

Reader Response on Two Novels: “The Changing Tides” And “The Hungry Tide”

The skill of interpreting the text content on reading of the books taken for reference - Expression Comprehended.

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Abstract:

The paper is a representation of the ‘reader-response’ theory and its effectiveness in comprehending fictions of interest. The theoretical approach deliberates the efficacy of the theory to the reader and implies its usage to the audience. A comparative self-assesses thought processes can be derived out of the understanding of the reader-response theory. It is on this pretext that this paper has been patterned as a comparative analysis of the novels ‘Hungry Tides’ by Amitav Ghosh and ‘Changing Tides’ by a Zambian writer, Michael Mulilo. Both of them have discussed a change and a requirement as essential in a society. Amitav’s work is on environmental protection and challenges that exists which need to be resolved. On the other hand, Micheal Mulilo’s version relies on the change as required in the existing governance of the nation with the challenges as faced by the tribal clan as general public. Both the fictions are relatively an exposure to the negatives of the society as well as the non-governance existence of reality. The hegemony of the governmental systems are also taken to discussion on a comparative basis of literary expression.

Keywords: Reader-response- comprehending- implies-self-assess-comparative-version- governance-exposure-hegemony-literary expressions.

Self-Realization as an introduction:

As days go by....

One day.....

When in evening, back from work a tide of thoughts flew into me, rushed across me like a flash of a lightning..... on the two books I had read this month. A thought kept reverberating in my mind that has made me write this article. “Tides” metaphorically seemed to be an awesome terrific world. I did feel it moulds, shapes and reconstructs, bringing in a brand new style in our living and thoughts. This was the reader response in me on those books I loved reading that conveyed similarities in vision and precision. A wide range of imagination rose in me for having read those books, “The changing tides” by Michael Mulilo, a Zambian writer and “ The hungry tide” by Amitav Ghosh, an Indian writer. A perfect rhythm of reality in both the books, where nature extolled, men revealed, life exploited all in grace with synchrony of words that has made the episodes of the book interesting to read.

Response reflected: As a reader my response was instantaneous that I should learn to get in with SILENCE for comprehending the rising tide within myself on reading those books. The feel that everything in life has a purpose and that there are no mistakes, no coincidences and all events are blessings given to learn from those literary books. The ideology behind are real lessons of life, the good and the bad; the realistic and unrealistic; the negatives and the positives spun around like a yarn of thread. These reverberating sensations made me believe in the reader response theory with the realism of the fact, “let’s remain stronger to one another, to let the tide of life pass by...”

Here as a thesis statement for the expression I have taken in reference, I wish to present the fact “Throughout the centuries those were the men; who take first steps down new roads armed with nothing....but with their own vision”. Such was the break through on reading the books, which is an expression of vision and mission to the society. As to the forum that is conducting this ‘august convention’, reading response criticism argues that a text has no meaning before a reader expresses; the reader reads it to interpret the concepts and ideologies in a logical sequence to the audience. This paper would reflect on scope and realism of a reader’s response to the audience. It would purely bring in personal reactions on these two novels with inherited and cultural conditions as expressed by the authors of those novels.

The background of the novels read: One from the most exquisite Asian country and another from the unraveled African country. Both the novels can be claimed as indigenous in its own way. Reading the story, one is sure to feel the surrealism of the author’s expression, which is unique and classic of its creation. There is so much of ethics on post structuralism, modernism and new historicism in the chapters of those novels.

The very word ‘tide’ and ‘tides’ would reveal the unfathomable depths of new experiences that is felt on reading the novels. It is a wild ecstasy of known and unknown facts that is realized on reading the novels. Each chapter is a truthful analysis of facts that are happening each day in many parts of the world with the rhythm of nature that spin around in this macrocosm. On detailed reading the books on a comparative basis, it can be assessed that a heavy criticism of different sorts would surely pour upon the narration of incidents in these books. Herein, it can be quoted the words of eminent Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe on Michael Mulilo’s novel:

“An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant- like the absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a fleeing rat” 1988. The pathetic revelation on Michael Mulilo is the criticism on his writing by a most eminent writer of Africa.

Michael Mulilo: I should say, he is the most unknown hero of the present century. By chance, I came across this novel in a school which is run by the ministry of education, Republic of Zambia. Seeing the book, didn’t wish to miss the chance of reading the book, met the student teacher in the upgrading programme to borrow the book to read. As thought off and wished, I could get hold of the book to dwell into its reality. The insatiable quest to know what lies within the book and to read a Zambian writer for the first time was the truth of the reality that has put forward this paper on the reader response interpretation.

Bringing the reference of the writer Michael Mulilo, who was born in the province named Kitwe in the year 1962 in Zambia. One should be amazed and filled with surprise to know that this town of Kitwe is

the world's leading producer of Copper, the versatile mineral that has high conductivity and widely used throughout the world in all networking systems. Worthy should have been the life of the author of the novel "The changing tides" but on the contrary it was not so. As for Michael Mulilo, it should have been a dream come true to write a novel which went unrecognized in the society. It should have been a dream that he wanted to realize, which has, in turn would make us dream of the truth behind his book.

More on the writer's educational achievements from schools of Kitwe and with a secondary diploma teacher's degree from Nkrumah teachers college in 1984, he further got a B.A in English literature from the University of Zambia in 1995. By January 1996 at a very young age of 34 he died leaving behind the only novel that he had written, "The Changing Tides" to the society as a remembrance of his caliber. The society in which he lived didn't recognize him of his work to the world. Shocking to understand that when goggling in to gather information on him in a website there is any. The only thought of him is his book, a legacy of the life he lived and what he dreamt of his nation.

The whole novel reflect on the social and political status of the land of Zambia after their independence from the colonial rule of the Britishers for a very long time with prevailing poverty and unstable systems that existed in that nation. Michael Mulilo has based his novel on victims of political tyranny, oppression and persecution. The atrocities committed by the then existing government is the main hold of the novel.

Relevance to Amitav Ghosh: In second novel "The Hungry Tide" depicts the urge of man on nature and to capture the good of nature for ones benefit. The author, Amitav Ghosh needs no introduction to the English literary world unlike Michael Mulilo. Nevertheless, Amitav Ghosh is the best author of the present century with profound literary knowledge and his story telling is at its best. He tries to resolve the unsolved mystery in this novel. He blends his story with individuals with an untold story which resembles the Bengali tradition of the river novel. The whole story is wrapped with incidences woven with nature. The nature revolves around the beauty of the river and the forest. The presence of nature in Amitav Ghosh's novel makes it elegant and stupefying. Unlike Michael Mulilo, Amitav Ghosh is a living writer of this macrocosm, most revered and respected in the English Literary world.

This conceptual understanding has brought in the creation of the readers response ideology in this paper to the learned audience of today.

"Master, your wish is my command"

This would have been the thought beyond and within every writer. Like a ray of light, the whole novel has taken its form both in "The Changing Tides" and "The Hungry Tide". The 'tides' and 'tide' gives a fathom of reading response for me. Both the novels are a realism of exploitation far and fast. We run with it. It's a new experience to realize to enjoy when the novels are read simultaneously...with the will to involve into the storyline. Both the novels speak out louder the writer's inner self, who have based their story with a remarkable real happening of the political and natural scenarios, which is the theme of the writing. The agony felt on a truthful happening and the existing society that runs behind unwanted vibrations or being chased to the end of unachieved targets. The hard struggle all the way through is expressed in grandness of time frame.

Unraveled realism: "The Changing Tides" flies in from Zambia with consuming fury. The novel expresses anger on the existing society and sheer irreverence of the governmental systems. This novel by Michael Mulilo is so realistic and politically potent that reading the novel made me feel that Zambia was

like that a few decades before. A shocking fact of the century that fear gripped my mind to see the pathos of the situation and the troubled scenarios of the storyline filled with terrifying blockbusters. Not so far, yet near. It was such a political agony that could not be so easy to express. Anyone listening to the story might feel, it might be a paranoid yarn by the reader. The persistent resistance expressed to the societal deformities by the negligence of the government is all the storyline of the changing tides. The writer is the protagonist of this novel who is caught in the trap for his simple innocent expression of the plight of the people in the society.

The storyline: The post colonialism in terms of leftovers of colonial existence in the chapters is thought provoking. The patriotic tinge is felt throughout the novel to awake and arise against all oddities is yet another truth behind in the novel. The pervasive existence of poverty in the major sections of the society is the real enigma of the story. The protagonist “Konosi” is depicted as a writer, educated and trained in a western country, who returns to his motherland named as Zibazaco in the novel. The country is shown to be in poverty but in reality with nature, geographically said to have large mineral resources which is hidden within. Disillusionment is witnessed by abject poverty, miserable and pathetic lives of his countrymen. The countrymen are being oppressed and tortured by the ruthless leaders. The ruthless leaders wear the mask of a humanitarian in the face of the world.

The main crux of the story is on the above said identity which makes the protagonist become a writer, though by profession he is a teacher in the school of the ministry of education. He looks into the eyes of his fellow men and draws inspiration with the power of his pen. ‘Konosi’ imagines the consequences of their lives, the societal delineation troubles him constantly while he repeatedly ponders of his societal upliftment. He builds up a whirlpool of events that culminates in ‘tides’ of mass uprising.

This mass uprising leads to bloody fight outs, confrontations, risky adventures, wild outbursts, mystic revelations and finally a real breakthrough to fight till the end to win over. A great mutiny broke into a mighty civil war, which finally changes the fate of his beloved country.

“There is a special kind of magic in the air”- My experience of a literary work: The origin of reader response theory can be traced back to 1930 to the concept as propounded by Louise Rosenblatt. Basically, it is linked to post-structuralism and that the reader’s interpretation of the text is more important than the author’s intended meaning. It helps to explore and synthesize the text read. It develops creativity and comprehension skills. A wide variety of reader’s responses design the integrity of the text content. That’s how the reading of these novels made me roll through the test of time with the rise and fall of the emotional tide within me to pattern and form this paper.

It can be rightly said Rosenblatt, the initiator of the theory of ‘Readers-Response’ believed that, “the reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, and individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader and a particular text at a particular time under particular circumstances” This is how this paper is embossed to the ideology of Rosenblatt. The ‘schema’, the expectations that arise from personal experiences is only taken for discussion here and not everyone would accept my perspectives. Individual thought process vary from person to person.

The storyline of ‘The Hungry tide’: This novel is a reflection of a sociological concept and gives an insight to post colonial writing skills. Amitav Ghosh in his elegant style tries to hold on to the intricate structure of the hungry tide as seen in the natural backdrop of the Sunderbans. This novel brings in a link of the past to the present running over a long period of time. There is mystic identity in the chapters

along with the realism of the nature. A time frame reference of more than thirty years is brought into the picture by Amitav Ghosh.

The mangroves of the Sunderbans in the west Bengal serve as the settings of the story for the entire novel. As said by the author, ‘...Between the sea and the plains of Bengal on the easternmost coast of India lies an immense archipelago of islands. Here there are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea, even land from water, for hundred years, only the truly dispossessed braved the man-eating tigers and the crocodiles who rule there, to eke the precarious existence from the mud’. The whole story revolves on this scenario till the end.

Another interesting concept of this landscape is that a certain parts of the Sunderbans in those colonial times, was bought by a visionary Scotsman from the British to bring in a settlement of the people irrespective of race, caste, culture and that they could live there in harmony. This concept of reality was taken in by the author in depicting his narration.

The novel is wrapped on legends, folk-lore, history and geographical wonders of the land of Sunderbans is brought into relevance most effectively all through the novel. The main characters of this novel are ‘Piya’, ‘Kania’ and ‘Fokir’. The whole storyline goes cyclic on the emotional involvement of these three people. There is a tussle between civilized world and the rustics of Sunderbans. The rustic always feel that the intrusion of the civilized people would surely intrude their habitat and thereby disturb the nature around them.

Parallelism runs through this novel. A mystical interpretation as referred in diary of Kanai’s uncle. Kanai reads out notes from his uncle’s diary which allows the authors to take the readers to a different time frame, a different period of time in Sundarban’s history. Every turn of the landscape is described so naturally to the rhythm of human life. Many a times, it looks like a travelogue to a visitor to Sunderbans. The story originates with the meeting of Piya, an American scientist of Indian origin who specializes in marine mammals with Kanai, a rich businessman. Piya is on visit to India to spend time in Sunderbans to do research on Irrawady Dolphins which can beautifully survive between freshwater and salt water. On reaching the land of Sundarbans, Piya faces some difficulty with governmental regulations. Yet she wins over the intrusions and is guided by an agent who assures to take her to the habitat of the dolphins. Meanwhile, she meets a local fisherman and his son who seem to be more conducive in guiding her to her place of interest. At all times, Fokir is of great support to Piya and makes her identify the marine mammals and take notes for her research analysis. Though she faces many hardships, with no communication between her and Fokir, yet she found that company more comfortable and educative. Even in normal situations, Piya did feel the closeness of her thoughts with dolphins which one can realize in this passage,” The dolphins’ quite regular breathing had lulled Piya into a dooze from which she was woken by a sound that seemed to come booming out of a dream”. Thus was the impact she felt being with those marine mammals.

The story runs long pages and Piya till the end feels Fokir the rustic was better a humane person than Kanai. She could rely on the instructions and guidance of Fokir than Kanai. As the storyline moves down, Fokir meets with his mishap and is killed in a natural calamity. Piya tries hard to find her way out of the sundarbans and reaches home to gather some money to help the family of Fokir. In fact she starts a research station on Irrawady Dolphins on Fokir’s name.

“Life is lived in transformation” and “We are not really at home in this translated world”: These are the verses from ‘Duino Elegies’, written by famous German poet Rilke, which are the two

underlying themes of the novel. The complete passage of the story has several characters, many story links and different time periods which emerge in this novel similar to the intricacies of the Sundarbans. The Hungry Tide explicitly handles the topics of humanism, environmentalism and a conflict of interest between them. There is a vivid research on fiction and facts, topics on refugees, freedom and war, life in Sunderbans, the absence of language in communication involving the research work on Marine mammals. Amitav Ghosh's picturization of the reality and pathos of hunger and being hungry among the society of the areas engulfed in tides is the natural referential observation of the author. Even though, the story reflects on the environment of the tidal area yet it has depiction to the environmental concerns of the day. More so, the references off different animals of the tidal regions with the roughness of the weather are the major episodic happenings of the narrative of Ghosh. Analogical relevance of human agony interlinked with love and pathos is predominant in 'Hungry Tides' with much of smaller level identification as seen in 'The Changing Tides' of Michael Mulilo of Zambia.

Impact of both the 'tide' and 'tides':

On a readers' perspective the novel 'The changing tides' by Michael Mulilo sounds more realistic and the flow of the story reflects as if it has happened or is happening. The story of a teacher who believed in writing his inner thoughts of the society to overcome the agony of the existing systems is seen in Michael Mulilo's fiction 'The Changing Tides'. He writes his views in an editorial of a leading newspaper and is caught unawares and got caught in a trouble. The president of the country is a dictator identifies him and orders the officials to put him in jail. Along with him the two editors of the newspaper were also tortured. The atrocities of the police on the three create a ranchos and the general public riot against the government. The rebellion spreads nationwide and reaches international attention.

Being in the jail, the protagonist 'Konosi' hoped and wished his inner thoughts as, "God had chosen to create man who was not prone to doing evil. Or if that was against His plans, he wished He had created an imperfect man but one incapable of inflicting pain on other" chapter IV ., page 183 o The Changing Tides'. This he utters because he wished a miracle would happen and he would be free.

The caption in narrative of Michael Mulilo's 'Changing Tides': "The President loses direction" of an article in the 'London times' is read many round the world. Sir Winter Trevor Howard a multi-millionaire from Britain takes up the issue into his discretion. He was one of the most criminal masterminds who had planned many mercenary activities against many unstable governments. With a well organized mercenary team, step into Zibazaco and release the three in jail. With their support in turn, the President of the country was overthrown and a new government was formed. This was done with the motif of taking over the rich resources of Zibazaco. The protagonist understood the truth and does not allow the mercenary team to involve in governmental activities.

The whole story is wild way to freedom of a country which was caught in the shackles of a few selfish politicians. The story has horrible episodes of torture and false entities of governmental undertakings. There was victory and revelations of triumph at the end. The only question cynics or skeptics asked was: would the new regime deliver the good or like the old be forced to eat its promises after disappointing the now celebrating masses. Only time would tell.....

Finale of thoughts as a reader's response:

Many countries of the world face the same situational conditions and the story of “The Changing Tides” is a truth well revealed. In context to the readers’ response theory I wish to express that both the novels had reality vandalized and exploited. Both have many truths unraveled to the world. The real observations and behavioral impacts were pictured as the storyline of the novels. The fondness of the word ‘tide’ in the novel ‘The Changing tides’ and ‘The Hungry tide’ is an untold history of the past lingering in the ever changing present. Sure the changing tides will be heralding a new world order while the hungry tide will disclose the scientific fervor and mystical ethos of the Sunderbans at all times.

In summation, in words of H.G.Wells, “The pearl is lovelier than the most brilliant of crystalline stones, the moralist declares, because it is made through the sufferings of a living creature” explicitly expresses the value of life. The two novels taken for discussion, in short, are ‘pearls’ to readers’ interest with literary knowledge brightened.

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