Hybridity, Ambivalence, Contingency in Post Colonial Literature: A Reading of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s Major Works

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Ngugi Wa Thiong’o happens to be one of the crusaders of postcolonial theory, though he advocates the re-establishment of Identity of Nativity by replacing the present hybrid or neo-colonial cultural and political mind set of the Kenyans particularly and the colonized countries in general. Ngugi is a post-colonial writer with one strong exception to the theory that post-colonial theorists do not believe in establishing anything at the centre but overall Ngugi argues that his native language, culture and people’s way of life should be re-established by replacing the present-neo-colonial powers. In fact, he has written political books namely Moving the Centre and Decolonizing the Mind. Here hybridity, ambivalence and contingency are noticed.

The paper intends to make very brief and foregrounding core issues of Ngugi which he continuously stresses upon in his major political and creative writings. It is also very true that Ngugi has written number of works which need volumes of books to be written on them, but here it is just aimed to study his writings in terse which may inspire the readers to read his works thoroughly.

Ngugi argues about the meaning of literature and necessary of the same as: “At the time literature is more than just a mechanistic reflection of social reality. As part of man’s artistic activities, it is in itself part of man, self-realization as a result of his wrestling with nature; it is, if you like, itself a symbol of man’s creativity, of man’s historical process of being and becoming. It is also an enjoyable end-product of man’s artistic labour. But more important, it does shape our attitudes to life, to the daily struggle with nature, the daily struggles with a community and daily struggle within our individual souls and selves”4.

Post-colonial literature questions all, answers none. The situation emerged after colonialism is so subtle and contagious. The erstwhile colonies were treated beyond human imagination which the post-colonial thinkers try to comprehend and reshape the things went wrong. The society in which we are part of it, is originated, reshaped by the myths, puranas, history-before the arrival of the whites, and after the departure of the whites and the present democratic aspirations. These are the complex reasons, which created hybridity, ambivalence, and contingency are the dominating characteristics of the post-colonial literature. It may not be very intentional but undercurrent inbuilt emotion of any writers, call it objective, subjective or even cosmic. All the works of Ngugi certainly discuss on the poor living conditions of the Kenyans in particular and the life of downtrodden world over and the loss of cultural identity of the people.

Ngugi as a University teacher–his radical ideas troubled him and thrown him out of the teaching profession his motherland – Kenya. His public rehearsals of the drama made him to get self-exiled. A writer of non-fictional writings, labeled him as radical Fannost Marxist-and anti-European powers. Ngugi as novelist is really amazing because his narrative techniques-such as multiple characters-keeping centers by each characters-use of myths, i.e., use of orature. The novels almost near to the real life situations. Because of his commitment to change of common masses, depicts the parallel situations of the fateful living conditions of the oppressed people and the brutal characteristics of colonial, neo-colonial powers.

Weep Not, Child (1964), The River Between (1965), A Grain of Wheat (1967), Petals of Blood (1977), Devil on the Cross (1980), Matigari (1986), and Wizard of the Crow (2004). Weep Not, Child mainly reflects how in a colonizing country education could spoil the young minds about one’s own country, language and how after getting colonized education the people of mother land face dilemmas and split-feelings leading to the life of rootlessness. Njoroge is the major character in the novel whishes to get English education and by doing so he faces the wrath of his novel and at end he plans to end his life. Ngugi’s the River Between, (1965) portrays the conflict between the native culture and the western culture. In the entire novel it would be very difficult to say which culture is good and which is bad-totally there is mixed-hybrid culture which does not have any identity. It is also an exploration of the life of extreme featured two cultures-African tribal rite of female circumcision and the hollowness of the Christianity. The characters are faced with a number of questions-what to accept and what to reject. A Grain of Wheat (1967), by Ngugi portrays mindset of the Kenyans just four days earlier to independence of Kenayn-Uhuru Day. It is historical fact that Kenya became independent in 1963, but the novel prominently discusses the tribal village of Thabai. Through flash backs he narrates how the people have different emotions, expectations after facing the cruel rule of colonialists. Petals of Blood (1977), is yet another literary master piece of Ngugi which attacks on capitalism i.e., how the landlords, rich businessmen got trained by the white, exploit the poor and working class. Karega, Munira, Abdulla and Wanja are the...
characters on whom one or the other case is registered, though all the four characters working as, a teacher, a headmaster, shopkeeper, maid servant in a bar and an ex-prostitute respectively. *Devil on the Cross* (1980), is a classic example of Ngugi about the pathetic living condition of women in Kenya. It shows how the rich people of Kenya use the poor-women and throw them on the street after using them. Wangari who struggles for the survival of life is cunningly exploited sexually in Nairobi by rich men. She tries hard to take revenge only the end she kills the man who used her sexually and made her mother without husband. Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy defines patriarchy as ‘the government of a family, Church or society by the fathers. The term was originally applied to the fathers of tribes of Israel, then became on honorific designation of the bishops of the Church and later the official designation of the heads of Eastern Churches’ (p279-rpt.1996).

*Matiigari* (1986), is the second novel Ngugi writes in his mother tongue Gikuyu and translates it into English by himself. The name of the hero and title of the novel is the same as Matigari. And Kenyan authorities mistook Matigari leading to issuing an arrest warrant against him as a real human being. *Wizard of the Crow* (2004), is an epic mammoth novel of 780-pages. Ngugi takes more than ten long years to complete the novel is significant. It is satirical. The Ruler tries hard to make his name immortal but all the time his name is getting tarnished because of his egoistic and flowing sycophantic power hungry men who are always around him. How the ruler tries to construct the tallest building by taking loan from foreign bank? How is he being treated during his visit to the USA? How the native – sorcerer could help him to save his life? What about the banned women revolution? Is it between civilized and barbaric? What is the difference between cultured and otherwise? Loss of Identity is the loss of everything? White aches of the characters in the novel. The main character is named after him the novel is all about but he does not have a name for identity. Though the entire novel is built on him but still the novelist has not given a name which would signify the tragic life of aftermath of colonial-neo-colonial society which is fictionally given the name as Abrurria. The name is given the prominent character is ‘Ruler’ and nothing else. It shows how post-colonial neo-society has no identity and even the name.

Ngugi advocates about the meaning struggle as in his *Home Coming* “No living culture is ever static. Collectively, human beings struggle to master their physical environment and in the process create a social one”2.

Ngugi asks some of the pertinent questions, in his *Writers in Politics* as: ‘Why is it that the Church is always preaching humanity and forgiveness and non-violence to the oppressed classes? Why do the liberals preach gratitude, humanity, meekness to the oppressed classes? Why is it that the Church does not concentrate it preaching and efforts of conversion on the very classes and races that have brutalized others, manacled others, and robbed others?’3 We need to understand implied/self-explanatory answers. These questions may be rhetorical.

II. WORKS CITED:


**Author’s Introduction:**

Dr. C. Channappa (1964-) was born in the lap of Sahyadri Mountain Ranges, known as *Malenadu* in Karnataka State. In 2010, he received his doctorate in comparative literature from Kuvempu University, Shimoga (on Ngugi Kenya and K. Channappa Bharathi, a Tamil writer) and did his PGDTE at EFLU (Hyderabad). He has been teaching at USMR College, Shankaraghatta, for past twenty two years. He has a genuine concern for the socio-economic and cultural well-being of the exploited and suppressed sections of society. He has presented research papers, especially on subaltern writings, at various regional, national, international seminars and contributed significantly to reputed literary journals. He has also done research work with UGC financial assistance and delivered a number of scholarly lectures including one at Nairobi, Kenya. Recently he has contributed an article to the book *Dalit woman writing: Bama*, published by (Prestige) entitled, *Bama’s Sangati: The Chronicles of Exploitation and Suppression of Dalit Women*. He has been an Indian examiner for a few reputed Universities in India. He has published three and three edited scholarly international books which are available online entitled, *Voices of Protest (Prestige New Delhi), Global Challenges in the Fiction of Ngugi (Vedanta New Delhi)*, and *Indian and African Literature (Prestige-New Delhi)*, Ed “Global Fiction & the New Challenges: Dalit, Diaspora & Diversity”, Ed “Feminist Theory and Literature”, Ed “Rise of the New Writing: Folk, Culture and Cinema”, and also conducted an international conference at Shimoga in association with ISCS, New Delhi during 2017.