



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol.2.Issue 3.,2015 (July-Sept)



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

DEVIL ON THE CROSS: The subaltern Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the paper, an attempt has been made to show how subaltern studies in third world countries including Africa having great relevance to the understanding and interpretations of the contemporary Kenyan society. The colonised/oppressed subject voices have been silenced. The subaltern underlines a subordinate position in terms of class, gender, caste, race and culture. According to Spivak it is impossible to recover the voice of the subaltern. Colonialism and patriarchy oppressed women and it is difficult for the Subaltern to articulate her point of view. The colonised women have now spoken. The subaltern studies incorporate the exploited group like the peasants, women and tribal people.

The novel *Devil on the Cross* affirms the tone and tenor of the plight of the most exploited and oppressed section of the society. It speaks volumes for the condition of the downtrodden and deprived masses in post- independence Kenya. The novel projects the woman in urban Kenya with sexual slavery. Ngugi's characters suffer strive and revolt against the white and their fellow Africans against exploitation.

Key words: subaltern, the colonised, silenced, recover, plight, downtrodden and deprived masses

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Ngugi discusses contemporary issues and also the elements of exploitation by the Africans elite who adopted the colonial ways to deceive their own people. The Peasants and the workers in Kenyan society toil and produce resources which are not enjoyed by them. The neo-colonial Africans exploit the poor. He asserted

his commitment to struggle for an egalitarian society. He grappled with the themes of brutal exploitation and domination in post African society. The neo-colonial situation finds an objective portrayal in the *novel*. Ngugi did not hesitate to use the strong political jargon and class analysis. Ngugi artistically weaves a powerful political ideology with acute class analyses.

The realistic story of Wariinga, set out with the journey in a mini-bus taxi (or 'matatu') from Nairobi to Ilmorog. She stands for social issues and injustice. During the journey, the driver and five passengers discuss the social issues which form the central themes of the work, relating them to their experiences in life, and differing in their reactions and moral assumptions. Their life histories are representative fragments of post-colonial Kenya. Their lives are deeply changed by the events in and around the nation. Ngugi used the journey as a symbolic to explore the state of affairs in Kenya. It is a revolutionary novel: "Revolution in humanistic context by differentiating the psychological, sociological and unverbaised motives in the working class against the materialistic acquisition- land, property, beliefs and rituals born with the materialistic attitude of the coloniser.(Mohan:206)

Jacinta Wariinga, a woman became a predominant character making all the male characters minor characters. She wages a war against the hegemony of dominant neo-colonial culture. Certain people in Ilmorog were living in disgraceful shameful and everlasting darkness. Wariinga the heroine of the novel lost her job because of refusing to sleep with the boss. She had been exploited sexually by men in imperialistic Kenya-a young boy and a rich old man. Her plight in the society speaks volumes for the condition of the sown trodden and deprived masses in the post –independence Kenya. Wariinga emerges as the fictional representation of the heroine of Kenyan history and its struggle. (Sircar: 1995, 136) Wariinga is a victim of sexual exploitation. So she would like take revenge on the society. Ngugi explained the irresponsible sexism of ruling class in the novel.

When her landlord hikes the rent for her room, she refused to pay the rent. He throws her luggage out on the street and threatens to issue her "a single way ticket to God's Kingdom or Satan's one way ticket to Heaven or Hell." (DC: 7) Her life falls apart in just two days for refusing the boss and the old land lord. Wariinga's battle against sexual exploitation, especially as practised by older and more powerful men, is indicative of social problem in Kenya. She decides to leave Nairobi being large soulless and corrupt. On her way to the Nyamakima Matatu stop, she sees a vision of Devil's crucifixion. She feels dizzy. She saw a devil in her dream. The devil in the dream represents symbolically all the evils in the world in the form of monopoly capitalism. She finds herself in the company of four others- one woman and three men.

Wangari narrates her story. She was a peasant from Ilmorog who participated in Mau Mau struggle. But after independence, she did not find a job in Nairobi. Wariinga met the company of four others- one woman and three men during riding in Robin Mwatatu. The travellers shared their personal experiences. Mwaura told Wangari, "I don't want any wrangling between us. This vehicle does not run on urine...Nothing is free in Kenya. Kenya is not Tanzania or China. (DC: 37) *The novel* describes its change into modern state in nothing is free.

Wangari told her story. She was a peasant from Ilmorog. She participated in Mau Mau struggle for independence. But after independence 'my small piece of land two acres had just been auctioned by the Kenya Economic Progress Bank as I, could keep grade cows.' (DC: 40) Her lands were confiscated. She is not able to pay back a loan of five thousand shillings to the bank. So her two acres of land was confiscated. She said that the neo-colonists loot the people in the name of development and economic liberation. She keeps on describing her best efforts to seek a job in Nairobi. But all her attempts are unsuccessful; she was arrested for not having authentic papers to enter into Nairobi. "I Wangari a Kenyan by birth-how can I be a vagrant in my own country? How can I be with vagrancy in my own country as if I were a foreigner? I denied both charges: to look for work is not a crime" (DC: 41) she exhorts that there are innumerable real robbers and thieves in Ilmorog.

Gatuiria, inspired by the narration of Wangari, set out his story. He worked as a junior Research Fellow in the Department of music in the university. He pursued his research in the field of culture. His main ambition is to compose a piece of music for many human voices accompanied by an orchestra made up of all

kinds of national instrument. His narration brings closer to the peasants- an old man from Bahati in Nakuru. He narrated to Gaturia old stories of ogres and animals. Gaturia retold one of the tales of Nding'un who sold his soul to the Devil. He told them that he had the vast empire of business inherited by his father. But he concentrates on the studies of African culture. He said that their ancestors' wisdom and philosophy had taken back seat. the natives were not even able to find books in their language. He concludes tale that he is going to Ilmorog to attend a Devil's Feast. He was invited to the function.

The second man, Muturi, caught the thread of the narration. He told them that he was a worker- a mason, a plumber, a carpenter a painter, etc., he is all in all. He worked for the Champion Construction Company. The similarity is that Wariinga also worked for that company. He started how his problems started when he demanded an increase of fifty shillings." We demanded an increase of fifty shillings demanded too that thereafter wage increases were to be linked to the rising cost of living". (DC: 72) As a result, he received the threat from employer in the form of armed policeman and he was fired by the management. Muturi would like to challenge the Devil by attending the Devil's Feast.

The next turn is taken by Mwaura by asking him to express his opinion on the situation in the country. He expressed typically that there are some traders and businessmen aiming to maximise profits, no matter how and at whose cost: "Business is my temple and money is my god. But if some other God exists that all right.... show me where the money is and I'll take you there".(DC:56)Earlier he told them : if I find myself among members of the Akurinu Sect, I become one of them , When I'm with those who have been saved , I too am saved; When I'm with Muslims, I embrace Islam. When I'm among pagans, I too become pagan."(DC: 47)They also come to know that Mwaura used to be the hatchet man for the colonial administration.

The last man in a grey suit with dark glasses named Mukiraai studied at Makaere opting his career in commerce. He expressed:" It is your kind of talk that is ruining the country. That kind of talk has its roots in communism. It is calculated to sadden our hearts and make us restless. Such works can lead us black people astray, and you know how deeply we believe in god and in Christianity. Kenya is a Christian country and that's why we are so blessed."(DC: 87)From the above narration it is clear that modern Kenya is divided into two nations- one having workers, peasants and intellectuals-two having traders and businessmen like Mwaura and Mukiraai. The former fought for freedom struggle and have been marginalised after independence. The latter became the part of the colonial administration and continued to plunder the Kenyan people with the help of the former colonial masters.

Devil's Feast is the central theme of second part of the novel which is in the form of a competition among the Kenyan thieves and robbers to elect the greatest of them all. The competition was organised in a cave near Ilmorog . Wariinga, Wangari, Muturi, Gaturia, Mukiraai participated in the ritual of devil' feast. The participant should mount the platform and proclaim: "How he first came to steal and rob, Dwell on the technique' to perfect our skills in theft and robbery" and finally to show us how we can develop the partnership between us and foreigners so that we can hasten our ascent into the heaven of foreign commodities and other delights."(DC: 87)

Ngugi said that the Devil is worshiped by the capitalist power magnets. Satan is exposed as the power of elite and their cynical exploitation of religion Satan is a true picture of what is going on in the neo-colonial Kenya. The devil is crucified by the workers and peasants. It is taken from the cross to resurrect the rich. So Satan is resurrected. We must not imagine that Ngugi is trying to invest morality in placing Satan on the cross in Christ's place. Wariinga finds a "common ground between socialist humanistic ethics and Christian ethics".(Cook:1983,131) He is not saying that Satan is his Christ, but rather that, whatever they may pretend, it is the Devil whom the capitalist power magnates and their entourage really worship.The novel is dedicated to all Kenyans struggling against the neo- colonial stage of imperialism.

The participants revealed their art of stealing –houses, cars, wives, and mistresses their expertise in theft and robbery made the extraordinary people apart from others. The local robbers invited the international comrade robbers from IOTR-International Organisation of Theft &Robbery to address the local participants. They advised:"I think there is no one who does not know that theft and robbery are the cornerstones of America and Western civilisation. Money is the heart that beats to keep the Western world on the move. If

you people want to build a great civilization like, then kneel down before the god of money. Ignore the beautiful faces of your children, of, of your parents, of your brothers and sisters. Look only the splendid face of money and you'll never, never go wrong. It's better to drink the blood of your people and to eat their flesh than to retreat a step". (DC: 89) One of them further suggests that they should bottle air and sell to masses for breathing. The Feast was interrupted by Wangari arriving with police but they rejected to arrest the devils and arrested Wangari for alleging false accusations.

The novel skilfully presents how the Kenyan bourgeois elite exploited the workers, peasants, petty traders and students. The Kenyan capitalists are depicted as the thieves, robbers, hypocrites and criminals. The novel gives us a message to fight against the evils in the post –independence Kenya of decadence, greed, and avarice. The novel proposes a proposition that there should be a need for improvement in the position of women in Kenyan society. The subaltern studies incorporate the exploited group like the peasants, women and tribal people. Ngugi discusses contemporary issues and also the elements of exploitation by the Africans elite who adopted the colonial ways to deceive their own people. Hence Ngugi perfectly articulated the subaltern ideology in the novel.

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