



CLASH OF WESTERN MORES AND KENYAN SENSIBILITY IN *THE RIVER BETWEEN*

DR. SHAMRAO WAGHMARE

Assistant Professor,
Loknete Gopinathji Munde ACS College,
Mandangad, Dist. Ratnagiri.
Affiliated to
University of Mumbai
(MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The River Between, is a second novel of NgugiWaThiong'o. . Waiyaki, the protagonist is caught between two worlds, the tribal world and the world of Christianity. Kamenno and Makuyu are the two ridges around which the story revolves and they represent the tribal tradition and the new tradition. . Ngugi focuses on the clash between the native and western cultures. Ngugi starts to examine the history from the time of Whites settling in Kenya. The Whites for spreading their wings supports Makuyu. They acknowledge that the new culture is carrying them away from their native culture and tradition.

Key words: Christianity, clash, native culture, western culture

INTRODUCTION

After settlement the colonizers started to impose the various taxes on the Africans. The colonizers forced the natives to pay the taxes to meet out the expenses for colonial administration. Siriana was the centre of administration. The natural reaction of natives against it was to oppose and protest. But their weak oppose was suppressed by the colonizers. According to Jess Stein, "Protest means, an expression or declaration of objection, disapproval or dissent, often in opposition to something a person is powerless to prevent or avoid: a protest against increased taxation" (Stein, 1156). The Africans were weak in

DR. SHAMRAO WAGHMARE

1P a g e



comparison with the colonizers. They opposed the colonizers but it badly dismantled by the mighty colonizers. The Africans after the protest facing tortures of colonizers in connection with culture started to protest. Here a first spark of protest was initiated by natives. The colonizers imposed a tyrannical condition on them to follow the European culture. Burchfield remarks, "The expression of dissent from rejection of the prevailing social, political or cultural mores" (Burchfield, 852). Aggrieved by the day today exploitation the Africans started to reject the colonizers binding. It showed further path of protest to the Africans.

The River Between, is a second novel of NgugiWaThiong'o. The novel focuses on the importance of love, education and the need for reconciliation between antagonistic beliefs of Christianity and tribal beliefs. Waiyaki, the protagonist is caught between two worlds, the tribal world and the world of Christianity. Kameno and Makuyu are the two ridges around which the story revolves and they represent the tribal tradition and the new tradition. Waiyaki is looked upon by his father, Chege, as the saviour of the tribe from the attack of non-natives. Muthoni, the daughter of Joshua, rebels against her father. He is jealous and preacher of new religion. Waiyaki strongly believes in education. He believes education is secret of White mans dominance. He always urges education is the key for the freedom, education for unity and for political freedom. The novel ends some extent suddenly, leaving Waiyaki and Nyambura to the judgment of the village for their alleged acts of betrayal of the tribe.

In *The River Between*, Ngugi tries to portray the historical panorama of Gikuyu tribe from the beginning to present condition. Ngugi focuses on the conflict between the native and western cultures. Ngugi starts to examine the history from the time of Whites settling in Kenya. He takes us away in the past. It is the origin of man that connects it with present. Ngugi takes the readers back and forth in the history in this novel. Before appearance of the Whites, the Kenyans were leading a calm and peaceful life by celebrating and enjoying the customs associated with the land. The common assumption in Kenya is that the land of Kenya is offered to the Kenyans by Muranga, a seer and highly respectable figure as a gift. He told them: "This land I gave to you man and woman. It is yours to rule, and fill you and your posterity" (Thiong'o, 1965, 2). Ngugi describes the Whites already settled and grabbed the natives land. The Whites wandered all over Kenya for preaching the new religion. 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. Ngugi stresses the loss of native culture and identity due to non-native in the colonial tenure at individual and social levels.

The mechanism of colonialism was systematically rooted by the Whites in Kenya. For this they first introduced the religious preaching with the help of native converted preachers like



Joshua. Later Siriana became the centre of Whites administration. The message of paying the taxes by natives to the Whites for to administration passed with the help of missionaries all over Kenya. The Whites started a missionary school at Siriana. The Kenyans were unaware of the fact that these educations move them towards exploitation. The new education associated with British history and European traditions. This new system of Whites expects full support of natives for the spread of new religion and its principles. Livingstone thinks that the native Kenyan culture and tradition is outdated. It became barren. The missionaries called Prince of darkness to Gikuyu God. The novel delineates the life of Gikuyu clans living in the two ridges of Kameno and Makuyu. The valley between Kameno and Makuyu is known as cure or bring back life. The cause of the conflict between these two is on the issue of leadership. Another cause of the conflict is that Makuyu dwellers accepted the new religion introduced by missionaries and the Kameno strongly believes in old tribal culture. This struggle is the product of colonial policies of Whites. Waiyaki the protagonist plays a role of middleman reconciliation of the two ridges. Chege, Waiyaki's father, an aged figure in Kameno is respected by everyone and fear. Respected because he has the knowledge of every religious incident and feared because he interprets the past and prophesies the future. In him there is a good combination of tribal myth and reality. Chege first of all predicts the appearance of Whites in the ridges. His prediction came into true when Livingstone entered among them. The first victim of the new religion is Joshua. He has attracted towards this new religion. In the course of time age dominates over Chege. He now wants to see the remaining part of Mugo's prophecy that the savior of the unwanted Whites from the ridges. Chege advises his son to accept the Whites' teaching. He told Waiyaki that salvation shall come from the hills. By following his father's advice Waiyaki joined Siriana mission. He met Kamau and Kinuthia his childhood friends there. He is impressed by the preaching of Livingstone. Livingstone recognizes that Waiyaki is the brave leader.

Ngugi now presents the scene of Makuyu ridge. Joshua is the staunch supporter of new religion and famous figure of Makuyu. He is living with his two daughters Nyambura and Muthoni. Being the daughters of converted Christian both know the importance of circumcision. It is a ritual in which cutting of foreskin is obligatory for both boys and girls. This ritual is practiced in the tribe for purifying the heart. Ngugi here shows the invasion of native culture. There is a struggle between Makuyu and Kameno on the issue of dominance. The Whites for spreading their wings supports Makuyu. They acknowledge that the new culture is carrying them away from their native culture and tradition. Chege always passes the stories of bravery and valour and past glory and heritage of his tribe to Waiyaki. He arranges to take Waiyaki in the forests, on the hills to disclose the secrets and philosophy of tribe. The past remains the source of knowledge and inspiration to Waiyaki. This shapes Waiyaki's journey to leadership. Waiyaki never seems the rivalry among Makuyu and Kameno. He



wants the amalgamation of both the tribes. In this task Chege supports him to accept this responsibility for welfare of the tribe. His advice to Waiyaki,

*“Arise heed the property,
Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and,
All secrets of Whiteman. But do not,
Follow his vices. Be true to your people,
And the ancient rites (Ibid. 20).*

Chege advises to Waiyaki to learn all the secrets of the success of Whiteman. He also warns Waiyaki never accept bad things of them. He tells him to be loyal with the natives. Joshua is a converted Christian. Though his tribe is not happy with his activities, the tribe offers respect to him. Joshua preaches the natives of the new religion. The parody is that Muthoni, the daughter of Joshua rebels against his strict discipline and adopts a ritual of circumcision. Unfortunately she dies. To fight against the colonial masters is easy task to the Africans. But the Africans are afraid of fighting against the missionaries. The White masters set up administration posts in Makuyu and forced the natives to pay the tax unnecessarily. The purpose of the missionaries is not reformative but to make weak the native tradition. They gradually introduce the new God of Bible. The missionaries are not the real soldiers of Jesus Christ. The missionaries used the innocent natives as a tool for the spread of new religion. Joshua is the first fish to come under its influence. The missionaries establish the church in Makuyu and offer its in-charge ship to Joshua. The missionaries from Siriana declare that everyone should follow the laws of church. Waiyaki, the follower of native culture wants to preserve the native culture of tribe. Waiyaki never opposes the missionaries. He is reformist by nature. He is the social goldsmith and knows the need of time. He knows the importance of education and started schools in the ridges. He knows the need of unity for giving the answer to the non-natives' exploitation. The novel serves the purpose. Waiyaki is caught in the dilemma of two worlds that is traditional tribal world and Christian world. The missionaries are demolishing the tribal customs. Waiyaki is the guard of the sacredness of his tribe. He uses the education for welfare of his tribe. Muthoni refuses to follow her father Joshua's preaching, agrees for circumcision to receive womanhood. The tragic death of Muthoni is due to septic but Joshua interpreted it as a punishment for disobeying the Christian rules. Waiyaki being the admirer of education wants to use the education for dual purpose - one is for creating awareness to drive away the non-natives, and another for unity. So he frequently repeats education for unity and unity for political freedom. His starting schools in ridges are important in this respect. This expresses Waiyaki's visionary outlook.

The parody is that Waiyaki is misunderstood both by Joshua and his own tribesmen of Kameno. Chege is afraid of his tribe's women accepting Christianity and its effects on native



culture. Chege's prophecy came true when his son Waiyaki believes in some of the facts of new religion and preaching. The new religion introduced by missionary functions as broker of colonialism. Christianity affected every field of tribal life. The followers of Joshua after knowing the weaker side of new religion start a new political organization *Kiama*. The objective of it is to protect and enrich the native traditions. It discards the things introduced by new preaching. The establishment of this new organization is reaction of protest arises from grass root level. The rebel of Nyambura another daughter of Joshua and her openly admitting the love for Waiyaki is the victory of native preaching on colonial preaching. It is not an individual defeat of Joshua. He is unable to control his own daughter. It is the defeat of the preaching of Christianity. Before the appearance of the Whites the people of both ridges were leading a peaceful and happy life following the customs and traditions. The land was fertile and undisturbed. Social attachment and bondage was an integral part native's life. But this picture is changed with the appearance of Whites. The Whites snatch the natives land by using sugarcoated words and created misunderstanding about native religion. In fact the natives are divided into groups. The Whites used the policy of *divide and rule*. Whites' used religion and education as an instrument to enslave natives. The cultural conflict of natives and non- natives is appropriately described in this novel by Ngugi. The missionaries have started a school at Siriana." In Ngugi's *The River Between* secular education is shown, potentially at least, to have a crucial role in the relationship between the world of tradition and the world of more modern ways" (Cook, 92). Waiyaki in this novel is trying to reconcile both traditions through education. He considers that education plays an important role in a process of transformation. Chege, father of Waiyaki desires that his son should get education like the missionaries for removing the Whites from Mugo's land. The natives have used education as a means to protest against exploitation. The missionary school syllabus includes the bravery of European warriors, their adventures, invention etc. But it suggests that traditional solidarity need not be opposed to modern adaption, that true wisdom might abort what is good from wherever it comes and reject suicide last-ditch stands. On the other hand, it insists that education and sephircation present a challenge to the young to use them in the service of ancestral society, not as an excuse for self-pitying withdrawal. Waiyaki is liberal towards education. He suggests that Kenyans should choose all good and reformative things from everywhere. Waiyaki is caught between two beliefs- the tribal faith and a new faith. Like Waiyaki, Muthoni daughter of Joshua has also not accepted the new religion thoroughly. She believes in the native religion. "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, Ngugi's *The River Between* focuses on the conflict between the native and western cultures. Ngugi starts to examine the history from the time of Whites settling in Kenya.

REFERENCES

1. Stein Jess. *The Random House Dictionary of English Language*. New York: 1996.
2. Burchfield, R. W. Oxford: *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*. London: Oxford. 1982.
3. Thiong'o, Wa, Ngugi. *The River Between*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd. 1965.
4. Ibid., 20.
5. Ibid., 2.
6. Narang, Harish. *Politics as Fiction: The Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*. New Delhi: Creative Books. 1995.
7. Cook, David. *African Literature- A Critical View*. London: Longman. 1983.
8. Ibid., 30.
9. Pandurang, Mala. *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. New Delhi: Fine Arts Press. 2007.