



Depiction Of Woman Wretchedness In The Novels Of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

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African women are one of the most basis of race, class and gender, the untold miseries of such women in the colonial context as well as in the independent Kenya, find voice in the novels of the famous Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. All major woman characters in Ngugi's novels, without exception are sufferers and spite of victims of exploitation either directly or indirectly, in spite of being attractive and independent . Ngugi's novels, development in the portrayal of these women . The silent victims of his later novels become even nation builders.

Exploitation of African woman in the early stages of colonial period has been more on the basis of race than on the basis of gender and class . Ngugi in his early novel *The River Between*, brings out concerns itself with Kenya in nineteen twenties and thirties , when young girls were exposed to constant anti-circumcision propaganda and at the same time were under pressure in their African community to complete ritual of circumcision . As the novel *weep not child* opens, the white settlers have all ready occupied much of the African lands have turned natives into 'Ahois' on their own land . Njeri and Nyokabi, wives of Ngotho, suffered under the economic exploitation by the white settler, Howlands. The family witted that Howlands would give them back their occupied lands . But, Howlands exploited their attachment to the land, paid Ngotho low wages and extracted more work .

Black people have been victims of double exploitation. They have been exploited on the level of the working class and the laboring masses . They have also been exploited on the dimension of race because of the whole colonial context in which black and white people have met ?

African women in the early novels of Ngugi could not do anything in opposition to the white's economic and racial exploitation directly in any form, as they wanted that the protest of their men in the form the strikes might help them to get back their land . But they could not succeed . In *A Grain Of Wheat* ,Ngugi portrays how African woman driven by reduced economic status, became during the most oppressive conditions of the Mau Mau emergency, just before 'Uhuru'. After the men in Thabi village were arrested and detained, their lands were confiscated by the white government. When heavy taxes were further imposed, the women struggled to feed the aged and children at their homes. They sold away their goats and cows. Most of the African children stopped their education. Kigondo, a farm labourer in Ngugi's powerful play, 'I Will Marry When I Want' describes the atmosphere during the Mau Mau emergency which is same as in *A Grain Of Wheat*

The emergency laws became very oppressive our homes were burnt down. We were jailed. We were taken to detention camps. Some of us were crippled through beatings, others were castrated. Our women were raped . Our wives and daughters were raped before our eyes. The forceful exploitation of African women by both the whites and the African has been more during the Mau Mau emergency , just before 'Uhuru'. E.Palmer rightly observes, "The African society was cleverly through back into prostitution by the schemes of white and the new black imperialist." The white settler Howland and the *Weep not child*, during his wife's absence picked up African

women and exploited them sexually but in 'A Grain Of Wheat', African women are sexually exploited by their own race. Ngugi sketches Mumbi as a most beautiful woman of the ridges and makes her a victim as a wife waiting in distressed conditions for her husband who was detained without trial for a long time. Karanja, the leader of homeguards, seduced her and when she realised what happened, it was already late. Mumbi, Wambuku too waited suffering for her man but she faced a different situation. Ngugi in his novels shows that women in African society are the victim of patriarchy and are also exploited by colonial powers. He clearly describes the picture of African society that is essentially patriarchal. It is a man made world where women is bound within a narrow confines prescribed by man. Male members of the family are considered to be more superior to the female counter parts. In A Grain of Wheat the effect of patriarchy in Mumbi marriage can be clearly seen. As she was not happy with her married life and wants to return back to her parents home but she was not able to do it because of patriarchal ideologies. Her parents also takes her husband's side and it is clearly distinguish in her mother Wanjiku's statement. "The women of today surprise me. They cannot take a slap, soft as a feather or the slightest breath, from a man. In our time, a woman could take blow and blow from her husband without a thought of running back to her parents". One of the traditional sufferings of women in African society is polygamy. Women were judged only in term of physical appearance and men see them as their property. Since Wangari's husband In A Grain of Wheat is not pleased with her sexual conditions, he falls out of love with her. Following lines clearly describes his thought about her wife: " He got new brides and complained that the things of the first wife did not yield warmth any more. He beat her, hoping that this would drive her away. Wangari struck on. Eventually, Waruhiu ordered her to leave his home and cursed mother and son to life of ever wandering on God's earth". Karanja's father has four wives, when he is bored of them and find more beautiful girl, he sends them away. That is, women are the victims of Karanja's father. Following lines support these statements: "She was the third of the four wives that karanja's father had acquired by paying so much bride price in goats in cattle. He acquired them, yes and then left them to their own resources".

Kihika was arrested and handed on a tree. Something strange came over her. For a few days she never left her home and when she did so eventually well, she only destroyed herself with soldiers and home guards. But she refused so it was said, the advances of this particular home guard who got his chance for revenge from the beating and died three months later in pregnancy. Ngugi tends in his recent work specially to set to his women characters as icon allegorical figures representing all that is resistant and strong in the kenyan people. He thus seeks to identify with the liberation of African women as a part of his resistance to all forms of oppression.

Unlike Wanja who was from the beginning arrogant, Guthera in Matigari was a girl of church with high morals before she allows herself to be sexually exploited as barmaid, when she refused to be exploited by the police her 'Father On Earth' was put to death. Unable to feed the other children of her 'Father Of Earth', she begged the church people in which her father worked for help. She was not able to feed and clothe them properly. Several days they went without food. One day when she decided to ' Walk On Street' she was able to feed the children. When self realization came to Guthera, she was able to recognize the common pressures under which women in general lived. Guthera dies leaving the question to the women everywhere. I want to do something to whatever it is that make people live like animals, especially us women. What can we as women do to change our lives? Or will we continue to follow the paths carved out for us by men? Aren't we, the majority anyway? These lines exhibit the feminist assertions of Guthera to pressurise the right of women. The love for the family that Ngugi's women exhibit in the earlier novels expand into love for the country in his novel. In an attempt to drive away the imperialists thus to the position of a patriot.

Thus Ngugi's aim is to build up nation, exposing exploitation during the colonial and neo-colonial period. He concentrates on the exploitation of the African women on the basis of race, class and gender and avoids drawing in detail problems prevalent within the African society such bride price polygamy and barrenness as expressed in the novels of African women writers. Ngugi wants women to recognize themselves as human being first and then change their lives, as second sex to become equals with men. Ngugi is thus not a feminist but a humanistic feminist.

Notes and References :

1. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart (London: Heinemann, 1958) p-136
2. Emmanuel Meziemadu Okoye , the Traditional Religion and its Encounter with Christianity in Achebe's Novel (Berne, 1987)
3. Abdul Jan Mohamed, "Sophisticated primitivism: the syncretism of Oral and Literate Mode in Achebe's Things Fall Apart" Ariel, 15:4 ,1984 ,p-33
4. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o , "The River Between" (London : Heinemann, 1970) p-171

