



## Western Education – Boon or Curse: Weep Not, Child

**Dr. Pallavi Bhardwaj**

Assistant Professor

Baddi University of Emerging Sciences and Technology, Baddi, Makhnumajra  
Dist. Solan, Himachal Pradesh-173205. India.

**Abstract:** *Weep Not, Child* is a poignant novel about the sways of Mau Mau mutiny on the lives of common populace. The work explores the deleterious facets of colonialism and imperialism through the life sketch of Njoroge, a young man whose yearn to join academia is packed down by the viciousness of Mau Mau insurgents and the fierce retort of white regime. Since the text exemplifies agony, grief, societal class difference and rebelliousness, Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister of Kenya personifies the dogma of nationalism. For the gullible inhabitants, Kenyatta becomes an insignia of customs and ethnicities polished by the poise of astuteness - a guardian angel, a redeemer - who will win the struggle against colonial supremacies.

**Index Terms - Colonialism, Imperialism, Western Education, Missionaries, Mau Mau Uprising**

### I. INTRODUCTION

*Weep Not, Child* (1964), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's first published novel is a heart-rending work with the locale of a Gikuyu village during a boisterous and ferocious epoch of Emergency amid 1952-1960. The text portrays the affiliation between black natives and white colonials resulting into the adverse consequences of Mau Mau uprising on the lives of gullible folks but with the ultimate deliverance of Kenyan nation from the shackles of British rule. *Weep Not, Child* depicts a significant point wherein freedom from colonists has become an indispensable motto of the inhabitants but keeping education, specifically western education as the solitary conceivable key to counterattack colonialism. The society with a split mode of transition and turmoil delineates an archetypal Gikuyu family, a miniscule of Kenyan civilization, which is utterly fragmented because of its staunch inclination towards west and western norms.

### II. BUCOLIC EXISTENCE

The foremost concern of the general public in a reliant nation is to earn adequate in order to meet its two meals. Following the footprints of numerous poor natives, Ngotho too works as a 'muhoi' - a squatter - on the acreage of a black village chief Jacobo who has assimilated affluence through collaboration with Mr. Howlands, the most influential white landlord of Mahua village. The humble squatter Ngotho lives in the place with Njeri, his first wife, mother of Boro, Kamau and Kari, and Nyokabi, the second wife and mother of Njoroge and Mwangi. Mwangi like other gullible was made a scapegoat by the British government to forcefully fight on their behalf during Second World War and was eventually killed. Though Ngotho was a blue-collar worker at Howlands' farm but being a courteous man he is always driven by his desire to preserve his ancestral land rather than procuring any reparation from his master.

Ngotho and his family are fairly modest who are contented with their serene living. At this time however, the kinfolk are exceedingly thrilled as their youngest son, Njoroge is about to live their dream of attending the school, the pictogram of esteem and prosperity. Njoroge who always aspires to become educated is at seven skies. His mother Nyokabi, who cogitates edification as a resource for augmentation of her eminence in the society, inquires the son: "Would you like to go to school?" The super elated kid gulped and become anxious that "the woman might withdraw her words" (3). Conversely, the mum is feeling delighted of having an educated lad and considers her objective of existence to be accomplished:

Look, I've a son as good and as well-educated as any [one] ... can find in the land. (16)

Ngotho too is a proud father who is enthusiastic over seeing his son going to the school and thus, perceiving himself analogous, "almost equal to Jacobo" (12).

Not only Njoroge's mother but everyone in the family as well as the society adulates education as a source of materialistic enhancement and honour for leading a privileged life. Kamau, Njoroge's half - brother who is a trainee carpenter falls under this category of individuals who believe education to be a stepping stone for self-evolution and wants his younger brother to join school which will in turn bring fortunes to the family and the clan.

### III. WESTERN TUTELAGE

Even the conventional folktales, an approach used for enlightening the youth too portrays the stories of teaching colonized people via dual source - authorized missionary schools and customary Gikuyu mode. The tale starts with the Gikuyu myth pertaining to the evolution of mankind, the dispensing of land to Gikuyu and Mumbi - the first couple - by the almighty Murungu and eventually the revelation by Mugo wa Kibiro, the Gikuyu soothsayer about western encounter and embezzlement of native land by the white skin. However, this twofold process of edification does not prove a benefit for the apprentices as the naïve get blindfolded by the charm of western culture and subsequently deviate from their actual path of progress.

Then came the white man as had long been prophesied by Mugo wa Kibiro ... He had warned the tribe ... the white man came and took the land ... at first not the whole of it. (25)

Ngotho at this point reminisce his own past wherein his ancestral land was illicitly and violently taken by the whites which made him landless turning into a squatter. However, the clairvoyant made one more prophecy that eventually the native will rise and lead their mass and in due course will retrieve his land from the bounds of the white men. Thus, politics and education is very well amalgamated in order to epitomize the liberation of the innocent black people from the fetters of the British statute. Njoroje after hearing the saga accepts that he will for surely be the vanguard for this movement against repression of his state-men by educating himself and attaining equal stature as that of the whites: "He knew ... for him education would be the fulfilment of a wider and more significant vision - a vision that embraced the demand on him, not only by his father, but also by his mother, his brothers and even the village. He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow" (39).

Despite the fervor of unshackling the realm from distress and disenchantment, the humble adolescent on being exposed to the Christian norms falls an easy victim to the gleam of western sovereignty and paradoxically surrenders to the embellished white world, presenting his own cultural heritage as savage and obsolete. Njoroje too is blinded by the supremacy of Christian deity and His sagacity: "His belief in a future for his family and the village rested ... not only on a hope for sound education but also on a belief in a God of love and mercy ... or Adam and Eve" (49). The young boy identifies the suppressed kinfolk as progenies of Israel which he has read in Biblooke. He unflinchingly embraces Christianity and its preaching that hardnosed beating and even slaying of the natives by the whites is not measured ruthlessly by him, instead, he contemplates such brutal acts as the penalty imposed upon the noncompliant lot for not following the values and beliefs of the white God. The young man even feels extremely embarrassed when he accidentally meets his classmate Mwihaki, Jacobo's daughter because of his traditional clothes, which he believes are the codes of regression:

For a time, he was irresolute and hated himself for feeling as he did about the clothes he had on. Before he had started school ... he would never have thought that he would ever be ashamed of the calico, the only dress he had ever known since birth. (19)

Ironically, Njoroje still talks about development of his realm 'the sun will rise tomorrow', but now with the intervention of a newly admired God who will bring luster to his gloomy populace. Mwihaki being familiar with his actual intention often taunts him:

You are always talking about tomorrow, tomorrow. You are always talking about the country and the people. What is tomorrow? ... What is the People and the Country to you? (106)

Contrary to Njoroje is his half-brother Boro, who is forcefully driven by British force to serve on their behalf in World War II, where he witnessed ample of slaughtering including that of his elder brother Mwangi, Njoroje's real brother. After returning from the war, Boro has transformed into an experienced man who no longer believes in any prophecy or any love and mercy rendered by the Christian God. He is sure that even after toiling hard for the British, the black youth will remain unemployed. Even their ancestral assets will be taken away by these missionaries, the alleged messengers of almighty. He became furious on knowing that his folks have not retaliated against these illegitimate and unpleasant practices of the whites but in turn have laid down their arms to the wishes and yearnings of their purported masters considering their words to be the verses of God:

How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting? And what was all this superstitious belief in a prophecy? (27)

Therefore, it is depicted that still there are young men like Boro who have firm faith in their affluent cultural ethics and norms contrary to the western system of education and dogmas. These men turn out to be the fuel for leading the wagon of freedom movement and thereby working hand in hand to release their territory from the colonial clutches and even lend helping hand to the misguided youth so that they should follow the righteous path of self-contemplation, which eventually will make their nation and their minds decolonized.

Meanwhile the entire nation got imbued with the vigour of independence movement. Youth like Boro and Kori who have moved out to the cities have reached their native places in order to fuel the crusade under the astute guidance of their elders. The elders suggest a national strike to obtain higher wages and advocates one such in their respective farms as well. Ngotho is always an antagonist towards any defiant drive, but being a member of the labor force he becomes a party to the existing strike acquainted well that he has a chance to lose his job. His family though was not contented with Ngotho's decision of going to the gathering. Even Njoroje was extremely distressed about his father's pronouncement which according to him will for sure prove a cataclysm to the family, including trampling of his years of acquiring education. The young boy still feels that education is the only weapon to overcome any obstacle:

Only education could make something out of this wreckage. He became more faithful to his studies. He would one day use all his learning to fight the white man, for he would continue the work that his father had started. When these moments caught him, he actually saw himself as a possible saviour of the whole God's country. Just let him get learning. (82)

In due course to mollify the congregation the white police inspector calls Jacobo, however the chief got attacked by Ngotho resulting into an insurrection and bloodshed. Fortuitously Jacobo survives and vows vengeance. Consequently, Ngotho is fired from the work and his kinfolk are vehemently out casted. The family now is shaken to the core and blames their father for this unfortunate situation. Nevertheless, Njoroje's expectation to pursue his studies is accelerated by his brothers who fund his education. But, this western education corroborates as an obsession for numerous young men who adulates it like any scripture: "Whatever their differences, interest in knowledge and book-learning was the one meeting point between people such as Boro, Jacobo and Ngotho. Somehow, the Gikuyu people always saw their deliverance as embedded in education. When the time for Njoroje to leave came near, many people contributed money so that he could go. He was no longer the son of Ngotho but the son of the land" (104-105).

Soon Njoroje joins Siriana Secondary School, an icon of white omnipotence, estranging the youngster from his clan and digresses him from his path of retaining national progression. Thus, the principal objective of the colonizers - the purported saviours of humanity - is accomplished by these misguided boys who believe that learning emancipates them from the clutches of violence, which is indeed an absurd disposition of the whites to curb liberation movement:

The school itself was an abode of peace in a turbulent country. Here it was possible to meet with God, not only in the cool shelter of the chapel, where he spent many hours, but also in the quietness of the library. For the first time he felt he would escape the watchful eyes of misery and hardship that had for a long time stared at him in his home. Here he would organize his thoughts and make definite plans for the future. He was sure that with patience and hard work, his desire to have learning would be fulfilled. Maybe the sun would soon rise to announce a new day. (108-109)

It delineates avid temperament of the adolescents towards western beliefs, erudition and customs. Subsequently, the enmity develops amidst Jacobo and Ngotho severed the ties of friendship between Mwhiki, Jacobo's daughter and Njoroge, leading the girl to admit to a new boarding school leaving her best friend Njoroge secluded. The streak of isolation thus, turns Njoroge mortified and he blames his father's actions towards Jacobo as absolutely inapt and contemplates the girl's decision of leaving him to be impeccably genuine and eventually he too joins another school.

#### IV. FREEDOM DRIVE

With the passage of time the liberation movement gains momentum and everybody's focus shift towards the forthcoming trial of Jomo Kenyatta, an illustrious frontrunner of the crusade. He becomes stimulation and hope of the black race who will unfetter the motherland from the oppressive seize, but all yearn got trodden as their saviour loses the trial and is put behind the bars. The failure amplifies the zeal of the native race for further protests and even greater subdual of the blacks by whites and their black collaborators. Jacobo and a white landowner, Mr. Howlands come in forefront to curtail the mounting Mau Mau campaign, an association endeavoring hard to fetch monetary, administrative and social freedom to Kenya. Jacobo denounces Ngotho for being the spearhead of the movement and threatens him to confine his kinfolk in dungeon. In the meantime, the circumstances in the nation worsen resulting into the execution of six black men. Mr. Howlands, an emblematic Kenyan colonizer is a product of the First World War. Having witnessed copious massacres and devastation, he now wants to lead an exciting life and for that reason choses Africa as a mode of exploration, "He had to escape. East Africa was a good place. Here was a big trace of wild country to conquer" (30). The audacious Howlands stands parallel to Ngotho who too has a resilient longing to explore diverse places:

They went from place to place, a white and a black man. Now and then they would stop here and there. Examine a luxuriant green tea plant, or pull out a weed. Both men admired this shamba. For Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this Shamba. Mr. Howlands always felt a certain amount of victory - whenever he walked through it all. He alone was responsible for taming this unoccupied wildness. (31)

During the initial years of Howlands' advent, he was compassionate towards the natives as well as the place, "My home is here!" (32), but after taking the charge of D.O., one can perceive an altered facet of his persona - the ruthless white colonialist carrying deleterious outlook towards Mau Mau campaign because the movement is propelled with the sole intention of deporting the whites and retrieving the lost land:

Who were these Mau Mau who were now claiming that land, his God? ... the fact that they had forced him into the other life, the life he had tried to avoid ... If Mau Mau claimed the only thing he believed in, they would see! Did they want to drive him back to England, the forgotten land? They were mistaken. Who were black men and Mau Mau anyway, he asked for the thousandth time? Mere savages! A nice word—savages. (77)

On the other hand side, even settlers like Howlands are entombed in such circumstances as the natives where they could not find a rescue: "He now knew maybe there was no escape. The present that had made him a D.O. reflected a past from which he had tried to run away. That past had followed him even though he had tried to avoid politics, government, and anything else" (76). However, the most perilous class is that of the black collaborators who oblige their white bosses even at price of morality. Chief Jacobo fits into this category of parasites that are eating their own men just to gratify their purported controllers. Even the masters are pretty cognizant about the paltry intents of these muggers but still they use these thugs as shoulders to accomplish their domineering goals. Howlands too uses Jacobo at frequent instants to vindicate the upright spirit of his profession viz., for disruption of the peaceable strike and arresting of Ngotho's kinfolk on fabricated basis for infringement of the curfew directives, merely with the intention of restraining the liberation crusade. Jacobo is therefore portrayed as a despicable fanatic who executes filthy deeds in favour of trivial fiscal profits.

Howlands had in fact helped Jacobo to get permission to grow pyrethrum. In turn Jacobo had helped him to recruit labour and gave him advice on how to get hard work from them. (78)

Hence, "A white man is a white man. But a black man trying to be a white man is bad and harsh" (21), signifying that the inhabitants like Jacobo who have acquired authority proves more hazardous than the conquerors themselves.

#### V. RENUNCIATION

Njoroje, an intellectual chap proves his worth at the new school too by qualifying an important examination that sanctions his admittance to High School. The earnest youngster is now owned by the entire community who ardently gather money for his further education. In reciprocation, Njoroje greets and expresses gratitude towards every person, yet he maintains a substantial space with Mwhiki but keeping their companionship still unaffected. However, the lad's fate is not that suave; nonetheless it looks as if that something else has been destined for the poor boy. Months later Jacobo got slayed by a Mau Mau adherent and the culpability lies on the shoulders of Ngotho and his family. As a consequence, Njoroje is expelled from the school by Howlands and he and his father are ferociously beaten, leaving Ngotho scarcely alive. It is further revealed that it is Njoroje's brothers who have assassinated the village chief and the land owner, and the father known to the fact protects his sons from the assault. Ngotho being clan's power house always keeps a high expectancy for accomplishment of the divination that asserts the retrieval of land to the populace, but his anticipations are worn out and he turns unreservedly disconsolate on perceiving the tangible face of the British authority.

Subsequently, the white supremacy illustrates its stern sway on the household: Ngotho could not resist the fierce bout and breathes his last breath; Boro, the vanguard of the crusade along with Kamau and Kori are incarcerated for lifetime; and Njoroje with his two mothers has to live unaccompanied sans patronage. At the outset Njoroje pays no heed to the arrest of his father and brothers, but after realizing the intensity of the situation wherein his father ends up his life only to protect his sons, the youngster apprehends the cohesive quintessence of kinfolk. Njoroje's existence turns no less than a shudder, he is left disconsolate and unaided to feed his mothers, an enormously grim chore as he is ousted from the school and there is no one to groom the kin now. The fellow is having no avenue to earn livelihood and for that reason approaches Mwhiki but she straight forwardly rejected him being the cause of her father's assassination. The

young man sheds optimism, fails to adulate the almighty and attempts to end up his life but is rescued well in time by his mothers. The man being absolutely crestfallen, capitulates all the once revered striking possessions viz., treasure, influence, conviction and even edification too which has psychologically metamorphosed him into an old person at a very tender age. Eventually as an ultimate salvation point the family leaves the town, thus portraying Njoroge as a naysayer, a sheer "coward" (136) who could not alter his destiny through determination and potency.

## VI. LEITMOTIF OF TUTELAGE

*Weep Not, Child* illustrates that the association with west or western customs leads to thorough fragmentation of the inhabitants. Ngugi narrates the tale of a community through a realistic sketch of contemporary Kenyan society wherein the lives of gullible natives are devastated under the sway of western beliefs and culture. The leitmotif of 'education' is precisely picked up by Ngugi as it the most contentious matter raised by the Kenyans during their struggle movement as the blacks were forbidden to enroll in mission-run schools. Accordingly, the public launches an autonomous Schools Crusade and sets up its own institutes. Characters like Njoroge center their sanguinity on western mode of education and contemplate it as a weapon to unfetter folks from physical as well as psychological constraints of colonialism. Averring the prominence of edification, Njoroge proclaims:

Y-e-e-s. I've heard father say so. He says that if people had had education, the white man would not have taken all the land. I wonder why our old folk, the dead old folk, had no learning when the white man came. (37)

Jomo Kenyatta portrays an earnest instance of those educated Africans who have raised their voice against all the ills inflicted on their citizens and have put their lives on stake just for the sake of nation's freedom. This polished class stands at par with its white counterparts to connote education as a gleam of optimism for future Kenya.

However, it is not only education that will transform the fate of blacks viz. 'procuring the land', instead it the most lethal operation which will for sure deviate the innocent individuals from their anticipated terminus of counterattacking whites for an impeccable existence. The chase for such goals turns the populace estranged to their own acreage and kinsmen. In fact, Killam avows that the novel perhaps is:

The beginning of the analysis ... the suspicion that the sort of idyllic formal education doled out in the remote safety of such schools as Siriana merely shields people from life and that the real lessons are learnt in the informal, sometimes terrifying experiences which one is left to synthesize for himself. But the matter is left up in the air here. (*An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi* 49)

Nevertheless the work does not leave the matter 'in the air': Njoroge drifts at the end and the streak of self-introspection hovers the youngster, making him muse over - the petrifying instances of his father's bereavement, slaying of Jacobo and Howlands, detention of his brothers and the girl's downright abjuration of his proposal.

The themes of education and sovereignty are juxtaposed to exemplify that the weapon of education cannot seek out freedom from the foreign subjugation, nonetheless it is the combative stroke that works as an operative device to bring serenity and integrity to a realm. Ngugi at no time backs the fierce facets of the freedom combatants; instead the writer favours the spirit of struggle for fetching independence sans the tinge of retribution.

Boro had always told himself that the real reason for his fight to the forest was a desire to fight for freedom. But this fervour had soon worn off. His mission became a mission of revenge. This was the only thing that could now give him fire and boldness. If he killed a single white man, he was exacting a vengeance for a brother killed. (103)

Thus, the novel dives squarely into the political theme as it depicts a very critical segment of history of colonial Kenya.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Ngugi treats Njoroge with an eye of irony because of his personal sense of culpability, as the writer himself has chosen schooling at that crucial spell when youth all over the nation was facilitating the Mau Mau crusade (Palmer, *An Introduction to African Novel* 48-66). The playwright delineates his own persona through the character of Njoroge who too was once an avid adherer of Christianity and it's preaching, considering them to be an inevitable part of education. Due to the influence of missionary teachings on his psyche, Ngugi cultivates an inexplicit empathy for white settlers like Howlands, but comes down severely on the African mediators like Jacobo, a chunk of society predominantly liable for the protraction of colonialism in Kenya. The novelist for that reason holds the Europeans' as well as the elite Africans' equally accountable for the prevalent atrocities levied on gullible Africans.

Consequently, to lead an earnest and self-sufficient life, the youngsters of the nation allies intensely with the liberation movement and according to their wills and whims split into two fractions – one like Njoroge who feels education to be the sole armament to eradicate the evils of subjugation, and the other category is that of Boro and Kori who contemplate struggle to be the solitary key against this despotism and indict individuals like Njoroge who are wasting their valuable time sitting on the fence waiting for affluence and autonomy. These conflicting outlooks hence denote dearth of cohesive approach amongst the Kenyan Africans, a glum reason for their suppression and suspension of the process of liberation. Thus, to triumph over suppression the inhabitants need to recognize the quintessence of unanimity, a conduit to reach horizon.

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