Chapter 2

The Multifarious Protagonists

The Indian protagonists – Ramaswamy of The Serpent and the Rope, Yogananda of A Dream in Hawaii and Billy Biswas of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas are unique, but the reverence for traditions, universalisation of experience and the meditative process link them. Waiyaki of The River Between, Ezeulu of Arrow of God, depict the conflicts of African society due to the clash between Christianity and native religion. Teeton of Water with Berries plans to return to San Cristobal and takes tragic actions to fulfil his return. The six novels clearly portray similitude, dissimilitude and the oddities of its protagonists and the varied culture and tradition. The concept of native and tradition differs from protagonist to protagonist. The protagonists also project the inner conflicts and emotions of the novelists in whose mind they are conceived. This chapter analyses the typical behavioural patterns of the protagonists and examines the domestic reasons behind their return. A close scrutiny reveals the autobiographical elements of the authors in the protagonists – Rao elements in Ramaswamy, Bhattacharya elements in Neeloy Mukherji and Joshi influence on Billy.

The three Indian protagonists belong to the affluent class and are
well educated. Ramaswamy and Billy reside abroad for completing their Ph.D Degree and to some extent enjoy the facilities they receive from the foreign countries. Later as a result of the mechanical life, identity crisis and family problems they think of return. Their return is justifiable. To some extent these protagonists mingle with the foreign society in order to save themselves from being considered aliens. In the long run they realise the futility of the foreign culture and the worthiness of their own culture. As S.Kandaswami opines, “The alienated characters in Raja Rao take refuge in oases of religio-philosophical traditionalism that still exist in modern changing, secular India. They either take Sanyas or retire to holy places or take refuge in Indian philosophy and metaphysics” (Kandaswami 1). Even Bhabani Bhattacharya’s protagonist, Neeloy, transforms into a yogi and later retires to the Himalayan foot hills.

The Serpent and the Rope of Raja Rao begins with the words of narrator-protagonist Ramaswamy: “I was born a Brahmin – that is, devoted to truth and all that” (SR 5). After completing his education, Rama becomes a Lecturer in History and takes up the Albigensian Heresy as the subject of research. His purpose is to search back the Indian background – Jain or may be Buddhist – or Cathars. He goes to France for this purpose and during his stay there he is attracted towards Madeleine, a French lady who is five years older than him. The reason
behind her fascination is his brahminhood. Her parents died leaving her an estate which is being looked after by her uncle Charles. She is a teacher at the University of Caen. They marry soon and they live in a villa in Aix. Ramaswamy's father regrets that Madeleine could not sing an aarati. Ramaswamy knows grammar and the Brahma Sutras; he starts reading the Upanishads at the age of four and is given the holy thread at seven. He is given the holy thread so early to perform the obsequies of his mother. He suffers a lot of psychological problems, chief among them being his orphanhood. He accepts the loss of his mother as an irretrievable loss which has left its mark on his mind. “I was born an orphan, and have remained one” (SR 6). His sobbing is heard throughout the novel right from the death of his mother. Rama’s second stepmother, Vishalakshi, whom he calls Little Mother, describes Rama, “He’s the bearing of a young pipal tree, tall and sacred, and the serpent-stones around it. We must go around him to become sacred” (SR 9). The tragic occurrences – like the death of his son, demise of his father, retrieval of Madeleine from worldly affairs, death of his second child – have aggravated Rama’s feeling of solitude. Rama’s father says that he has always been an independent child and will never obey anyone unless he is convinced (SR 45). The orphanhood which haunts Rama forces him to journey in different directions and finally he ends up with
his realisation of a genuine Indian identity. Rama thinks, “Life is a
pilgrimage, I know, but a pilgrimage to where – and of what?”
(SR 26).

Through rootlessness of their protagonists, both Raja Rao and
Bhabhani Bhattacharya are trying to portray the inner conflicts they
experience while intermingling with people of other cultures. When
Ramaswamy reaches Europe for the first time in 1946, he does not feel
himself an alien. He also does not feel any unfamiliarity when he smells
Madeleine’s golden hair. Though Rama is a historian by profession, he
rejects history and proves himself a devout Brahmin. “There never was
time, there never was history, there never was anything but Shivoham,
Shivoham, I am Shiva, I am the absolute” (SR 197).

Ramaswamy admits in the closing lines of the novel that he has
been telling a lie to Catherine, Georges and others and even to himself
about his real home. He says, “My real home is in Travancore, Benares is
there, and there you have no crocodiles nor pyres” (SR 406). He repeats
and redefines his definition of a Brahmin during his conversation with
Catherine in the last part of the novel. He says, “A Brahmin is who
knows Brahma, that is one definition” (SR 406). He says further, “There
is another, a roguish definition. A Brahmin is he who loves a good
banquet” (SR 406). From the beginning to the end, Rama feels that he is
a Brahmin. Rama loves his mother but loves his father only after his death. Though he and Madeleine are husband and wife, a true affection does not bind them. When she interrogates, “What is it separated us, Rama?” he says, “India” (SR 331). To the same India he plans to return finally in search of his guru.

Raja Rao has attributed several of his personal traits to Ramaswamy in the Sahitya Academy Award winning novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. Kavita Agrawal discloses that Rao is a “religious man and his novels are imbued with the real problem of ‘dukha’, the cosmic sorrow that Buddha sought to eliminate from the world” (141). Raja Rao was born in an orthodox Brahmin family, in 1908 in Mysore. When Raja Rao was only four, his mother died. The same condition of orphanhood, he pictures through Ramaswamy. Raja Rao has done graduation in History just like Ramaswamy. Professor Dickinson inspired him to study French. He worked for the doctoral degree and his protagonist Ramaswamy also works for Ph.D. Raja Rao is a great sadhak and the central themes of his novels are ‘Vedic vision’ and ‘Advaita’. Vidyanaya Swamy, one of his ancestors was perhaps the greatest teachers of Advaita philosophy after Sankarachaarya. Ramaswamy preaches Advaita in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Raja Rao married a French lady, Camille Moully. He was very much attracted to Benares for the religious
activity performed there and thought of renouncing the world and becoming a sadhu. But Swami Aatmananda, a great Vedantist and believer of Advaita philosophy convinced him that a person could attain spiritual salvation by meditating on God and carrying on his duties as a son, husband and a father. Raja Rao considers him as his guru.

In *A Dream in Hawaii* Yogananda’s disciple Devjani also ponders on a guru. It is much relevant and it is equally applicable and similar to the thoughts of Yogananda and Ramaswamy. It is stated in *A Dream in Hawaii*, “One could not go far without a guru’s guidance, his expertise. That was why the guru was a set figure in the landscape of Indian traditions. There would have been no Nivedhita without Swami Vivekananda” (89). If the protagonist in *A Dream in Hawaii* is spiritually motivated by Swami Vivekananda, the protagonist of Raja Rao in *The Serpent and the Rope* is highly influenced by Sri Sankara.

Bhabani Bhatacharya was born in Bhagalpur, Bihar. After his education in Patna University, he left for London for higher studies. In 1969 he joined East West Centre Honolulu, as a senior specialist visiting professor at the University of Hawaii. This experience of Hawaii he blends in his novel. Balram S. Sorot declares, "The historical events in India which formed the background of Bhattacharya’s writings and influenced them powerfully can be divided into two phases: the first
phase stretches from World War II to independence and the second from independence to the late seventies. The social political and economic conditions of both these historical phases are reflected in his writings” (Introduction 13). Bhattacharya admits, “Tagore appeals to me from my school days and my writings also began from those days. It was therefore quite unlikely that I would miss the impact of Gurudev’s all pervading personality” (Joshi, Sudhakar vii).

The protagonist of A Dream in Hawaii is Swami Yogananda who has taught philosophy for six years in Indian universities before he renounces the world. At thirty he becomes one of India’s famous spiritual leaders. Swami Yogananda knows how to give plain words a dramatic content. He fills a simple thought with meaning and depth.

Ascetics of every order in India had gurus of their own – tradition demanded that. Yogananda, bold conformist, claimed to have received his initiation, the secret mantra whispered by the guru in his disciple’s ear, from a person who had left his earth-form half a century earlier: Swami Vivekananda dominant in the pantheon of the remakers of India. Yogananda lived with his chosen Master’s unseen presence. To know him, you had to know the other (DH 9).
Usually the people who are forced to leave their own country feel themselves as ‘rootless’ as however they try, they cannot mingle with a culture that is far away from theirs. Moreover, even if they try to mingle to some extent, their own culture interferes with their movement.

In Bhabhani Bhattacharya’s *A Dream in Hawaii*, Neeloy Mukherji says, “Among the seventy million great mantras the very best mantra is: *Aham Brahmaasmi*. I am the Brahma, the Absolute Reality” (*DH* 10). Yogananda is termed as ‘ageless and rootless’. Initially he teaches Vedantic Philosophy at the University of Varanasi. Devjani, his student, sees the spiritual potential in him and requests him not to waste his time as a teacher. Initially he rejects it by telling, “A firefly cannot be a star!” Then Devjani replies, “And a star cannot be a firefly!” (*DH* 92). As a result of her continuous suggestion, within six months, he gives up his job and withdraws to the foot hills of Himalaya at Rishikesh where he becomes an ascetic or a yogi. In two years he becomes Yogananda.

The very presence of Swami Yogananda in Hawaii takes place because of the plan of American lecturer, Stella Gregson, to introduce the Eastern guru to the Western society. When Yogananda reaches Hawaii, he expects Devjani in the airport. But a close friend of Devjani informs him that she is away as the chairman of Sanskrit at Harvard, Professor De Bryum has arranged a research grant for Devjani. He
becomes disappointed. Stella thinks that Yogananda is the right person to be the interpreter of the East to the people of the West as he has profound interest in Vedanta and desire to propagate the message of the ancient Hindu scriptures known as Vedas. Hawaii is considered the meeting ground of East and West. The lectures of Yogananda are expected to establish equilibrium in the confused and chaotic ways of life in the West. His interaction with the American audience starts with the message of Bhagavad Gita or The Song of Celestial. He delivers a lecture in Orvis Auditorium on ‘Crisis in a Sick Society: What Next?’ Stella points out that encounter with Yogananda gives her “Release" which she needs most. When Dolores Birdfeather who teaches Hindi at the university, asks if Yogananda could attend her language classes, Yogananda asks her to consult his sponsors as every minute of his is controlled by them. He does not have the freedom of decision. Walt Gregson asks Yogananda how a yogi like him manages his sex life. According to Walt, yogis in India are doomed to an abnormal way of life. He further explains the right to enjoy sex is normal, while self imposed abstinence is abnormal. He remarks it is unfair to kill the fires of life which are inherent in us. Yogananda comments that sex is as cheap as mass-produced drinks while pointing to the sex crimes, child abuse and incest. Their talk remains incomplete as it gets interrupted by the
entrance of Vincent Swift. Walt asserts to his students that unless America goes to India’s rescue, Indians would have to starve. All the twenty six students of Walt unanimously agree that Yogananda’s mission should not be limited to his own country. According to them he is a “world citizen.” The plot of Walt turns Yogananda defile. Walt is shocked and he thinks of Yogananda, “Stripped of his holiness, never again would the fallen guru stand on the lofty pedestal!” (DH 226). He accepts Swami’s defeat as his own defeat.

In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Dhunia, a primitive describes Billy, “He is like rain on parched lands, like balm on a wound. These hills have not seen the like of him since the last of our kings passed away” (SCBB 157-58). After the completion of his Ph.D from America, Billy Biswas joins the University of Delhi as Professor of Anthropology. He does not like the forced surrender to a routine life and a family which he feels is not his. The strange analysis of Tuula Lindgren, a young Swedish Psychiatrist, is that Billy has some sort of strange primeval force in him. She says, “A great force, urkraft, a...primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it” (SCBB 19).

Billy sees the essence of primitive source in Bilasia. Devinder Mohan describes Billy as a fish of deep water who cannot survive in shallow one; he is depicted as a primitive man who cannot accept
Bilasia, a lady who is not as pretty as his wife Meena, but capable of expressing primeval eroticism attracts the Professor of Anthropology who is indeed fascinated by the tribal cultures. Romi is astonished to observe Billy’s collection of books:

It contained every thing from old copies of the national geographic magazine to the latest pornography that was being peddled in Times Square; from learned treatises on black magic and witchcraft to a critique of the theory of relativity. What struck me most was a series of nearly 40 biographies including several on Van Gogh whose turbulent career, I learned later held considerable fascination for Billy at one time. (SCBB 9)

Billy strongly believes that the primitive people following a simple life style and living close to nature are superior to modern educated human beings who are corrupted by civilisation. Billy says that all he wants to do in his life is to visit the places, described in the books and find out about the aboriginalness of the world. This idea of Billy is similar to that of Rama. Billy has irregular timings. Each day of Billy has its own schedule. Some nights he does not return and some days he
sleeps right after breakfast and does not wake until supper. Tuula is highly interested in India especially the tribal people, a subject on which Billy could talk endlessly. They often discuss the works of Verrier Elwin. Billy usually speaks about the ‘other side’. “Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills; the hills beyond the valley” (SCBB 14-15).

Once in America, during midnight Romi hears an unexpected sound out of George’s apartment. He finds to his astonishment Billy playing a pair of bongo drums. This incident has much significance as it is closely linked to an occurrence which happened in Bhubaneswar, when Billy was around fourteen. A link can be made between Arun Joshi, the novelist and Billy, his protagonist. Arun Joshi got a scholarship to the U.S. and got a degree from the University of Kansas in Engineering. He worked in a mental hospital where his uncle was a Psychiatrist and dealt with chronic schizophrenics. Joshi himself being an Engineer sends his protagonist abroad for engineering but restructures Billy as an Anthropologist. In the formation of Tuula Lindgren’s character, he has made use of his uncle’s characteristics and experience.

Billy’s comments on the Krishna murder case illustrate his fascination to the strange world. A clerk is supposed to have committed
human sacrifice to save his son from Leukemia. The clerk justifies himself by stating that he had a dream in which the Goddess had asked him to arrange a human sacrifice to save his son. When the Prosecution states it is a premeditated murder, the Defence argues that it is a case of temporary insanity. Billy’s father who was to give the judgement believed that it is a case of murder and that there was no concept of “temporary insanity” which lasts for a week. Billy defends the clerk by stating that a man can very well operate under the laws of the other world. He strongly argues that such cases are reported from Africa, Indonesia, Japan and even from Sweden. Billy asks his father to “look up the records of any of the tribal agencies and you will know what I mean” (SCBB 54). Billy’s fascination for the tribal world is reflected in the words “all I am saying is that there are worlds at the periphery of this one, above it and below it, and around it, of which we know nothing until we are in them” (SCBB 54-55). This strange world calls him. Billy’s frequent disappearance is justifiable in Sankhya System of Kapila and yoga system, which are complementary to each other. Swami Harshanada argues:

Prakriti evolves into this universe in the presence of the purusas (the individual souls) who act as catalytic agent.

In fact the whole process of creation is for the benefit of
purusa for their spiritual upliftment resulting finally in their emancipation. The panchabhutas (the five elements like earth, water, fire) are evolutes of prakriti. The universe is a permutation and combination of these. Though essentially detached from prakrithi, the purusa involves himself in bondage by getting attached to it and its products. This leads to repeated transmigration (19).

Billy finds himself comfortable only when he joins Bilasia in the Saal forest. He faces existential crisis in the phoney society where he does not get any support even from his family.

In Arrow of God, the action is primarily seen through the chief character Ezeulu's eyes, and he is constantly experiencing the tensions of being caught in the middle of two colliding cultures. Achebe pictures the mind-set of Ezeulu, the high priest of Ulu. He is a man modern in outlook. By stating to Winterbottom that Umuaro is at fault in fighting the unfair war, and the disputed land belongs to Okperi, Ezeulu proves that he is the conscience keeper of his clan. Ezeulu is bold enough to declare the truth, though the truth is not favourable to his own village.

My father said this to me that when our village first came here to live the land belonged to Okperi. It was Okperi who gave us a piece of their land to live in. They also gave us
their deities – their Udo and their Ogwugwu. But they said
to our ancestors – mark my words – the people of Okperi
said to our fathers: we give you our Udo and our Ogwugwu;
but you must call the deity we give you not Udo but the son
of Udo, and not Ogwugwu but the son of Ogwugwu. This is
the story I heard I from my father. If you choose to fight a
man for a piece of farmland that belongs to him I shall have
no hand in it \(AG\ 15\).

According to the Ibo belief, a father never lies to his son.

Winterbottom has no second thoughts regarding the person who should
be appointed as Paramount Chief of Umuaro. He has decided to confer
the title on Ezeulu. He says, “I have gone through the records of the case
again and found that the man’s title is Eze Ulu. The prefix eze in Ibo
means king. So the man is a kind of priest-king.” \(AG\ 107\)

There are many instances in the novel which establish Ezeulu’s
dynamic character. Ezeulu scolds his eldest son for not becoming fierce.
“My first son, somebody says to your hearing that your father had
committed an abomination, and you ask me what you should have done.
When I was your age I would have known what to do. I would have
come out and broken the man’s head instead of hiding in the spirit-
house” \(AG\ 52\). He feels that Obika’s “fiery temper” is better than the
“cold ash” of his eldest son Edogo. (AG 52). Though Ezeulu points out the mistakes of his sons bluntly, he tries to defend them in front of outsiders. When Akueke’s in-laws complain about Obika’s violence towards Akueke’s husband, Ezeulu tries to placate them without admitting that his son has done anything seriously wrong. He asks his daughter, Akueke, to stand before them. He boldly says, “You should have seen her the day she came home. Is this how you marry women in your place? If it is your way then I say you will not marry my daughter like that” (AG 12).

Achebe, whose artistic mind conceived a character like Ezeulu, states some of the outstanding features of this character, in an interview conducted by Robert Serumaga:

Ezeulu the chief character in Arrow of God is a different kind of man from Okonkwo. He is an intellectual. He thinks about why things happen – of course as a priest; you see his office requires this – so he goes into things, to the roots of things, and he is ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the value of change and therefore his reaction to Europe is different, completely different, from Okonkwo’s. He is ready to come to terms with the new – upto a point – except where his dignity is involved. This he could not
accept; he is very proud. So you see it is really the other side of the coin, and the tragedy is that they come to the same end, the same sort of sticky end. (Duerden 17).

For the smooth functioning of their administration, the British appointed selected natives to act as warrant chiefs, clerks and messengers to assist them. This practice was disliked by Ibo because it was an alien imposition violating their own democratic structures. Moreover those who accepted the appointments were men without status conferred by the villages and without allegiance to their own committees. As the high priest of the village deity, the central character, Ezeulu, is a tribal intellectual who senses the need for change. His mental alertness and consequent scepticism lay him open to the charge of betraying his own people. When Akueke and others ask Ezeulu, the reason for not naming the day of the New Yam Feast, Ezeulu replies that according to his reckoning there are still three more yams to be eaten since he could not do so, during his stay in the white man’s prison. He informs them, “Go back to your villages now and wait for my message. I have never needed to be told the duties of my priesthood” (AG 204). This was a sweet revenge taken by Ezeulu as his “face glowed with happiness” (AG 204) after the return of his visitors. He is very stern as he does not reconcile even after the request of ten titled men
who ask him to eat the remaining yams and declare harvesting day as early as possible. He is very ambitious and dynamic as illustrated by the first chapter of the novel. He wants to assert his power as the chief priest; he dislikes being anybody’s puppet.

No! The chief priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival, no planning, no reaping. But could he refuse? No chief priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare. (AG 3)

Akuebue reports to Ezeulu what the people say about him, “if the chief priest of Ulu could send his son among people who kill and eat sacred python and commit other evils what did he expect ordinary men and women do? The lizard who drew confusion into his mother’s funeral rite, did he expect outsiders to carry the burden of honouring his dead?” (AG 125-26). Akuebue states that he has betrayed the clan by supporting Okperi in the land dispute. They also feel he is still betraying them by sending Oduche to join in desecrating the land. Ezeulu asks, “Who brought the white man here? Was it Ezeulu? We went into war against Okperi who are our blood brothers over a piece of land which did not belong to us and you blame the white man for stepping in. Have you not heard when two brothers fight a stranger reaps the harvest?”
Achebe makes Ezeulu his mouthpiece as he establishes that the conflicts within the country paved way for colonisation. Ezeulu further asserts, "We have shown the white man the way to our house and given him a stool to sit on. If we now want him to go away again we must either wait until he is tired of his visit or we must drive him away" (AG 131). Akuebue says that though Ezeulu is his close friend, he cannot forget that “one half of you is man and the other half spirit. And what you say about your father and grandfather is very true. But what happened in their time and what is happening today are not the same; they do not even have resemblance" (AG 133).

Ezeulu is stubborn as he says that eating the remaining yams would be equal to poison or death. The postcolonial dilemma is evident in Ezeulu’s behaviour. He fights for truth, no matter, if that truth favours the coloniser. The suspicious men of Umuaro who think that Ezeulu would rather see the six villages ruined than eat the remaining yams suggest to him to consult Ulu and find out what their fault is. Ezeulu announces that his consultation brings no result and that the “villages would be locked in the old year for two more moons longer” (AG 210). This bizarre declaration throws the people into bewilderment as they have to perform sacrificial offerings to people who died during the old year. Ezeulu eats the twelfth sacred yam and announces that the New
Yam Feast would be held in twenty eight days. John Jaja Goodcountry, Catechist of St. Mark’s CMS Church, Umuaro gains more popularity for the Christian God by telling the people of Umuaro that if they make their offering to God in the church, they can harvest their crops without fear of Ulu.

Ezeulu becomes alarmed at the turn of events like massive conversion of his people to Christianity and the death of his son Obika. He questions Ulu, “Ulu, were you there when it happened to me?” (AG 228). The contradictory religious and domestic happenings force his fevered mind to lose balance and he spends his last days in “the haughty splendour of a demented high priest” (AG 229). In a desperate outburst of arrogance, he attempts to restore his prestige and to reassert the power of his God, but he merely succeeds in alienating the villagers, who begin to turn to the Christian missionaries.

Achebe is not that radical as Ngugi. Ngugi professes in *Homecoming* that literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum. He adds that it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. Chinua Achebe’s concept and attitude towards white man is portrayed through the character of Ezeulu. Achebe was born in 1930 in Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria. His mother tongue was Ibo and he was brought up as a
Christian. He started studying English at the age of eight. His admiration of Ibo culture is reflected in the novel. Like Oduche, Achebe attended church schools.

In *The River Between*, Waiyaki, the son of a famous seer is born when the white missionaries bring change to rural Kenya. He is prophesied to be his people’s saviour but privately he is torn between his respect for the tribe and his love for the white man's education. Waiyaki is depicted as a Christ figure. He shares a lot of similarities with Ezeulu of *Arrow of God*. Ezeulu feels he is not a being to abide by the instructions rendered by the whites. He thinks he has a better responsibility to the natives of his own country than to the whites. The priest who feels earlier that the white man is in a better situation accepts later that white man is like a ‘disease’.

In *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the inhabitants of the Kameno ridge have indigenous cultural traditions such as polytheism and circumcision, and those of Makuya ridge have already succumbed to Christianity and British colonisation. A mission educated character tries unsuccessfully to synthesise the Christian world view with the Gikuyu, even as he comes to understand the completely destructive force Christianity will have on this indigenous culture. Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s personal experience could be observed in this conflict.
Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s family belonged to Kenya’s largest ethnic group, the Gikuyu. His father, Thiong’o wa Naducu, was a peasant farmer, who was forced to become a squatter after the British Imperial Act of 1915. Ngugi attended the mission-run school. At school he also learned about the Gikuyu values and history. Later he rejected Christianity, and changed his original name in 1976 from James Ngugi, which he saw as a sign of colonialism, to Ngugi wa Thiong’o in honour of his Gikuyu heritage. The most prominent theme in Ngugi’s early work is the conflict between the individual and the community. Ngugi describes his latest novel *Wizard of the Crow* as a global epic from Africa. It is an English translation of his Gikuyu language novel, *Murogi wa Kagogo*. In 1977, Ngugi was arrested for his involvement with communal theatres. While in prison, he reflected on the urgency informing a truly African literature and at the same time wrote *Devil on the Cross* on the prison issued toilet paper. “Toilet paper at Kamiti was meant to punish prisoners. So it was very coarse. But what was bad for body was good for the pen” (*DM* 74). He lost the university position and his family suffered constant harassment. Ngugi’s experience makes his character Waiyaki also rebellious.

African novelists deal with themes like forcible conversion to alien religion and ignominy suffered in the hands of coloniser. Ngugi is
considered an African Novelist with a message. His novels are novels of ideas. Two prominent ideas are faith in one’s own culture and the importance of education which he is trying to portray through *The River Between*. Traditional values of the tribes challenged by tribal members, who have converted to Christianity, are depicted in the novel. The two projected conflicting interests are the interest to convert Africans to Christianity and the tribe trying to keep their traditional values in the midst of Christianity. Two contrasting characters are Waiyaki and Joshua. Waiyaki has a strong influence on the people of the land, and his father Chege is a man who has powerful visions of his son’s future. Waiyaki’s father puts the burden of the prophecy on his son’s shoulders.

The strength of Waiyaki is portrayed in the beginning of the novel, when the young Waiyaki urges Kamau and Kinuthia to stop fighting. Waiyaki is the only son of Chege. “He was quite young; not of Kamau or Kinuthia’s age. He had not even gone through his second birth. Waiyaki was, however, already tall for his age” (*RB* 7). In spite of all this, when Waiyaki enquires, the boys reveal the reason behind their fight. Kamau says, “He called my father a convert to the white man” (*RB* 7). The conflicts between religions become a subject of quarrel even for children. Chege, Waiyaki’s father, is a well-known elder in Kameno, “The other elders feared and respected him. For he knew, more than any
other person, the ways of the land and the hidden things of the tribe. He knew the meaning of every ritual and every sign. So, he was at the head of every important ceremony” (RB 8). One important feature of Waiyaki is his eyes:

A light came from them, a light that appeared to pierce your body, seeing something beyond you, into your heart. Not a man knew what language the eyes spoke. Only, if the boy gazed at you, you had to obey. That half-imploring, half-commanding look was insisting, demanding. Perhaps that was why the other boys obeyed him. His mother always turned her eyes away from his. And some women and big girls remarked that he made them feel shy. Waiyaki was not aware of anything strange in his eyes, although sometimes he felt something burn in him, urging him to say and do daring things. (RB 13).

This power of the eyes later enables him to win the hearts of the people, who calls him ‘teacher’. The power does not help him to fulfil the prophecy. What Eriks professes has much relevance:

The failure to fulfil the prophecy is narrated in such a way as to suggest that it is not the fault either of Waiyaki, or of the messianic quality of the prophecy, but instead it seems
that it is the fault of the intransigence of the 'tribe.'

Waiyaki's downfall is caused by his love for Nyambura, which is a transgression of the oath he made to serve the 'tribe' in its purity. Nyambura, being uncircumcised, violates this purity, but Ngugi's presentation of Waiyaki's impossible decision—between the personal and the community—demonstrates sympathy for the protagonist. (Eriks)

Unlike the other protagonists, Teeton of Water with Berries lacks the power to take decisions. San Souci is the name of Teeton's province. When the gathering tries to execute their plan of return,

Each answers to the name of the province where his assignment will take him; as though the place and the man must be inseparable: a discipline which trains them to identify with the river and the plains they will soon inhabit. It is the same discipline which makes them go blind if they meet by chance in any street. They will never acknowledge each other by daylight. No disaster can be sufficient reason for them to break this rule. (WB 42).

The isolation and alienation one suffers in the foreign land is made the subject of art—painting, music, drama. Teeton, Roger and
Derek are representatives of these art forms. Teeton's friend Roger thinks of Teeton and the life of painters he knows. “This was a different kind of isolation. Like his own, it could always be kept active. His services might not be required; but he always had worked to do. The meanest occasion could fertilize Teeton’s mind, drive his hands to invent a form he had never seen before. And it was the same in his own experience of making music” (WB 66). Teeton, Roger and Derek have travelled together from the “torrid island” of San Cristobal into “the surprising bleakness for the English spring” (WB 68). Roger always feels a kind of embarrassment for their “island could not say 'before the birth of Christ' and go on to trace its memory forward to his own time” (WB 70). Teeton’s identity crisis matches very much with that of Derek Walcott:

Being both American and West Indian is an ambiguity without a crisis, for I find that the more West Indian I become, the more I can accept my dependence on America as a professional writer, not because America owes me a living from historical guilt, nor that it needs my presence, but because we share this part of the world, and have shared it for centuries now, even as conqueror and victim, as exploiter and exploited. (Walcott 257)
When Jeremy says, “My professor of History was quite right. You’re abroad because London offers a richer pasture in which to graze” (WB 91), Teeton replies that the professor was among “the first of the goats to get away” (WB 91). Jeremy, shocked to hear “goat”, states that the professor had no option during his time and he has returned to his homeland. Then Teeton retorts, “He doesn’t think the home pasture is so green,” (WB 92). By presenting the professor’s dilemma Teeton foresees his own future. Jeremy counters, “It may not be too green but it’s good grass. Much better than this” (WB 92). Jeremy is astonished to find the change that has come over Teeton:

Teeton had come to the defence of the English with surprising ease. Jeremy watched him; studied him; tried to get the measure of this departure from normal practice. A most unpredictable departure, it seemed. He hadn’t seen Teeton in many years; but he couldn’t imagine any change which might have brought the English in for Teeton’s praise. (WB 91)

Teeton fulfils his aspiration to return by resorting to violence. He gets the inspiration for this from Fernando and his daughter, Myra. Fernando admits his love towards the Old Dowager, his brother’s wife. He has murdered his own brother. It is not complete sentences that the
emotionally affected Fernando utters, “I wanted to marry her after my brother went away. I would have brought our daughter back. He knew she was our daughter. He knew it. Just as he knew the woman he called his wife by marriage was really mine, my own kingdom. Mine. She was mine. That’s why he found it so easy to leave her behind. He had no claim of love on her. But he took our daughter. Out of spite. Her only child. My God! He could have allowed her some compensation. Her only child. My god, can you imagine it?” (WB 226). Fernando further avers that his brother took the three year old child, Myra to an island.

To live on islands he had never seen ..........brings her up among a tribe of monstrous butchers. Living with brutes. For fourteen years. And not a word, and not a single greeting back to his country. Not one item of news whether that infant had ever survived. Out of spite. He was always one to experiment with spite. (WB 226)

Fourteen years after his desertion, when Fernando makes a journey to find their daughter for the sake of the Old Dowager, to his horror he finds that the child is not informed that she has a mother and about her real father. “Educated the child himself in lies, lies, lies” (WB 227). He calls his brother, “that monster. Sprung from the same loins as myself, it’s true. But a monster” (WB 227). Fernando is introduced to his own
daughter as a partner who was absent for fourteen years from the estate. He expresses his feeling of meeting the child, “no longer a child. So beautiful, but with her head full of riddles. Educated only by my brother with his taste for the dead “(WB 228). “There she was. The fruit of his revenge. Talking the language of the savage who was his servant”(WB 228). The horror that Lamming is trying to communicate is highly commendable.

Fernando explains the brutal rape of Myra which he too witnesses and his helplessness as he was tied to a chair. It is the most pitiable and pathetic of all scenes. In no other novel chosen for study is such a horror depicted. It is the horror of the West Indian:

I should have saved her before that black breed of scorpions seized the chance to crawl over her. God, god, the monsters. How they took her body, like the cannibals feeding on some carcass they had never hoped, never dreamed they might ever taste. God, how they brutalised her beauty. For she was that: beautiful; an absolute beauty until they set the hounds upon her. Can you imagine it? Or perhaps you can, you can. Perhaps you can imagine how they made the hounds violate her sex. The animals. The very creatures which
had been her fondest pets. Those monsters stirred up the animals’ lust for her: and let them loose over her body. Just as they had seen their masters do with some of them. His own field servants. Oh, yes, my brother, come from the same blessed loins, the same ancestry of privilege and blood; my brother himself had made this devil’s crime a common sport upon his servants. Male and female alike. Trained his hounds to mound a human sex. That monster. I should have killed him before; could have taken her away before the monsters got at her. (WB 228).

The chaos Lamming presents here makes the West Indian novel really outstanding. The condition of the colonised West Indian community is totally different from that of other communities. Blaming Teeton, Fernando nails him to a chair and takes a knife to finish him off. Immediately the Old Dowager who overhears their conversation shoots Fernando. When he lies dead she asks him, “Fernando, dear, why did you say the storm took Myra too? Why did you tell me that she died?” (WB 231). Teeton becomes the sole witness of this murder.

Roger who used to write and perform before large and appreciative audience in the West Indies, gets disappointed when he
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does not even get enough to survive. He develops shades of paranoia and makes his American wife abort everytime she conceives as he cannot face the racial impurity. Derek’s performance is limited to the role of a corpse. He protests by raping the white actress on the stage.

Teeton has given up painting. He recollects:

He had once deserted his comrades in San Cristobal. It was desertion. There was no other name for his escape from the island. After seven years the word had lost none of its terror. It seemed to drag its echoes up from the deepest root of his being. Seven years ago he had been arrested after a minor revolt in the San Souci plains. The island was never to be same. But he had got away, leaving some of his own cellmates behind. Two were now dead. And the charge had pursued him ever since. How was it possible for him to get away? And when did he decide to go? After seven years he could still hear that martyrdom screaming in his ears. It was desertion. In the notorious plains of San Souci they couldn’t have found any other name for his escape.

(WB 18)

This “desertion” haunts Teeton greatly. Lamming tries to present the situation of writers who migrate looking for a wider audience. The
West Indian writers go to London to get their works published, to earn a wider reading group and earn international acclaim. The situation was same in India too as the Indian writers turned to London and Paris to get published.

Teeton feels prick of conscience, when he considers his desertion in not having braved imprisonment and probable death with his fellow revolutionaries in San Cristobal. Teeton appears very reserved and master of a very few words. “He had a way of keeping himself apart. Even in friendship he seemed to make that distance a condition. Unlike Derek who could convert any feeling into some form of partnership” (WB 59). Roger of East Indian descent rejects San Christobal. He thinks this accidental birth is responsible for the humiliation he suffers. He feels everyone around him takes a mad delight in celebrating the impure. He rejects his father, Judge Capildeo, the archetypal hollow man. He and his wife have separate lodgings. There is no room for even his wife in his private compartment of music. Racial and cultural hybrid becomes a permanent torture due to the refusal of Roger to acknowledge Nicole’s child as his. Like any woman she considers pregnancy as the affirmation of their relationship. Roger protests by burning all the places which shelters West Indian emigrants; by doing so he tries to burn all colonial relationship. He burns the rooming house
Mona and plans to set fire on the Old Dowager's house. Derek is an orphan who turns out to be an actor. "He was born in the theatre, had grown up there, could not imagine an ambition that could take him elsewhere" (WB 239). Roger and Nicole were a great support to him. But when they break up partly due to his instigation, Derek becomes totally fragmented. The Caliban revolt is reflected once again when Derek rapes the heroine of the play A Summer's Error in Albion.

The protagonists are multifarious as they belong to different walks of life. Rama and Billy are engaged in research in History and Anthropology respectively. Rama does not complete his doctorate, but Billy completes and returns to India. Rama, Billy, Yogaganada and Waiyaki are teachers by profession. Yogananda and Ezeulu are spiritual leaders. Teeton is an artist who faces creative sterility. Each protagonist appears to be highly individualistic and unique, but the ardent desire to return girdles them. The intensity of deviation from culture varies from native to native. The native who deviates most from the native culture is Ramaswamy, so his spirit to return is staunch. All other protagonists’ deviation is slighter than Rama’s; Ezeulu’s mind only wavers seeing the pomposity of the wisdom of white man.

Education is an important attraction to all the natives. Ramaswamy and Yogananda go abroad for the purpose of education,
Yogananda to Easternise the Westerners and spiritually enlighten them. Waiyaki studies in a Christian school, and Ezeulu sends his son Oduche to learn the white man’s wisdom. Ezeulu's return after his imprisonment to his native land Umuaro is unique. His imprisonment by the white man hinders the discharge of his duties during that period. The priest king finds it impossible to perform his sacred duties like observing the New Moon, eating the yam and declaring the New Yam Feast. Finally when he returns his mind is instilled with poison against his own clansmen who did not turn up to rescue him from the white man's clutches. He becomes conscious of his power and delays the declaration of the New Year.

A short period of diaspora is evident in Ezeulu’s imprisonment. It is not a voluntary act from his side, but a forced action caused by the white man. Ezeulu rarely leaves his village as the chief priest is not permitted by the custom to leave his village. Though he remains away from his land only for a couple of months, the experience he gains is strong enough to strengthen his hostility towards the whites and indifferent elders of Umuaro. The negative feelings accumulated in his mind raises the question 'Who am I?’. He tries to assert his power and teach his people a lesson by delaying the New Yam feast. The return of Ezeulu is prompted by the selfish motives strengthened by his ego.
which in fact results in the massive conversion of the people from the
native religion to Christianity. The whites foray the minds of the natives
which results in their forfeiting their loyalty towards the native religion
and native language. They succumb to the foreign religion which
appears to be their bread winner. The white man proves his wisdom
and fools the natives by promulgating Christianity. What is commented
earlier about the white man becomes true that they will wipe away all
customs.

Teeton admires his island: “He had tried to find some refuge in
the virtues which he had always conferred on San Cristobal. He was
feeling the loyalty of a patriot whose pride of country had become even
greater during his long absence from home” (WB 149). Right from the
beginning to the end of the novel, Teeton is sure of only one thing. That
is his return.

The fragile balance which remains between the coloniser and the
colonised, the Prospero and Caliban, shatters in the case of the three
artists in Water with Berries. The three artists are three versions of
Caliban who are trapped by ties of affection and promise for which they
have sacrificed their birthright. The violence which they resort to
establishes Fanon’s idea that both colonisation and decolonisation
result in violence. It is through affection, the coloniser tries to trap the
natives. Rama becomes a victim of Madeleine’s love, Yogananda is impressed by the words of Stella Gregson. The greatness of the novel *Water with Berries* lies in the realisation of Fernando that the coloniser has committed mistakes to the colonised which cannot be cured. Fernando admits he has learnt, “That experiment in ruling over your kind. It was a curse. The wealth it fetched was a curse. The power it brought was a curse. That’s why my brother found it to his liking. He knew it could deform whatever creature it touched. A curse I tell you. A curse! And it will come back to plague my race until one of us dies. That curse will always come back. Like how you have come here” (*WB* 228). Domestic reasons are also outstanding in the case of each returnee.