INTRODUCTION

The new voice of contemporary Africa writing in English emerging as a discipline of English studies, tries to emancipate Africa from its literary stereotype. Africa, to the insider and outsider as well, is no longer a gloomy phenomenon, a dark continent, and a fantasy world as pictured in western motion pictures. Major exponents of 'modern' Africa novel like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, James Ngugi, Cyprian Ekwensi and others, look at their tradition as to create a different order of reality through their universalizing imagination. Their primary concern is not Africa anthropology but the human condition in Africa exposed to the West. Though African writers address themselves to the native audience, their novels in English are also meant to enlighten the foreign audience, about rich African culture, religion and heritage and defining the relevance of colonial experience to the present. The form 'novel' is European but the 'things' Africa and the use of native myths and certain techniques of narration give authenticity and African flavour to make African novel in English distinctly 'novel'.

African novelists' deep concern with Africa colonial past and their chronological survey and historicity, make the readers believe that they are more historians than fictionists. But despite their involvement with history, they are primarily artists expressing their
concern about African past, present and future but through the lives of individuals and communities. James Ngugi too is concerned with the lives of individuals and their private dreams but intertwined with public concerns in African situation arising from centuries of Imperial rule affecting native tradition and systems.

Kenyan literature has made its mark on literary scene only with the publication of Ngugi's novel *Weep Not, Child* in 1964. But Nagugi's first written novel *The River Between* (published one year after *Weep Not, Child*) marks the beginning of modern fictional prose writing in Kenya and the emergence of Kenyan novel. Ngugi's narrative patterns, topics and motifs can be traced back to a proto-literary tradition of the beginning of this century. *Adventures of a Kamba Boy*, written in Kamba, before World War I by Ndunda Kitsokwe, a teenage Kenyan boy, is a narrative of some events of his life–of the great famine around 1900, his wanderings with his family to Kavirondo, Nairobi and the coast for food and shelter and his eventual reception at the mission station. The main proto-literary activities in the twenties were in political journalism documenting tribal traditions as Jomo Kenyatta's Journal *Mugithi* from 1928 to 1930. The publication of two important books in English–*An Africa Speaks for His people* by Parmenas Mockerie and *Facing Mount Kenya* by Kenyatta, appeared in print in the thirties. Pre-Independence writing
Land of Sunshine (1958) is another landmark of Muga Gikaru’s autobiographical account of history and politics in colonial Kenya. The early sixties saw the distinct literary form to express the traumatic experiences of the country from the arrival of the first Christian missionary for evangelization until the years of the Mau Mau revolt. Mau Mau Detainee (1963) of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki documented his childhood, school life and experiences in British detention camp, the first narrative memoirs of the Mau Mau revolt. James Ngugi also dealt with the period of revolt in Weep Not, Child. But his first written novel The River Between has recorded the earlier period of modern Kenyan history from the advent of Christian missionaries in the 1880s to the Independent School Movement in 1930s, and becomes the first novel chronologically and historically.

Ngugi’s novels present a Gikuyu society moving slowly, painfully and often violently towards independence, and man as vulnerable, weak, frequently treacherous and rarely heroic, but distinguishing those who are able to cope with the new ways of life to build a new Kenya from mere dreamers, self-seekers or embittered destroyers. The main spring of Ngugi’s fiction is the colonial experience of the Kenyans, the focus being the conflict between the white colonial masters and the black natives. In fictionalizing the conflict, Ngugi offers us a critique of colonialism with a focus on its unpleasant aspects rooted in its ideology, assumption and functioning and has also ensured our
engagement with individuals by exploring and unravelling the complexity of their minds in the given colonial situation. Caught in the complex web of the colonial encounter, Ngugi becomes conscious of the need to dispassionately comment on the situation and the problems of his society and the country. He believes that Kenyan writers:

"must be wholly involved in the problems of Kenya; at the same time he mustn't allow the involvement in that particular social situation to impinge on his judgement on his creative activities..... Writing I take to be a kind of confession where the writer is almost confessing his own private reactions to various individuals, to various problems.... the feeling of shame here, the feeling of inadequacy there, the love-hurted".

This enables him to see the human problem, the human relationship in its proper perspective.

Ngugi, of all foreign tongues, is favourable to the use of English and French as a medium of expression to express adequately African ideas, concepts and philosophy

and African fiction in particular and Africa literature in general and for their capacity to unite African people against divisive tendencies and forces. In 1977 after seventeen years of his literary career producing Afro-English literature, Ngugi has changed the medium of his writings from English to Gikuyu, his mother tongue, for various reasons. He has shown that Gikuyu, a vernacular language, also could be a powerful and adequate medium to present more effectively without much distortion and misinterpretation, as foreign tongues tend to do, the ongoing realities in Africa, to its native audience as to reeducate and regenerate the society. Ngugi has joined his people to fight out imperialism and contrary imperialistic ideas and imposed tradition of school curriculum. For he feared that the new education system would only alienate Kenyans from their own culture and tradition.

Ngugi opined that as to reach the masses "an Africa writer should write in a language that will allow him to communicate effectively with peasants and workers in Africa - in other words he should write in an Africa language". 2

He also contended that "The first sure sign of self-colonization is when one reaches a position where one

feels that one doesn’t know enough of one’s own language, meaning that one knows more of another people’s language.” 3

He determined to come out of this self-colonization and communicate with the masses in Kenya in Gikuyu. But other prolific African writers like Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe of Nigeria, have found African idiom of English adequate and suitable to express themselves and to use local myths for creative purposes.

Cyprian Ekwensi’s People of the City and Achebe’s No Longer at Ease deal with disruptive forces and corrupting system of new education and administration through urbanization, a baneful influence of the imperial rule also affecting native tradition and culture and alienating people within the community.

In the People of the City of Ekwensi, there is protest against urbanisation and urban culture under the influence of the West. Beatrice and Aina become victims of the new dispensation, and Amusa Sango and other could only dream of ‘highlife’ because of lack of resources to get rich.

In Achebe’s No Longer at Ease, the protagonist Obi Okonkwo is caught in the web of external trappings and

sophistication of alien culture and has failed to live up to the expectations of Umnofians and his family. The new missionary education had alienated Obi from his own society only to suffer in the end. But Achebe seems to be critical about the improper perception of alien culture and value system in *No Longer at Ease*.

But Ngugi is unlike Achebe in his ambivalence to the alien forces affecting native culture, religion and education system. His perception of colonization and measure of decolonizing the African mind is different, as has been greatly influenced by Marxist philosophy and his radical socialist thinking.

Africa fiction, popularized by writers like Tutuola, Achebe, Soyinka, Ekwensi, Ngugi, Flora Nwapa, Armah, Camara Laye, etc., for its historicity native setting, innovative techniques of narration and novelty in expression, evoked much favourable response from readers also in the West. It is hailed as "the new literature with delight as quaint, charming, dignified and different".  

African novel unlike African poetry and drama, has made a significant mark in world literature today because of its socio-political, cultural and psychological

implications. It has emerged as a work of art despite its Africanness. It is not the pleasure giving quality but its being at the service of man in Africa, based on African aesthetics and philosophical assumptions that has differentiated it from other western and European novels. The merit of the novel has to be adjudged in African context and sensibility within certain linguistic considerations. It is well-made novel, a composite of message and technique.

Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* has both the qualities in it. Technically it is considered superior to many other novels because of its effective characterisation narrative technique, density of texture and sophistication of its language. On the other hand it dispassionately depicted the cruelty of the Whites and the weaknesses of the natives as well. The novel endeavours to make Kenyans realize their present and react to the reality, and unitedly fight against oppression by Whites and some blacks as to reconstruct their deteriorating culture and society.

African writers' experience in Africa, their total involvement and awareness of different situations of past, present and future, and total commitment to the native society and people, give sufficient strength and vigour to their novel to make it unique and potential.
Ngugi has only adopted the literary form of novel as a medium of communication but not the European version of content to fill in. He has incorporated into his novel, poems, songs, statements, elements of drama moulding it into a form more in line with the function of language and literature in the African oral tradition, giving a new form to 'novel', not entirely a new genre.

In most of the writings of African writers like Ngugi, Achebe, Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Armah, Elechi Amadi and Gabriel Okara, the social relevance of theme to the present, thematic setting, native techniques of narration and didacticism are harmoniously synthesized to make their novels impressive.

Majority of African writers with their deep commitment to the society, as cultural antennae and conscious keepers of time, endeavour to bring about a kind of cultural revolution to regenerate the native society and to preserve its distinct cultural identity unaffected by the West.

Ngugi finds fault with the few African writers interested in western novel writing tradition dwelling more on imagination, western rhetoric and neurosis, as to achieve artistic sublimity. Ngugi opines— "In a novel the writer is totally immersed in a world of imagination which is other
than his conscious self. At his most intense and creative
the writer is transfigured, he is possessed, he becomes a
medium."  

Ngugi's works aptly reflect his leftist ideology. Micere Mugo, his colleague and Ime Ikiddeh, Ngugi's fellow student in Leeds, have observed: "Like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, Ngugi has been courageous enough to challenge political systems for exploiting the masses and denying people genuine freedom."  

Weep Not, Child Ngugi's first published novel in 1964 records the Mau Mau movement in Kenya and of the emergency imposed in the country in the nineteen fifties. The epicentre of the novel is based on the struggle of the Kenyans for political freedom which is 'synonymous with repossession of the land'. The natives consider the appropriation of their land by the aliens as God's punishment. Njoroge's private dream, to become great and successful man through 'new' education to serve his people better, conflicts with the public concerns only to become disillusioned and desperate to attempt to kill himself. On the other hand Waiyaki, the protagonist of The River Between written before Weep Not, Child, is both tragic and


impressive. Unlike Njoroge, Waiyaki has leadership qualities in him and is also optimistic and sentimental. But both Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child* and Waiyaki in *The River Between* fail in their respective missions. Probably Ngugi wants to suggest that the solution to the country's problems did not lie in education. In his opinion it is only a convenient tool to evade responsibility.

*Weep Not, Child* is to a large extent autobiographical based on a colonial situation and the sufferings of a family involved in the movement to get back their land from the alien intruders Ngotho, who is also an 'ahoi' on the estate of an African land owner is like Ngugi's father Thiong'o Wa Ndugu, an 'ahoi' a dispossessed peasant farmer. Boro, Njoroge's brother, goes into the forests to join the Mau Mau forces, as did Wallace Mwangi Ngugi's brother. Njoroge's school life closely parallels to Ngugi's own school life. Alliance High School, where Ngugi studied repeatedly figures in his works. Carey Francis, the Principal of the School, whom Ngugi admired for his effectiveness as a headmaster also figures in his works. For example the portrait of the Reverend Livingstone in *Weep Not, Child* bears a close resemblance to Carey Francis.

By the time Ngugi wrote *A Grain of Wheat* he is a matured writer. *A Grain of Wheat* is his most ambitious and successful novel to date and Ngugi is at his best in
characterisation, narrative technique and sophistication of language. The events in the novel do not follow the chronological order. There are flash backs within flashbacks, "reflector within reflector, point of view within point of view, cross-chronological juxtaposition of events, and impressions." Ngugi doesn't blame the aliens for the plight of the natives, on the other hand he finds fault with the natives and holds them equally responsible for their misery. Similar is Ngugi's attitude to the problems faced by Kenyans in general in all his first three novels.

Ngugi's Petals of Blood written between 1970 and 1975 depicts the post-independence situation in Kenya. The novel subtly presents the unflinching analysis of the new tribalism, the haves and have-nots.

The exile that Ngugi experienced is quiet different from that of the other writers. The Black Hermit deals mainly with the alienation of the educated elite from their origin. His studies in Leeds alienated Ngugi physically for some time and even after return to Kenya his Western education made Ngugi alienate himself culturally from his people to some extent.