

Human Values in the Works of Nagugi Wa Thiongo and Mulk Raj Anand

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Introduction

The literary output of each of these writers is immense and it is a fact that they are prolific writers and make us forget the severe challenges they had to face when they started to write. Both wrote 'protest' literature. Their books did embarrass at times the political establishments. Both had to define the realm in which the novel was to operate in their lands. The challenge was to uphold the relevance of non-Eurocentric models against the Eurocentric. This had to be achieved by relating their own traditions to modern experience. As Ngugi puts it in *Decolonizing the Mind*.

Amidst massive illiteracy, amidst the conflicting phonetic systems even within the same language, amidst the new superstitions of the bible and the church, how can we talk meaningfully of the African novel? How could I contemplate the novel as a means of my reconnection with the people I left behind? My targeted audience—the people—were the two classes represented by Kamiriithu. How could I take a form so specifically bourgeois in its origins, authorship and consumption, for such a reconnection with a populace ridden with the problems outlined above? (67-68).

The Problem

Both writers dealt with this problem by conceiving their writings within the context of a world heritage. Ngugi says:

The social or even national basis of the origins of an important discovery or any invention is not necessarily a determinant of the use to which it can be put by its inheritors... Gunpowder was invented in China. It was effectively used by the European bourgeoisie in its spread and expansion to all the concerns of the globe. Mathematical science was invented by the Arabs but it has been appropriated by all the nations of the earth. The history of science and technology taken as a

whole is a result of contributions from many nations and races in Africa, Asia, Europe, America and Australia. The same is true of the history of the arts—music, dance, sculpture, paintings and literature (*Decolonizing the Mind*, 68).

It is this total human context in which Anand too places himself as a writer:

As the novel concerns the whole of human life, in all its multifarious expression,... we must remember the truism that all art forms of every period more or less reflect the environment, either by extending the accepted tradition with its old myths,... or by moulding the environment, much, or little, ... or by revolutionizing it so as to cohere with the new myths which dimly grow from the hunches about ourselves (Indian Literature of the Past Fifty Years, 110-111).

The Argument

The most important factor in the total human context, for both writers, is the common labourer and the peasant. With great conviction and clarity Ngugi speaks of the cultural achievement in the world:

The most important breakthroughs in music, dance and literature have been borrowed from the peasantry. Even the games like football and athletics have come from ordinary people while all the others normally associated with the upper classes were refinements of those of the people. Nowhere is this more clear than in the area of languages. It is the peasantry and the working class who are changing language all the time in pronunciations, in forming new dialects, new words, new phrases and new expressions. In the hands of the peasantry and the working class, language is changing all the time, it is never at a standstill (*Decolonizing the Mind*, 68).

When in detention, Ngugi contemplated seriously on the appropriate ‘fiction language,’ that is, ‘fiction itself as language’ (*Decolonizing the Mind*, 75). He felt compelled from within to write in Gikuyu.

Mulk Raj Anand, whose ideas about the dynamics of creation are similar to Ngugi’s, did not switch over from English to Punjabi or any other ‘Indian’ language. But he is as much concerned about his readership. It is most important for him to relate to his audience, and the language that can be heard by the common man is the right language, according to him. In India

where there are numerous languages, English got peculiarly assimilated by Indian culture. The English that Anand uses in his fiction is certainly not British English. In any case, for both Anand and Ngugi, content is the ultimate arbiter of form and language.

Conclusion

This research paper ends with the hope that further exploration in the field would be rewarding. An examination of Anand and Ngugi from the Marxian angle could be attempted. Also, the nature of violence in their fictional works appear to be a probe worthy subject. Towards the end of *Matigari*, which has a neo-colonial setting, the crowd burns the houses and property of the rich and the hero returns to the forest (from which he emerged at the beginning), and prophesies a ‘Second Coming’ of the Mau-Mau struggle. The language here is reminiscent of Fanon’s:

Justice for the oppressed springs from the organized armed power of the people. Matigari had already laid down the belt of peace. He would now return to the forests and wear his belt of arms for a second struggle (*Matigari*, 160).

Devil on the Cross ends with the murders of the ‘rich old man from Nakuru’ and his two rich associates. With a sense of poetic justice, Waringa the protagonist shoots down her seducer and the exploiters and walks off the scene in a triumphant manner. Similarly, Wanja, one of the protagonists of *Petals of Blood* kills the representatives of neo-colonialism. In *The Sword and the Sickle* there is Razwi, who is spokesman for violence. Professor Verma and Count Kanwar Rampal Singh counter his arguments for violent means to achieve freedom, but the interesting fact is that Razwi remains the character with vitality. There are other advocates of violence in Anand’s world like Sauda, the trade union member, and Ratan in *Coolie*. P.K. Rajan’s observation is worth consideration:

Violence, in Anand’s novel...has its distinctive dualism. He shows his awareness that positive revolutionary movements cannot avoid violence, but the possibility of having violence without murder seems to obsess his humanist imagination—an obsession which it (sic) has remained impossible for him to overcome (*Mulk Raj Anand: A Revaluation*, 177).

It must be clarified that both Anand and Ngugi were committed to humanitarian vision of society. Ngugi believes that

We must all struggle for a world in which one's cleanliness is not depended on another's dirt, one's health on another's ill-health, and one's welfare on another's misery (*Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya*, 75).

Anand declares, "Violence against violence is futile" (*The Hindu*, May 9, 1993).

In the present comparative study the parallels between Anand and Ngugi may appear too neat. One reason for such an approach is obviously the anxiety to assert, in the absence of comparative studies of the two writers, their literary kinship. The interaction between past and present is a compelling aspect of Anand's and Ngugi's attempts to relate their traditions to modern experience; and since it is easy to see a dichotomy between the traditional and the modern in protest literatures of the colonized regions, there was the need to guard, from the very beginning, against the dangers of making the tradition-modernity polarity simplistic. Therefore, the two writers are discussed, not individually, but in an inter-related manner throughout.

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