With two Nobel prizes and at least one Booker prize during the last seven years, African writings in English seem to have come of age, meriting more serious consideration than has been granted to them hitherto by Indian scholars. And yet with the exception of prescribing a novel here -- Things Fall Apart, most probably -- or a play there -- The Road or Congi’s Harvest by Wole Soyinka, most probably -- most English literature departments in the country do little else for promoting the study of this very vibrant body of literature. Ironic as it may seem, African studies departments and departments of Political Science, History and Sociology in Indian Universities are paying more attention to African creative writings than the departments of literature -- English and French -- whose primary concern it is to study them. And it is so despite the fact that the socio-cultural experience portrayed in African literature written in European languages is so much similar to our socio-cultural world in India, thanks to our common colonial past and similar exploitation at the hands of the British Colonial ‘raj’.

The reasons for such a neglect of the study of African literature written in English are, however, not far to seek. The reasons are more or less the same for
which our own Indian writings in English were denied serious consideration by Indian scholars for decades. For long, English literature departments in Indian Universities, modelled as they are after the English departments in England, held the view -- some of them still do -- that no worthwhile creative writing in English was possible by the former subjects of the raj, be they Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Kenyans, Nigerians, Ghananians and even Canadians and Australians. The result is that most English departments have shown no initiative in bringing about changes which are very necessary to keep up with changing times. More serious, however, is the fact that scholars in these departments fail -- or even refuse -- to realise that English literary studies in India were themselves a part of a grand design whose primary function was to perpetuate the colonisation by instilling a sense of racial inferiority in the minds of their subjects. Macauley's Minute of 1835 states it so emphatically.

Most students of English literature are quite surprised on being asked if they have read any books of literature written by an African author. The answer in most cases is of course a 'no' -- a 'no' which is a matter-of-fact statement with hardly a tinge of regret or apology about it. But then their sense of bewilderment is
much more when they are asked if they have read any books of literature written in Indian languages, especially in their respective mother tongues. 'What has this to do with studying English literature?', is what most of them ask in reply. What they fail to see is the relationship between a society and the literature it produces. To them a daffodil -- they may have never seen it -- is more real than say a marigold only because they have read Wordsworth’s tribute to it.

Similarly, scholars of English literature refuse to recognise the need for a relationship between curricula -- in this case, of English literature -- and national goals. For instance, they fail to perceive the racial prejudice in the writings of Rudyard Kipling, Joyce Carey, Karen Blixin and even the immortal Shakespeare whose books they continue to prescribe year after year. That such prejudices expressed either overtly -- remember the Prospero-Caliban relationship in The Tempest -- or covertly -- the character of Mowgli in Kipling's Jungle stories -- run quite contrary to our professed socio-political goals is of little consequence to our scholars and students. 'But you are talking politics and what has that to do with our studying literature?', is what most of them remark. Literature and politics, they believe, are
apparently mutually exclusive and had better remain so.

It is with this aim of studying the relationship between literature and politics and highlighting its significance for developing societies like ours that the present study has been undertaken. The choice of a Kenyan author's writings in English as a case study has been made with the twin aims of highlighting the common core of experience underlying the writings of Kenyans and Indians -- or authors from other Asian, African and Latin American countries for that matter -- and of underlining the need for paying more attention to such writings by prescribing them as a part of our English literature curricula.