



THEME OF EXPLOITATION IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S WEEP NOT CHILD.

Esak Sayyad Shaikh

Pune District Education Associations
Waghire College of Arts, Commerce and Science
,Pune-412301

Dr.Shahaji Rajaram Karande

Rayat Shikshan Sanstha's,
S.M.Joshi College, RSaswad , Purandar
Hadapsar, Pune-28

Abstract:

This paper aimed at Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a towering figure in African literature, weaves powerful narratives that delve into the complexities of post-colonial African societies. One of his earliest works "Weep Not Child published in 1964, explores the theme of exploitation against the backdrop of British colonial rule in Kenya. This paper discussed how Ngugi vividly portrays various forms of exploitation-economic, social, and cultural - in the novel.

Keywords: Exploitation, Economic, Social, Education

Introduction:

The word 'Exploitation, broadly speaking, implies unfair utilisation of a person or a community for one's own selfish ends. The victim of exploitation is made to suffer irretrievably. There are myriad ways in which the exploited are affected socially, economically, psychologically and even politically. Exploitation refers to the act of taking advantage of someone or something for personal gain, often at the expense of their well-being, rights, or dignity. It can occur in various contexts, including labour, economics, relationships, and natural resources. Exploitation involves an imbalance of power, where one party, typically the exploiter, uses their position to manipulate or extract benefits from the other party, known as the exploited.

In the realm of labour, exploitation often manifests as unfair working conditions, inadequate wages, and lack of benefits. This can include practices such as child labour, forced labour, and sweatshops, where workers endure long hours, unsafe environments, and meagre pay. Exploitative employers capitalize on vulnerable individuals who may lack alternatives due to socioeconomic constraints or limited job opportunities.

Economic exploitation revolves around unequal distribution of resources and wealth. This can be seen in systems where a minority controls a disproportionate share of resources, while the majority struggles to meet basic needs. Colonialism and neo-colonialism, for instance, historically exploited the resources of colonized regions, resulting in economic disparities that persist to this day. Exploitation is not limited to economic contexts. Human trafficking and the sex trade are stark examples of the exploitation of vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children, for financial gain. These industries thrive on manipulation, coercion, and the violation of human rights, often leaving victims traumatized and trapped in cycles of abuse.

In relationships, exploitation can take the form of emotional, psychological, or physical abuse. Manipulative individuals may prey on the vulnerabilities of their partners, using emotional tactics to control them or engaging in coercive behaviours that undermine their autonomy. This can lead to long-lasting psychological damage and a sense of powerlessness for the victim.

"Weep Not, Child," written by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, is a poignant novel set in Kenya during the tumultuous era of the Mau Mau uprising and decolonization. The story follows Njoroge, a young Kikuyu boy, as he navigates the challenges of growing up in a divided society. Njoroge is determined to pursue an education, which is seen as a pathway to a better future. His family faces economic hardships, worsened by the oppressive British colonial rule and land dispossession.

Exploitation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Weep Not Child

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The theme of exploitation of the colonised through missionary education recurs in Weep Not, Child novel of Ngugi. T.N. Dhar comments "In Weep Not, Child the weep not child is at the centre of the novel for his has the fear of being exploited at the hands of others. Naturally, the child Njoroge has the sympathy of the author for him. In Weeps Not Child, Njoroge is advised by his father, Ngotho to join missionary school of Siriana. Njoroge saw himself destined for something big. Njoroge did not want to be like his father working for a white man, or, worst for an Indian." He had heard and seen the hardship of his father. He would escape through his education from such conditions and have his brothers and mothers to escape from such poor conditions and hardship that they were facing.

Njoroge's desire to get himself educated became more intense and he actually saw himself as a possible saviour of the whole God's country through his education. Soon he became a slave to the western values that cut him off from his native roots. He was also tuned by the influence of the Bible, which was taught as part of education at the school. The Bible became his favourite book and it brought about a change in his vision of life thus:

His belief in a future for his family and the village rested then not only on a hope for sound education but also on a belief in a God of love and mercy, who long ago walked on this earth with Gakuyin and Mumbi, or Adam and Eve.

His sense of justice was tuned up by the principles of missionary education. He traced the oppressed Kenyans as those children of Israel about whom he read in the Bible. He began to believe in the brotherhood of the Whites and the blacks. This education made him not to look upon the Whites who occupied their lands as his enemies. With this subjugated mind, Njoroge was not able to fight for the lands occupied by the colonisers. He, like Waiyaki, had put too much of faith in education as a weapon against the exploiters but in the process, he himself became the exploiter. In the hour of need, when his father was dead and all his three brothers were imprisoned, it was not Njoroge's education that rescued them; it was Kamau who helped them financially. All Njoroge's vision of childhood vanishes when he forced by strained circumstances, sought to work in an Indian shop. He looked pathetically at the children going to school with these faces gleaming with hope. Njoroge was removed from the shop as he did not prove to be a successful salesman. His hope Sun will rise tomorrow became a mere illusion. He felt that western education made him a coward, an old man at the age of twenty. If only he had learnt anything other than missionary education that would teach to earn his livelihood like Kamau, his life would have taken a different turn and he too would have become useful to his family and society. Ngugi through young and sensitive Njoroge revealed the exploitative nature of the White colonial education and its drastic effect on the minds of the young Kenyan children who were to grow into responsible Kenyan citizens. He exemplified Wayaka's relation at the end of the novel; Weep Not Child that education for oppressed people is not all

In Wee Not, Child, Ngugi records the exploitation of the Africans at the hands of the African landlord Jacobo, who is d named black European indulges in ruthless exploitation of African farmers His political allegiance, his house and privileged positions set him sport from most of his countrymen He hindered other farmers from growing rich like him. His land was as big as a settler's farm. In return to the permission given by the settlers to grow cash crops, Jacobo recruited labour and gave Howlands advice on how to get hard work from African workers for unfair wages Ngotho, as one of the workers supplied by him to Howlands, suffered in the suppressive hands of Jacobo. Jacobo acted as an agent to the Whites in pacifying the Africans to work for low wages. He was raised to a chief's position on account of his suppressive power. Acting as an agent to Howlands, he tried in vain pacify the revolted Ngotho Unsuccessful in his attempt, he becomes an opponent to Ngotho and nurses deep-seated resentment against him. He searches continually for ways of getting Ngotho and his sons out of the way to win Howlands's favour. He tells Howlands:

Now, if we leave them alone, there'll flare up big, big trouble in the village. Their detention would make it easier to keep an eye on this Ngotho because as I was telling you he may be the real leader of Mau Mau.

These lines throw light on the exploitative nature of Jacobo. Even Howlands despised Jacobo 'because he was a savage.

Exploitation of the Africans by their own countrymen in the colonial and neo-colonial Kenya has been clearly brought out by Ngugi. The Africans who have been set on their own race by the British have proved themselves crueller than their British masters. They act as agents of the British in exploiting their own people for their materialistic gains. They are at once the exploited as well as the exploiters. In *Weep Not, Child*, the African landowner Jacobo, an agent of the white settler Howlands, supplies African labourers at low wages to work on the settler's fields. In return, he alone grows cash crops like Pyrethium and hinders other Africans from growing it with Howlands help. When he is raised to the power- of chief, he tries to suppress Ngotho, an Ahoi and his family members' cruelly.

Conclusion:

In "*Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o masterfully dissects various forms of exploitation that plagued colonial-era Kenya. By weaving personal experiences and historical context into the narrative, Ngugi paints a vivid picture of economic, social, and cultural exploitation. The characters' journeys mirror the broader struggles of the African people against a backdrop of colonial domination. Through this exploration of exploitation, Ngugi invites readers to critically engage with the complexities of post-colonial African societies and the enduring legacy of exploitation.

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