

COLONIAL IMPACT ON NATIVE CULTURE IN NGUGI'S *THE RIVER BETWEEN*

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ABSTRACT

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is considered as a singer of rich Kenyan culture. Major concern of his writing is issues of culture. His writing is full of promotion of Kenyan culture, heritage and languages, which have been marginalized and suppressed by colonial power. His writing is about Kenyan characters in specified Kenyan situations, depicting traditional Kenyan world. He has also highlighted a stark picture of marginalization and exploitation of native culture by the colonial forces. A cultural struggle between colonialism and native culture is one of the concerns of his novels. Colonialist bring Christianity with them and used as a tool to enroot in Kenya. In The River Between we find dominance of Christianity over native culture. For a spread of new culture colonial forces have used all means of suppression and exploitation. In his novel The River Between we find a tension between missionary introduced new culture and conventional Kenyan culture.

Key Words: culture, heritage, marginalization, struggle, colonialism, Christianity, dominance, suppression.

A present paper advocates richness of native Kenyan culture and its suppression after introduction of missionary culture in Kenya. It is well described in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. European claims that the European culture is highly superior and civilized than the native. "Africa as a continent has been a victim of forces of colonial exploitation, oppression and human degradation. In the field of culture she was taught to look on Europe as her teacher and the centre of man's civilization, and herself as the pupil" (Thiong'o, 100). The colonizers' desires to uproot the natives from their native cultural roots. They expect Africa as a pupil, should follow the European culture. They thought that if they do so, it will easy for them to rule. A culturally slave or community never deny or oppose anything. He obeyed everything without asking question. "Economic and political control of people can never be complete without cultural control" (Ibid. 93). Colonizers by nature were trade

lovers. So to fulfil their purpose they wanted a complete control on Africa. For this they started to exploit natives culturally.

In *The River Between*, Ngugi tries to portray the historical panorama of Gikuyu tribe from the beginning to present condition. Livingstone, a missionary always prefers to visit hill for the spread of the preaching of Bible. Joshua the converted native functions as representative of Livingstone. He preaches Jesus Christ as their God. This preaching influenced Kenyans a lot and started to shake the roots of traditional beliefs. Ngugi portrays the conflict between two cultures with a tragic touch. He stresses the loss of native culture and identity due to non-native in the colonial tenure at individual and social levels. “With the coming of Christianity a process of disintegration of the various set-ups began because acceptance of Christianity meant an outright rejection of the values and rituals which had held them together” (Narang, 41). The missionaries started to condemn different aspects of Kenyan culture. They instilled a sense of inferiority in natives mind as far as native custom, heritage and other aspects are concerned.

Primarily a novel narrates a story of a momentary tension of faith. However a conflict between conventional life and missionary culture is also delineated in a novel. Ngugi focuses on an issue of role of missionaries and the indigene in the process of enrooting new culture to suppress native one. Joshua after getting more or less sympathetic treatment from Mr. Livingstone remains as an agent of missionary culture. Both try to Europeanized native traditions. Joshua accepts assertions of the missionaries. He has been assigned a duty to quieten the natives and facilitate missionary ideas in society.

The missionaries started to condemn different aspects of Kenyan culture. They instilled a sense of inferiority in natives mind as far as native custom, heritage and other aspects are concerned. The Whites by introducing their new religion and its greatness started to occupy the land. They are successful to convert some of the natives. Joshua is the first fish caught in their net. Conversion is the initial stage as far as issue of colonialism and exploitation is concerned. Rev. Livingstone occasionally visits the hills to charge his new followers. Joshua is local middleman. This new religion invaded and weakened the native religion. The new religion and its preaching have a harmful effect on tradition of Kenya. The Whites used religion to establish their colony.

Colonialists introduced capitalism as supportive to improve lives and aspirations of natives. It is introduced by the way of education and religion. They want to finish local culture. They expect complete co-operation from the students. The colonial education taught the native students to accept the domination of the new religion. It tries to take away the students from their native beliefs, customs, rituals etc. “In *The River Between* focus is on alienating of young Gikuyu minds from their native culture” (Pandurang, 115-116). The new missionary culture has influenced the natives. They think that the new culture will lead them to

reformation. Youths are the main target in this task. In the course of time, the youths came to know that the new culture is taking them away from the native roots.

In short *The River Between* portrays the picture of things falling apart in Africa due to appearance of a new culture. Colonialists introduced capitalism as supportive to improve lives and aspirations of natives. It is introduced by the way of education and religion. They aspire to finish native culture.

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