CHAPTER FOUR
FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE SELECTED NOVELS OF NGUGI WA THIONG’O

4.1 Background of Kenya

Kenya is situated right along the equator, on the eastern coast of the African continent.\(^1\) As a commonwealth realm Kenya ‘regained her Uhuru (independence) from the British on 12 December 1963\(^2\) and in 1964 became a republic. Kenya has a history of millions of years. The earliest fossilized of hominids have been discovered there, like the hominids which were discovered by anthropologist Richard Erskine Frere Leakey (1944- ) and others in the Koobi Fora area along the shore of Lake Rudolf that have included portions of *Australopithecus* boisei. It is mentioned on net:

_Fossils found in East Africa suggest that protohumans roamed the area more than 20 million years ago. Recent finds near Kenya’s Lake Turkana indicate that hominids lived in the area 2.6 million years ago._\(^3\)

In 1929, the first evidence of the presence of ancient early human ancestors in Kenya was discovered by Louis Leakey (1903-1972) who dug up one million year old Acheulian hand axes at Kariandusi in south west Kenya and in 2000 Martin Pickford (1943- ) found the
six million year old *Orrorin tugenensis*. It is explained in Wikipedia that:

*From 1971 to 1978 Pickford had carried out extensive research in the Tugen Hills under a permit issued by the Kenyan Office of the President. During the surveys Pickford and his team found many important fossils ranging in age from 15 million to 2 million years old. In 1974 he found the first hominid from the 6 million-year-old Lukeino Formation (published in *Nature* in 1975) a lower molar which is today included in the hypodigm of *Orrorin tugenensis*.4*

Kenya is the home of immigrant Arabs, Asians and Europeans because they all had visited Kenya for their special benefits and purposes. Arab traders around the first century AD, started coming towards the Kenya coast. Then, about 500 AD, traders from the Persian Gulf, southern India and Indonesia made contact with East Africa.

The colonial history of Kenya dates to the Berlin Conference of 1885, when the European powers first partitioned East Africa into spheres of influence.5 In 1887, European Caravans started travelling across the Kikuyu country. Some of the Caravans were led by ‘a German explorer named G.A. Fisher and a Hungarian traveller, Count Samuel Teleki’.6 Fisher and Teleki massacred numerous Kikuyu. Numerous Europeans started travelling into Kenya in the 19th century because European demand grew for the products of Africa including
ivory and cloves. The British government on 1 July 1895 established direct rule through the East African Protectorate.

The make-up of Kenyans is primarily that of 13 ethnic groups with an additional 27 smaller groups.7 ‘The majority of Kenyans belong to ‘Bantu’ tribes such as the Kikuyu, Luhya and Kamba.’8 Bantus in Kenya comprise three-quarters of population. There are ‘62 languages spoken in the country (according to Ethnologue).’9 Most of them are African languages which ‘come from three different language families - Bantu languages (spoken in the center and southeast), Nilotic languages (in the west), and Cushitic languages (in the northeast).’10 English is the official language in Kenya and Kiswahili (Swahili) is the national language which is a mixture of Bantu and Arabic. It developed as a lingua franca for trade between the different peoples. Kiswahili is a widely spoken language in Kenya, and it is the first language of the Swahili people (Wswahili).

4.2 Impact of British Colonization on Women in Kenya

The British plundered the world to enrich themselves through Christian evangelism as a facilitator of imperialism and colonial powers. Their motto was to uplift the weaker races of the world which proved to be doubtful in reality.

The African people became slaves of the imperialistic Western world. They infused patriarchal ideologies into the educational system and encouraged the boys more to join school than the girls. They also
supported men to oppress women. Male domination made the African women powerless and disabled, socially, politically and economically, and caused gender conflict which undermined the stability of Kenyan society. It became an obstacle for the development of the country as a whole.

There are historical evidences that the African women during pre-colonial era had economic independence. They had actively participated in social, cultural, religious and political activities and functions. Their associations in the mentioned fields were quite significant. The colonial rule was expected to improve the condition of women in African societies by raising their living and educational standards and free them from farm labour and the oppression. But colonialism did not liberate them. In fact, colonialism diminished the rights the women had enjoyed during pre-colonial era.

Eleanor Burke Leacock (1922-1987), an American anthropologist in her book Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives (1980) asserts that in the hunting and gathering and early horticultural societies, relations between men and women were equal. This equality was expressed in the communal household, the reciprocal division of labour. Both males and females contributed to subsistence. Men indulged in game hunting and women did gathering vegetable products, but due to colonialism women were neglected and oppressed.
Women had autonomy and were able to decide how to share production. They were engaged in a variety of occupations like cultivating the land and making food products. They also raised surplus crops, traded farm products, prepared food items and manufactured goods to be sold in the market. In addition, retail trading was the most widespread occupation of the women folk. But during colonization, they were marginalized and oppressed and suffered from double colonization. In colonial era, women fought against both, African and British male authorities.

Kikuyu society included nine clans Achera, Agachiku, Airimu, Ambui, Angare, Anjiru, Angui, Aithaga, and Airandu. These names came after the legendary nine daughters of Kikuyu and Mumbi, the patriarch and matriarch of the Kikuyu tribe. The clans all together made the Kikuyu tribe. It is stated that the Kikuyu society was originally matriarchal. Women in Kikuyu community of Kenya were potential and occupied substantial positions of leadership like Wangu Wa Makeri who was the legendary Kikuyu leader and powerful matriarch. Ngugi’s *The River Between* (1965) through Chege indicates that women were in power:

*Long ago women used to rule this land and its men. They were harsh and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, men came together and overthrew them. Before this, women owned everything. The animal you saw was their goat. But because the women*
could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak. So why should they fear them? 11

4.3 Feminist Interpretation of the Selected Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o

4.3.1 Preliminaries

Ngugi views that colonialism prominently and post-colonialism partially are responsible for oppressing African women. He clearly shows the problem of patriarchy and its impact on women in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Kenyan society through his novels. Even in post-colonial Kenya, women are marginalized and considered to be foolhardy. During colonization, women became aware of and alert to their rights and started to dismantle inequality in gender relations.

Ngugi believes that the British colonial administration was responsible for destroying the social, political, and economic structures of the African society, and destabilizing the traditional Kikuyu life style system. The Kikuyu life style was deteriorated by the emergence of colonialism. The lands were confiscated and given to the white settlers. The economical life was destroyed and Kikuyu people were forced to work as labourers on their own land and were subjected to heavy taxation. Ngugi views himself as the champion for the cause of peasants and workers of Kenya and claims for a social
revolution to eradicate capitalism to unite all Kenyan peasants and workers and re-establish a democratic and egalitarian society. Ngugi asserts that all Kenyan peasants and workers had the same nationalist aim which was to drive the white man away from the land. The culture of colonization was the culture of domination and exploitation. As a result, the Mau Mau revolution in Kenya emerged to make the country independent. The Mau Mau revolution was the climax of cultural tensions and conflicts between Kikuyu and the British colonialists.

Josiah Mwangi Kariuki (1929-1975), a Kenyan socialist politician in his book “Mau Mau” Detainee: The Account by a Kenya African of His Experiences in Detention Camps 1953-1960 explains that the British came with the missionaries, traders and administrators to colonize Kenya. Kenyan people knew that the British had come with knowledge—education, medicine, farming and industrial techniques, which were welcomed by the people of Kenya. Kariuki shows the grievances of Kenyan people towards Europeans. Kariuki states that Europeans used Kenyans as their slaves and often behaved as if God created Kenya and its people for their use. They looked down upon black people.

The colonial education was Eurocentric and had disastrous effects on Africans. The Siriana Mission School in The River Between functions to alienate Young Kikuyu minds from their native culture
and is a perfect tool of colonial administration to colonize the country. Ngugi (1986) asserts:

_African children who encountered literature in colonial schools and universities were thus experiencing the world as defined and reflected in the European experience of history. Their entire way of looking at the world, even the world of immediate environment, was Eurocentric. Europe was the centre of universe. The earth moved around the European intellectually scholarly axis. The images children encountered in literature were reinforced by their study of geography and history, and science and technology where Europe was, once again, the centre._

In Ngugi’s novels, women struggle to get rid of male domination—socially, politically and economically. Ngugi’s aim like Achebe is to present the image of Africa realistically unlike the western writers who presented Africa as a backward Continent. Ngugi also wants to reestablish the image of the African women in literature which is negatively presented by some African male writers who write about women from Eurocentric point of view. Sembene Ousmane (1923-2007), Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Nuruddin Farah (1945- ) are feminist writers. They explicitly present negative and positive aspects of the lives of women. They also challenge the social and political dominance of patriarchy and strongly support women’s issues. They explore alternate possibilities for self-actualization in addition to the sexual roles of their female characters. On the
contrary, novelists like Cyprian Odiatu Duaka Ekwensi (1921-2007) and Elechi Amadi (1934- ) portray women as lascivious—lustful—causing lust predators—preying upon others— or seductive women, reinforcing the stereotype. They present only negative aspects of women’s lives in their fictional works.

Ngugi portrays patriarchy as a prevalent phenomenon that exists under the skin of society. He brings out how women are sexually, physically and mentally exploited, oppressed and ill-treated. Rape and successive pregnancies, verbal and physical violence, low payment to the domestic labourers, attribution of taboos to women, sexual oppression and abuse and objectification of women are some illustrious examples of the facets of oppression that women continuously experience in the African society which is highly patriarchal and determines women’s identity. The reader can easily understand how besides patriarchy, colonialism has cruelly deprived women from their role as active agents in the society. Roopali Sircar (1995) asserts:

Several anthropologists like Leacock (1972), Boserup (1970) and Gough (1971) have concluded that in societies where men and women are engaged in the production of the same kinds of socially necessary goods and where widespread private property and class structure has not developed, women’s participation in production gives them access to and control of the products of their labour. It also gives the women considerable
freedom and independence. But where the colonizers introduced cash crop cultivation, women were displaced by men. Women were also deprived of technology with men alone given access to machinery. This reduced women’s contribution, relegating them to the domestic sector.\textsuperscript{13}

Ngugi perceives women from feminist perspective. Most of his literary works concentrate on women’s issues and Kikuyu culture to reveal women’s major contribution in liberating the society from male domination in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. The present chapter is a critical analysis of the selected novels—\textit{Weep Not, Child} (1964), \textit{The River Between} (1965), \textit{A Grain of Wheat} (1967) and \textit{Petals of Blood} (1977) of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o in the light of feminist perspective to show women characters and their significant roles in the patriarchal system as well as the impact of colonialism on the roles of female characters and their relevant reactions to the same.

\textbf{4.3.2 Weep Not, Child (1964)}

Ngugi’s first novel, \textit{Weep Not, Child}, is a story of prevalent oppressive relations in society. In this novel, it is shown that the Kenyans are subject to oppression and exploitation but the injury of suffering is double in case of women because colonization alienated women from their traditional status. The roles of women are unwisely undermined in the capitalist society. This leads to the perception of
women as sexual objects, and this in turn causes widespread prostitution and subjugation of women. During the colonial domination, they had to tolerate the oppressive and dominating treatment of their own people like husbands and sons. The only strategy women can adopt is to educate themselves because they believe that education can bring salvation to their oppressed life and equip them with the power to oppose oppression and subvert the oppressive system. The novel is about the village community of Mahua. The focus is on the family of Ngotho, the father of the protagonist of the novel, Njoroge. In spite of the fact that, Njoroge belongs to a poor family, he is sent to school by his parents.

Through the character of Nyokabi, the mother of Njoroge and the second wife of Ngotho, Ngugi explicitly reveals how women take care of the economic survival of the family and feel more responsible than men. Nyokabi as a mother is highly careful and worried about the future of her child. She works like a man and uses a part of her earnings to educate Njoroge. Her main purpose is to make her son to be able to get education. One day, when Njoroge comes back home, he finds his mother, ‘shelling some castor oil seeds from their pods’. He tells her, ‘Mother, let me help you.’ Nyokabi does not allow him to waste his time by helping her. She tells him, ‘Go and do your school work first.’ Nyokabi encourages Njoroge to learn and be a man. When Njoroge tells her that he was unable to tell a story that day in the school, Nyokabi tells him, ‘man should never be afraid. You should have scratched your head for another story.’ In this way,
Ngugi shows the mother’s concern with her children in order to enable them to stand on their own feet.

Nyokabi, though illiterate, is able to realize her son’s undivulged dream for education. Nyokabi strongly desires to compete with others and reach the level of others. ‘She {tries} to imagine what the Howlands woman must {feel} to have a daughter and a son in school. She {wants} to be the same. Or like Juliana’, wife of a wealthy chief and an important landowner of the village, Jacobo, because Juliana also has an educated daughter and son—Lucia and John respectively. Nyokabi believes that through the education of her son, even her husband will stop working for Mr. Howlands, the British colonial settler and district officer. She wants to be similar to the Howlands women. Nyokabi is determined to educate all her children because she believes that education will bring happiness to the entire family.

The narrator states:

If she (Nyokabi) had much money she would send her married daughters to school. All would then have a schooling that would at least enable them to speak English.  

Through the novel, Ngugi shows that the males get more opportunities to access education than females. Nyokabi’s aspiration to educate her son, Njoroge proves the reality that the males get more benefitted from school education. It is believed that the males can save family from poverty and wretchedness through education and
educating girls is not beneficial and will not bring change in the family because they get married and work for their husbands and in-laws. Nyokabi insists on educating her son. She shells castor oil seeds and sells them at the market to earn little money for the survival and to educate Njoroge.

Ngugi skillfully reveals that with the encroachment of colonialism, men become idlers and loiterers. They waste their time and enjoy their lives without taking care of their families. Providing basic needs for the family depends on women entirely:

Some young men spent all their time doing nothing but loitering in the shops. Some could work the whole day for a pound of meat. They were called the lazy boys and people in the village said that such men would later turn to stealing and crime.19

Ngugi, through the narrator of the novel shows that women do not want to be submissive and passive any more. A woman can complain in front of her husband to show her unhappiness. The narrator speaks of the Kikuyu village of Mahua life, how men get bored and travel to the nearby town of Kipanga. They loiter there and leave their wives behind. In such a situation women try to assert themselves by exposing men’s behaviour:

Go and don’t loiter in the town too much. I know you men. When you want to avoid work you go to the town and drink while we, your slaves, must live in toil and sweat.20
Women are not trusted by the society, even Ngotho, a good companion to his wives, has negative attitude towards women. He says that women are ‘fickle, and very jealous. {....} no amount of beating would pacify {them}. Ironically, Ngotho’s home is ‘well-known for being a place of peace’ because Ngotho does not ‘beat his wives much’. Thus, the reader understands that beating women is traditionally accepted.

Ngugi further reveals how women are victims of colonialism. Their husbands are kidnapped and killed by the colonial government. The wives of Nganga (the village carpenter) suffer a lot in searching their husband because he is taken away from bed by white soldiers. Juliana, wife of Jacobo also suffers and is pitifully left alone when Jacobo is killed most likely by Boro, son of Ngotho by his first wife, Njeri. Ngotho’s wives, Njeri and Nyokabi suffer the death of their husband.

Njoroge belongs to a family where patriarchal conduct is dominant. Unknowingly, he also becomes familiar with the ideology and tries to behave accordingly. For instance, when he gets late with Mwisaki on their way back from school to home, he directly puts all the blame on Mwiaki and thinks of her as a ‘bad girl and {promises} himself that he would not play with her anymore. Or even wait for her.’ Njoroge thinks as if she is an evil creature to be seriously avoided.
Njeri’s hut is used for meeting by Ngotho’s children to speak about the current issues such as Mau Mau revolution which was a military movement against British colonial government in Kenya between 1952 and 1960. ‘All the sons of Ngotho with other young men and women from Mahua ridge {are} in Njeri’s hut.’ Njeri, as a senior wife loves the sons of Ngotho. ‘Boro and Kori {keep} their beds in Njeri’s hut’ due to their participation in Mau Mau. Through this, Ngugi brings out the importance of mother’s house to congregate and tackle the current issues and resist the stereotypical views of men that women cannot achieve the social role but are only fit for housework.

The novel further brings out white man’s lustful attitude towards African women. He uses them to quench his sexual desire without any emotional attachment:

*He {Mr. Howlands} did not know why he now missed his wife. He wondered if he would go and get the black woman he had taken the night before. He had discovered that black women could be a good relief.*

Ngugi shows that the white imperialists are not ready to accept the African women as their wives but want to enjoy sex with them. Ngugi reveals that the white woman is also a victim of the patriarchal oppression. For example, Suzannah is taken to Kenya by her husband, Mr.Howlands and at the same time is utterly neglected by him. He gives more importance to land than Suzannah. Land becomes his
second wife. This is brought out by the following paragraph:

*His mind was always directed towards the shamba. His life and soul were in the shamba. Everything else with him counted only in so far as it was related to the shamba. Even his wife mattered only in so far as she made it possible for him to work in it more efficiently without a worry about home. For he left the management of home to her and knew nothing about what happened there.*

Indigenous and Christian men are similar in their views towards women to keep them under their control. Mr. Howlands takes his wife, Suzannah to Africa but he is oblivious of her being bored because his views about women are similar to the Victorian-Age belief which considers a woman as an angel of the house. Suzannah has to search for her own solution to reduce her boredom:

*She {Suzannah} too was bored with life in England. But she had never known what she wanted to do. Africa sounded quite a nice place so she had willingly followed this man who would give her a change. But she had not known that Africa meant hardship and complete break with Europe. She again became bored. But she soon had a woman’s consolation. She had her first child, a son. She turned her attention to the child and the servants at home. She could now afford to stay there all the day long playing with the child and talking to him.*
Through the paragraph describing Suzannah’s mental state, Ngugi states that white women also experience negligence by their husbands and the secondary status in their society. It means white women also share the same position as that of black women. Ngugi’s comprehensive feminist perspective is evident here. He strongly desires positive changes in women’s plight, white as well as black women.

Ngugi indicates that co-operation of the male and female is necessary for the survival and continuity of the family and society. Njoroge’s mothers are good women and good companions. They like each other and never quarrel. ‘The two women usually {stay} together to ‘hasten’ or ‘shorten’ the night.’

Their purpose is to bring happiness and bright future for the entire family. At the end of the novel it is presented that Njoroge fails to achieve his dream to liberate his society from colonial oppression through his education, so he decides to commit suicide. His mother, Nyokabi as a savior ‘is looking for him. For a time he {stands} irresolute. Then courage {fails} in him.’ She does not let him hang himself. Both, the mothers stop him from committing suicide. In spite of the curfew, Njeri too is in search of Njoroge.

In addition to the fact that Ngugi presents the image of women who play important role in their families and society to fight with colonization and bring a positive change in society, they are raped and seen as fickle sex objects.
4.3.3 *The River Between* (1965)

In his second novel, *The River Between*, similarly, Ngugi does not forget to draw the image of women as active agents in order to preserve the traditions and customs of their society alive and free victims of patriarchy and colonization simultaneously. *The River Between* brings out the clash between Westernism and African traditionalism in which Kikuyu women are active participants and play vital roles to keep the traditional Kikuyu culture alive.

Women play important roles during circumcision ceremony which is one of the most important ceremonies and traditional customs of Kenyan-Kikuyu society. During the circumcision ceremony, youngsters are taught how to inculcate a sense of responsibility and sustain the sanctity and unity of the community. They further learn to maintain the tribal traditions, religion, folklore and mode of behaviour. The initiates get their admission into full membership of their society. By circumcision, cutting of a foreskin or clitoris, the Kikuyu people mean cutting away the childhood and become an adult. Thus, circumcision becomes the secret password of the community that allows the person to access the tribe’s secrets.

Through circumcision, male gets complete freedom to become capable to enter all the corners of society. He can be a warrior to protect his society, in case of girls, they become eligible for marriage. During circumcision, women have a great influence on male characters. Waiyaki the male protagonist of the novel sits between his
mother’s thighs for circumcision. He forgets himself and thinks that he is “Demi na Mathathi”, ‘giants of the tribe. They had lived a long way back, at the beginning of time. They cut down trees and cleared the dense forests for cultivation’.30:

Bravely clearing the forest, a whole tribe behind him. But when he {looks} around and {sees} old women surrounding him, he {begins} to cry again like a little child. He {feels} the pain of fear inside himself.31

Ngugi boldly portrays Muthoni, the female protagonist of the novel as an assertive character. She wants to be independent and follow the rituals of her society. She does not want to be controlled by her circumstances. She is the symbol of reconciliation because she is Christian and at the same time, she wants to be circumcised in order to improve her femininity. She tells Nyambura, her sister:

Look, please, I — I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges.32

Muthoni insists on her demand to get circumcised despite the fact that Nyambura warns her that it is a pagan rite. Nyambura tells that it is “devil’s work” that tempts her but Muthoni does not listen to her. Muthoni and Nyambura are quite different from each other. Nyambura is content to follow whatever her father tells her but Muthoni is assertive and independent. She tells Nyambura that she knows that circumcision is a pagan rite but she wants to get
circumcised like her parents. She wants to combine the traditions of her society with Christianity:

*Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man’s faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man’s God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills, that you and I know.*

Joshua, the Christian convert of Makuyu and father of Muthoni and Nyambura, is very stubborn and disowns his daughters because they are not in conformity with him. Their mother, Miriamu is always in favour of her daughters but does not want her daughters to rebel against their father and wants her family to live together peacefully. ‘She {is} a peace-loving woman and she never {likes} unnecessary tension in the house.’ She always asks her children to obey their father because she knows her husband very well that he is a staunch man of God and never refrains from punishing a sinner. When Nyambura decides to leave her father and be with Waiyaki, she holds Waiyaki’s hand in front of her father and tells him ‘You are brave and I love you’. Then, Joshua tells Nyambura, ‘you are not my daughter. ….you will come to an untimely end. Go!’ ‘Miriamu {is} weeping and saying, Don’t let her go. Don’t.’ This shows that she is a kind woman and worried about the future of her daughter. Through this
example Ngugi shows how colonialism had inculcated hatred among the members of family and society; to the extent that the daughter is estranged from her father.

Ngugi tries to show that woman is not a submissive being and can strongly oppose and stand against oppression and subjugation. He presents his female characters as strong women who can bring about change in family and society and can make their own decision. For example, Nyambura as an assertive and decisive woman finally decides to be with Waiyaki and rebels against her father. In front of her father, she tells Waiyaki that she loves him without caring to Joshua’s threat.

Ngugi presents that all men Christian as well as non-Christian view woman in a similar manner. Joshua is Christian and looks down upon Miriamu, his wife. Sometimes he says, ‘I wish you had not gone through this rite {circumcision}’. Joshua prays God to forgive him for marrying a circumcised woman:

\[
\text{God, you know it was not my fault. God, I could not do otherwise, and she did this while she was in Egypt.}
\]

Ngugi states that in Kenyan society, being a mother, means ‘bearing on one’s shoulders all the sins and misdeeds of the children’. Ngugi shows how the family is disintegrated and has fallen apart due to the advent of the white men. This is caused by colonization. Joshua converts himself to Christianity which changes
his mindset. When Muthoni is missing, Joshua tells Miriamu, ‘I tell you again. You know where your daughter is. Go! Go out and look for her’. Miriamu actually goes out to look for her daughter but comes back without finding her; once again Joshua shouts at her ‘Go back and find her. She cannot sleep out’. This leads him to disown his daughters. He warns his family about Muthoni:

\[
\text{For once, I (Joshua) give you (Nyambura) permission to go to Kameno. Go to that woman you call aunt. Tell Muthoni to come back. If she agrees we shall forget everything. If she does not, then tell her that she ceases to be my daughter.}\]

Through Muthoni’s character, Ngugi shows that women can bring about change in their society. Finally, Muthoni does her circumcision but the wound gets infected. Her health deteriorates and she dies in the hospital. The novel brings out that the heroines of Ngugi are firm believers in their cause and are ready to die for it.

Owing to Muthoni’s death, native people become aware that the minds of the people of the ridges have been depraved by colonialism. Muthoni’s death becomes a turning point for the people of the ridges. ‘The power of hate and the ever-widening rift, generated, as it were, by Muthoni’s death, was enough to worry anyone.’ It is after Muthoni’s death that Nyambura gets vexed with her father’s religion and transforms herself from a submissive girl to an assertive girl. ‘The death of Muthoni had deprived her of the only companion she had ever had.’ Nyambura does not want to live any longer with her
family because she does not feel happy at home after Muthoni’s death. She gets weary of her father’s brand of religion because it is not associated with love and humanity for the native people.

In order to reveal another form of assertion Ngugi portrays Waiyaki’s mother, who can assert and make her own decision. She warns Waiyaki not to marry Nyambura because she is an uncircumcised girl. She cautions him:

_Fear the voice of the Kiama. It is the voice of the people. When the breath of the people turns against you, it is the greatest curse you can ever get._46

Joshua does not approve the marriage between them because Waiyaki is not Christian. The society also does not approve of their marriage unless Nyambura rebels against her father in order to be a circumcised girl:

‘Will you marry me?’ he [Waiyaki] whispered. {....} ‘No,’ she [Nyambura] said at last faintly. [....]She didn’t want to rebel like her sister. Waiyaki felt hurt. ‘Why? Don’t you love me?’ ‘I do, I do,’ her heart said. ‘But can’t you see we cannot marry? Can’t you?’ aloud she said, Father will not allow it. I cannot disobey him._47

Nyambura, uncircumcised and Muthoni, circumcised become the victims of the Christian faith and the Kenyan traditions. Nyambura finally rebels against her father and breaks her relationship with him.
and goes to Waiyaki, who is non-Christian and a circumcised boy, consequently, her father disowns her. But Nyambura cannot stand against the will of the society because the community does not let Waiyaki marry an uncircumcised girl. Nyambura and Waiyaki are brought before the public on the charge by Kiama, a group of traditionalists which is formed to ensure the purity of the tribe. Muthoni dies due to the circumcision which is one of the important Kenyan traditions. Even, Kabonyi, the opponent of Waiyaki, says ‘Muthoni died because she was visited by evil spirits’. Ngugi shows that in both the cases, it may be a traditional or untraditional, woman is a victim.

Ngugi shows that women can rebel but they may not find followers as women are not perceived as leaders. Waiyaki is impressed by his female counterpart, Muthoni’s revolution. He realizes her bravery and revolutionary act. Her revolution is a rebellion against the authority. Waiyaki cannot find that ability in himself. He thinks that if he were in her place, he would have not been able to do as Muthoni could do. Chege’s words to Waiyaki are like a dream—to be a saviour of the land, while Waiyaki is inspired by Muthoni’s revolution to search for what is missing in the country:

_Suddenly he thought he knew what he wanted. Freedom. He wanted to run, run hard. Run anywhere. Or hover aimlessly, wandering everywhere like a spirit. Then he would have everything—every flower, every tree—or he could_
fly to the moon. This seemed possible and Waiyaki raised up his eyes to the sky. His heart bled for her. But he could not run. And he could not fly. 49

Muthoni could see Christ through marrying the rituals of her tribe and going back to the tribe. In the hospital, she tells Waiyaki, ‘tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe…..”50

Ngugi’s female protagonists are subject for the reconciliation of ethnicity and the nation, betrayal and hope, tradition and modernity. Their roles are to return to nationhood and to portray the tribe as an organic whole. Muthoni is Christian and accepts Jesus, but through her circumcision, she strongly desires to reconcile the traditional ways of the tribe and Christianity. Joshua’s wife, Miriamu is Christian by name but essentially a true Kikuyu woman:

One could still tell by her eyes {Miriamu’s eyes} that this was a religion learnt and accepted; inside the true Gikuyu woman was sleeping.51

Thus, through the novel, The River Between, Ngugi shows the significant role of women in their society who desire to be independent and fight against male-domination and colonialism. Through the novel, Ngugi portrays his female characters as courageous and brave who are ready to take high risk and die for their cause.
4.3.4 *A Grain of Wheat* (1967)

In his third novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi portrays African women as workers during the oppressive conditions of the Mau Mau emergency just before independence. The women struggle to survive and feed the aged and children at their homes. They start selling away their goats and cows. Kigondo, a farm labourer in Ngugi’s powerful play, *I Will Marry When I Want*, during the Mau Mau emergency says, ‘our women were raped. Our wives and daughters were raped before our eyes’.

Harish Narang (1995) opines:

> With *A Grain of Wheat* Ngugi began a conscious attempt to not only create positively powerful women characters but he also began to make them more ‘visible’ by providing them with greater ‘space’ in his books. This effort culminated in his portrayal of Wariinga as the protagonist in his *Devil on the Cross*.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, as in *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi describes men as idlers. They leave their women without supporting them financially. Providing basic things for the family becomes women’s duty. During colonization women were doubly exploited because they were neglected and left alone by their husbands:

> At the Old Rung’ei centre where young men spent their time talking the day away. Occasionally the men went on errands for the shop-owners and earned a few coins ‘for the pockets only, just to keep the trousers warm’.
Women work hard on the farms as well as at home. They are cruelly left by their men to work single handedly. They are selfishly used by men as slaves and maids just to do domestic chores:

*Mugo* {the hero of the novel} found that some women had risen before him, that some were already returning from the river, their frail backs arched double with water-barrels, in time to prepare tea or porridge for their husbands and children. 55

Ngugi portrays Wangari as a strong and honest woman. When Gikonyo (Wangari’s son) and Mumbi (Gikonyo’s wife) quarrel, Wangari tells Gikonyo, ‘Touch her (Mumbi) again if you call yourself a man!’ Wangari is hard working and does not want to give in to the obstacles of life. When her husband, Waruhiu kicks her out of the matrimonial home in Elburgon, she decides to soldier on. She boards in a train to Thabai with her son, Gikonyo to settle there. Waruhiu does not wish to live with his wife anymore because he thinks now she cannot satisfy him sexually. Consequently, he drives her away from the matrimonial home. Thus, Ngugi shows that men used to look at women from sexual point of view only:

*Waruhiu* complained that ‘the thighs of the first wife [Wangari] did not yield warmth any more. He beat her, hoping that this would drive her away. Wangari stuck on. Eventually, Waruhiu ordered her to leave his home and cursed mother
and son to a life of ever-wandering on God’s earth.57

Even though, woman is exploited and looked down upon, she is faithful and caretaker of her children. Wangari, in her critical condition sends Gikonyo to school in order to bring bright future for him. ‘But Gikonyo {does not} stay there for long because the woman {has not} enough money for fees.’58 Gikonyo becomes a well-known carpenter in Thabai. During Gikonyo’s detention, Wangari becomes a close companion to Mumbi, Gikonyo’s wife. ‘The two {go} to the shamba together; they {fetch} water from the river in turns, and {cook} in the same pot.’59 Ngugi portrays mother as an educator and caretaker of the family. Despite Ngugi’s female characters’ sincerity and hard-workingness, they are oppressed and exploited. This is brought out by the following paragraph:

Thanbai was famous because men from there successfully fought other groups and took away their women. ... At the platform things were different... There, the man who beat you the previous Sunday and took away your woman, was a friend. You talked and laughed together. But he knew later in the wood you would look for a chance to stab him and take away his woman.60

Ngugi portrays that men manipulate women and use them to quench their libido. Karanja tells Mumbi that ‘your husband is coming back’61, and then Mumbi feels overwhelmed with joy. She says, ‘I let Karanja make love to me’.62 Consequently, Karanja
manipulates her and seduces her. Mumbi becomes a victim who waits in distressed condition for her husband who is in detention for six years. She gets a child from Karanja. Gikonyo calls her a whore. Wangari, as a sincere and hard-working woman feels sad for the couple as it is described in the novel:

Wangari felt the pain of the son and the misery of the daughter. She searched her own heart for the healing word. She had always known that the knowledge would be hard to bear: now, she willed a mother’s strength and tenderness go to him as she let out the truth. ‘Karanja’s child!’ she said bluntly.  

Gikonyo is not faithful to his mother and his wife because he has been brought up in a patriarchal society in which man is indifferent and careless regarding his wife as well as mother:

Instead of buying clothes for himself or his family, Gikonyo did what Indian traders used to do. He bought maize and beans cheaply during the harvests, put them in bags, and hoarded them in his mother’s smoky hut. That’s where he and Mumbi also lived. He argued: they (his wife and mother) have been naked and starved for the last six years. A few months of waiting won’t make much difference.
Ngugi describes Mumbi’s plight through her words when she is told by Karanja that her husband would come back soon from detention:

Something that caused pain rippled in me, as if, as if I had been paralysed all over and blood and life was now entering into me… “Please, Karanja, don’t play with me,” I stammered. My voice was broken. My heart was full of fear and hope. I would have done anything to know the truth…. I was in a strange world, and it was like if I was mad.65

Through the above monologue, Ngugi shows Mumbi’s weakness of intense love for Gikonyo, which makes her allow Karanja to blackmail her sexually. When Gikonyo is in detention, Mumbi opines, ‘I {hang} on to Gikonyo with all my heart. I {will} wait for him, my husband, even if I {am} fated to rejoin him in the grave’.66 On the contrary, Gikonyo calls her a whore and shouts at her as he comes back, ‘I ll make you shut this mouth of a whore,’…. slapping her on the left cheek, and then on the right.”67 As self-respected and self-esteemed, she decides to take risk and rebels against him and leaves his house with her child. When Gikonyo is in hospital, she visits him. ‘Every morning Mumbi and Wangari {bring} him food.’68 Mumbi is a woman who has learned the necessity of compromising. She grows in understanding, compassion and independence.
Ngugi does not forget to describe the white woman who also suffers due to her husband. John Thompson, an early British settler and administrator of Thabai, neglects his wife, Margery. She is ‘bored by staying in the house alone. Normally she {chats} with her houseboy or with her shamba-boy.’

Margery cannot bear her loneliness and frustration any longer. ‘She {dances} with Dr Van Dyke {meteorological officer} at Githima hostel.’ Also ‘later in the evening he {Dr. Dyke} {takes} her for a drive, she {submits} to his power. She {lets} him make love to her’, because her husband, Thompson does not give her emotional support and love. Mr. Thompson is busy with his job and pays more attention to his job and neglects his wife. Ngugi indicates that women, whether black or white are the victims of patriarchal society. Margery submits herself to Dr. Van as revenge towards Mr. Thompson, her husband.

Ngugi depicts women as the most exploited beings during the Mau Mau Movement. The white district officer, Robson arrests women and men and burns huts as a punishment to Thabai village in order to make them stop to provide any help to the fighters against the colonial government. Ngugi describes in detail how women suffer.

Mugo remembered that those who did not move into the new village in time were ejected from their old homes; their huts were burnt down. Homeguards attack and beat women very brutally. Mumbi says Home guards ‘splashed some petrol on the grass-thatch of my mother’s hut. …the roof caught fire. Dark and blue smoke
tossed from the roof, and the flames leapt to the sky. Wambuku, a pregnant woman, is severely beaten by a village guard and dies there in pregnancy. Homeguards take ‘her body and {throw} it into a grave dug a few yards from the trench’. Homeguards also burn Mumbi’s hut. She says, ‘something in me cracked when I saw our home fall.’ Women are in a horrible condition, they are only ‘allowed two hours before sunset to go and look for food’. Colonial power misuses all the ways to oppress African people and make them stay under colonial government, even the new District Officer permits ‘soldiers to pick women and carry them to their tents’. There is also shortage of food, ‘a number of women secretly and voluntarily {offer} themselves to the soldiers for a little food’. Thus, Thabai becomes ‘a warning to other villages never to give food or any help to those fighting in the Forest.’

They cruelly demolished Thabai village but in rebuilding the new homes and huts, women only play vital roles. Mumbi gets depressed because there is no man to rebuild the hut, ‘she {ties} a belt around her waist and {takes} on a man’s work. Together with Wangari, they {clear} the site… Within a few days the site {is} ready. Next she {goes} to her father’s small forest and {cuts} down black wattle trees for posts and poles.’

Ngugi portrays his female characters as nationalists. Mumbi gets help from Karanja to survive her family from starvation. But later on, when Karanja joins colonial government, Mumbi as a nationalist
female character stops accepting any help from him. She determines ‘not to accept any more help from Karanja, who by now {works} his way up and {is} the leader of the homeguards’. 81

Mumbi has sex with Karanja but if we compare her to the other men in the novel, she is honest and faithful. For example, Karanja joins colonialism for personal gain and becomes the leader of home guards to oppress his own people. Mumbi rebukes and reprimands him for embracing colonialism and refusing to join the Mau Mau revolution. Mugo also becomes the traitor of Kihika and betrays him in a selfish way to save himself. But Mumbi’s sex with Karanja is unintentional sex affair and at the same time she regrets having done the same. She says:

When I woke up and realized fully what had happened, I became cold, the whole body. Karanja tried to say nice things to me, but I could see he was laughing at me with triumph. I took one of his shoes and I threw it at him. I ran out, and I could not cry. Although a few minutes before, I had been so happy, now I only felt sour inside. 82

Wambui, ‘one of the woman from the river’ 83 believes ‘in the power of women to influence events, especially where men (have) failed to act, or seemed indecisive’. 84 She encourages men in a meeting at Rung’ei to discuss the workers’ strike at a shoe factory near Thabai in 1950. The strike becomes important to African people to paralyse the British administration and make the situation more
difficult for the white man to govern the country. Ngugi shows that women have potentiality to achieve something concrete and have impact on social life. They encouraged their male counterparts to resist colonialism. Wambui makes it evident that women are more enthusiastic and courageous than men in order to free Kenya. She states:

> Was there any circumcised man who felt water in the stomach at the sight of a whiteman? Women, she said, had brought their Mithuru and Miengu to the platform. Let therefore such men, she jeered, come forward, wear the women’s skirts and aprons and give up their trousers to the women.\(^8\)

Wambui is always ready to use all her abilities to do everything to make the struggle successful. Ngugi explicitly brings out that women are not docile. He delivers the message through his novel that women fought to bring freedom. They valiantly participated in various activities and helped bring prosperity to their country. Ngugi breaks the stereotype of women that they are weak. He portrays Wambui as a strong and brave woman. ‘Wambui \{is\} not very old, although she \{has\} lost most of her teeth.’\(^8\) She carries a pistol and is about to be discovered and searched by the police. She makes a trick and gets rid of the situation by saying, ‘I’ll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother, it is so aged, and see what gain it’ll bring you for the rest of your life’.\(^8\) She makes gestures to lift her clothes but the
fellow leaves her alone and she is let off. Wambui as a practical woman is a great supporter of the revolution against colonialism:

During the emergency, she carried secrets from the village to the forest and back to the villages and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Njoro, Elburgon and other places in and outside the Rift Valley.\(^8\)

The relationship between Mumbi and Gikonyo presents man-woman relationship in the society. Ngugi presents the existing plight of women in Kenya through Mumbi. He portrays women as active and enthusiastic in bringing social changes, he also shows that they have serious problems which they do not dare to tell their parents. Mumbi leaves her husband but she finds it is difficult to discuss the problem with her parents. On her going back to her parents, her mother, Wanjiku reflects the typical patriarchal attitude by saying:

The women of today surprise me. They cannot take a slap, soft as a feather, or the slightest breath, from a man. In our time, a woman could take blow and blow from her husband without a thought of running back to her parents.\(^8\)

According to Ngugi, Mumbi symbolizes fertility and defilement of the land. Ngugi names Mumbi knowingly because the name refers to the first woman in Kikuyu tribe. Mumbi is a symbol for Kenya.

Thus, in *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi has shown the plight of women more extensive than in *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*. 

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4.3.5 *Petals of Blood* (1977)

In his fourth novel, *Petals of Blood*, the emphasis is on the exploitation of the African women on the basis of race, class and gender. Ngugi strongly desired to enable women to see themselves as human beings first and then change their lives to become equal with men. Ngugi portrays Mariamu, a squatter of Munira’s (the central character in the novel and a schoolteacher) father’s farm. She is assertive and does not want to be submissive to her husband any more. ‘She {complains} about her triple duties: to her child Nding’uri; to her husband and to her European landlord. Mariamu does not tolerate this any longer, because, ‘she never sees a cent from her produce’. Her husband takes all her money for himself and gives her limited money. Finally, she rebels against him and ‘he {beats} her in frustration. She {takes} Nding’uri and {runs} back to Limuru where she {begs} for cultivation rights from Munira’s father.’

In Limuru, Munira’s father, Brother Ezekiel, ‘a wealthy landowner and a respected elder in the hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church’, tries to exploit her and wants to have sex with her but she refuses him openly. Ngugi describes this to reveal women’s plight at home as well as outside.

Ngugi’s portrayal of Nyakinyua as the central female character, having a great deal of respect in Ilmorog is an illustration of his strong belief in women’s potentiality. He makes her narrate the history of Ilmorog that the villagers strongly believed in hardworking
and achievement. Nyakinyua successfully brings the villagers together and guides them efficiently. She describes Ilmorog as the thriving community to inspire people to prepare themselves for a bright future.

Ngugi shows that women are active and love farm work. Wanja, granddaughter of Nyakinyua, wanders around Ilmorog with her grandmother, Nyakinyua during the subsidence of the rain. Ngugi portrays Wanja as an active woman who forms a group which is called Ndemi-Nyakinyua, to cultivate and weed the land. The purpose is to work in group and help other women to increase their efficiency in work. She also works as a barmaid. Her salary is paid to her according to the whims of her employer. She wants to quit the job, but does not have any one to rely on. Her father runs after money and does not care of her. As a result, Wanja becomes a prostitute and opens a brothel. Ngugi portrays her as an example of Kenyan woman’s exploitation. According to him, neo-colonial and imperialistic conditions are responsible for this. Wanja tries to go beyond traditions and is caught in the clutches of the colonial capitalist society. Mala Pandurang (2007) writes:

Significant in Ngugi’s portrait of Wanja is the amount of heroic energy packed into her tortured body, for in spite of the numerous violent experiences that have seared her psyche, she still emerges as an admirable character who exudes the most telling traits of selfless humanism. Or
how does one explain her offer to work as Abdulla’s barmaid so that Joseph could start schooling? Or herself sacrifice to the vulture Kimeria who wanted to possess her for only a few minutes, if only to save the life of Joseph during the trip to the city? But all these acts of humanism by Wanja do not save her from the agonies inherent in a bruised soul that had thrown her baby into a latrine long ago in her school days. And with her aborted relationship, with Karega in Ilmorog, and the changing tempo of capitalist, intrusion into the lives of Ilmorogians after the plane crash, Wanja throws herself “body and soul” into capitalism and emerges as one of its few reigning queens in New Ilmorog.94

Ngugi describes how economic decline drives men to exploit women. One of the reasons to drive Wanja to prostitution is her exploitation by a wealthy and ruthless businessman, Mr. Kimeria who holds her hostage and rapes her. Wanja wants to find her identity and build her personality but it is difficult for a woman in a patriarchal society to do so. Mala Pandurang (2007) asserts that:

Kenya’s brutalized and exploited womanhood finds expression in the portrait of Wanja Kahili, the barmaid whore. And in her portrait is etched the agonies of the lumpen classes of Kenyan women who are victims of Kenya’s capitalist structures. Wanja had started life as a brilliant pupil from a working-class family. But her working-class background was to be her undoing
since her parents, long exploited and brutalized by
the power of capital, thirst for the luxuries of life
enjoyed by their propertied neighbours. And it is
one of these neighbours, “a family friend,”
Hawkins Kimeria, that seduces her and terminates
her educational career, thus turning her into a
lumpen element that would roam the many bars of
Kenya’s tourist centres.\(^95\)

Wanja financially is in a critical condition. She says, Kimeria who
has ‘ruined my (Wanja’s) life and later humiliated me (Wanja) by
making me (Wanja) sleep with him (Kimeria) during our journey to
the city… this same Kimeria was one of those who would benefit
from the new economic progress of Ilmorog.'\(^96\) It strikes her that
Kimeria is being benefitted from the new economic progress of
Ilmorog, but she cannot do anything due to the existing social system.
Wanja does not like city life. She decides to go back to Ilmorog but
due to the death of her grandmother, the advent of a new economic
and Karega’s (a young man who works in Munira’s school as an
assistant teacher and who is also Wanja’s lover) escape, she does not
stay in Ilmorog goes back to the city unwillingly decides to establish
a brothel on the basis of the law, “you eat or you are eaten”:

\(^95\) If you have a cunt... if you are born with this hole,
instead of it being a source of pride, you are
doomed to either marrying someone or else being
a whore. You eat or you are eaten. How true I
have founded it. I decided to act, and I quickly
built this house.... \(^97\)
The above comment reflects women’s helplessness. Of course, Ngugi draws both positive as well as negative aspects of female characters and does not create unrealistic and fanciful female characters. The negative and the positive points which build Wanja’s personality are clearly described in the text. For example, Wanja hears the voices of children as they suffer due to starvation, she feels ‘a wound inside her smart so sharply that tears would press against her eyelids. She {feels} an excruciating love for them and she would have liked, at such moments, to embrace and give milk to all the little ones of the earth.’ And at the same time, the negative point of Wanja is clearly shown when Karega says: ‘How could such a woman (Wanja) have thrown a child, a life, into a latrine? How could such a woman (Wanja) be trading on the bodies of other girls?’ Ngugi shows that Wanja is a strong and loving woman but the society cruelly drives her to be a prostitute and makes her life tragic. Kimeria lustfully rapes her and she later on kills him. She ‘had killed Kimeria… struck him dead with the panga she had been holding.’ ‘Wanja’s act of violence in this instance is an act of personal liberation, a kind of cleansing and revitalizing Fanonist violence.’ Ngugi condemns the exploiters in the society who drive women to exceed limits, like those who drive Wanja into murdering her child during a desperate situation. Wanja tells a story about her aunt. She
explains how her aunt is exploited and has gone through a difficult life:

She had married a man who kept on beating her. There was nothing that she could do right. He would always find an excuse to beat her. He accused her of going about with men. If she had money through working on the land, he would take it away from her and he would drink it all and come home to beat her. So one day she just took her clothes and ran away to the city. [.....]. ‘My aunt was a clean woman though,’ she continued. ‘She was very good to us children. Her husband was a hard-core Mau Mau. I was even more proud of her when later I learnt that she used to carry guns and bullets to the forest hidden in baskets full of unga.\(^{102}\)

Ngugi clearly emphasizes the worthy side of his female characters. In delineating Wanja’s character, he brings out her kindness, resourcefulness, mental strength and loving nature. James Stephen Robson (1986) states:

Wanja, like her predecessor, Mumbi is the most resilient and the most victimized character in *Petals of Blood*. Her betrayal is the most complex of all the characters. Like Munira she faces the memory of past recriminations concerning her father and Kimeria. Like Karega she leaves Ilmorog during crisis situations. She abandons co-operative endeavors for the personal profit of Theng’eta and the Sunshine Lodge. Like Abdulla
she is capable of neglect as in the case of Nyakinyua. Yet in spite of these betrayals she is capable of regeneration. This is evident throughout the novel from personal sacrifices on the “Journey” to the co-operative farmers’ organization in Ilmorog to the elimination of Kimeria before the fire in Sunshine Lodge. Wanja’s character is later proletarianized further through Wariinga in Devil on the Cross, although in her case the possibility of a regenerated political environment is less likely.\(^\text{103}\)

Ngugi maintains that women are more worried about the welfare of the community than men. Nyakinyua is an assertive woman; she is against colonialism and advises people to be aware of colonialism. She thinks that colonialism has oppressed and exploited women more than their men and westernism has affected the people to leave their village and parents and become idlers. She observes the situation:

*Our young men and women have left us.\(\ldots\) They go, and the young women only return now and then to deposit the newborn with their grandmothers already aged with scratching this earth for a morsel of life.\(\ldots\) Others sometimes come to see the wives they left behind, make them round-bellied, and quickly go away as if driven from Ilmorog by Uhere or Mutung’u.*\(^\text{104}\)

Nyakinyua’s observation brings out the condition of women and the plight of the poor. Thus, *Petals of Blood* deals with the
exploitation of the African women on the basis of race, class and gender.

In this way, Ngugi’s women characters are brave, resilient, determined and resourceful. Jennifer Evans observes: “In Ngugi’s novels women are shown to have a fundamental role in the struggle against oppression and exploitation, and often courage and hope are ultimately found in their hands.”

4.4 Conclusion

The chapter deals with the geographical background of Kenya and the impact of British colonialism and it analyses the feminist aspects of the selected novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o. The women characters in the novels, Weep Not, Child, The River Between, A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood are the victims of the patriarchal structure of the African society the forces of which are also unleashed by women. The rebellion of women against the oppression is praiseworthy. The women characters in these novels try to define their roles in the male-dominated society. Their struggle to earn living and safeguard the interest of the family is marked by their courage and determination. Ngugi brings out women’s natural abilities like love, understanding, and determination to educate their children, providing basic needs to the family members and strong opposition to injustice, oppression and exploitation.
Through Ngugi’s novels, the readers come across the fact that a woman can be a mother, politician, socialist, educator and provider of the family at the same time. Women like Nyokabi and Njeri in *Weep not, Child*, Muthoni and Nyambura in *The River Between*, Mumbi and Wambuku in *A Grain of Wheat*, and Nyakinyua and Wanja in *Petals of Blood* struggle hard against colonialism. They strongly desire to curb oppression and exploitation of Kenyan society. Ngugi shows British colonialism becoming responsible for the destruction of Kikuyu-Kenyan society. He strongly believes in women’s natural abilities and qualities. Most of his protagonists are women and they play roles in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. They try to break patriarchal barriers and bring changes in their society to liberate themselves.

Ngugi shows that women in *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* are exploited on racial basis but in *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, women are exploited sexually as well as racially.

Ngugi criticizes the patriarchal preference in educating boys not girls. The boys do not finish school education and fail, such as, Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child*, Kihika and Gikonyo in *A Grain of Wheat*, and Karega in *Petals of Blood*. Ngugi maintains that colonial education has introduced gender discrimination and class conflicts in Kenya.
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