



Research Paper

The Grain of Wheat: An Account of friendship and Treachery

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Abstract

The present research paper discusses the themes of friendship and treachery, exploitation and struggle, and the various emotions of human like love; fear through Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's **The Grain of Wheat**. Although all these emotions are very common and used by many writers in various forms but Thiong'o portrays this with the painful experiences of colonized and that make this unique and different from others. In this novel he tries to represent the situation after Independence of Kenya and discussed the double jeopardy i.e., a sensitive and consciousness of an individual with a nationalist consign betrayal at the both ends by the colonizer and colonized. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's works reflects the bright vision and concern for the future of his country and countrymen. He surely is one of the most prominent voices of African literature.

Keywords: Betrayal, Colonizers, Defiant, Exploitation, Humiliation, Injustice, Oppression, Treachery.

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Post-colonial literature and theories has already made their significant mark in the English literature. The themes used by writers such as Achebe, Thiong'o, Soyinka and the theorists like Homi Bhabha, Said and Spivak made their mark with philosophical, intellectual and inspirational discussions. These thinkers made it possible for young scholars to understand historical, political, emotional and even psychological aspects of that period. Literature and theory of post-colonial period is full of the intellectual as well as personal experiences. Apart from the themes of exploitation, subalternity and resistance, quest for identity writers also discussed the very personal and close emotions of love, fear, admiration, friendship and betrayal. Though these emotions are used by almost all the writers in different period but the treatment to these and its exploration with personal painful experience made them unique and worth discerning.

The Grain of Wheat is one of the crucial works of Thiong'o. It was first published in 1967 after the four years of independence of Kenya. It was revised in 1987. It is the third novel of Thiong'o. The present novel highlights on cultural, historical, political as well as personal experiences of the natives of Kenya. The novel dwells in the period before 1963 when the natives are eager to celebrate the day of Uhuru, their independence from colonial rule. Like the other novels of Thiong'o this novel also consists the Mau Mau rebellion in its background. The scars of violence and exploitation are carried by natives. It is sad that they have been exploited by white officers during the colonial period and after freedom the exploitation from their own people became their fate. Apart from exploitation the natives are victims of so many traumas. Betrayal, adultery, disloyalty and scheming against each other. Thiong'o works discusses the predicament of colonized in general and Kenyan in particular, or for that matter works of post-colonial writers depict the exploitation of nation as well as individual from the foreigners as well as from the hands of their own people. Apart from **The Grain of Wheat**, **Petals of Blood** is also dominated by the same themes. It appears that the writers of post-colonial period intend to mention the exploitation of their people and the traumatic past of the nation in order to preserve pain and anguish of the past. Like Thiong'o many writers from colonial land like Achebe, Soyinka and Armah presented the prominent themes which includes the continuous struggle of natives about past and present, about tradition and modernity or even the conflict between individual ideology verses community or society. Individuals like Thiong'o suffered a lot in the atmosphere of greedy and selfish society, in the end of year 1977 after the publication of

Petals of Blood Thiong'o was arrested and was detained without trial just for criticizing the injustices of Kenyan society. He became the most prominent activist of language and culture of his land after his confinement. More specifically in his essay, *Decolonizing the Mind*, he talks about the impact of English language on the mind, culture, history, and identity of colonized countries. The specialty of Thiong'o's work is that it represents the situation as it is, he does not employ the artificial and false notions to please his readers. While reading we must surrender our senses thinking that there may not be anything beautiful and pleasing it can highly disturb you and will challenge your claim of living in humanitarian society. But the more real and apt Thiong'o went, his work screams to be more authentic. Thiong'o is not just an ordinary writer but is a leader of a community which refuse to revive themselves. He is a visionary and a staunch social critic. He blends fictional characters with non-fictional to make his readers recognize the history of colonial struggle in Kenya. His works reflects the bright vision and concern for the future of his country and countrymen. He surely is one of the most prominent voices of African literature.

The Grain of Wheat is set in the village of Thabai and around a villager Mugo, Kahika Gikonyo, Karanja and Mumbi. Mugo, who was reclusive but is considered as the hero of the village for his active participation in the freedom struggle. Thabai is tangled in histories of the place as well as mythical illusion. The novel opens with the Mugo who was orphaned at a young age, we brought up by drunken and cruel aunt who tortured him throughout his life, Mugo hated her a lot and desire to kill her one day. His pain and suffering in childhood made him lonely, self-doubting and anti-social. But for Thabai he is hero, a hermit who suffered for his land for his people and refuse to submit his honor to white man. It was said that he refuses to confess the oath during the period of detention. His loneliness made him a spiritual man who can hear the voice of God...the one who talks with God. He was told to deliver a speech on Uhuru. He was anxious and nervous to deliver but his village elders requested him to do so. Villagers wanted to celebrate the day, they wanted to remove the shame and humiliation they faced from ages and for that they are ready to awake their dead ones as-

We must raise them...even from the dead...to share it with us. Our people, is there a song sweeter than that of freedom? Of a truth, we have waited for it many a sleepless night. Those who have gone before us, those of us spared to see the sun today, and even those to be born tomorrow, must join the feast.¹

Though he is respected among his people but Mugo is living in the world of guilt, his reason of guilt was revealed at the end of the story. The other main character is Kahika, who is a total contrast of Mugo. Kahika was loved and admired by his family and friends. He is centre of everyone's vision during the political struggle of Kenya. He had sense of responsibility towards his community, he ran away and joined the Mau Mau movement. The stories of his courage and dare were prominent among villagers. Villagers wanted to pay tribute to his death in Uruhu and asked Mugo to deliver a speech which combines tribute and struggle of their region. Kahika was publicly hanged from tree in the centre of market by colonial authorities to show the result of rebel against them. Kahika conquered a police station and killed the hated District Officer Robson. His death is symbolic in the novel, it shows that this sacrifice is significant for the new beginning of the land. Thabai decided to celebrate the freedom on the same field where Kahika had been hanged. Kahika was hanged by colonial authorities but he was betrayed by Mugo who worked as an informer to give the information about Kahika's where about to the authorities. Kahika after assassinating Robson seek help from Mugo to hide him knowing that no one can suspect Mugo since he is a loner and not part of any association. But his faith was betrayed by his most trusted person. The end of Kahika leads to the new beginning of Mugo as a person and as a civilian of the imperial land. The famous Algerian writer Frantz Fanon defines the complexity of freedom and slavery in his famous work *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that the condition of political slavery subtle but powerful curtain between perception of freedom and perception of slavery. It could often blind both the free and the enslaved. This results in a condition called double jeopardy i.e., a sensitive and consciousness of an individual with a nationalist consign betrayal at the both ends by the colonizer and colonized.

Kahika's sister Mumbi, the wife of Gikonyo, also played an important role in representing the theme of treachery while Gikonyo was imprisoned she slept with Karanja and had a son with him. Karanja had been appointed village chief by the colonial power. Gikonyo remains faithful ideal and firm in his thoughts about freedom and patriotism;

Gikonyo was respected and admired as a symbol of what everyone aspired to be: fiercely independent, bending all efforts to success in any enterprise.²

His image, his respect and whatever he built up with his honesty was shattered by his beloved wife Mumbi. Gikonyo like Mugo is also full of guilt since he betrayed his country by confessing the oath taken by him with Mau Mau in a hope to be released early from detention camp and to return to Mumbi whom he loved dearly. When he saw the baby he realised her adultery with his friend Karanja, he was mad but he could not do anything except pouring his anger on Mumbi. He refused to have any interaction about the child and even about the feelings they are going through. Mumbi tries hard to have the harmonious relationship with him but her guilt made it difficult to have peace between them. Mumbi loved Gikonyo but falls prey to Karanja's lust in absence of her husband. Unfortunately, Mugo deceived Kahika when Kahika was in serious need of help and shelter. Being a friend and a person who belong to the same country he must have helped him to continue Kahika's mission of liberation on the other hand Karanja and Mumbi betrayed Gikonyo when he was away for a good cause. The narratives of the many works of African writers shows that the close relative and best friend is the one who betrays the one who is involve in the freedom struggle or try to bring up the noble cause in society. The reason may be political and economic corruption, personal jealousy, bitter past experiences and selfish approach of an individual. By secretly betraying their country and countrymen they may achieve the feeling of authority and supremacy among the rest but they don't realise that;

...the true self of the oppressed person is moulded, subverted and distorted in such way that it is ultimately driven to a state of powerlessness, normlessness, facelessness, dependency, and insipidity existence to the extent that it is almost "infantilized".³

Karanja among the natives is one such character among all who is least bother about freedom movement and struggle he is simply trying to establish himself among white supremacy. Karanja works at Githima, a Forest Research Station originated by the colonial government. He tries to cultivate the approval of the DO, John Thompson, who is posted there with his wife Margery. Margery was having sexual relationship with Dr. Van Dyke who was contrast to John. She also enjoys her power over Karanja as a white woman. The two women, Mumbi and Margery represent two separate worlds of women treachery. A hopeless colonized and powerful colonizer. Mumbi felt ashamed and wanted to reconcile her relationship with her husband on the other hand Margery enjoyed her sexual allure.

In *The Grain of Wheat* Thiongo deliberately chooses to set the whole novel on the background of the celebration of long-awaited Independence Day. Where natives are excited and over joyed for celebration and the ones who betrayed the country and countrymen are filled with guilt. Mugo the admired hero and Kahika the well-known traitor suffers from the same agony. The corruption and moral decadency of all these characters are part of post-colonial texts. The inner guilt of betraying each other and not being able to participate in the freedom struggle resides in their psyche. Which leads them to the humiliation and attempt to end their life tragically.

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