, Makuyu and Kameno, who are both united as well as separated by the River Honia that flows in between. The novel deals with the conflict prevalent in the tribe that is caused by some people accepting Christianity and others remaining true to their indigenous religion. Both the parties, one led by Joshua (convert) and the other by Waiyaki (traditionalist), are firm in their belief and thinking and consider the other in the dark. Another issue taken up in the novel is female circumcision. Muthoni, Joshua's daughter, gets herself circumcised to attain full womanhood irrespective of the fact that her father has become a hardcore Christian, but soon after she dies from her wounds. Later, Waiyaki falls in love with Joshua's uncircumcised daughter, Nyambura which becomes a major concern for the traditionalists as Waiyaki violated the oath of purity. Third in a row, Ngugi wrote *Devil on the Cross* (1982) on toilet paper during his detention in prison. It was written in Gĩkũyũ after Ngugi declared that he would not make use of the colonizers' language. The novel is a satire upon the prevalent social vices of the times after independence in Kenya. The story centres round the following five characters - Wangarĩ, Warĩnga, Gatũria, Mwaura and Muturi. In the end Warĩnga finds out that the Rich Old Man who impregnated her is none other than Gatũria's (whom she loved) father. The novel ends with Warĩnga's killing of the Rich Old Man, leaving scope for a lot many interpretations of the text. These three selected novels have different themes. Whereas *Weep Not, Child* talks of the affect of the colonial era upon the Africans, *The River Between* deals with the tiff prevalent between the Africans with regard to traditionalism and westernism. *Devil on the Cross* is a critique of the Africans in power in postcolonial Kenya. Ngugi takes up the case of Kenyan women in the novels, talking of both their rebellious and submissive nature. He adopted a completely different and unique style to narrate the stigmatic journey of Gĩkũyũ women from the postcolonial era to the neo-colonial period. He presented them as impervious, dauntless and rebellious, yet enigmatic and uncanny. Not only this, he also discusses the effect of outside forces on their lives. The rules and norms laid out by the society for its females are different from the ones that its male members follow.

Patriarchal societies neither give women the equality they deserve nor bestow upon them the feeling that they are anywhere near to their male counterparts, irrespective of the roles they play in the society. In nearly all the novels of Ngũgĩ, women characters are seen taking decisions for themselves as well as for their children. Portraying women as decision-makers set out their high stature that overtly is a pointer to the elevated position that women enjoy in society, but the truth lies at the core of this ideology. The need to portray women characters as strong and bold was necessary because, according to Ngũgĩ, this might help real African women invigorate themselves. Although critically analyzing the novels of Ngũgĩ reveal that his female characters, too, are bound by the patriarchal structures of society and whenever they try to break free from those chains, they have to wear the garb of masculine attributes else they are not considered holding any position in the community. The incidents in the novels show that women are not capable and competent enough to take apt decisions every time. Ngũgĩ's women succeed in creating a place for themselves in the community, they have to pay a heavy price for being unconventional. Whenever they try to come out of their closet, they have to face serious hardships whereas the women who adhere to the traditional rules and regulations assigned to them live a life that is not as horrendous as of those who rebel against patriarchy. Ngũgĩ succeeds in his intentions of showing strong female characters, which go against the current. Most of the women in Ngugi's works possess a fighting spirit which can hardly be expected at the beginning of the novel. Those women who fight without giving up hope, herald the impending change in the position for both men and women as they reconsider their social roles. In his novels, besides the concepts such as nationhood, betrayal, and resistance, Ngugi portrays the postcolonial women figures in various types of characters. No matter how they are oppressed and exploited, the postcolonial women are the victims of colonialism and their own society. He presents female characters as powerful women who rather than being sexually and psychologically flattened by the African culture, choose to redefine their roles in supportive and mutual relations with African men and with their families. And, in spite of all their sufferings, they achieve to stand against all the harsh sides of life, like a flower growing in a bloody garden.

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