



LANGUAGE IS A MAJOR CONCERN FOR POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN WRITERS: EXPLORING NGUGI WA THIONG'O

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ABSTRACT

This paper sheds light on the way literature has utilized language in the post colonial period. The Research methodology would be content analysis and re reading of selected texts of post colonial African Writers. This paper shall answer some questions related to importance language and the writings of African writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. How literature would have been treated if it has ignored the significance of language? Can we imagine pure literature without language? Is Post colonialism all about expression of language? Language is that fertilizer which nourishes the seeds of any literature. Ever since humans had acquired language to communicate with one another its power had increased tremendously. Literature is incomplete without words and readers enjoy its enigmatic charm. This lurch for word game in literature is impossible without language. Frankly, language is a wonderful tool for digging and reaching the depth of ocean called Literature. To gain supremacy over language was one of the aspects of colonialism. Honestly, it is impossible to enjoy pure literature without effective language. The relevance of literature would have become vague subject without language. Literary world is no less than a vast ocean where we find different languages scattered like conchs and when we blow these conchs the original sound of Literature is heard round the globe.

Keywords: Literature, Pure Literature, Language, expression, post colonialism, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

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This paper is about exploring language and its position in colonial period (especially in Africa), then this paper will discuss about language choices of Africa's literary gems N'gugi Wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe and finally concluding with how language is a cutting edge tool for expressing literature in postcolonial period.

Languages

Humans are the supreme creature on this crystal ball (earth) as only humans are gifted with this power of language. In other words humans are blessed for their ability to use language and style of expression. From the ancient times humans are integrally associated with literature and in turn literature is associated with language. It is a clear

indication that language and humans are inseparable. So, it would not be wrong to say that without language humanity is impossible. Language has been one of the central issues in the colonial period and in post colonial period around the world. And understanding the human's connection with language is complex one. In the colonial period, one thing that was also a major concern for the revolt was imperialists stopping the colonised people from writing in their own language. And it is obvious that if imperialists were stopping them from using their own language they were literally mocking their humanity. Eventually, suppression of language had backfired and the colonisers boomeranged in the form of protest in the country. Colonial people were abstained from using their own languages and now in this contemporary post colonial period it is due to the strength of language that one's place is secured and one's language has got recognition too. If anybody is abstaining from using one's own language it is just like cutting very important organ called tongue. Language is without any doubt the best medium of expression. Today we see how we are in continuous progress to become bilingual or multilingual. This shows that language is directly proportional to human's progress and vice versa. Language is very important to express one's feelings, thoughts, creations and what not. Language has a major role to play in literature and literary world. Language is itself a subject of research but at the same time language is also backbone of any literature. How a piece of literature is perceived depends upon the use of language applied in it.

Colonialism and Language

It is known fact that colonialism has attacked the very existence of its colonised people. It took away their culture, scattered their community, silenced their language and crushed their existence and left them in identity crisis. Everything was affected in the storm of imperialism except for the language. The spark of language continued burning and it suddenly outburst and burnt the oppressive footings of imperialism. When we peep in the past colonial period we see there was no place for any language except for the compulsion to accept coloniser's language i.e. English.

It is again a true fact that imperialism spread due to many reasons like trade, economic output, commerce profitable investment outlets but language was one main hurdle for the Europeans because they were helpless due to the issues of language and hence their motive was also to replace their native language with English. Imperialists tried to weaken them further by keeping them away from using it. To some extent they were successful in weakening them but the people felt the nostalgia for their own native language and they started to protest. And writers had a major role in this as they were loaded with weapon of ink. Writers spilling of ink were not in vain. It ultimately aroused the feelings of people and then community and finally cut the tentacles of colonisers.

In the colonial period, language was one major reason for the revolt of colonial countries to remove imperialism. It is language which links people and makes them cultural rich and united. In the colonial period it was a major strategy of the Imperialists to abstain them from the use of their own language. If we talk about writers of the colonial period, it would be like giving someone pen without ink in it. Because unless a writer is given freedom to express in the way she/he wants it is very difficult to expect a genuine writing. But when they are given this freedom to express in their own languages we get many magnum opuses (master pieces). When the writers are given this freedom of language, they are in their tendency to write with their heart rather than borrowing other language and using it. During colonial period many writers were writing about the sufferings and troubles of the colonised people but it could hardly reach the world audience due to language issues'.

Postcolonialism and Language

In the postcolonial era, language has become sine qua non to express one's feelings and thoughts. Post colonialism is all about expressions and letting out suppressed feelings with tremendous force. And it is also true that in post colonial era, the subalterns(a term frequently used by feminist critic (Gayatri Spivak), the marginalised, the fourth world people all have come out of their cocoon shell and they are striving hard to make the world listen to their voices. And language plays an

important role in it because using one's own language and writing in one's own language is the precious gift of post colonialism. It is the freedom of using one's own language and writing that today we are able to get to know about the tribulations and pangs of colonial people. Colonial people had suffered a lot and this is evident from the literature and history of their country.

No doubt, post colonialism is all about expressing and that too in one's own language. Imperialism and its bad impact then protest and revolt by people and subsequently decolonization; this is not simply a tale to tell with spirit rather it is a troublesome journey of regaining language, culture, identity and voice of the people of colonised nations. I would prefer to talk (rather write) about a nation who became free from the stinking tentacles of Imperialism in 1960s. Yes, it was Africa. African nations got freedom in 1960s and their protest for this freedom is very striking and unparallel in commonwealth literature. After achieving Independence the African nations were immediately concerned about the language choice. And gradually some countries replaced English and favoured their regional or native language and even declare it as their official language.

Frankly, Post colonialism is not a simple a journey of gaining freedom but it is a very heart touching and sometimes hair raising incidents which we come across by reading African writers. Writers play with words and languages but it is very interesting to tangle in their language game. No need to elaborate, that during colonial period many writers from different countries had to strive hard for writing in their own languages. There are many examples but I have opted an African writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o a Gikuyu writer from Kenya who had a major role to play in fighting for the right of African native language (i.e. Swahili). And at last he was successful in this mission to bring forth his native language to the world platform.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo quoted in his famous work 'Decolonizing the mind':

“[i]t is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues” (p-20 Wa Thiong'o).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o doesn't support the use of that language which has been given by the colonisers and he is strictly in favour of using his own African language for expression. And he struggled for Swahili language and demanded its place instead of English. And Ngugi's struggle for his native language has a very long and painful story to say.

Nigeria's most influential and world's renowned writer, Chinua Achebe who published his first groundbreaking novel 'Things fall apart' (1958) boldly narrates the true story of Africa and also retorting Imperialists with his witty use of language and writing style. This novel has got world acclaim not because of the story of Igbo community presented by Achebe but mainly because of the use of bold and clear-cut language. Achebe vividly describes the horrible Africa's journey from colonization to decolonization. Here, my point in stating Chinua Achebe is that he understands well that writing in English language will definitely reach in every corner of the world and his aim and dream of presenting real and true Africa will come true. And the same happened because of his language choice. Although some African writers like Ngugi wa thiongo didn't appreciated this move but Achebe's dream came true. Ngugi Wa Thiongo was not at all in favour of appreciating English for African writers. He craved for some African English. Can we assume that Ngugi wished for something impossible? Hopefully No, because after decolonization one is free to choose one's own language. Frankly, the role of language is very crucial rather than mere presenting a piece of work for the sake of your own people. But it was really a herculean task to produce such a real story in a very right moment and in an appropriate language when in 1960s many African nations got independence.

'A slave is not completely a slave until he accepts that he is a slave'. (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o p -12)

Honestly, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has very superbly quoted about being slave. Slaves are not born rather they come in this category because they accept it. And moreover they are submissive. In other words, it is not wrong to support Thiongo's statement about slave. When we talk about slave, colonialism

flashes before our eyes. It is very surprising that the word slave is very frequently used in African context. It is not mentioned in the field of literature only but slaves have been widely and of course seriously been discussed in every realm be it mass media, social context or political context. I also agree with Thiongo's definition and further I feel if we have a scintilla of doubt about the lives of slaves; it is better to dig the rich mine of African literature. And the one thing which is noteworthy here is that slaves too have no languages to speak. They were silenced and their voices were suppressed. It was very well known to Imperialists that if the slaves are given freedom to speak they will learn to protest. As the role of language is sine qua non for any revolt be it cultural, political or social.

African literature had very well put the complete history of slaves. Have we ever pondered why African literature has become a destined source for showcasing slave narratives? The answer is very simple that the colonials had given Africans many stories to tell the world. And the story is all about brutality, suppression, and marginalization. But here the question arises what was their language of expression? The freedom to use language was not given to them and it left them like a dumb mannequins. The scars of their psychological trauma have not been healed even today. It is still haunting their present.

Thanks to Africa's own efforts and spirits that they are now free to use their own languages and also they are adopting and writing in English language. It is their flexibility that they are getting world acclaim due to their writing in English. No doubt, they have recognized the demand of time and are doing accordingly. African writers have grown widely in recognition and due to freedom of expression of language we see Nobel Laureate like Wole Soyinka.

When we are able to read and know about the true image of any culture, community, their struggle, without any change in its subject it is literature of pure category. And to produce a pure literature without the help of language is quite impossible. By the dint of language literature becomes a rich, presentable and worthy subject. It is also truism that this contemporary postmodern time

the theatre of absurd (a term coined by Martin Esslin) has been in wide use. People love to read books based on absurdity, people love watching that is based on absurd themes. Loving absurd themes doesn't mean any weirdness rather this genre had tried to improve human's predicament. But at the same time African literature which has gradually become protest literature is considered to be very realistic. Africans fought for their space, identity, voice and above all for their language. When they got voice after decolonization they were worried about the choice of language. They were not able to decide as to which language they should adopt. And this tussle led them into many difficulties.

Language acted like a sharp weapon which helped them to express boldly. African literature is full of protest theme because it had suffered in the hands of European imperialism very badly. Europeans had robbed the language and literature of Africa. Africa had suffered in the hands of European power to such extent that it was left with mere skeleton. I mean to say, Africans had no language so they were not able to protest simultaneously. I call this scramble for Africa's soul and the shivering soul which was stirred due to colonialism.

CONCLUSION

By the way of conclusion, I think that Language is the best weapon of expression in post colonial period. Without the use of language Empire can't write back.('Empire writes Back' used by Salman Rushdie). It is only the freedom of using one's own language and expression that today we are able to know that Rudyard Kipling's White Man's Burden was not just a poem but he was mirroring the worst tendency of Europeans to civilize the blacks. In post colonial period, if one is ignoring the relevance of language then it is sure that the suffocated expression would be presented before the world. And no one will be interested in listening to them. Literally speaking, garland called literature started to collect its pearls after the introduction of language in our society. Language has such power that it could be easily used for good as well as bad purposes. Literature which is at war with the language is impossible Language is a true companion of literature. No doubt, language and

literature are complementary. Post colonialism is all about decolonization and its repercussion but it is also true that war for language was not over immediately. Literature is definitely not possible when it is detached from language. Literature has associated itself closely with two things history and language. Language plays a crucial role for the establishment of literature. The mouthpiece of any Literature is language. In this contemporary post modern period, the world is enjoying literature of pure kind and this is mainly because of the freedom to express in any language one wishes to. And lastly, I would say Humans will only be considered as the supreme creature when they are able to place religion and culture in the centre and not excluding language, for language is the best fuel to run the vehicle of literature.

Works Cited

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