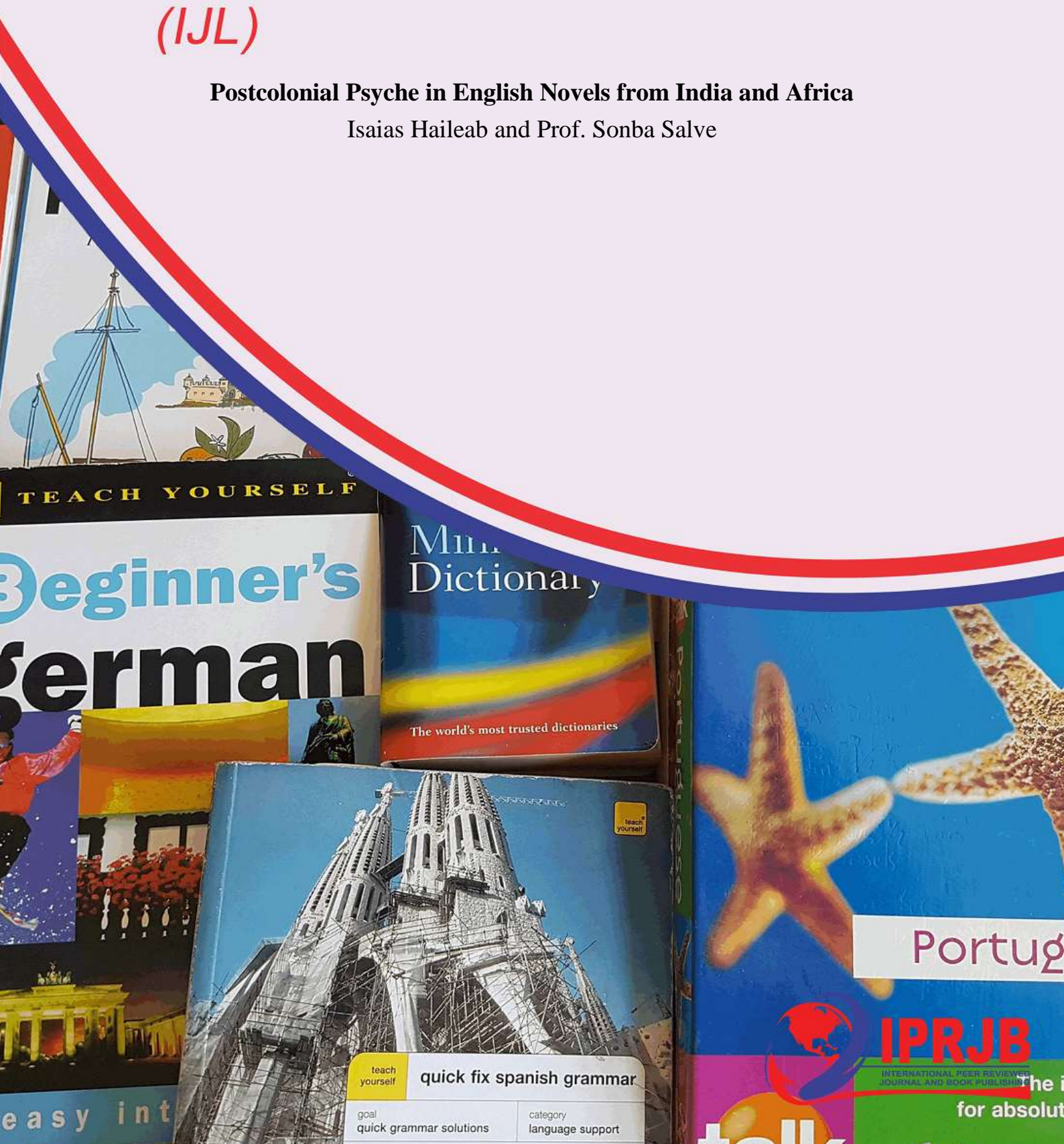


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Postcolonial Psyche in English Novels from India and Africa
Isaias Haileab and Prof. Sonba Salve



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Isaias Haileab

PhD Scholar: Department of English Literature of
EFLU, lecturer at the College of Business and
Social Sciences (CBSS) in Adi Keih, Eritrea

Prof. Sonba Salve

Professor: Department of English Literature EFL
University, Hyderabad, India

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Abstract

Purpose: *Postcolonial Psyche in English Novels from India and Africa* is a thematic analysis of four novels, two from India and two from Africa. The novels are: Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Matigari*. They represent the vast postcolonial writing which has emanated from these two lands as a result of the disaffection that indigenous writers felt that colonialism had exacted on their people, culture and literature. The novels stand out in their treatment of the postcolonial themes of conflicts between the colonial and the local, the past and the present, the traditional and the modern, the communal and the individual aspects of the European colonial legacy in both India and Africa. A study in Postcolonial English novels from India and Africa is important as it may unfold the comparative experience of the effect of colonial period and the literary reaction by English language novelists from these two lands, which were subject to more or less similar colonial master.

Findings: The study reveals that all the four novels share in common the strong postcolonial theme which is at the crux of everything that follow. The story of the coming and going of the colonial powers in India and Africa had left their mark and it was not naturally compatible to the peoples of the populace in these two environments that were both colonized by the British.

Methodology: This article is based on a textual analysis of primary and secondary materials. The primary materials were obtained from the four selected English novels from India and Africa: Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Matigari*. The secondary materials were obtained from various books and articles published on the novels and on the subject of discussion as well.

Keywords: *ELN (English Language Novels), Disaffection, Precolonial, Colonial, Postcolonial, Indigenous, Communal.*

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INTRODUCTION

Colonialism has affected India and Africa in many ways. It has left its mark on their linguistic systems, educational systems, artistic production and perception, and the overall cultural systems of their societies. However, these changes were not aimed to bring about parity between the colonizer and the colonized and hadn't done so. What resulted was a cultural hegemony based on superiority of the west and inferiority of the colonized societies. Colonialism had disrupted and manipulated the societal traditions in these societies. There were walls imposed between the civilization of the colonizer and that of the colonized. The colonized peoples of India and Africa were losing their past, their culture and their history. Therefore, postcolonial writers in India and Africa needed a literary weapon to salvage their history, to transgress the walls, to break the hegemonic narratives of the West, and to reclaim their dignity of culture through art and literature. That literary mission created the postcolonial literature in India and Africa.

Postcolonial Indian Novels in English

India produced a huge amount of postcolonial literature by writers who were writing novels in the English language. They were in most cases similar to the aspirations of African postcolonial writers who were expressing their dissatisfaction with the exploitation of the West, of not only material resources but also of cultural values as and history. According to V.P. Abrami:

During the imperial rule, the natives were subjected to a number of harassments. Especially, the cultural and moral lives of the natives were deeply [in disarray] ... The early works of the Indian English authors were set against the backdrop of the "Postcolonial" themes of 'Nationalism', 'Racism,' 'Ethnicism' and 'cultural Identity. The writers also dealt with a variety of sub-themes such as 'rootlessness', 'alienation', 'gender discrimination', 'labour exploitation', 'hybridity', 'poverty', 'corruption', 'marginalization' and so on. Among the various genres of Postcolonial Indian English Literature, the genre of 'novel', emerged as the most successful and effective one. Rajalakshmi (2018: 169)

The novels, *Cry the Peacock* and *Midnight's Children* have a wide array of themes apart from the postcolonial one. However, it seems that the overarching and the root of all their other concerns, i.e., the psychological, the cultural, the postmodern, the magical reality and so on, stems from that primary cause, the colonial effect and the disruption of the precolonial lives of the peoples of India.

Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* has a very strong and overridingly psychological connotation and read because the main protagonist Maya suffers in her mind and that her conflicts were internal as there was no clear-cut antagonist facing her in the novel. Even the husband that she kills was due to her psychological neurosis and not because she calculated and had made the decision to murder him in that manner. She reaches at a point of nervous breakdown, which eventually culminates with her taking even her own life. However, all the psychological problems of alienation and depression could have been avoided had it not been for her aloof and unfeeling husband, Gautama, who is an embodiment of a colonial clerk, who doesn't spend time at all to contemplate about the real human bond around him but is obsessed with abstractions of figures and economy.

Her indigenous love of nature and respect for humanity, love and sympathy for the poor and warmth of heart is met with his cold and unresponsive attitude that is completely un-Indian in nature. Even his mother and his sister are like him that he is the complete embodiment of

colonial attitude, while Maya, who had a compassionate upbringing is yearning to be close to her roots and her family. When she fails to find it in her marriage Maya laments:

In Gautama's family one did not speak of love, far less of affection. One spoke - they spoke - of discussions in parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government they had innumerable subjects to speak on and they spoke incessantly. Desai (1980: 12)

Therefore, starting from its title, *Cry the Peacock*, which could be taken as an invitation for love and closeness, which is what is normal human feeling, and which is frustrated by her unresponsive husband, Maya falls under the deep depression that turns out to be fatal to the both of them in the tragic end of the novel.

Cry the Peacock has a great significance as a psychological novel particularly with the strong focus given to the main character in the novel is undoubtedly Maya, who faced solo the problems coming her way from her immediate and surrounding environment. She is the heroine and a victim with a strong feminist connotation that her tribulations seem to originate due to the fact that she is a female. As a result, she receives the brunt of the pressures that arise from patriarchal domination in her marriage. Even though her insensitive and unsupportive husband is not cruel to her, his patriarchal attitude doesn't spare her from being a female victim. However, the novel in and of itself has more psychological and psychoanalytic themes than just feminist as the multifaceted conflict mainly manifests itself inside her head, where her anxiety increases from time to time and her loneliness gets the better of her until the end. The attitude of her middleclass husband and of her in-laws in addition to her missing her father and her brother become obstacles to her psychological happiness and tranquility. She maintains and preserves a great deal of her femininity and Indian traditional morality against all of the obstacles facing her from the society. Her desires and wishes are not fulfilled and that devastates her inner psyche. However, she is not a character that gives up easily on her determination to keep her identity and dreams, only that the problems facing her were stronger than she could bear in her psychologically. As she is not supported by her husband on whom she put a great deal of hope as a confidant and warm partner. That brings about her doom and she is defeated in the face of a strong challenge from her husband and the society in which she was trapped. Ruth K. Rosenwasser writes:

Maya is a heroine from the feminist perspective: she defines her signifying self as separate and distinctive (as marginal); she struggles to maintain that identify even though at odds with the society around her (patriarchy, religion, female stereotypes); and she finds validation in her own voice (life-affirming). Maya's feminism is her struggle for personal fulfillment in countering the female stereotype of her friends and the expectations and criticisms of her husband. As a heroine, Maya dares to maintain her "aesthetically and morally coherent unique" individualism despite a lack of support from friends, family, or religion. Rosenwasser (91)

The stress that plagues many a household due to the lack of libidinal dissatisfaction or its absence thereof, constitutes one of the main components of the psychological conflicts in *Cry the peacock*. Maya is an Electra complex and a prodigious character whose marriage was a disappointment especially in the areas of not only eros but also libido as a result of having married the stone-cold husband whom she had envisaged as the perfect representation of her father. This kind of problem wrecks any marriage in any place or society as the absence of libidinous satisfaction is one of the desires of normal human beings, especially those who had had passionate attachment and unfinished love with their parent that would come round to

haunt them in their subconscious, long after they have been married. That is the reason why that after having pondered with the idea that her main problem was the unfeelingness of her aloof husband, Maya is hit with the realization that there was another dimension to her yearnings. There was a vacuum in her relationship with her legally-wedded husband due to the fact that he was not gratifying her libidinal needs, in addition to his being distant and unfeeling to her feelings. Her desire was to love and be loved fully, own and be owned by her husband and have a feel of not only his physical flesh but also have a delving access into his inner and outer world unreservedly. That constituted her ideal life and anything short of that was, to her, the opposite of life. She wanted all or nothing and continuously agonized with her desires to pursue a happy and passionate life with Gautama, who, contrary to her yearnings turned out to be quite unmoved and uninterested in either eros or libido in their marriage. His main occupation was the socio-political and economic affairs of the nation and of the world as opposed to the private matters of the heart and the home. She found him to be loveless and he blocked her attempts to try to make him come to her direction every step of the way that she found it to be very frustrating and her depression increases day by day. When she realizes this she says:

Under the onrush of this ghastly revelation, came the undercurrent of another searing realization – that it was not only for his presence, his love that I longed, but mainly for the life that would permit me to touch him, feel his flesh and hair, hold and then tighten my hold on him. And not on Gautama alone, but on all the pulsating world around him, from the frieze of stars silently exploding in the summer sky to the faintly fluttering owls, making cover, hidden love in the crotch of the fig tree – all that suggested life and the great and entrancing world to me who was doomed not to live. *Cry the Peacock* (88)

Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children* makes use of a vast array of Postmodern and Magical Realism techniques throughout the narration of the novel. However, its themes reflect merely the symptom and not the root cause of the conflicts between the characters in the novel. The actual cause of all the troubles of the novel is postcolonial in nature. The partition of India after the long period of colonial rule by the British had created a wide gap in the Indian subcontinent that had been living in peace and harmony for thousands of years, which was disrupted by their arrival and later by their departure and had created a divide between religions, regions, languages, cultures, and so on. Therefore, colonialism had already taken its toll even before it left India in 1947. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai contemplates after a scene in a cinema:

Once upon a time there were Radha and Krishna, and Rama and Sita, and Laila and Majnu; also (because we are not unaffected by the West) Romeo and Juliet, and Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn. The world is full of love stories, and all lovers are in a sense the avatars of their predecessors. When Lila drove her Hindustan to an address off Colaba Causeway, she was Juliet coming out on to her balcony; when cream-scarfed, gold-shaded Homi sped off to meet her (in the same Studebaker in which my mother had once been rushed to Dr Narlikar's Nursing Home), he was Leander swimming the Hellespont towards Hero's burning candle. As for my part in the business-I will not give it a name." Rushdie 1981 (259)

When Salman Rushdie writes about the home, family, childhood fantasies and many such domestic stories in his novels, it may give the impression that the topics he raises have relevance only at the narrow level of the homely life. However, through his masterclass use of

the magical realism in narrating his stories he is able to cross the bounds of home environment, and provide a picture of the larger society and its realistic situations. He plays with the psychological and the magical realism techniques so effectively that it widens the space and scope in his novels. By taking up a single family's journey and delving deep into the psychoanalytic sentiments of the main characters, Rushdie maneuvers to reflect the public sentiments of his own childhood and his homeland India. To do this he heavily relies on his own background and home area where he grew up as a child before moving to Kashmir, and with his boisterous use and command of the English language, is able to capture moments in Indian history and politics. That's why his writings have been widely regarded as metaphorical allegories of the life of his fellow Indians, and as any realistic depiction of the deep feelings of society may, his novels quite often arouse strong debate and controversy. For the same reason that his characters are suffering from conflicts of the binary opposition, his readers find it polarizing as they themselves have been subjects of the binary opposite realities as they are rebounding from the aftereffect of colonial subjugation, which had left many impoverished while it had created some sympathetic well-to-dos. As Saleem Sinai is torn between accepting his normal life or living his magical life to the fullest, many in the Indian society were disoriented as a result of their having fully adopted the cultural ideologies of the colonizer while a great multitude of their indigenous communities were utterly grounded in their original cultural attitudes. Upstone writes:

More than for perhaps any other author, magical realism is crucial to Rushdie's engagement domestic space: the dwellings Rushdie provides seem to reflect traditional nostalgic construction, seem to act as simple metaphors for the nation, but they are quickly imbued with a fantastic life that complicates such connotations. Upstone, 2007(268)

Psychology was playing a big role in the politics and family life of Amina Sinai that she became more and more inclined toward the communist party ideology as she was heavily invested in her love and unfinished business with her ex-husband Nadir Khan. While at the same time her husband was suffering from reverse psychological trauma as a result of trying fight his way up in the capitalist system that was not fully completed and had been marred with corruption, and which had ripped him off his capital. But for young Saleem Sinai politics was not a matter known to him and his biggest fight was to keep his mother and his oedipal love from disappearing from him. Perhaps if his mother was only interested in the politics of Nadir Khan and not acted in an illicit show of love, Saleem Sinai would begin to understand that it was not a love affair that was going on and would have embarked on the journey of trying to make out what was her deal and perhaps would have understood that there was such thing as politics that had brought the two lovers together. So, each one of them saw and understood life in their own capacity and background and their conflicts of the mind were of different nature as a result. Saleem Sinai was too young to understand politics but he was a primal candidate for Oedipus complex as a young boy of ten years in which there was multiple signs for him to get confused by the possibilities that his passionate love for his mother was put at risk. In any normal psychoanalytic case involving oedipal complex of a boy child the rivalry and jealousy would be between him and his father, whom he saw as a competitor for his mother's love. As a result, he harbored a strong feeling of bitterness and revenge against his mother in a kind of jealousy that a husband would have against a wife who is cheating behind his back with another man. Looking back at his life later on in life Saleem Sinai analyzes the fact that he was too young to

understand the world around him and how much it hurt him in his psychology and how much he didn't sympathize with his mother but was just filled with vengeful rage:

Amina Sinai moved amongst the destitute on behalf of the Communist Party-a fact which never failed to leave her amazed. Perhaps she did it because of the growing impoverishment of her own life; but at the age of ten I wasn't disposed to be sympathetic; and in my own way, I began to dream dreams of revenge. *Midnight's Children* (218)

Postcolonial African Novels in English

In the case of Africa, the portrayal of the continent and its people in Western canonical works was a lot harsher and degrading. In their attempt to restore the values of their colonized people, Africa's postcolonial writers reflected on the European colonial period that had left their societies stunned, befuddled and disordered. In the narratives of the West, all the attributes of good and creative qualities of civilization that have changed the world were credited to the colonizer while all the undesirable negative and backward attributes were associated with the colonized peoples. According to Ngugi Wathiongo':

In fact, the Western world equates knowledge, modernity, modernization, civilization, progress and development to itself, while it views the Third World from the perspective of the antithesis of these positive qualities. Wathiongo 2000 (12)

Those kinds of negative messages that stereotyped the third world countries were perpetrated not just with literature but also with the colonizers system of education that forced the history of India and Africa to look inferior and that of the colonizer to look superior. As a response to such degrading and negative portrayal of Africa in the literature of the Western bigots, many postcolonial writers fought back with their own version of literature. Edward Wilmot Blyden wrote:

All our traditions and experiences are connected with a foreign race- we have no poetry but that of our taskmasters. The songs which live in our ears and are often on our lips are the songs we heard sung by those who shouted while we groaned and lamented. They sang of their history, which was the history of our degradation. They recited their triumphs, which contained the records of our humiliation. To our great misfortune, we learned their prejudices and their passions, and thought we had their aspirations and their power. Blyden 1990 (91).

African postcolonial novels were set out to attain several motifs, prominent among which were: to recreate a literary perspective that is uniquely African, to recreate a form of an African identity, and to reclaim for Africans their sense of nostalgic values of the past generations which were suppressed by the arrival of the colonizers. These motifs made African postcolonial novel to be identified for specific and recurring themes. These themes were focused on issues such as clashes between past and the present, clashes between individualism and community, clashes between socialism and capitalism, themes of disillusionment, themes of gender bias, and themes of diaspora.

Postcolonial African novel has been the subject of literary critics who have attempted to classify and categorize it according to its wide array of themes and topics. Many writers remarked on several conflicts as: the clash between Africa's past and present, between tradition and modernity, between indigenous and foreign, between individualism and community, between socialism and capitalism, between development aid and self-reliance and between

Africanity and humanity. Many more themes were also discussed at the time including: social problems such as corruption, the economic disparities in newly independent countries, and the rights and roles of women. Women writers are now well represented in African literature than before independence.

With respect to the themes of clashes between the past or the traditional and the present African life, postcolonial writers pushed the angle of operation that focused the perspective of representing Africa in the essence that Africans could recognize and feel a sense of belongingness rather than the brand it had been receiving in the colonizers' literary texts. African postcolonial novels paid close attention to the clash between the individual and community in such a strong conviction, arguing that Africans before the arrival of colonialism believed in communal life and that individualism was a strange colonial legacy. This negation of community and communalism by the Western colonial powers had made Africans lose their *ubuntu* and it was one of the themes that postcolonial writers emphasized in their novels. Hence, postcolonial African novels took it as their mission to engage in their discourses and their narratives to address the clash between individualism and communalism.

Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* is no different from these two Indian novels in that it brings together many different themes that cover cultural, feminist, psychological and other aspects of the lives of the characters in the story. In the words of MSC Okolo, 2007: "Achebe's pre-independence novels offer invaluable insight into the traditional life, and events from colonialism with their burdens, lessons and challenges to the moulding of an African identity. His post-independence works reflect his direct experience and examine defining political events in modern African history: independence and subsequent disillusionment leading (in Nigeria at least) to civil war and the entrenchment of military rule. They also express faith in the potential of the African peoples and suggestions concerning their future." *African Literature as Political Philosophy* (36)

However, even in *Things Fall Apart*, the overarching issue is the arrival of the colonial powers, "white man" and the disruptions to the precolonial coexistence of the lives of native peoples of Africa. The changes the white government introduced in Nigeria, the religion of Christianity they brought, and the values of the Igbo society that they undermined is all summed up in the village of Umuofia, where a convert of the Christian religion known as Mr. Enoch, even the name was given to him after his conversion, does things which were not acceptable and disrespectful to the customs of his own people:

One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did. The annual worship of the earth goddess fell on a Sunday, and the masked spirits were abroad. The Christian women who had been to church could not therefore go home. Some of their men had gone out to beg the *egwugwu* to retire for a short while for the women to pass. They agreed and were already retiring, when Enoch boasted aloud that they would not dare to touch a Christian. Whereupon they all came back and one of them gave Enoch a good stroke of the cane, which was always carried. Enoch fell on him and tore off his mask. The other *egwugwu* immediately surrounded their desecrated companion, to shield him from the profane gaze of women and children, and led him away. Enoch had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion. Achebe 1959 (104)

Okonkwo drives his strength of character and hatred for weakness due to his fear of becoming like his father. As if that was not enough, his son, Nwoye becomes rather a sissy and very much like his grandfather, Nwoye. Whereas on the other hand, his daughter, Ezinma becomes a strong character just like her father, making Okonkwo wish that she should have been the male instead of her brother, Nwoye. Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna was a very difficult act for him to do and for the reader to read but he considered it important and killed him anyway because he didn't want to be seen as a soft man though he loved the boy as his own son. He was warned ahead by the wise man, Ozeudu against bearing any hand in the killing as the old man noticed that the boy considered Okonkwo as his father. But his deep unconscious fear of appearing as a weak person and his abhorrence of his father that he sustained from his own boyhood got the better of him and was able to strike Ikemefuna with the fatal blow. That was one of the major psychological conflicts in Okonkwo's life as he was not the same again after the incident. According to Counihan:

... Okonkwo's tribulations fall into neatly diagnosable etiologies, into a knowable world of psychic struggle and drama. In this narrative, choices and fate are determined by his desire to compensate for his masculinity-his father's status as agbala - with his own aggressive brand of manhood. Driven by his fear that he will be seen to be like his father, Okonkwo consistently acts to fulfill his of masculinity but just as consistently ends up infringing or violating codes that structure his and the village's life. Counihan, 2007 (172)

The predicament that the African writers in English faced was highlighted in the criticism that the use of the English language for literature was not even supported by the writers themselves. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is one such example of authors who preached its abolition in favour of native African languages. However, it was in the English language that he himself was able to get acknowledged in the literary arena at a world stage. M S C Okolo writes:

Ngugi is perhaps the first African writer profoundly to articulate the paradox of African writers narrating and expressing themselves in the language of the colonialist, which embodies categories, biases and values that denigrate the African and against which the African writer must consciously and systematically work. Ngugi meets this challenge by bridging the gap between theorizing about making the ordinary people understand their situation and effect change and helping them to do so on a practical level. He understands that the real task facing a writer, to paraphrase Marx, is not merely to interpret the world but to change it. His restlessness in the presence of injustice, no matter how subtle it might appear, will reverberate in the conscience of both the just and the unjust. Okolo (37)

In *Matigari* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o the postcolonial theme is pushed through a Marxist attitude of the main protagonist Matigari and the overall Kenyan workers who were protesting and the general public who were under oppression by their own leaders and capitalist West. As the fight for liberation from colonial rule ended and as the patriots thought that their country was going to live peacefully ever after, the neocolonialism that entered the country through corruption of leaders and corporations was detrimental to the lives of millions of poor Kenyans who had not gained anything from the struggle for independence as their dreams of bringing a prosperous, peaceful, and democratic Kenya was not realized. Matigari had thought that the war was over and that he would go back to his home and land that was grabbed by the white man Mr. Williams and his servant Mr. John Boy. He muses:

We shall all gather, go home together, light the fire together, and build our home together, those who eat alone, die alone. Could I have forgotten so soon the song we used to sing? Great love I saw there, among the women and children, we shared even the single bean, that fell upon the ground.” Wathiongo’ 1986 (104)

Matigari is a novel that portrays a compelling parental quest for reunion with their children and vice versa. The protagonist started his journey right after he came out of the forest by searching for his ‘children’. Here the people of the newly independent African nation are symbolically referred to as ‘children’. The people in *Matigari*, the protagonist emphasizes, were the ones for whom he had fought against the colonizers and white settlers. Not only himself but also the martyrs who were sacrificed were for the sake of the entire people of Kenya, whom they saw as their children. However, there are two characters who stand out for their psychoanalytic importance in the novel, and both of whom had lost their most loved parent violently, which had affected their future lives. These characters are Muriuki, the young boy and Guthera, the prostitute.

Muriuki develops a special attachment with *Matigari*, whom he sees as his father figure. For the entire of the time he could remember he was raised by a single mother and didn’t remember his father. He loved his mother so dearly and when she was killed in the accidental fire, he became a devastated orphan. For this reason, when the opportunity came for him to befriend *Matigari*, he took it as a revival of his psychoanalytic fulfilment and stuck with the protagonist to the end. Whereas for Guthera, the story was somewhat different.

Guthera was raised by a father who was a church figure. However, when the police arrested and killed him, she developed an eternal bitterness and hatred against them. The worst scar was left in her psyche as they had presented her with the dilemma of choosing to save her father by giving up her body to them, which was a direct contradiction with what her beloved father had taught her as well as her devotion for her heavenly Father. She had stood her ground and refused to badge in the face of losing her father, which she did. However, she couldn’t save her brothers and sisters later on, and she was forced to lead a life of prostitution. Similarly for her, the opportunity to befriend *Matigari* was a deep psychoanalytic fulfilment of her Electra passion and a chance of redemption from the sin of prostitution. According to Gurnah:

Guthera is symbolic of degraded womanhood.... Her story is one of extreme innocence and of religious passion perverted by corrupt and irresponsible men. If, by the end of the novel, the reborn Guthera can be regarded as "pure," the lost boy Muriuki is "resurrected." The corruption of the adult world evident in Muriuki's story is the same as that behind Guthera's experience.... both characters are redeemed by the intervention of *Matigari*, who sees them, and indeed the whole community, as his "children." Gurnah, 1991 (170)

Therefore, all the four novels share in common the strong postcolonial theme which is at the crux of everything that follow. The story of the coming and going of the colonial powers in India and Africa had left their mark and it was not naturally compatible to the peoples of the populace in these two environments that were both colonized by the British.

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