CHAPTER VIII

Matigari, the sixth novel of Ngugi, is his third in a row to be set in post-independence Kenya. It was originally published in Gikuyu in 1986 and was later translated into English by Wangui wa Goro, who is a social critic, interpreter, writer and translator herself. It revolves round the actions of a central figure named Matigari in his quest for Truth and Justice. Using the quest motif of the medieval romances, Ngugi tries to satirise the contemporary situation in Kenya where both Truth and Justice have been strangled by the new bourgeoisie regime. The type of administration which Ngugi presents in the novel might be termed as disguised dictatorship. Though the form of government is democratic in essence it does not contain any of the qualities which make a government truly democratic. In fact, Ngugi was trying to portray how the new government in Kenya had failed to fulfil the aspirations of the people and had become a toy in the hands of the few rich and politically powerful. Perhaps Ngugi’s intention in this novel has been to show how the concentration of power in the hands of a corrupt few can lead to a situation where the common masses are deprived of all developmental activities and their condition becomes no better than it had been during the colonial period.

Matigari, the protagonist in the novel, is an ex-forest fighter who has come out of the forest because his nation, Kenya, has finally gained independence from European rule. As he decides to search for his family whom he had left long back while going into the forest to fight for the freedom of his country, he is faced with the bitter facts awaiting him in independent Kenya. It is through his experiences that the novel emerges as a vehement critique of the neo-colonialist regime in Kenya, where the true rewards of independence are solely enjoyed by the privileged few. The success of Matigari as a critique of the neo-colonialist regime can be perhaps best understood when attention is drawn to the fact that Matigari, the fictional hero of the novel was searched by the intelligence agencies as a real-life subversive character throughout the countryside. The novel is modelled on a traditional Kikuyu tale, but it could be set anywhere in Africa; and not only in Africa, but in any post-colonial set up since the novelist leaves it to the readers to decide the place:
The country is imaginary – it has no name even.

Reader/listener: may the story take place in the country of your choice.¹

It is a powerful story that mixes oral tradition, Marxism and Christianity, concrete detail and symbolism, humour, poetry and politics. The reference to Resurrection and the Second Coming of Christ had tremendous impact on the reading public. In the Note to the English Edition of the novel, Ngugi himself notes the effect of the novel in the following words:

By January 1987, i.e. only two months after the publication of the novel in October 1986, intelligence reports had it that peasants in central Kenya were whispering and talking about a man called Matigari who was roaming the whole country making demands about truth and justice. There were orders for his immediate arrest, but the police discovered that Matigari was only a fictional character in a book of the same name. In February 1987, the police raided all the bookshops and seized every copy of the book.²

The novel begins with the description of Matigari who has come out of his hiding and as he stands in the valleys a riderless horse gallops past him. It stops, looks back at him for a while and disappears into the woods. This reference to the horse can be linked to the white horse that was seen during the birth of Christ. So, is this man, Matigari, a re-incarnation of Christ? But this metaphor is soon suppressed under the immediate postcolonial narrative as the author writes in the next line:

It reminded him of the horses that Settler Williams and his friends had often ridden as they went to hunt foxes accompanied by packs of well-fed dogs.³

In fact, the Biblical metaphors and the postcolonial narrative run simultaneously through the novel and it gives Ngugi a technique to explore the different dynamics of power-relationships as represented in the novel. Along with Christian metaphors, myth and folklore are also combined in the narrative to bring out the insidious forms of neo-colonialist exploitation in post-independence Kenya.
Throughout the novel, Matigari is shown as being in direct opposition to the state which has been represented as existing by a demonstration of sheer brutal force where the police, the intelligence and the military spread terror and help the privileged few in the society to maintain their power. But behind the narrative of such direct opposition between the state and Matigari, there are layers of power-relationships operating at different levels. Power as an operative agent is a more complex phenomenon in Matigari than it seems to be at first sight.

As already mentioned, the opposition or the conflict between the state-machinery and Matigari can be interpreted as a direct conflict between neo-colonial power and the power of the people as symbolised by the forest fighters during the days of anti-colonial struggle. The very fact that Matigari is an ex-forest fighter points towards this direction. However, given the context of independent Kenya, the struggle between these two forces is the symbolical need to continue the struggle against all forms of oppression and exploitation by the poor and the suffering masses.

It is interesting to note how revolt/rebellion is seen as perhaps the only way out of the vicious cycle of exploitation for the common people. The emphasis that Ngugi has put on revolt – violent revolt – has led to the view that this novel is a re-affirmation of the novelist’s belief that things can be set right in independent Kenya only through a peasants’ and workers’ revolt which will bring the corrupt machinery of the state to a standstill. When one tries to link such view to the manner in which the Companion to African Literature divides the growth of Ngugi as a literary artist into three phases, this last phase in which he composed Matigari has been marked as that period of his literary flowering when the influence of Marxism and Fanon had become strong in him. Indeed, there is continuous reference to a strike organised by the workers in the novel – it is a different fact that the strike does not become successful because of the use of the repressive apparatus by those in power.

If strike is considered as a mode of resistance, then it might be noted here that there have been instances of strike in the other novels of Ngugi too. Weep Not, Child has a strike of the workers in the background – the fated strike which makes the enmity between Ngotho and Mr. Howlands open and places them in a position where both become sworn enemies of each other. Similarly, Petals of Blood is also marked
by strikes, and in this novel, strikes are on more than one front – at the academic front against the policy of divide and rule at Siriana Mission School and again the strike by the workers in which Karega is involved. However, in almost all these instances, the strikes meet with failure because of the weak bargaining position of the workers. It is only towards the end of Petals of Blood that there is the news of an organised strike to be launched by the workers at the factory and the hope that things might get better in future. But in all cases, strikes have been projected as the only weapon in the hands of the workers to raise their just demands. I use the phrase ‘to raise’ instead of ‘to meet’ their just demands because in almost all the three cases we do not come across any strike becoming successful and the workers gaining anything out of the hands of their capitalist owners.

This insistence on the part of the novelist to represent the abject condition of the workers in a neo-colonial situation and the need for the redressal of their problems provides scope for viewing power as a conflicted theme in this novel; where the conflict is between the capitalist and the working classes on the misappropriation of the benefits of labour. In fact, because of the concentration of power in the hands of a few persons only who by virtue of their wealth and influence are able to control the police and the administrative machinery of the state, the condition of the common people has been shown as one arousing pity and anger. In the words of Matigari, it is a country where

The builder sleeps in the open,
The worker is left empty-handed,
The tailor goes naked,
And the tiller goes to sleep on an empty stomach (?)

These questions are raised again and again in the novel in different contexts and yet they point to a single thing – the rampant injustice in the land where the true fruits of labour go into the wrong hands. It is a parasitic society which the novelist is portraying in Matigari, and the parasites are none other than the industrialists, the bankers and the politicians. While in his earlier novel, Devil on the Cross, Ngugi had heavily satirised international capitalism as the disguised form of colonialism, in the present novel the conditions are such that international capitalism has reached its
peak. Also, the fear that a nexus between the corrupt rich and the corrupt powerful will breed misery in the land is represented here in no uncertain terms. But the novelist also does not fail to point out that the fault lies with the people too for their pitiable condition, and the fault lies in their fear of the entire oppressive machinery that controls their lives. The refrain “Too much fear breeds misery in the land”, is reiterated throughout the novel by different characters under different circumstances. Matigari's search for truth and justice in such a corrupt land and his own fearless actions serve as the clarion call for the common people to rise up as a united body in protest against the injustice meted out to them.

In Matigari, the power of a people united is presented as a counter-force to the power of the state; and since actual power in the state is exercised by a few industrialists, politicians and neo-colonialists, it also serves as an opposing force to the corrupt and exploitative use of power. In a situation where everything is controlled by the state machinery, the people can claim their rights only by standing in direct opposition to the state – thereby leading to a situation which in legal terms would amount to treason. The actions of Matigari, when seen from this angle, they amount to no less than treason in the context of independent Kenya, but it is through his very actions that are termed as subversive by the state, that Ngugi is trying to project a situation where democracy exists only in name and not in spirit. The administration that Matigari is opposed to is one which is far from being democratic in nature and indeed is a mockery of the spirit of democracy.

The power of the state is represented in the figure of 'His Excellency Ole Excellence', the one who leads the government. In the totalitarian form of government run by His Excellency Ole Excellence, the objective of the state has been shown as being towards the capture of absolute power within its territorial jurisdiction and the eradication of all sorts of opposition. The plea is that since it is a people's government, the people do not want opposition. It is a wonderful example of twisted logic where the same argument is extended to argue that since the people do not want any opposition, any opposition to the government (here, standing for the state) will be understood as treason and would invite the harshest of measures to deal with it. It is clear that under the garb of democracy totalitarian forces are at work:
Government bans the Opposition Party ... His Excellency Ole Excellence has said that this is a people’s government ... The people do not want opposition parties, as they only cause disorder in the country.5

The above lines are a part of a radio announcement which also calls upon the workers to dissociate themselves from those who are preparing for a strike. The media, which is considered to be the fourth pillar of Democracy is shown as being under full control of the government. Rather, the media becomes a means for the government to spread its power and presence across the country. The power of this very important means of mass media is exploited to the maximum by those in power. The use of irony attains its great height when the broadcasts over the radio are referred as the ‘Voice of Truth’.

In the totalitarian situation where things are decided by the capitalists and the agents of international capitalism as described by Ngugi, Marxism is perceived as a threat to the power structure generated and maintained by the capitalist system. There are direct references to Marxism as a threat to the stability of the country and people who teach, practice or preach the tenets of Marxism are arrested and prosecuted. Marxism, because of its emphasis on revolution as a feasible measure for restoring balance in an imbalanced society by providing social equality and justice to the people is considered as the greatest enemy to the established socio-political and economic order where the fruits of labour are enjoyed by those who do not have to shed a drop of sweat.

For Ngugi it was natural that he should put Marx as a potent force against the type of state organisation that he has presented in the novel. The presence and the importance of Marxism in the novel can also be taken as a result of postcolonialism. Reference to Marxism, though in an indirect manner is made at the beginning of the novel in the same radio bulletin which bans all opposition parties as being against the spirit of a government the people. The reference is brought in the context of an impending strike by the workers in the following manner:

...This is the Voice of Truth. The Minister for Truth and Justice has said that this a workers’ government. All workers should disassociate themselves from
those who are disrupting industrial peace by demanding increases in wages. Such workers were no better than the soldiers who had disrupted the peace with their attempted mutiny...\

Since the reference in the radio broadcast is to workers and their unrest over the issue of higher wages, it will not be improper to guess that Marxism is seen as a suspect by the government. It is also not difficult to understand that the situation in the state is mutinous since an armed revolt has already been attempted by the soldiers. Direct references to Marxism begin from that point when Matigari is arrested by the police for confronting John boy Jr. while claiming his ownership of the house which he had built with his own hands. It is in the cell of the police station where Marx and Marxism are referred directly when he meets a teacher who has been ‘arrested and accused of teaching Marxism and communism in school’.\

Detailed and more direct references and accusation on Marxism as a philosophy for stirring up discontent among the workers and the masses is made by the Minister for Truth and Justice during the meeting with the workers at the factory. This incident, much like the ‘Devil’s Feast’ in Devil on the Cross, is one of the most important points in the narration. The Minister for Truth and Justice, in his address to the workers refers to the escape of Matigari from prison and then vents his suspicion on Marxism in the following words:

The government knows exactly who these Gabriels are: the teacher and the student. Imagine, these two were teaching Marxism even in prison. But they were cowards. These two had locked themselves in, reading Karl Marx. Take them all away! Their cases will be settled just now...\

After a few more words, Marxism is again vindicated as:

…it is those who teach Marxism – in other words, communism – who spoil our students and our workers. That is why they should be detained without trial.
It is equally interesting to see how the Minister for Truth and Justice twists terms like ‘socialism’ to suit his own purpose. After accepting the donation and gifts of cash and shares from the directors of the company, he calls the company as a national company since now the government has been given a stake in it, and henceforth, all actions against the smooth functioning of the company is to be taken as anti-national. He tries to hide capitalism under the garb of socialism and tries to give it the name of ‘true African socialism’.\(^{10}\) It is to be seen that all the while the attack is directed against Marxism:

This is *capitalism with a socialist face – or socialism with a capitalist heart.* That is to say *true African socialism.* Not like that of Karl Marx and Lenin that the students and teachers are always talking about. *Lakini watona cha mtema kuni!*

‘They will have to take those revolutions of theirs back to the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Cuba or Albania. Why can’t they learn and teach the kind of socialism we have been shown by the leather and plastics factory?\(^{11}\)

It is evident that Marxism is perceived as a potent threat to the state machinery run by the capitalist class.

The totalitarian nature of the state machinery is maintained by the application of sheer force. It is only with the help of the police and the military that the government is possible to maintain its authority over the people. The voluntary participation of the people in the policies and decisions of the state are missing and it is evident in the attempted mutiny of the soldiers, which, unfortunately is crushed down. The presence of the large number of policemen and military personnel during the meeting called by the Minister for Truth and Justice is an example of how the totalitarian state machinery needs their help to force law and order. At the same time it also reflects the fear of the authority regarding any unexpected violent reaction by the people. It is again with the help of the military and the police that the government is able to finish the strike of the workers at the leather and plastics factory. In the face of such large number of police and military the state authority, represented by the Minister for Truth and Justice arrives at a resolution to bring an end to the strike, and
his verdict on the dispute is one-sided. He either fails miserably to take into account the workers’ side of the problem or decides to ignore that part. All strikes are banned with a presidential decree:

‘I shall now give the verdict on the dispute between the employers and the workers. Firstly, I want all the workers to go back to work now and end the strike immediately. Is that clear? From this minute on, the strike is over...

‘Before I finish, I would like to remind the masses wherever they are that strikes are banned by a presidential decree. ¹²

The approach adopted by the Minister in arriving at the verdict is the least democratic in nature, whereas every now and then references are made to the government or the factory as belonging to the people. Twisted logic seems to be at work again when His Excellency Ole Excellency is hailed as ‘a worker, a first-class worker. Number One’. ¹³ And so the government is supposed to be led by a worker, leaving no space for the workers to complain about. The irony of the whole situation increases when the reader is reminded that all this is done in front of foreign delegates from Britain, America and other European nations who have come there to witness ‘African socialism’ at work. As already mentioned, the situation during the meeting of the Minister for Truth and Justice is not much different from the situation in the Cave during the Devil’s Feast in his earlier novel.

The reply to the Minister’s words comes from Ngaruro wa Kiriro, who is the leader of the workers, and his words seem to have their foundations on the eternal dispute between the owners and the producers:

I would like to say that a dispute or agreement is always between two parties... Ours is a dispute between labour and capital. But the owners of capital should remember that even the capital in question comes from the labour of our hands. Your verdict only shows that you – the government and the ruling party – are on the side of capital, on the side of those who own companies and large farms. I have only one question: Where is our government, we workers? ¹⁴
Since Ngaruro wa Kiriro continues to raise the demands of the workers, he is charged with sedition and sent to prison. Finally, he becomes a victim of police firing.

When the role of Ngaruro wa Kiriro is seen in the light of his position as a trade union leader, his importance in the novel as the mouthpiece of Marxism becomes clear. Like Matigari, he is another inspiring force but operates in different sphere. While Matigari goes around arousing the people, Ngaruro’s role in the novel is to represent the dissatisfaction that was there in the minds of the workers – another exploited class in society. Together, Matigari and Ngaruro symbolise Ngugi’s belief in the need for a workers’ and peasants’ revolt in Kenya if things are to be brought back to normal. This faith on a workers’ and peasants’ revolt is the result of Ngugi’s dissatisfaction with the bourgeoisie class, whom he considered as a parasitic class because of their association with the international capitalism. The song of mutual cooperation that was sung by the people during the days of struggle has not been fulfilled in the days of independence:

Great love I saw there,
Among the women and the children.
When a bean fell,
We would share it among ourselves.\(^{15}\)

This is the song which is referred to in other novels of Ngugi also (particularly in A Grain of Wheat). In the present novel under discussion, as Matigari sings a few lines of this song while sharing the bottle of beer and the packet of food that he had in the dark cell with his fellow prisoners, it sends an ironic message to the readers that this very form of love is missing among the people now. Those who have are the ones who go on gathering more, while those who do not have are the ones to constantly wallow in poverty.

The incidents inside the prison cell point to another important aspect in this novel – the use of Biblical allusions and the heavy reliance on the Bible. As mentioned in the beginning of this Chapter, the description of the white horse on the plains on Matigari’s arrival seems to have Biblical allusions, but this Biblical
metaphor is soon lost in the postcolonial narrative that the author engages in. However, the use of Biblical metaphors does not end there, it continues throughout the novel. Ngugi seems to employ the Bible as a potent force in the novel to make it more symbolic in content. There is constant reference to the Second Coming of Christ and at times Matigari is referred to directly as the Christ of the Second Coming. To catch the imagination of the reading public for whom this novel was intended (since it is essentially a revolutionary novel), Ngugi introduces incidents in the novel which have direct Biblical references. For example the incidents that take place inside the prison cell are reminiscent of the Last Supper. As Matigari shares his food and the bottle of beer that he had with him, the drunkard started speaking “as though he were reading the Bible from the pulpit”:

‘And when the time for the supper came, he sat at the table together with his disciples. He told them: I want you to share this last supper with me, to remind us that we shall not be able to eat together again unless our kingdom comes. And he took the bread and after breaking in he said: This is my body, which I give to you. Do this unto one another until the Second Coming …’

It is also interesting to note that there are twelve persons with whom Matigari shares his food and beer in the cell – lending the full flavour of the Last Supper to the incident; also, it indicates that there might be a Judas figure hidden among them. The allusion to the Judas figure is important in the context of contemporary Kenya where the ‘informers’ has again become important in running the administration of fear in the land. The ‘murderer’ in the cell tries to warn Matigari of the presence of informers everywhere as he tells:

There are a lot of police informers in the country. Wherever you find twelve people gathered, one of them will always be an informer, a traitor.

The apprehension regarding the ‘Judas’ or the informer is later proved true when during the meeting between the Minister of Truth and Justice and the workers at the factory, all the escaped prisoners are caught and the sentence is passed on them on the ‘nod’ of the hooded informer. The information which the ‘murderer’ had given Matigari regarding the presence of many informers in the country is later asserted by
the Minister too. The informers and the collaborators are integral part of the state machinery as Matigari tells the Minister of Truth and Justice of his struggle against the colonial master and his collaborator in the forest:

We hunted each other, trying to see who would be the first to bring down the other. I first tried to bring down Boy. The settler was nothing without the support of his servant. Settler Williams could never rock the foundations of my home without a collaborator.\textsuperscript{18}

While it is clear that the Executive in the country is completely a party to the process of neo-colonial exploitation of the land and its resources, the Judiciary is also not free from it. It seems that all the organs of the government – the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary work in unison to establish a power-structure in which the common people will be left with no choice but to go by their dictates. The Minister for Truth and Justice prides himself as the only person to carry a court with him wherever he goes, adding that ‘Justice delayed is Justice denied’, but the manner in which he deals with cases is perhaps not justifiable in any way. The trials are held in closed rooms and there is ample scope for doubt about the fairness or the veracity of these trials since the final verdict is passed on the assent or the refusal of a hooded informer. The role of the police, the military and the intelligentsia remains like it was during the days of colonialism. These three elements constantly monitor and control the activities of the people at all possible places. The same pall of fear exists in the minds of the people as it did during the days of colonial administration. Nothing has really changed; only power has passed from white to black hands. The players have changed – the game hasn’t.

Even religion is made a part of the corrupt machinery in the land. The priest in the novel is shown as intricately linked to the Minister of Truth and Justice and the latter uses him to certify his actions as backed by religious sanction. The meeting between the Minister of Truth and Justice and the workers at the factory begins with a prayer by the priest\textsuperscript{19} and later the priest reads the Ten Commandments to the crowd so that they might perform their duties sincerely towards the state. It is interesting to note that in the earlier part of the novel the same priest was greatly disturbed by the rumours of the Second Coming of Christ. He was greatly worried on having missed
the chance to go and meet Christ in his prison as revealed in his thoughts which were constantly haunted by the words in the Bible:

Two women shall be grinding the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other will be left behind. You should always be ready, for none knows when the Lord will return …

He felt as if he stood fair chance of being damned. Furthermore, he was also not sure whether there actually had been the Second Coming or not. He argued with himself that he should not be damned since God had not revealed Himself to him, his Servant. Yet he was in a dilemma because God had the way of revealing Himself to the innocent and the poor. The priest has been represented as one who is torn between his belief and disbelief of teachings of the Bible and the confusions arising out of the present rumours.

Because of the priest’s connection with those in power, he can be seen as a development in the line of priests that Ngugi has portrayed in his earlier novels – particularly Brother Ezekiel and the other black priest in Petals of Blood – who are more concerned about their own fulfilment rather than of the salvation of their flock. In spite of the heavy reliance on the Bible, Ngugi has not spared the practitioners of religion from his satire. It is also possible to say that religion has not been able to extricate itself from the colonial machinery (and neo-colonial machinery, in the present novel) in his novels.

Education, particularly European education, comes under Ngugi’s attack because of its role in ‘white-washing’ the blacks with European philosophies and turning them into mouthpieces of colonial government. The failure of Euro-Christian education was the theme of Weep Not, Child too where the tragedy of the protagonist was shown as arising out of his belief on the power of education to liberate the people and the land. In Matigari, English education turns John Boy Jr. into a stern believer in the tenets of European culture and on his return from England he is the fit person to carry on the work of a collaborator in place of his father. Like Njoroge, English education alienates him from his own people and blinds him to the faults of Europeans. At this point it is important to note how the people had sung of him as a
hope to ‘cleanse’ the land on his return from abroad with the power of education. The common people had contributed to his education from their pocket, singing with hope that he would deliver them from slavery. He had been the boy whom they “sent off to study, saying that a child belongs to all, that a nation’s beauty was borne in a child, a future patriot”\(^2\) He had been proudly claimed as the community’s child, but on his return he is farthest from what the people had expected him to be. There is no fellow-feeling in him as he tells Matigari:

> Our country has remained in darkness because of the ignorance of our people. They don’t know the importance of the word “individual”, as opposed to the word “masses”. White people are advanced because they respect that word, and therefore honour the *freedom of the individual*, which means the freedom of everyone to follow his own whims without worrying about the others. Survival of the fittest, but you black people? You walk about fettered to your families, clans, nationalities, people, masses. If the individual decides to move ahead, he is pulled back by the others.\(^2\)

Here is finally an advocate for individualism and capitalism who holds community-feeling as a fetter to the development of an individual. Nothing could be more expressive than the words of John Boy Jr. advocating the Laissez faire principle and given the fact he was educated at the London School of Economics, it seems fitting that he should speak thus.

Due to his insistent search for truth and justice in a society where truth and justice have been commodified and there is (ironically) a Minister to cater to ‘Truth and Justice’, Matigari is taken as a subversive character who is bent on stirring the workers into strike and thereby disturb the economic equilibrium in the country. Also, given the very fact that he calls himself as ‘Matigari ma Njiruungi’, literally meaning ‘the patriot who survived the bullets’, he is seen as a threat by the state and the generation which has replaced the older generation. The older generation of colonial settlers and their henchmen have been replaced by their sons; and as Matigari runs into conflict with them, he is charged with disrupting the peace in the country. As the worker in the prison cell tells Matigari:
‘If you had collided with anybody else but the master and his servant, it would have been much better,’ the worker said. ‘I should know. That inseparable pair have been oppressing us all this time. Every worker knows that Robert Williams and John Boy are like twins born out of the womb of the same ogre. And do you know something else? The whole police force is in the hands of these two. So are all the law courts. So I think that you will be very lucky to leave this prison soon. You should brace yourself for a long spell here, because, as the saying goes, gaols were built for men.’

This is how the administration works through the nexus between money and force in this land where the real producers of the nation’s wealth are deprived of the basic necessities of life. Matigari’s demand is for the re-distribution of the national wealth to the real producers, but this re-distribution is to come through a revolution by the workers and the peasants:

I will not produce food  
For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to feed on it.  
While I go to sleep on an empty belly.

I will not build a house  
For-him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to sleep in it  
While I sleep in the open.

...  
I have refused to be like the cooking pot  
Whose sole purpose is to cook and never to eat!  

This is a clarion call for the workers of the world to unite and demand for their rightful wages – the fruits of their hands.

Besides the workers, peasants and the government with all its agencies, there is yet another strand to the matrix of power as represented by Ngugi in this novel – and it is the common Kenyan female represented by Guthera. Guthera’s predicament is not much different from her predecessors in the earlier novels of Ngugi. In her silent sufferings, her profession as a prostitute and her later resolve to fight back, she seems to embody some of the traits of the earlier heroines of Ngugi. Also, in her
status as an exploited female in the contemporary situation as presented by the novelist, she adds another member to the class of the exploited in the novel. If a direct comparison is made between Wariinga (Devil on the Cross) and Guthera, a fine line based on the objective of the novelist in portraying them differentiates them from each other. In the later part of Wariinga’s portrayal in his earlier novel, Ngugi was trying to project his vision of the new and emancipated Kenyan women, but in Guthera, he tries to project that class of women who, after years of suffering under oppression, finally decide to rise and fight. Perhaps Ngugi was aware of the fact that no revolt in the country can be successful without the participation of women.

In her profession as a prostitute, she is a member of a class which has to depend on the body to earn bread; as such, making them physically vulnerable to males. However, it is the same body which she later uses to ‘buy’ freedom for Matigari when he is arrested and sent to jail for demanding the house of John Boy Jr. – the house that he had built with his own hands. But in her decision to sleep with a policeman, she had violated one of the Ten Commandments which she had observed even at the cost of her father’s death; the Commandment that one should not commit adultery. This breaking of the Commandment has other implications in the novel too. It tries to project the dilemma that one can be faced with when caught between one’s faith on a certain teaching and the cruel demands of present hour. It seems ironical that while the observance of the Commandment had been the cause of her sufferings, it should be the breaking of that very Commandment, which is supposed to be a Christian sin, should leave her with a filling of fulfilment. In doing so, was Ngugi trying to project the view that in the contemporary situation where faith is not independent from the game of power and politics, it will fail to provide solace to the suffering? But it is from the moment Guthera breaks the Commandment which she had earlier followed so rigorously that she identifies herself as one inseparable from Matigari in his struggle to possess that he had lost to the likes of John Boy Jr. and Williams.

However, it is not that Ngugi has represented only the exploited class of female in the novel. The incident in the novel when Matigari ‘hijacks’ a car to enter the house of John Boy Jr. and leaves the occupants in the car naked except for their underwear, includes a high-profile lady who happens to be the wife of the Minister for
Truth and Justice. Guthera, on recognising her from the contents of her hand-bag identifies her and tells how she is always in the papers or over the radio with her fine talk that ‘Women are the corner-stones of the home.’ This incident is important as it helps to shed light on the ladies belonging to the upper class of the society whose actions are far from what they themselves profess and would like others to follow. Thus, it seems that class, more than gender, decides the position of an individual in the context of the novel.

The violent end that Matigari and Guthera finally meet is sad, but it does not put an end to the spark of revolution which Matigari had kindled as we find the young boy Muriuki arming himself with the weapons of Matigari and preparing for future struggle. And as he does so, the white horse which had appeared on Matigari’s arrival from the mountains appears again, thereby announcing the beginning of a new period of renewed struggle. With it the biblical metaphor also seems to come a full cycle and the novel ends with the following lines:

He recalled the night of the workers’ strike. And suddenly he seemed to hear the workers’ voices, the voices of the peasants, the voices of the students and of other patriots of all the different nationalities of the land, singing in harmony:

Victory shall be ours!
Victory shall be ours!
Victory shall be ours!
Victory shall be ours!

While the participation of Matigari, Guthera and Muriuki in the fight against John Boy Jr. and Williams can be interpreted as the revolt of a whole nation, irrespective of gender and age, against exploitation, the ending of the novel which is a picture of continued struggle reaffirms the belief of the novelist for the need of a peasants’ and workers’ revolution in Kenya. Finally, with the representation of Matigari as an ex-forest fighter, Ngugi’s representation of the Mau Mau in his works seems to have completed a full circle. With this novel Ngugi’s handling of the theme of power also moves from the early colonial past to the contemporary situation in
Kenya where he feels the urgent need for a revolution to set the balance of power right in the country.

Notes:


2 Matigari, p. viii.

3 Matigari, p. 3.

4 Matigari, p. 98.

5 Matigari, p. 7.

6 Matigari, p. 7.

7 Matigari, p. 54.

8 Matigari, p. 106.

9 Matigari, p. 106.

10 Matigari, p. 108.

11 Matigari, p. 108.

12 Matigari, p. 108-09.

13 Matigari, p. 109.

15 Matigari, p. 55-56.

16 Matigari, p. 57.

17 Matigari, p. 63-64.

18 Matigari, p. 144.


20 Matigari, p. 93.

21 Matigari, p. 48.

22 Matigari, p. 48-49.

23 Matigari, p. 65.

24 Matigari, p. 97-98.

25 Matigari, p. 150.

26 Matigari, p. 175.