

Colonization and Deforestation in Kenya: An Ecocritical Study of 'Weep Not Child'

Dr. Amit Kumar Bhagat*

Assistant Professor, Department of English, P.G.D.A.V College (Eve) University of Delhi

Abstract – Ngugi wa Thiong'o, right from the beginning of his writing career, is bent on writing the past of Kenya and correcting the myths and misinterpretations in western discourse. His another obvious aim is to make the people aware of their veracity, rich tradition and the completely unreasonable dispossession of the Kenyan in particular and the African in general of their land by the British. This paper aims at exploring Ngugi wa Thiong'o "Weep Not Child". This is an effort to demonstrate the writer's sincere intention to depict the rich connection of the people with their land and how the colonizers influenced their wilderness and the warmth in their inter relationship. This is a humble effort to demonstrate the depth of Ngugi's eco-consciousness and his contribution to open the eyes of his countrymen to this crucial aspect.

Key Words: History, Environment, Eco-consciousness, Patriotism, Disruption, Deforestation, Exploitation

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INTRODUCTION

Ngugiwa Thiong'o was writer with the intention of emerging from the historical events of Kenya, from the anti-circumcision protests of women of the 1920s to the thick and thin fight against the British to drive them away; the dream of being put in the land of pseudo-civilized colonizers of the Kenyans.

Franz Fanon observes that "The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope." The purpose of writing Weep Not, Child is clarified in the following statement made by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "It was Africa explaining itself, speaking for itself and interpreting its past. It was an Africa rejecting the images of its past as drawn by the artists of imperialism." (Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms 79) He is in same line with the thought of Chinua Achebe whose one of "the goal in writing Things Fall Apart was to correct a whole history of misrepresentations of his people and country in occidental discourse." (Alam, "Reading Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart Eco Critically"). The Africa rejected images from the past, as drawn up by the artists of imperialism. The African writers are expected to focus on the spiritual connection between the true artist and his society in accordance with the essay "Publishing in Africa" by this fashion writer (Achebe, Morning). The problem of the Kenyan relationship with his country is always a matter of its very nature. As Ngugi says, "The land question is basic to an understanding of Kenya's

history and contemporary politics, as indeed it is of twentieth century history wherever people have had their land taken away by conquest, unequal treaties or by the genocide of part of the population." (Decolonising the Mind, 44). (Decolonizing the Mind). This is a very important issue for the people to be considered seriously. Even the African people's armed movements, especially those from Kenya, have been directed towards the recovery of their colonial land. As Ngugi puts, "The Mau Mau militant organization which spearheaded the armed struggle for Kenya's independence was officially called the Kenya Land and Freedom Army." (Decolonising the Mind, 44). In the prose called "Named for Africa", Achebe asserts that the African writers take to the tradition of folk storytelling which "had had the immemorial quality of the sky and the forests and the rivers" (Achebe, Morning, 101). Ngugitoo has taken to the folk storytelling tradition to encompass the basic arena which an African writer should do.

Ecocriticism is a branch of recent literature which adopts a "text-centered approach" (Garrard, 1). Any critiques of the whole of ecology "share the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" and as "a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land." (Glotfelty xix) Thus the problem of the prevention and protection of the natural environment has made intellectuals recognise the risks and find some ways to encourage a literary and other ways of

saving Nature. The concept of Cherys Glotsfelty is that "ecocriticism is studying the relationship between literature and the physical surroundings" Ecocriticism thus assesses how literature and literary practices form contemporary environmental perceptions and how nature in the cultural arena is linked. It is also about some ideas of nature and the natural environment that are traditionally conditioned. Ecocritics often consider their intellectual work as a direct contribution to existing social, political and economic discussions regarding pollution and conservation of the world.

"Ecocriticism" Lawrence Buell describes ... In the United States of America in the late 80's and in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s, ecocriticism as a distinct critique was introduced as a study of relationship literary to environmentally committed praxis "(1995: 430)."In general, 'ecocriticism' is the preferred American term, while 'green research' is popular in UK.' Leader of ecocriticism: Literary ecological landmarks were a pioneer in the promotion of the thesis. The word "green" critique, "ecopoetics," and "ambient literary critique" often refers to ecocriticism in the sector.

Pramod K. Nayar's observation is quite comprehensive while he says, "Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches." (242) Ecocriticism analyzes the role of the natural environment in the imagination of a cultural community at a specific historical moment. It tends to examine how the concept of "nature" is de- fined, what values are assigned to it or denied. It also deals with the reasons for the present state of things and reflects on how the relationship between humans and nature is envisioned. It endeavors to delve into the exact meaning of nature and examining the human perception of wilderness and so on and so forth.

However the study of ecocriticism is yet to gain an organic form because "the movement still does not have a widely-known set of assumptions, doctrines, or procedures." (Barry) But it is not stuck in any stage, rather its research is on with vigorous efforts to advance it and ecocriticism has proved its sway in the arena. Therefore a number of diverse and contradictory environment methods have been expressed by green criticism from the outset. Four different approaches are mentioned in Greg Garrard's Ecocriticism:

- (i) The "discursive construction" foregrounds the extent to which the very distinction of

nature and culture is itself dependent on specific cultural values;

- (ii) The "aesthetic construction" places value on nature for its beauty, complexity, or wildness;
- (iii) The "political construction" emphasizes the power interests that inform any valuation or devaluation of nature; and finally; and
- (iv) The "scientific construction," aims at the description of the functioning of natural systems. (2004:89) General discussion and analysis are to situate themselves in relation to these discourses.

Bate's recent book, The Song of the Earth (2000) argues that colonization and deforestation have frequently gone together. He writes: 'As Robert Pogue Harrison has demonstrated in his remarkable book *Forest: The Shadow of Civilization*, imperialism has always brought with it deforestation and the consuming of natural resources.' (Berry 242) The very truth was represented by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Weep Not, Boy*. He well understood that the English came to kill the wild nature that fosters them for centuries with a depraved mentality. Their naturally long-lasting inheritance in nature was disturbed and this disturbance began when forests were cleared. As we can hear from Ngotho "We made roads and cleared the forest to make it possible for the warring white man to move more quickly".

The Kenyan-land relationship was a question of life, livelihood and nature and nothing else. Without the organic essence of the relationship they could not think of their lives, and they held them fully. Thus Ngotho is seen as the ground man. He knows well that he is displaced from his ancestral country and works as a day labourer in the same property. However, because of his passion for the land he works with all his attention because he can't imagine his life apart from the earth. How much Ngotho was a man of the soil is noted by Howlands. This is why Howlands "just loved to see Ngotho working in the farm, the way the old man touched the soil, almost fondling, and the way he tended the young tea plants as if they were his own.... So much of the farm was Ngotho that he could be detached "(33). The importance of the land and the sense of harmony on land are almost equal or even greater even in the new generations. The firm faith of Njoroge is that education should have stopped the stealing of land by his ancestors. Thus he claims "that a white man would not have taken the entire world if people had been educated". It's the echo of the confidence of his father. He inspired Ngoroge to say "Education is everything". But deep within his firm faith his "doubted" because he knew deep within his heart that it was all ground. Training

was only nice as it would put the lost lands back to life (43).

The Kenyans went to the first major war, The First World War, fought and died for the British and eventually returned to the country from which they were displaced in the expectation that they would be compensated. (29) The soil is more than anything for them. They "wanted to return and to yield, to build rather than to kill". They have been eager to stop damaging the planet, yet to care for and feed it, because their lives are also part of the earth. It is land that empowers them to stand tall and to be warriors. So Ngotho and his father continued to work in the expectation that one day the prophecy of having the country back will come true. But it was just foolish to Boro. And he raised the issue, the matter of all the people of Kenya, for this cause. He asks his father, "How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?" (30)

The author sometimes provided the organic essence of the family relationship, where the warmth of heaven was a touch and the sense of a blood relationship or of the distant one could not be felt. It is evident in Ngotho's family relationship. All the sons of Njeri, Ngotho's eldest wife, were Boro, Kori, and Kamau. It was Mwangi who died in the battle, Njoroge's only true child. Yet they were all like mothers. "(25) The ideal home was a complete repose for serenity, peace and happiness. They were not the rich people. But they knew how to be in touch with nature and how to be happy in the environment. "Home was especially a nice place when all the brothers and many village girls and boys came in the evening and, sitting around the fireplace in big circle, they would gossip, laugh and play." (25)

Oral tales, part of the rich tradition of Africa, relieve people and the storey revolves mainly around the region. Experts like Ngotho tell the tales and immerse themselves in them and spell others. He also forgets "Kamau, Njoroge, Boro, Kori, and many other young men and women who had come to make the long hours of night shorter by listening to stories." (28) Thus telling a story is not only a source of enjoyment, it is also the provider of relief from their pangs and pains of daily life. The novel's protagonist Njoroge is looking forward to joining in. Even in hardship, this absolute integration in the land sustained. But the hypocritical colonizer did not encourage the indigenous people to do so. The White is explicit about their arrival in Kenya and it has nothing to do with civilization. They disguised themselves as a benefactor, but discovered that they were plunderers in a short time. They plundered even a dreamer's dreams, because we noticed that "Njoroge had always been a dreamer, a visionary who consoled himself faced by the difficulties of the moment by a look at a better day to come." (155) When he was about to mature, the baleful hand of the so-called pseudo-civilized broke it. The whole

system of civilization was torn up. No meetings had taken place. "People were sitting late in families these days only." Everybody was scared and only the dark lingered. "They were sitting in the dark. It was important to put out lights early. And they were talking in whispers, even though they didn't talk a lot. You had nothing to say but make meaningless statements and a joke that nobody laughed at here. They knew it'd be a long, dark night. (90) This is the blessing of the white. They came from England and pursued their materialistic gain at the cost of the life of the Kenyans and the Kenyans understand that "they all left their country to come and rob us of acres of what we have." (49) So besides robbing the natives of their land, the white stripped them of the soulful surroundings that they maintained thoroughly

The title of the novel is taken from the poem *On the Beach at night* by Walt Whitman and the lines he quoted are

"Weep not, child/ Weep not, darling,

With these kisses let me remove your tears, the ravening,

Clouds shall not be long victorious,

They shall not long possess the sky."

He shows them instead the flicker of light, which lasts even in these suffocating circumstances. He considered the real aspirations and hopes of the Kenyans very profoundly. As Ngotho says, "My father and many others had been moved from our ancestral lands. (29) But they did not segregate themselves from the land rather they grew up "working on the land that belonged to our ancestors". (29) He was a poor man, waiting only for the white man to come. "The one hope they nourish is to return to their country, because they know that land is the nest, that land is the nourisher, and that land is the creator's gift. So they keep on wanting. And the Kenyans only continued their relationship with the lands because of their wishes. This is not the ideal continuity. It's so strong that the desire to reclaim a place of desperation brings complete hope. When Mr. Howlands expressed his concern over who, in his absence, would look after the farm, Ngotho automatically thought he was going and would return to the farm. So he asked him, "Are you going back to---?" (36) The usurper instantly replied as if with a shudder, "My home is here!" So the flicker got extinguished and he asked himself as if their lingering would never come to an end. "Would these people never go?" (36)

Ngugiwa Thiong'o is a man whose aim is to weave the country's tapestry of history and to wake people up by a patriotic writer. He shows us how the youth stretch their hood out of the shoulder. Boro along

with others went to the war to fight for them and "fought to save them from the hands of their white brothers...." (25) In return they received further deprivation which made the young upset and "He drank a lot and he was always sad and withdrawn." (25) But this is not all about Boro and other young men. We find that Kori who worked in the town "brought with him the town gossip and what was happening in the country." And he gave the news "when Jomo came from Britain" (25) Boro got prepared mentally and physically. So he could declare about Jacobo's murder as "He betrayed black people." (145) He wanted to know from Howlands about his grabbing the lands and he demanded them to be his own. So Boro, the rebel, says, "you white dog, you'll die on your land." (145) for them, land is not the possession to share with the robbers as it is their sacred treasure. At the end of the plot, the author shows us the whole disturbance and devastation of ordinary life in Kenya in the novel *Weep Not, Boy*. All was afraid of death, the country had become a prison, and spirited fighting individuals were killed, captured or concealed. The hopes of the few young generations have been fully broken. Hero Njoroge has hit the end of his life expectancy. His hopes were over, his wife left him, and his place of work was not right for him. So he tried to kill himself and went to the tree but was unable to succeed. "And he ran home and opened the door for his two mothers." (154) But not everything came to a close, the writer showed light of life, light of hope, a sight of future dreams

CONCLUSION

Weep Not Child tells a critical time in Kenya's history that the lives of the people of Kenya are inseparably connected to the environment. These people's very life is rooted in the world that nurtures them. Any deviation from this position leads to an immense catastrophe for them, and that occurred when the colonizers further deployed them. And in the conditions in which they are the inhabitants of the world can this relocate. The novel portrays this organic aspect of the bond very well. From its deep Eco consciousness, Ngugiwa Thiong'o wrote the book. This reading has offered a different reading and ideally introduces a new dimension of the novel before its readers that can be used for contemporary environmental thought.

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Corresponding Author

Dr. Amit Kumar Bhagat*

Assistant Professor, Department of English,
P.G.D.A.V College (Eve) University of Delhi