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## A Study on “Cultural Imperialism and Literary Resistance: A Postcolonial Reading of Ngugi wa Thiong’o”

Smt. Soumyavati Maribashetti

M.A. B.Ed., Lecturer in SJMVS Women’s Arts and Commerce Degree College and SJMVS Law College, Hubballi

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intricate relationship between language, identity, and resistance in the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, with particular focus on his seminal text *Decolonising the Mind*. It explores how colonial language policies in Africa functioned as powerful tools of domination, shaping cultural consciousness and reinforcing systems of imperial control. By privileging European languages over indigenous ones, colonial regimes not only imposed political authority but also transformed systems of knowledge, memory, and self-perception, leading to deep cultural alienation among colonized peoples. The paper further examines Ngũgĩ’s critique of linguistic imperialism and his insistence on the centrality of language in constructing and preserving identity. It engages with the idea that postcolonial societies often continue to suppress local languages and cultures, thereby perpetuating colonial power structures even after achieving political independence. This internalized domination reveals the enduring depth of colonial influence on the mind and highlights the urgency of intellectual and cultural decolonisation in contemporary contexts. Furthermore, the study analyses linguistic decolonisation as a form of cultural and intellectual liberation. The imposition of English and other European languages not only marginalized native tongues but also disrupted indigenous epistemologies and systems of knowledge



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production, creating a lasting divide between language and lived experience. Ultimately, the paper argues that decolonising the mind is an ongoing and dynamic process of resistance, negotiation, and renewal, demanding conscious efforts to reclaim identity, restore cultural autonomy, and achieve intellectual self-recovery.

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### **Introduction:-**

Man is a social animal, but he constantly strives to uphold his personal dignity and occasionally faces difficulties. Not only does man strive to survive, but every nation in the world fights to dominate smaller nations. Similar to this, Britain battled and dominated the world in the name of political, commercial, and intellectual might. The British have a strong desire to share their culture and language with the globe. The majority of the nations were governed by the British under the colony name.

The history of colonialism is a significant cultural change in addition to economic exploitation and territorial conquest. Indigenous identities and worldviews were altered as European colonial powers imposed their languages, educational systems, religious beliefs, and cultural norms on colonized countries. These cultural structures have maintained their influence even after colonial rule officially ended; this phenomenon is frequently referred to as cultural imperialism. Postcolonial studies emerged as an academic discipline to analyze these enduring effects of colonialism. Through discourse, representation, and knowledge systems, scholars have attempted to understand how colonial authority functions. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is a prominent person in this intellectual lineage who emphasizes the importance of language in processes of dominance and opposition.

Ngũgĩ's work is particularly significant because it moves beyond theoretical critique to practical intervention. Because Ngũgĩ's work goes beyond theoretical criticism to real intervention, it is very noteworthy. The language hierarchies created by colonialism are radically challenged by his choice to write in Gikuyu instead of English. The conceptualization of cultural imperialism by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and his writing practice as a means of resistance are examined in this article.

This study's main argument is that Ngũgĩ's work shows that decolonization must take place at the level of culture and language rather than just politics. Writers can oppose cultural imperialism and help develop alternative epistemologies by recovering indigenous languages and narratives.

**Cultural Imperialism:-**

The term "cultural imperialism" describes the imposition of the values, beliefs, and practices of a dominant culture on another, which frequently results in the erasure or marginalization of regional customs. This practice was institutionalized through education, church, and government during the colonial era. Language played a crucial role in this process. Indigenous languages were written off as archaic or outdated, while European languages were portrayed as engines of modernity and advancement. This created a hierarchy of knowledge that privileged Western perspectives and devalued local ones.

The process of imposing the language, values, and meaning systems of one dominating culture on another is known as cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism, in contrast to overt political domination, frequently operates covertly, influencing how people view the world and themselves. Native African languages were suppressed and undervalued in colonial Africa, while European languages like English and French were considered better. Elite audiences are the main target audience for colonial-language literature. Most Africans who speak their native tongues are left out. It carries on colonial dominance's heritage. In reaction, Ngũgĩ decided to reject cultural imperialism and make literature accessible to the general public by writing in his native Gikuyu language. Western knowledge systems were given precedence over regional customs in the hierarchy of cultures that resulted from this hierarchy of languages. Because of this, colonial people frequently internalized a feeling of inferiority, which resulted in identity fragmentation and cultural estrangement. Language carries culture, history, and identity. By forcing Africans to learn colonial languages, imperial powers disconnected them from their heritage. Education systems punished the use of native languages, making people feel inferior about their own culture. Thus, language becomes a psychological weapon that colonizes the mind.

In Orientalism Edward Said argues that the West used a system of representation to justify colonial dominance and create the East as a "Other." Colonized peoples' perceptions of themselves and others were shaped by the knowledge generated by this discourse, which strengthened power dynamics. Thiang'o's works can be seen as an extension of Said's insights, focusing specifically on the role of language in shaping cultural identity.

Homi K. Bhabha introduces the concept of hybridity to describe the cultural interactions that occur in colonial contexts. According to Bhabha, colonial encounters produce new, hybrid identities that challenge fixed notions of culture.



Thiang'o is primarily focused on the restoration and preservation of indigenous cultures, which he believes are under threat from colonial dominance, even though he recognizes the complexity of cultural interaction.

One more prominent writer of postcolonial literature Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak highlights in her "*can subaltern speak?*", the ways in which marginalized voices are often silenced or appropriated and also she raises the question of whether the subaltern can speak within dominant discursive frameworks. On the other hand Thiang'o emphasis on writing in indigenous languages can be interpreted as an attempt to create a space where the subaltern can speak in their own voice.

### **Education under Colonialism and Linguistic Domination:-**

Cultural dominance was significantly influenced by colonial educational systems: African customs and heritage were misrepresented or disregarded. European values and heritage were exalted. Pupils were taught to reject their own culture and respect the colonizer. According to Ngũgĩ, this is a planned tactic to keep power even after political independence. The colonial educational system was one of the most effective tools of cultural imperialism. In colonial Africa, schools were intended to convey European values and worldviews in addition to information. Students were frequently praised for using English or French and punished for using their native tongues. As a result, there was a stigma attached to native languages and traditions. The idea that their own languages were inferior was eventually accepted by many people.

Thiang'o describes in vivid detail how colonial school language practices caused a psychological gap between students and their cultural heritage. African languages came to be associated with inferiority and backwardness, whereas English became associated with intelligence, success, and modernity. Identity formation was significantly impacted by this language hierarchy. Colonial educational systems successfully distanced people from their own cultural origins by favoring European languages. Even after independence, this alienation remained because English remained the primary language of literature, government, and education. Thus, education turned into a tool for maintaining colonial ideology. Many African countries kept using colonial languages and curriculum even after gaining their independence, which strengthened cultural reliance.

*In Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ describes his personal experiences in colonial schools and provides a detailed description of this process. He argues that language was employed to regulate thought and imagination in addition to communication. Colonial powers were able to affect people's perceptions of



reality by influencing the language they use. The ramifications of this language dominance were extensive. It produced a class of educated elites more in line with colonial ideals and cut off from their cultural origins. In many postcolonial cultures, where Western languages still predominate in politics, education, and literature, this estrangement endures.

Ngũgĩ promotes cultural resistance by means of: Reclaiming native tongues, Encouraging oral traditions and local expertise, Creating works of literature based on African experiences, Reorganizing educational institutions. According to him, liberating identity, language, and thinking from imperial control is the first step toward true decolonization. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, cultural imperialism is a subtle but potent force that dominates colonial societies through language, education, and literature. In order to restore identity and attain true freedom, his work advocates for a radical re-centering of indigenous cultures and languages.

Ngũgĩ's decision to abandon English and write in Gikuyu represents a radical intervention in postcolonial literature. In *Decolonising the Mind*, he argues that language is the "collective memory bank of a people's experience" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 15). Writing in indigenous languages allows authors to draw upon local traditions and cultural contexts, thereby resisting the homogenizing effects of cultural imperialism.

### **The Linguistic Turn of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o:-**

Ngũgĩ's decision to write in Gikuyu instead of English signifies a significant shift in both his career and postcolonial literature in general. This change was a political action intended to oppose cultural imperialism rather than just a personal. Then he aims to resist colonial structures and restore cultural sovereignty by reclaiming indigenous languages. His linguistic shift is indicative of a larger dedication to cultural and psychological decolonization. decision. Ngũgĩ contends in *Decolonizing the Mind* that language is the "collective memory bank of a people's experience." By utilizing regional customs, idioms, and cultural allusions when writing in indigenous languages, authors are able to produce literature that has a deeper impact on local readers.

Ngũgĩ's dedication to democratizing literature is also reflected in his linguistic turn. Instead of restricting literature to an elite, English-speaking population, he aims to make it accessible to a wider audience by writing in Gikuyu. But there are difficulties with this choice as well. Writing in indigenous languages frequently results in a smaller readership and challenges with publication and dissemination. Ngũgĩ is nonetheless dedicated to his goal of linguistic decolonization in spite of these challenges.

**Literary Resistance:-**

A major idea in postcolonial studies is literary resistance, which refers to the use of writing to contest colonial dominance and recover cultural identity. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o uses literature as a potent weapon to oppose cultural imperialism and reinstate the dignity of those who are oppressed. His theories reframe literature as a tool of social, political, and cultural freedom, particularly as they are expressed in *Decolonizing the Mind*.

Literature, according to Ngũgĩ, is never neutral. Because it either upholds or challenges power structures, writing is intrinsically political. Colonial literature frequently provided justification for imperial rule. These narratives need to be contested and undermined by postcolonial literature. According to Ngũgĩ, authors have an obligation to stand in solidarity with the downtrodden and utilize their writing as a tool for resistance. He argues that literature should not serve colonial or elite goals, but rather reflect the realities of the people.

Reclaiming suppressed histories, customs, and cultural values is the goal of literary resistance. African civilizations were frequently depicted in colonial narratives as inferior or primitive. In reaction, Ngũgĩ's writings: Honor African customs and oral traditions. Emphasize pre-colonial beliefs and histories, Acknowledge the diversity of native cultures, Literature thus becomes a tool for self-assertion and cultural revitalization.

Ngũgĩ attacks African authors who write only for elite audiences and utilize European languages. According to him, genuine literary opposition needs to: Involve laborers and peasants, Represent their challenges and goals. Be approachable and involved, His dedication to people-centered literature is demonstrated by his participation in community theater initiatives like the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Center. With this method, literature becomes an active social force rather than a passive art form.

Early works by Thiong'o, including *Weep Not Child*, and *The River Between*, examine how colonialism affected Kenyan society. These pieces portray the conflicts between modernity and tradition as well as the hardships faced by those torn between opposing cultural influences. Despite being published in English, these works immediately show a critical view of colonial dominance. They draw attention to the ways colonial policies upend social systems and give rise to new kinds of inequality.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngũgĩ presents a complex portrayal of the Kenyan struggle for independence. The novel employs multiple perspectives to depict the collective nature of resistance. By demonstrating that



resistance involves moral ambiguity and personal sacrifice, the story undermines oversimplified ideas of heroism. Additionally, it criticizes the drawbacks of post-independence leadership, arguing that political independence is not enough on its own.

A more radical critique of postcolonial society can be found in *Petals of Blood*. The book reveals how exploitation and inequality are sustained by neo-colonial forces. The story emphasizes the continuity between colonial and postcolonial systems of dominance through its portrayal of social injustice, economic exploitation, and corruption. It implies that a complete overhaul of social and economic systems is necessary for real liberty.

### **Theatre as a Tool of Resistance:-**

Ngũgĩ's work in theatre represents an important dimension of his resistance. Unlike written literature, theatre allows for direct engagement with communities, making it a powerful tool for political mobilization. Co-written with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, his drama *I Will Marry When I Want* tackled problems like class injustice, labor exploitation, and land dispossession and was produced in Gikuyu. The Kenyan government suppressed the play due to its popularity and political message, indicating the threat it posed to established power structures. Ngũgĩ expands literary resistance to include performances in addition to written texts. He addressed social and economic inequities in his drama *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*). It involved local people and was performed in Gikuyu. His arrest as a result of the play's political message demonstrates the true power of writing as resistance. According to him, theater transforms into a revolutionary and collective arena where individuals face injustice.

Ngũgĩ's participation in community theater demonstrates his conviction that literature ought to interact directly with the public rather than being restricted to exclusive settings. His larger goal of cultural democratization is in line with this strategy.

Although Ngũgĩ's ideas are significant, they have generated controversy. Some argue that African writers can reach a worldwide audience by using English, while others think that hybrid languages can also oppose imperialism. Nevertheless, Ngũgĩ's main point—that literature should serve the people and oppose dominance rather than support it—remains potent.

### **Decolonization of Language, Identity, and Psychology:-**

One of the most profound aspects of Ngũgĩ's work is his emphasis on the psychological dimensions of colonialism. Cultural imperialism affects both internal consciousness and external structures. Language



plays a central role in this process, When individuals are forced to think and express themselves in a foreign language, they may become alienated from their own cultural identity. This alienation can lead to a sense of inferiority and self-doubt.

In his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o offers a potent critique of colonial dominance that extends beyond political control and penetrates the cultural and mental life of colonized societies; for him, true decolonization necessitates a radical transformation of how people speak, think, and perceive themselves. The question of decolonization is inextricably linked to his analysis of language, identity, and psychology.

The central thesis of Ngũgĩ's argument is that language is a carrier of culture rather than just a means of communication. He contends that in addition to exploiting labor and land, colonialism in Africa aimed to control the minds of the populace by forcing European languages like English. African pupils were discouraged—or even punished—for speaking their native tongues in colonial educational systems. As a result, the colonizer's language came to be associated with wisdom, advancement, and power, while indigenous languages were progressively diminished. Ngũgĩ is renowned for saying that "language carries culture," which means that when a language is suppressed, the cultural values, customs, and worldview that are ingrained in it are also compromised.

An identity issue is directly caused by this linguistic dominance. Ngũgĩ asserts that a person's identity is derived from their language and cultural surroundings. Colonized individuals become estranged from their own culture when they are compelled to learn a foreign language. They start to idealize the colonizer's culture while viewing their own customs as archaic and inferior. This leads to a division between one's internalized ideals and one's actual reality, which Ngũgĩ refers to as a type of cultural dislocation. In their minds, people live in a foreign cultural framework even though they are physically part of their home country.

Ngũgĩ argues that a psychological liberation process must be a part of decolonization. This necessitates both confronting ingrained colonial views and restoring indigenous languages and cultures. He writes in *Gikuyu* in an effort to reestablish a feeling of cultural pride and identity. His research shows that language is an important site of ideological conflict in addition to being a tool for communication. Therefore, psychological emancipation requires the reclaiming of indigenous languages. It enables people to confront internalized injustice and reestablish a connection with their cultural heritage.



The work of Frantz Fanon, who also examined the psychological impacts of colonization, is consistent with Ngũgĩ's criticism of identity construction under colonialism. According to both scholars, colonialism makes the colonized feel inferior. Ngũgĩ, however, emphasizes the significance of language in this process. He contends that the imposition of a foreign language establishes a hierarchy in which indigenous cultures are devalued and the colonizer's culture is viewed as superior. As a result, colonized people experience a decline in confidence and self-rejection.

For Ngũgĩ, colonialism's most damaging feature is its psychological component. He contends that colonial educational systems serve as tools for mind manipulation. These systems influence colonized people's awareness in ways that support colonial aims by giving preference to European languages and literatures. While their own cultural heritage is either disregarded or misrepresented, students are taught to respect European history, literature, and ideals. This eventually results in what Ngũgĩ refers to as a "colonized mind," a way of thinking that unintentionally upholds colonial beliefs long after official colonial rule has ended.

Therefore, mental liberty must be a part of decolonization. Ngũgĩ maintains that if people continue to think and express themselves within the confines of colonialism, political independence is insufficient. Returning to native forms of expression and rejecting linguistic and cultural dominance are necessary for achieving true independence. For this reason, Ngũgĩ took the bold decision to write his literary works in Gikuyu, his home tongue, rather than in English. This gesture was more than just symbolic; it was a conscious attempt to emphasize the importance of African linguistic and cultural heritage and to contest the dominance of colonial languages.

Ngũgĩ highlights the significance of literature and narrative in the decolonization process in addition to language. He contends that literature is an effective vehicle for the transmission and preservation of cultural values. African literature produced in European languages during colonial control frequently reflected colonial viewpoints and was intended for Western readers. In order to combat this, Ngũgĩ promotes the production of literature in native tongues that captures the hopes, hardships, and experiences of Africans. He thinks that this kind of writing can be very important in rebuilding cultural identity and promoting a sense of pride in the community.

Ngũgĩ also believes that decolonization is a group effort rather than a personal one. It entails communities taking an active role in redefining their identities and recovering their cultural heritage. This entails promoting regional languages in public and educational settings, recovering oral traditions, and



opposing the predominance of Western cultural standards. By doing this, societies can start to demolish the cultural imperialist systems that still influence their reality.

Ngũgĩ's support of native languages has generated a lot of discussion in postcolonial studies. Global languages like English, according to some academics, can promote cross-cultural contact and raise awareness of postcolonial literature. Some argue that in a globalized society, linguistic purity is neither desirable nor feasible. They highlight the possibility for multilingual artistic expression and the hybrid character of postcolonial identities. Because it emphasizes the power relations ingrained in language, Ngũgĩ's work continues to have an impact despite these criticisms. His claims promote a critical analysis of language decisions and their effects.

The interconnection between language, identity, and psychology is central to Ngũgĩ's theory. Language shapes how people think and perceive the world; identity is formed through cultural and linguistic belonging; and psychology reflects the internalization of these influences. When language is colonized, identity becomes fragmented, and the mind is conditioned to accept subordination. Conversely, reclaiming language can lead to the restoration of identity and the liberation of the mind.

Totally Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's perspectives on the decolonization of language, identity, and psychology provide a significant critique of the lingering effects of colonialism. His writings emphasize the necessity of addressing the deeper cultural and psychological aspects of colonial dominance in addition to political independence. Ngũgĩ offers a thorough framework for comprehending and opposing the lingering consequences of colonialism by promoting the use of indigenous languages, the restoration of cultural identity, and the emancipation of the mind. In the end, he sees decolonization as an endeavor to empower formerly colonial peoples by restoring their sovereignty, dignity, and cultural integrity.

### **Contemporary Relevance:-**

Cultural imperialism has not vanished in today's globalized society; instead, it has taken on more nuanced and intricate forms. Modern cultural imperialism functions through global capitalism, media networks, digital platforms, and transnational institutions, in contrast to the overt political dominance of previous colonial regimes. Media, technology, and education are just a few of the new ways that cultural imperialism persists in today's globalized society. Tastes and values are shaped by the dominance of Western cultural items in international markets. The revival of indigenous languages and cultures is a developing movement at the same time. A useful foundation for these endeavors is provided by Ngũgĩ's work, which highlights the significance of cultural autonomy and resistance. In situations when



linguistic diversity is in danger, his theories are especially pertinent. They serve as a reminder that protecting and advancing indigenous languages is a political as well as cultural concern.

International readership may be limited when writing in native tongues. Cultural exchange can be mutually beneficial rather than always repressive. Ngũgĩ rejects unfair power relations that favor one culture over another, but he does not condemn cross-cultural engagement. His focus is still on giving underprivileged cultures their dignity and balance back.

Many countries, including India and African nations, still privilege colonial languages like English or French in education, administration, and intellectual discourse. This often marginalizes indigenous languages and knowledge systems. That's why Thiang'o argued that language carries culture, and when people are educated in a foreign language, they may become alienated from their own cultural roots. Today, movements advocating for mother-tongue education and linguistic diversity reflect ongoing efforts to decolonize the mind by reclaiming cultural identity and making education more inclusive.

The significance is equally evident in the field of knowledge production. Eurocentric viewpoints have historically dominated academic fields, especially the humanities and social sciences. The decolonization of curriculum—re-examining curricula to incorporate underrepresented perspectives, indigenous epistemologies, and alternative histories—is becoming more and more popular among academics. The goal of this endeavour is to eliminate intellectual dependency and establish more diverse and egalitarian knowledge systems.

Cross-cultural communication has been made possible by globalization, but it has also accelerated cultural homogenization, which is frequently spearheaded by Western businesses and media outlets. By emphasizing dominant narratives, social media, streaming services, and digital technologies can perpetuate cultural imperialism. However, these platforms also provide avenues for resistance, giving underprivileged people a chance to reclaim their voices and tell their stories. Decolonizing the mind has become essential to the fight for racial justice, indigenous rights, and cultural autonomy in politics and social movements. A larger urge to address historical injustices and modify social memory is seen in movements like Black Lives Matter, indigenous land rights campaigns, and initiatives to remove colonial monuments. These movements stress the need to change consciousness in addition to structural transformation.

**Conclusion:-**

Ultimately, Ngũgĩ's vision of decolonization highlights linguistic diversity, cultural autonomy, and the transformational potential of literature. His writings still serve as motivation for initiatives to oppose cultural imperialism and create more welcoming communities. By advocating for the use of indigenous languages, the reconstruction of cultural identity, and the liberation of the mind, Ngũgĩ provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and resisting the enduring effects of colonialism.

Decolonization of the mind is a continuous intellectual and cultural battle rather than a finished historical endeavour. It entails challenging ingrained cognitive patterns, recovering repressed identities, and making room for a range of viewpoints. Ngũgĩ's thoughts continue to be essential for promoting social fairness, intellectual independence, and cultural dignity in an increasingly interconnected yet unequal society.

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