

African Reality
in
Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Fiction

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Preface

The relationship between literature and nation-building has been one of the most crucial issues in postcolonial studies. The novel in particular is regarded as a means by which writers forge national consciousness among the colonized during the time of colonization. Many African writers themselves, for example, conceive of their work as an arena of resistance to European colonialism which disfigures the identities of Africans and denies their history. European renaissance marked the beginning of the dis-membering of Africa, her body and soul were torn apart as her resources were raped and her beauty disfigured. Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 – ‘good hope’ for the invaders and ‘bad omen’ for the invaded. Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the most famous Kenyan novelist and thinker, has tried to deal with almost all the sensitive issues of Africa from pre-colonialism to post-colonialism. His novels are genuine documents of African reality. He bitterly criticizes the colonial presence in Africa and its long lasting adverse impacts on the entire continent.

First chapter entitled as “INTRODUCTION” deals with the biographical details of the most famous writer of contemporary Kenya and one of the leading literary artists of Africa, Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1938-), formerly known as James Ngugi. He was born during the critical period of Kenya in 1938. The colonial rule destroyed the entire social, cultural and economic spheres of Kenya. The strong reaction against the hegemony in form of Mau Mau is the historical movement in the entire continent. Ngugi was the true witness of the struggle. His family

was also involved in it and had to pay a big price. Ngugi's childhood was spent in complete control of colonialism. His education at missionary school and his bitter experiences with the white teachers are very interesting. He witnessed how the tribal students were ill-treated and forced to obey the colonial rules. Such experiences created a long lasting impact on Ngugi Thiong'o. He became a crusader against the entire colonialism. Second chapter of the book discusses the various realities of the continent, Africa. It begins with the various views regarding Africa, especially negative in general. The European thinkers believed that Africa was without glorious history and social development. It was the continent with wilderness and barbarianism. In the chapter there is a strong argument that the views of the European thinkers were fully biased. In fact, Africa had glorious past with ideal social set up and intellectual people. There are certain views of the thinkers who strongly believe that Africa is not wild or uncivilized as the European thinkers hold. The chapter may be divided into three divisions as I have tried to discuss African reality in Pre-colonial era, Colonial era and Post colonial era. Third chapter deals with the thematic concerns in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels. Ngugi Thiong'o has written seven novels, namely **Weep Not, Child**, **The River Between**, **A Grain of Wheat**, **Petals of Blood**, **Devil on the Cross**, **Matigari** and **Wizard of the Crow**. Ngugi's seven novels may be divided into three phases such as Colonialism in Africa, Anti-colonial movement and Neo-colonialism in contemporary Africa.

Fourth chapter is concerned with various narrative techniques used by Ngugi Thiong'o in his seven novels. There is a special emphasis upon his inclination to African Oral Tradition. Despite the ravages of slavery and colonialism on

Africa's political, economic and social systems, the continent's cultures and aesthetic sensibilities remain independent and vibrant, particularly in the orally based forms of cultural expression. Although African societies have developed writing traditions, Africans are primarily an oral people, and it is that tradition that has dominated the cultural forms created on the continent. Artistic expression plays an important role in the lives of African peoples, providing a forum for participation in the community and for exploring the mysteries of humanity.

Ngugi's fiction feeds on oral traditions of his culture. He makes use of myths, legends and folklores. Ngugi explores devices of oral traditions for the purpose of the preservation and projection of socio-cultural heritage and to teach moral values.

Fifth chapter discusses how Ngugi wa Thiong'o got influenced by the thoughts of Karl Marx and Franz Fanon. Ngugi as a writer is not only radical but also an idealist. Early stage of his life as a creative writer is highly colored by Marxism and Fanonism. Ngugi, a champion of the Mau Mau, a crusader against the Neo-Colonial hegemony in modern Kenya, owes his debt to Marxist ideology and has now become a Socialist Realist in fiction. In his works we find his continuing crusade against the Capitalist and the Neo-colonial forces operating in Africa. The concluding chapter is about how African reality is reflected in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fiction. All the seven novels of Ngugi become a genuine documentation of African reality.

DR. J.D.Hirpara

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