INTRODUCTION

In 1987, intelligence agencies in Kenya received information that someone with the name of Matigari was propagating sedition against the government. Soon an arrest warrant was issued against him. After searching in vain for months, the police discovered to their chagrin and embarrassment that Matigari was only a fictional character in a novel of the same name written in Gikuyu by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Around the same time, several poets in South Africa, after having been banned from publishing their latest compositions, were reading them at the funeral services for those South Africans who had fallen victims to state terror during their struggles against apartheid and for the establishment of a non-racial, democratic South Africa.

Earlier, in 1966, Chinua Achebe's fourth novel -- A Man Of The People -- was published by William Heinemann. The novel which is the first to be set by Achebe in the background of independent Nigeria portrays the powerful nexus between politicians and criminals on the one hand and politics and money-bags on the other. It is, to borrow the words of Chinua Achebe himself, 'a serious indictment of post-independence Africa' and it won the praise of many
a Nigerian. However, what intrigued many readers and outraged the Nigerian public at large was the fact that towards the end of the novel, Achebe showed a military take-over taking place in Nigeria -- something which was both unthinkable and undesirable. Lo and Behold, within weeks of the publication of the book a military coup -- Nigeria's first did actually take place in which, as we know, prime minister Tafawa Balewa and many other senior ministers were killed. Achebe was immediately hailed as a political prophet.

It is very difficult to find better examples of a 'functional' relationship between literature and society in our times. Such a relationship inspires writers to commit themselves to the people's struggles through their writings. At the same time it also raises people's level of consciousness about social commitment so that they in turn help in bringing about basic changes in the social structure for a still higher level of consciousness.

Such a 'functional' relationship was quite apparent in the writings of nineteenth century European writers -- Dickens, for instance -- but is, unfortunately, almost completely absent from it now. However, literature written in South Africa, Malawi, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria,
Ghana and scores of other countries of Africa has played a vital role in mobilising the masses during their respective freedom struggles. It is no coincidence that a quantum leap in the production of literature which had begun as early as the first quarter of nineteenth century was witnessed in Africa only during the 60s and the 70s of this century with the culmination of the process of decolonisation of the continent.

It is quite interesting to recall at this stage the renewed beginning of these literary efforts by emigrant Africans as a result of a conscious decision to open a 'second front', as it were, to assist their respective freedom struggles. History tells us that the demand for national independence has gone hand in hand with cultural revival and former African colonies were no exception to this rule. In fact, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau considers national liberation movement as 'the organised political expression of the struggling people's culture.' A number of African writers, journalists, teachers, doctors, engineers and other professional people living in Europe in the late forties decided to step up their cultural activities to support their respective national movements for political independence. A formal status was accorded to such efforts when in 1956, a
meeting was convened in Sorbonne, Paris under the auspices of 'Presence Africaine', a journal devoted to various aspects of Africa and its people which was being published from there under the editorship of Alioune Diop. The meeting adopted a resolution which stated, among others, that there was no nation without culture, no culture without a past and no authentic cultural liberation was possible without political liberation first. This meeting was followed by a second one in Rome in 1959, which proclaimed, among others, that 'political independence and economic freedom are indispensable prerequisites of fecund cultural development in underdeveloped countries in general and in the countries of black Africa in particular.'

Political scientists like Philippe Decrane and Thomas Hodgking, writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and critics like Lilian Kesteloot recognised immediately the significance of such literary efforts. Philippe Decrane considered Senghor's theory of negritude as the literary counterpart of panafricanism whereas Ms. Kesteloot opines that African writers have produced original works only when they have become politically committed.'

Soon this body of African writers forged links with others in underdeveloped countries, particularly of Asia, and a larger body of Afro-Asian writers came about whose initial meetings were held in New Delhi in 1956, Tashkent in 1958 and Cairo in 1962. Thus literary rejuvenation in Africa became a part of a larger cultural renaissance which had evolved close links with political struggles of various countries on other continents. An African writer, therefore, used his pen not only like the barrel of a gun but he also carried a pen in one hand and a gun in the other — literally. Sedar Senghor, Augustino Neto, Mamadu Dia, Tfawa Balewa, Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah were not only the first ranking political leaders of their respective countries but their leading writers as well. In the context of South Africa, the names of Alex La guma, Dennis Brutus and Ruth First spring to mind immediately. Since the aims of African writers were overtly political, they decided to use for their creative writings, the languages of their masters — English, French and Portuguese. There were two main reasons for this: first, they wanted to reach their message to the educated, politically aware and liberal-minded people in the ruling countries so as to elicit empathy for their cause of political independence.
Secondly, a large number of African languages had a sizeable body of oral literature but they lacked a script and hence had no tradition of written literature. This was the reason why early writers like Plaatje, Senghor, Ousmane and Tutuola made use of the languages of their colonial rulers as a political weapon for fighting their rule on the continent.

The themes chosen by these early writers were also carefully thought out. The early writings were full of details of social and anthropological aspects of their lives which included descriptions of food habits, manner of dressing, forms of address, kinship organisation, customs and rituals, social and political organisation etc. Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* are excellent examples of such writing. This was not done, as is sometimes erroneously assumed, for selling African 'exotica' to the west but for making them aware that Africa was no 'dark continent' whose past was not 'one long night of savagery' as had been made out by slave-traders, missionaries, travellers and early settlers who all had opined that Africa had no history, no culture, no past. Mention must be made, in this connection, of the research and writings of Chiekh Anta Diop who has collected -- very painstakingly -- evidence from various sources to show the African origins
of ancient Egyptian civilisation. Simultaneously, it was also the intention of these writers to reawaken through such writings, a faith among the fellow Africans in their own cultural heritage which many of them had lost completely, thanks to the colonisation of their minds through incessant propaganda by the colonial regimes. These 'anthropological' themes, however, soon gave way to themes of 'protest and conflict' which again had the political objective of giving an impetus to the ongoing struggles. It can, therefore, be safely deduced that modern literature in Africa had its 'functional' role cut out for it from the very beginning. These writers, however, were forced to continue to perform this very role of intervening in the socio-political affairs of their respective countries even after the objective of political independence had been achieved because soon a number of these countries went under neo-colonialism and their fledgling democratic set ups were replaced by military juntas. However, there were also a number of African writers whose minds continued to be colonised even after the goals of political independence had been achieved in

their respective countries. They became, through their writings, apologists for either the 'glorious past' under colonialism or the new ruling coterie flourishing under the tutelage of neo-colonialism. There is yet another category of writers -- and it includes such celebrities as Wole Soyinka -- who question the very role of a writer in providing 'some kind of conception of the society in which he is living and the way he wants the society to go.'

As stated earlier, it is with the intention of studying this functional relationship between literature and politics closely that this study of the relationship between Kenyan writings in English and the Kenyan Freedom movement, particularly the so-called Mau Mau Movement has been undertaken. Kenyan freedom movement, as we know, was the first of a number of prolonged freedom struggles waged on the African continent which also involved an armed struggle. Since all such studies need to be delimited carefully, it has been decided to restrict the present study to the analysis of the writings of only one writer-- Ngugi wa Thiong'o -- who is not only the most prolific of contemporary Kenyan writers but who is also the most prominent one too.

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orature, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o would like to call it -- which various communities in Kenya share with most other communities in other parts of Africa, Kenya has also had a tradition for over two hundred years of written literature -- primarily poetry -- in Swahili which as we know is a kind of 'trade language' used around the coastal areas of East Africa. Shaaban Robert is the most well-known of contemporary writers in Swahili.

Of the various British colonies in Africa, Kenya was perhaps the last to emerge on the map of literary writing in English. Finding it difficult to express their thoughts in Swahili -- particularly poetry -- Kenyan writers took the writing in English -- primarily prose -- in a big way. Soon the body of literature produced by Kenyans in English more than matched the one produced by their counterparts in West Africa. The dominant forms were short-story and novel. Leonard Kimeria (Potent Ash), Charles Mangua (Son of Woman), Meja Mwangi (Carcase for Hounds), Mwangi Ruheni (What a Life), Grace Ogot (The Promised Land) Samuel Kahiga (Girl from Abroad) and Godwin Wachira (Ordeal in the Forest) have all contributed in bringing Kenyan writings in English to limelight. However, it is Ngugi wa Thiong'o who has single-handedly through his writings -- fictional as well as non-fictional
forced scholars and critics of African literature to pay serious attention to Kenyan writings in English.

Born in 1938, in the family of a landless squatter on the land of a well-to-do farmer in Kamiithu village near Limuru in Kiambu district, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went to the mission-run Kamaandura school in Limuru and later to a school of the Independent Schools Movement. Later, he joined the Alliance High School -- Kenya's first full-fledged school for Africans -- run by an alliance of the Protestant denominations in Kenya. It is here that Ngugi's religious awareness about Christianity -- a fact which is more than obvious from his writings, particularly in A Grain of Wheat where copious references were made to the Bible -- was formed.

Ngugi was fourteen when a state of emergency was declared in Kenya in 1952 -- on October 20, 1952, to be precise. His passion for education seems to have weighed heavily with him in his decision to continue with it and as a result he missed out on actual participation in the movement. This fact seems to have given him a kind of guilt complex and is perhaps one of the major reasons for

5. Independent Schools Movement was started by Kenyans after the missionaries had disallowed the children of those parents who practised polygamy or female circumcision from attending mission-run schools. For more details, see discussion on p.76,
making the freedom struggle, particularly the 'Mau Mau' phase, repeatedly the theme of most of his books.

After finishing his school education at Alliance High School, Ngugi joined B.A.(Hons.) in English at Makerere University College at Kampala, Uganda which was the only university college in the whole of East Africa. It is here that his creative talents developed. Before graduating in 1963, Ngugi had written his first full length play - The Black Hermit - which was performed on the occasion of the Independence of Uganda in 1962. He had also written his first two novels - The River Between and Weep Not Child. During this period he also became the student editor of Pen Point and wrote a number of short stories as well. During the same period he also contributed a regular column - As I see It - to the 'Daily Nation', a prominent newspaper published from Nairobi. It was a conventional course in English literature that Ngugi pursued at Makerere and some critics are of the opinion

6. Ngugi tells how once when he ran into the student editor of Pen Point, origin East Africa -- the literary magazine of the college -- and told him on the spur of the moment that he had a story to contribute. On being told to bring it to the editor soon, he was in trouble, for he had not written any. However, he did manage to produce one before long and this appears to have launched him on his literary career.

7. David Cook and M. Okenimkpe, for instance, in their book Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his writings, consider this to be the case.
that the study of D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad left an early influence on his writings.

Leeds was Ngugi's next halt for education. Here he soon became a part of Arnold Kettle's group which provided him with new perspectives on various issues -- political, social, cultural and academic. In his own words -- 'Leeds systematised my thinking'. At Leeds he started working on Caribbean literature as his dissertation for the M.A. degree -- a work which he never submitted and which was later to be published as a part of his first book of essays -- *Homecoming* -- in 1972. Leeds also provided him with an opportunity to participate in a number of conferences in Syria, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. But what is really significant about his stay in Leeds is that it is here that he published his next novel -- *A Grain of Wheat* -- in 1967.

Returning home the same year, Ngugi became a lecturer at the English department of Nairobi University. Soon he suggested a number of radical changes in the syllabus recommending, among others, incorporation of literature written in African languages as a part of the programme. These were, however, not accepted. Ngugi resigned from his position in 1969, due to the stiff attitude of the university against students when they had
been forced to go on a strike in support of various demands of theirs.

Back to Makerere where he had accepted a year’s fellowship, Ngugi wa Thiong’o helped the department reorganise its English department as African literature department with special focus on world literature rather than English literature. This was very much in keeping with his recommendations at the English department in Nairobi university.

Ngugi went to the U.S.A. for a year to teach African literature at North Western University, Illinois where he got an opportunity to observe, as he put it in The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, 'Neo-imperialism at close quarters'. He was back at the English department in Nairobi University in 1971 where he was able to bring about the desired changes and the department was organised as Department of Literature. The period between 1972 and 1977 proved very fruitful in Ngugi’s literary career. He published a number of books beginning with Homecoming and Other Essays (1972), The Trial of Dedan Kimathi (1976), which he wrote together with his colleague Dr. Micere Mugo. Secret Lives (1975), a collection of stories and Petals of Blood (1977), his next novel, were also published during this period.

Ngugi got into trouble with political authorities
over portions of his Petals of Blood in which he dealt for
the first time with situations in post-independence Kenya.
Also the text of a play - Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry
When I want) -- about peasants in independent Kenya which
he wrote together with Ngugi wa Mirii in his mother tongue
Gikuyu and which was performed at the Kamiriithu Community
Education and Cultural Centre, Limuru in 1977, was
objected to by the authorities who eventually banned its
performances on November 16, 1977. On 31st December 1977,
Ngugi was taken to a police station near his residence for
'routine questioning' but was detained without trial for
almost a year — until December 12, 1978 to be precise.
He was released as unexplicably as he had been detained.
However, he was not restored to his position as Professor
and Head Department of Literature, Nairobi University
despite repeated requests. During his detention, Ngugi
wrote down on pieces of toilet paper — literally — the
details of his routine as a detainee as also the
strategies through which he was to keep his sanity alive
in the face of humiliation and torture — both physical and
mental. This was later on published as Detained: A
Writer's Prison Diary in 1981. During this period he also
8. For details of the circumstances leading to the
ban on the performance of the play and Ngugi's
detention see Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary,
wrote the manuscript of his next novel -- Caithani Mutharaba Ini (Devil on the Cross) -- in Gikuyu. Ngugi, let us recall, had made his first attempt at writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu as a conscious decision when he had collaborated with Ngugi wa Mirii, in writing a play which was published as Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will Marry When I Want) in 1980.

His requests for the restoration of his position as Professor at the Nairobi University having been turned down, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went away to England, settling down as a fulltime writer. It is from here that a number of his books - Writers in Politics, Barrel of a Pen, Decolonising the Mind and his latest novel, Matigari have been published. He has also made common cause with all those who are fighting for the restoration of democracy in Kenya.

Ngugi has made Kenyan history, including the freedom struggle, as the theme of his powerful writings. For reasons of consistency and homogeneity of analysis, the study has been further confined to only one genre, namely fiction, although Ngugi is an equally, powerful playwright, short-story writer and essayist. Comparisons have been set up, wherever possible, with other Kenyan writers like Meja Mwangi and also with other African writers like Chinua Achebe. Again, although the analysis
is formally confined to novels only, references have been made to Ngugi's plays, stories and non-fictional writings as well.

Finally, a word about the methodological approach. Instead of employing any particular theoretical framework, a very eclectic approach within the broad framework of sociology of literature has been used for analysing and evaluating the texts. The socio-economic and politico-ideological circumstances which define the life and historical experiences of modern African nations -- Kenyan in the case of our present study -- cannot perhaps be taken care of by existing theoretical frameworks in the field of literature. We certainly need a new and more functionally relevant theoretical approach for evaluating African literature than the ones currently in fashion. Most of these -- Semiotics, Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology, Structuralism, Feminism, etc. -- have originated in the west where colonialism and its aftermath have never been the conditions of life. Moreover, as there is no functional relationship left any more between literature and society in the developed world, their evaluatory criteria too have tended to sequester literature from society. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that any didactic note struck by African writers in their works is
held in a very low esteem by western critics who dismiss it as mere 'propaganda'. In Africa, on the other hand, colonialism and its aftermath, namely neo-colonialism, are stark ground-realities in most nations. Literature is still functionally relevant and as has been shown in the beginning of this chapter through reference to two incidents, it still intervenes in and affects the day-to-day life of its people, as was the case in most pre-colonial African societies.

Besides an Introduction, the study has been divided into seven chapters, the first two of which are by way of background. While the first one defines in very general terms the relationship between literature and politics within the broader framework of relationship between literature and society, the second provides a detailed background of the history and political developments in Kenya, particularly during its colonisation by the British. These two chapters form the first part of the study. The remaining chapters analyse in detail the various texts of Ngugi's novels in the chronological order in which they were published. The first two novels of Ngugi — The River Between and Weep Not, Child have been clubbed together into a single chapter because they were written almost simultaneously and hence they represent a single frame of mind on the
major theme of the novels, namely the introduction of western education system in Kenya and its impact on the life of the people, particularly the young. However, separate chapters have been devoted to the next two texts - A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood. While A Grain of Wheat deals with the role of Mau Mau in the freedom struggle, Petals of Blood depicts life in independent Kenya. The next two novels -- Devil on the Cross and Matigari -- have also been dealt within the confines of a single chapter. Both these books -- written as they are in Gikuyu rather than in English -- may technically lie beyond the scope of our present study -- Kenyan Writings in English -- but they are essential to our understanding of the development of Ngugi wa Thiong'o as a writer and also his treatment of the Theme of Kenyan history. The analysis of the texts in the chronological order in which they were published has provided us with an opportunity for tracing the development and growth of Ngugi's views on various issues which were thrown up during the Kenyan freedom struggle, more particularly, the role of western education, its impact on African culture and the role of Mau Mau in the struggle for freedom of Kenya. Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross and Matigari although located temporally in independent Kenya, deal with the same theme
primarily because a debate about these issues has continued to be waged even in free Kenya. In a way, the debate still continues.

The concluding chapter analyses Ngugi's own views about relationship between literature and politics, literature and society and the criteria for evaluating literature, as put forth by him in his various books of non-fictional essays. Since these too have been analysed in the chronological order in which they were published, they also help us in evaluating Ngugi as a novelist, particularly as a chronicler of Kenyan freedom movement.