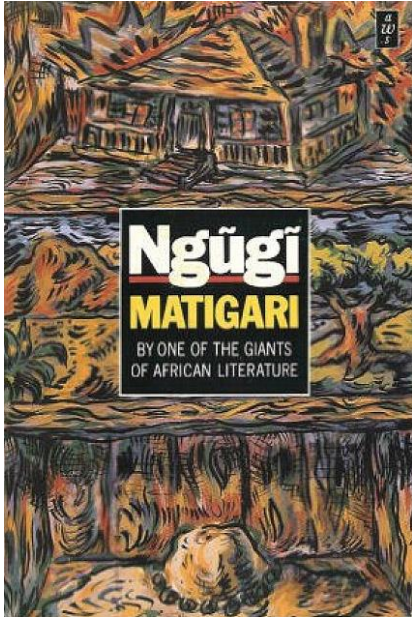


Book-Review

Matigari: A Revolution of the Masses



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Matigari

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

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Matigari is a novel by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Written in 1986, the year in which Thiong'o gave up writing in English in order to show his anti-colonial perspective as he associates English with the colonial language, the book discusses the mistreatment of the Kenyan masses by the intellectual elites after the end of the Kenyan war of independence (1952-1962) against the colonizers.

What makes this novel a piece of excellence is the depiction of the character of Matigari, the protagonist whose name is also the title of this book, as a revolutionary of resistance. He is aware of the rights of the downtrodden oppressed people of Kenya who till the land but never owns it. With the belief that there should be democracy as well as equality

in Kenya, Matigari remains the embodiment of all the exploited individuals who are victimized and tortured. Matigari has to sleep in the veranda, tend the estates for miles and work all the machines in the industries but his colonial master slept in the house, took home the harvests and kept all the profits in the bank only to give some cents to Matigari. The machines have snapped them from all their strengths and they are left with bones. During retirement workers get a clock as a thank-you gift and no pension. Matigari seeks that the land belongs to the tiller and not to parasites and foreigners. I agree that justice for the oppressed springs from the organized armed power of the people as well as fear itself is the enemy of the people. Fear breeds misery in the land is one important belief of inexorable Matigari which cannot take place as the sell-out intellectuals are not in friendly terms with the local non-entity, the have-nots of Kenya.

He argues that there is nothing worse than slavery in this world as it chains the mind and the soul. Matigari is the embodiment of all the poverty-stricken people of this world who has retaliated against enslavement. Revolution or the transgression of law in Kenya, I also believe, is necessary to assert liberty from the pent-up frustration and subservient confined slave status of the destitute class. The peasants need to stand against injustice.

Thiong'o success is also apparent in his portrayal of the woman and children of Kenya who are the most underprivileged ones of the society. Women like Guthera has to sacrifice her chastity in order to feed her siblings after her patriot father is killed by the police. She lost her mother at childbirth and her patriot church elder Christian father is killed as he carried bullets in his Bible. The policemen want her to sacrifice her chastity in order to save her father by saying you are carrying your father's life between your legs. As she wanted to tread the path of virtue and righteousness only, she turned down the offer. However, she has to sell her body after her father's death due to poverty. She is a strong woman as she helps Matigari by breaking her eleventh commandment where she vowed not to sleep with any policeman. The problem

here is that the surplus from many hands remains in the hands of some parasites. They sell the people's food to fatten their own bank accounts. The fool's staff is used by the cunning. She also is well aware that ivory is sold to some greedy Asians and Europeans.

I really like the novel's style which always manifests the psyche of Matigari. The hunt and chase style of the polices and Matigari keeps the readers participate in the action of this novel. We can visualize this chase and run incidents.

Furthermore, one of the accomplishments of the novel is that Thiong'o has exhibited lucidly the miserable lives of children in post-independent Kenya. On the one hand, we can see children paying tax to enter the filthy garbage yard. Muriuki's mother is burnt by the landlord whom she cannot pay and he lives in the vehicle cemetery. On the other hand, despite the drought in the country the selfish rich people's houses have enough water for their lawns and shrubs and their swimming-pools.

Various mimic men are also delineated well by Thiong'o. The Minister of Truth and Justice arrests the workers, university students and bans all opposition party and the books which write on the liberation of peasants and works. Even students are killed when they held a prayer meeting at the church to pray for those who had been arrested. Ngaruro wa Kiriro, the worker who opposed his government is killed. His death signifies the criminality of Kenyan law which does not allow any opposition. This shows that voices against the government is totally shut down by extreme measures. People are not allowed to walk in groups of more than five people and crowds were banned in the village. The Minister wants fucking among the poor people should be stopped by a presidential decree! This again emphasizes on his intention to curb the masses. News channels are bound to display his news and trivial matters like his visit to a school or giving of any donation are always the theme of radio programs. Even the church father thinks that the Minister is enlightened and a good Christian. His announcement to shoot all madmen on sight denotes his injustice. Ironically, the police have been told not to harass

white people even if they have long beards, dirty clothes. So, here the ruling part is not the direct expression of the masses.

John Boy, the hippo fat cook of Williams adores the Eurocentric forces. He saves his master from Matigari and later his son, John Boy Junior lives in Matigari's house. This boy who studied at the London School of Economics dresses like a gentleman. This exposes his tendency to mimic or copy the colonizers. He feels no respect towards the masses of Kenya who has paid money for his education. So, Matigari's dream that this boy will enlighten the masses is destroyed as we can find that he has become a mimic man. According to Junior, Kenya has remained in darkness because of the ignorance of the people who do not know the importance of the word individual as opposed to the word masses. As the White people respect the freedom of the individual, they are advanced. He has no kindness for the masses who belongs to his own class.

The reviewer argues that violence is necessary as the party in power is also using violence to destroy the voices of the have-nots. At the end, the spirit of revolution for the true rights is prevalent as we can hear the voice of the peasants, workers and patriots singing in harmony that Victory shall be ours! Hence, I can conclude that Thiong'o is optimistic that the poverty-stricken people will fight for their rights and they will get their rights, freedom, status and wealth in the future. So, it is observable that the revolution against the elites is necessary as they are dehumanizing the lower-crust of the Kenyan society.

To cap it all, the message of Thiong'o is that equality and democracy should be there to improve the lives of all Matigaris of this world in his book *Matigari* which is a must-read for all those who want to protest against the oppression of all the masses of this world.

About the Reviewer

Mahbuba Sarker Shama is a lecturer in the department of English at Green University of Bangladesh (GUB). She has already published articles in *Crossings* of ULAB University, *BUP Journal*, *Green University Journal* and *UITS Journal*.