

# Paradigm Shifts in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Matigari*

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## Abstract:

This paper aims to analyze the paradigm shifts portrayed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in the novel *Matigari*. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a Kenyan writer, voices for the liberation of African people from Imperialism. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o discussed the materialist aspects of post-colonial Kenya in his early works. His narration shifts to non-materialistic aspects as a heart-touching weapon to awake his people from darkness by depicting many new and optimistic examples in his novel, *Matigari*. The study will expose the paradigm shifts narrated in the novel *Matigari* scrupulously.

**Keywords:** hope, women, language, politics, paradigm shift

The term, ‘Paradigm shift’ is defined in Oxford Dictionary of English as, “a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions” (“Paradigm shift 1287”). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o depicts the necessity of Africans to shift from mourning to a rigorous change. In the novel, *Matigari*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o emphasis the need of change in psychological thinking of women,

political aspects and religious aspects of African people. The novel also exposes the paradigm shift in the narration of the author from his early books.

Matigari is the protagonist of the novel. The novel begins with his arrival to his country after his service in independence struggle of Africans. He arrives with a firm hope in his heart about his new country without western influence. He comes to his place and searches his family to rebuild it. Matigari is dismayed by the post-colonial reality of Kenya. The novel delineates the protagonist's search for truth and justice. It enlightens the people who are still dispossessed of their own dignity and who are still unacquainted with influence of imperial power in post-colonial Kenya.

Matigari begins to preach inevitability of unity among his people in order to defeat imperialism which is widely prevalent throughout his country. The author explicates the oppressive condition of the workers, tailors, peasants, etc., who are ignorant to fight for what is theirs and their ignorance towards their progress as:

How can the tiller go on working for the benefit of those who reap-where-they never sowed? Yesterday it was whites. Today they have been joined by some blacks. Matigari asked the people in the restaurant 'My friends! Tell me where in this country one can find truth and justice. (75)

Matigari is depicted as a returned hero after a long absence from his society. His grace, his compassion, his love, his patience, his peacefulness, gentleness are all the qualities of Christ. In the beginning of the novel the society seems to be under fear and disillusionment due to the presence of greedy, selfish and dictator leadership. People were pessimistic and feel despair at the beginning and tried to resist Matigari's progress. However, due to his strong commitment and determination, he miraculously agitates people's hope for bright future. Matigari is visionary and dreamful to change the society and to fight against oppression imposed by settlers and some blacks.

In *Matigari*, the author demands women to actively oppose all forms of oppression and socio-economic and political exploitation of their gender. The author tries to promote in his works an awareness on female education which would lead to the socio-economic and political empowerment of more African women. In *Matigari* not only Guthera, the female character, but also Matigari, the hero, struggles to protest against female oppression. It is Matigari who saves

Guthera from the betrayal of police. Matigari asks Guthera to resist the injustice happened to her by giving hope through his words, “Leave her alone. What kind of law is this which allows policemen to harass defenseless women? ...get up.... Come, stand up, mother ....”(31)

Guthera joins hands with Matigari in the struggle to get freedom for women of her society. Her expression in the story goes, “Whether he was crazy or not was beside the point. she thought: I will go with him, support him, until he finally finds his people.” (39) The author depicts the paradigm shift in the psyche of women to liberate themselves from imperialism.

Matigari seeks truth and justice for his people. He asks everyone, where the truth lies in our country. The author expresses the need for change in social, economic and political condition of the country. Ngugi supports Matigari’s search for truth and justice by uttering the words, “truth and justice are mightier than any armed power.” Matigari is hopeful in rebuilding his country. There is no sense of disillusionment in his progression. Matigari gradually persuades the society by creating awareness of the presence of imperialism after independence by asking the Minister of Truth and Justice as:

The builder builds a house, the one who watched while it was built, and moves into it. The builder sleeps in the open air. The tailor makes clothes, the one who does not even know how to thread a needle wears clothes.... The workers produce goods. Foreigners and parasites dispose of them. The worker is left empty handed. So where are truth and justice on this earth? (113)

The author portrays the major character, Matigari as a God in his speech and prophet. The major character has the ability to resist pain in his progress. In the story of *Matigari*, the people associate the events from the life of Matigari in searching for truth and justice as a miracle performer like Christ. Matigari’s expression in the story “let the children come to me” (73) has a relationship with Christ’s speech in Matthew 19:14b which says “let the little children come to me.”

*Matigari* consists of songs and oral proverbs in many parts of the story. The title of the novel is in his Gikuyu language. The paradigm shift of authors’ choice of native Gikuyu language instead of English which is the medium he has used in his earlier works.

As a prophet who tries to reinvigorate the spirit from the days of Mau Mau, Matigari represents these ideas of resistance against oppression. Due to his commitment, finally, Matigari is perceived as a sincere freedom fighter by the society. *Matigari* exposes the necessity of unity among Africans to surmount western influence through his paradigm shifts.

### **Works Cited**

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