Book Review

Vijay Kumar Roy, editor. *A Companion to African Literature*. New Delhi: Paragon International Publishers, 2024, pp. x + 222, HB, Price: ₹995, ISBN: 978-9394964679.

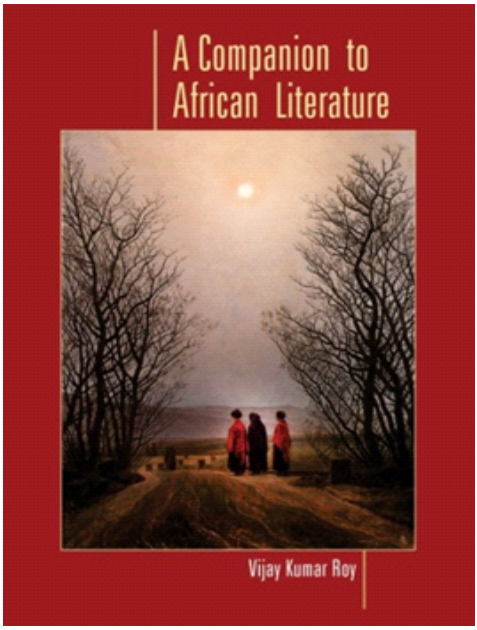
Reviewed by
Yuvraj Nimbaji Herode*

Until the lions have their own historians,
the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.

– An African Proverb

The essence of this great proverb has been exactly illustrated through his message, when Chinua Achebe, the editor of *Penguin African Writers Series*, writes,

> Africa is a huge continent with a diversity of cultures and languages. Africa is not simple – often people want to simplify it, generalize it, stereotype its people, but Africa is very complex. The world is just starting to get to know Africa. The last five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature that presented Africa in a very bad light, and now the time has come for Africans to tell their own stories. ("Message from Chinua Achebe," in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*)



The European imperial powers started to colonize Africa in the late 19th century and lasted till the 1960s. There has been the gradual decline of these forces during the World War I. The culture of Africa is rich and varied because it encompasses

a fusion of various countries with numerous tribes representing their exclusive cultural practices. During the era of European colonialization of Africa, the colonizers (hunters) frequently tried to prohibit the Africans from identifying their rich cultural heritage. They forced the Africans to adopt the European culture and language. As a result of this, the Africans were torn asunder between the cultures and dual identities. This created the hegemony of the culture of European hunters on the African cultures. Thus, there have been the glorification of the culture, history, and language of the European hunters in their master narratives. However, there is a rise of the African lions who are writing about their history, culture, and various emergent concerns in African continent.

Vijay Kumar Roy has attempted to put together the explorations of literary imaginations of the African realities in his book, *A Companion to African Literature.* It is an edited volume of 18 research papers that explore diverse perspectives on African literature such as social realism, poverty, exploitation, Igbo women, leadership, prostitution, British colonialism, environment, African life and culture, war, aesthetics, alternative development, children, and identity. In "Introduction", Amar Nath Kumar has precisely worded about these perspectives as "Interestingly, the subjects covered are all relevant and exemplify the socio-cultural movement over the time, starting from narratives of nationalism, establishing and restoring the cultural identity and also the post-colonial disillusionment and the problems which plague the continent today." (xv) Therefore, the book is worthwhile for its collection of significant authors from diverse African backgrounds and their varied perceptions which stand at the core of these backgrounds.

A chapter in this book is devoted to acknowledge the leadership of Igbo women. In Nigeria, traditionally, males were considered powerful and authoritative to perform masculine roles in every field, while the Igbo women were relegated to perform less important work associated with household and child rearing. But in the contemporary era, women are conscious about their capabilities and potentials, which were historically suppressed by the male dominated society. The women authors, being good leaders, like Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, raise their voice to get their contribution to the African culture recognized. Another chapter evaluates the same theme of Igbo society with the effects of colonialism on the Igbo culture as portrayed in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In another chapter, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been interpreted in terms of ecocritical perspectives in African society concentrating on "people who are annihilated as well as detached from their root, culture, language,

identity, surrounding nature, myths, rituals and stories with the advent of the European colonizers." (58)

Ama Ata Aidoo, a feminist of Africa, has advocated the need of equality between sexes through her literary oeuvre including *Anowa* , *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* and *Changes: A Love Story*. The chapter devoted to her characterizes the women characters who have extraordinary strength to survive in the hostile situations. Prostitution, an age-old cruel profession, has been a blot on humanity, because it imposes some stringencies on the women who are engaged in it and it is illegal in many African countries, particularly Ghana. The repercussions of this inhuman practice on the women prostitutes have been explored in a chapter through Benjamin Kwakye's *The Sun by Night*. It speaks about how the prostitution results in violence, mistreatment, and exploitation of sex workers.

Festus Iyayi, another significant Nigeria novelist, has been dealt with by interpreting his novels, *Violence* and *Heroes* showing how poverty and exploitation are inevitable indicators of class polarity in Africa. This chapter elaborates on how, in Africa especially, the author has "engaged … audience with incidents of spiralling poverty and exploitation given that the continent has experienced brutal colonialism with imperial overlords plundering the homeland, leaving the people poor, exploited, and wretched." (21) Iyayi's *Violence* has been illustrated in terms of the material advancement of the lower-class people such as workers, peasants, and students. It proposes the need for a revolutionary action from the working-class people to change the exploitative system of the oppressors. Likewise, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil On the Cross* has been analysed through Marxist perspective which focuses on various forms of exploitation and class division.

Nigeria is an important nation in Africa that has come across various issues such as environmental pollution, terrorism, and national insecurity. These issues have been the substance for Nigerian writers who used realism as a technique to represent the social reality through their writings. The genre of children's literature has been looked down by many authors as very flimsy form of writing, but the chapter on children's literature in Africa explores how pertinent and substantial it is as compared to other literature.

Though the book addresses the wide-ranging topics spanning from (pre)colonial period to the post-colonial scenario in Africa, it doesn't cover the works of representative writers from all the countries in Africa. The book focuses on Nigerian literature along with the literature written by the authors in Ghana, Kenya, and

Ethiopia. Africa, a vast continent of 54 countries, is a home to millions of significant writers from different languages and cultures. Some of the authors from many countries in Africa, other than the nations referred to in this book, have the rich variety of poems, novels, short stories, dramas, and historical writings which are equally important. However, *A Companion to African Literature* is a reigning contribution to New Literatures in English and is useful to all those who are desirous to explore African literature.

Works Cited

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*****Assistant Professor, Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj – 211002, UP, India. Email: dr.yherode@allduniv.ac.in

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