



# Roots and Resonance: The African Paradigm of Afrocentricism

Narinder K. Sharma, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Niharika, PhD<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of English at the Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, Punjab, India

E-mail: [narinderksharma.elt@gmail.com](mailto:narinderksharma.elt@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of English, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab, India

E-mail: [niharikasharmaeng@gmail.com](mailto:niharikasharmaeng@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**— Afrocentricity is an approach that aims to revitalise the conversation about African aesthetics, politics, and cultural connections. Through a process that involves revisiting and reinterpreting the works of well-known African authors, this technique challenges the long-held beliefs that Africans are backward and lack civilisation. The postmodern literary environment of the postcolonial period has enabled these authors to discover their voices and critically evaluate the limitations placed on their cultural manifestations. Africans and authors of African ancestry have been given the required motivation to break out from traditional patterns as a result of the resurrection of postcolonial literature, which was followed by the Afrocentric movement. This movement calls into question and critiques the unfavourable cultural attitudes and acts of Europeans against African people. Ultimately, Afrocentricity seeks to improve Africans' mental health on the continent and abroad. Promoting a cultural renaissance will accomplish this by recovering and redefining African identity and legacy. It is in this larger context that the present paper attempts to analyse the emergence of postcolonial dynamics shaped by social and cultural disruptions and dialectical disputes vis-à-vis the African paradigm of Afrocentrism, keeping in view the dialectical transition from colonial to postcolonial thought.



**Keywords**— Culture, postmodern, discourse, dialectics, paradigm, Afrocentricism.

Postcolonialism addresses difficulties that have arisen as a result of colonial interactions and the implications that have resulted from them over a prolonged period of time. This is accomplished by analysing the cultural, political, and social effects that colonialism and imperialism have generated. Accordingly, this paper investigates the ways in which these factors have influenced civilisations, identities, and power systems in the past and continue to do so now, and, in this sense, postcolonialism strives to unearth and elevate the perspectives and experiences of those who have been colonised, as well as to question the narratives that have been generated by colonial powers. In addition, it provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which colonial histories and legacies continue to permeate contemporary cultural and socioeconomic settings. These

legacies have a pervasive impact on a wide range of different aspects, including but not limited to art, literature, governmental legislation, and social conventions. Postcolonialism is a potent framework for understanding the long-term effects of colonisation as well as the continuing battles for decolonisation and cultural reclamation, which are achieved by examining power dynamics and resistance movements that occur inside territories that have been colonised. It is interesting to note that this perspective of postcoloniality addresses the concept of decolonisation, which paved the way for the neocolonial age. As a result, the word "postcolonial" incorporates not just a historical movement but also a movement that goes beyond the limitations of colonialism and/or nationalist conflicts as they pertain to the third

world. As a result, the manner in which colonialism and neocolonialism interface with globalisation sheds light on the varied postcolonial systems that are now in existence in different parts of our modern globe.

Notably, postcolonial African literature arose from a collision that was simultaneously historical and experiential in scope, and this paper foregrounds and subverts Western cultural hegemony in Africa, advocating for the decolonization of African thought and consciousness. Decolonization entails the investigation or pursuit of constructive African concepts, viewpoints, methodologies, and principles, taking into consideration the fact that this body of literature is history-obsessed in its spirit and substance. Contextually, Nayar's view of history as a theme in postcolonial literature covers several important themes, which include: 1) interrogating the effects of colonialism, especially in terms of cultural alienation; 2) the anti-colonial struggles of the 'Third World' and the rise of nationalism; 3) the creation of 'mimic men' in colonial culture; 4) the appropriation of history by the colonial master; 5) the attempts to retrieve and rewrite their own histories by the formerly colonised cultures; and 6) the modes of representation. (37)

Contextualising this from a broader perspective, the artist actively builds or reclaims an identity that was previously denied or taken away from them as part of a parallel process of re-Africanization occurring simultaneously. The purposeful embrace of an African identity and the reclamation of cultural symbols are both components of this endeavour, which is a movement that is sometimes referred to as Afrocentricity. With a view to dealing with issues of marginalisation and misrepresentation that have been historically imposed by colonial and Eurocentric narratives, the concept of Afrocentricity proposes to place African culture and viewpoints at the center of attention. Thus, this idea is very appealing to authors and artists of African descent from a variety of places, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, Black America, Britain, and Southern America. As a result, the rich traditions, histories, and philosophies that have been repressed or ignored are encouraged to be investigated in greater depth. In this sense, Afrocentricity is an approach that tries to question and destroy the prejudices and misunderstandings that have been connected with African identities for a long time.

Elaborating further, the Afrocentric approach assumes that globalization does not include distinct African discursive activities, such as literature, in its scope for creating a homogenous global culture. So, the idea of universality, especially when it comes to politics, doesn't support the unique and special place of African literature and its

ability to provide a framework for the Black African experience, both before and after independence and, in some cases, while they were slaves. Asante's *The Afrocentric Idea* is a groundbreaking document in the history of Afrocentricity. It establishes a comprehensive framework that examines the shortcomings of multiculturalism, which fails to acknowledge the significant contributions of Africans to the historical, artistic, and intellectual progress of the world. Additionally, it confronts cultural dominance and power. Asante aims to liberate Africa from the influence of "...anthropologists by constructing an authentic account of the continent. He accomplishes this by examining the impact of Diopian historiography, Kawaïda, and black nationalism on Afrocentricity. Although these movements share similarities, they also possess distinct ideological orientations" (Smith 2).

Therefore, it is necessary to assess the overarching concept of Afrocentricity as presented by Assante and his group of intellectuals. It is evident that there are postcolonial elements that influence and examine every aspect of African culture, including literature. While the focus is on Africa, postcolonial dynamics also apply to literary and discursive practices in other countries, such as India. Assante observes that the idea of Afrocentricity is "...a defense of African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, and literature and a defense of a pan-African cultural connection based on broad responses to conditions, environments, and situations over time" (4). In this sense, Afrocentricity signifies the deliberate suppression by European hegemony of the intellectual history, contributions, and cultural reality of people of African origin. Fanon also substantiates the ongoing stance by observing, "The colonialist bourgeoisie hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity and whose only wealth is individual thought" (86). So, there is a need to reposition loss and emasculation with renewed energy, reflecting the upcoming changes in African cultural identity components. Importantly, literature has the potential to revitalise the African narrative by challenging the ideas that hinder it and preventing it from exploring new yet harmful ways of thinking.

Asante seeks to shift the emphasis away from the *timing* of historical events that influence African identity. Instead, he seeks to highlight the African individual as the central figure in historical analysis, particularly in terms of interpreting and expressing cultural desires and awareness. In a similar vein, another noted scholar, Mazama, also argues that Afrocentricity establishes a connection between Africa and the fundamental mechanisms of empowerment and expression. He opines: "The

Afrocentric idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African experience for African people. Its goal is to restore our African triumphant consciousness. In the process, it also means viewing the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one” (Mazama 5). Such an understanding allows Africans, especially in the diaspora space, to place their acquired knowledge within a local and global framework that is free from the limitations of ethnocentrism and racism. Concurrently, the acknowledgment of African values refracts the limits of deceptive *language*—used to maintain power, privilege, and social status—while Africans explore social interactions that promote personal and communal self-esteem. Therefore, Afrocentricity strives to revive the magnificence of Negritude, which vanished in the wake of colonialism and the misguided consequences of decolonization.

With a view to delve deeper into the intricate components of the Afrocentric discourse, it is somewhat necessary to analyse of the distinctions that exist between Afrocentric discourse and other critical frameworks that are concerned with postcolonial African narratives in order to shed light on the distinctive qualities, objectives, and procedures that constitute Afrocentric philosophy and set it apart from other postcolonial approaches. Afrocentric speech is based on an Afrocentric worldview that centers its analysis around African culture, values, and experiences and it is an attempt to redefine history and culture from an African perspective, with an emphasis on the significance of African action and self-determination. This perspective is not just about regaining African identity; it is also about fostering a profound feeling of pride and affirmation in African ancestry, signifying a rejection of the marginalisation that is imposed by colonial and Eurocentric attitudes, as well as a complete reevaluation of the contributions that Africans have made to world civilisation. Some people think that the Afrocentric worldview and other postcolonial frameworks are interchangeable; however, these frameworks have subtle differences in the sense that postcolonialism is a more comprehensive critical framework that examines the effects of colonialism on a variety of cultures and communities. It often focuses on the hybrid and overlapping identities that are the result of experiences with colonial powers. Accordingly, this approach has a tendency to investigate topics like hybridity, imitation, and resistance, with the goal of analysing the power dynamics and cultural exchanges that occur between colonisers and the colonised. Conversely, Afrocentric discourse primarily focuses on the perspectives and experiences of African individuals. This endeavor aims to create a narrative that is intrinsically African and free from the distortions and

prejudices that result from colonial influence. A concerted effort is underway to emphasise the significance of African philosophies, epistemologies, and cultural practices within the discourse. Scholars and artists who are afrocentric work towards the goal of developing a self-defined identity that is resistant to assimilation into Western paradigms. This identity places an emphasis on the uniqueness and depth of African cultural traditions. In this sense, the Afrocentric worldview places a strong emphasis on cultural continuity and inheritance, which is one of its most notable features. The purpose of this endeavor is to establish a sense of unity and continuity over time and place by establishing a connection between present African identities and their historical contexts. This method stands in contrast to some postcolonial frameworks, which may place a greater emphasis on the fragmentation and hybridisation of identities that arose as a consequence of interactions with colonial powers. Tilloston opines, “At this point, it is necessary to make the critical distinction between two different schools of thought: one that utilizes an African world view as a framework and one that utilizes an Afrocentric philosophical perspective as a framework” (67). Therefore, the contrasting discourse between the two schools of thought and the intermediate space in-between must be subjected to critical evaluation while determining the nature of Afrocentric dialectics.

Contextualising further, the Afrocentric approach in *literature* seeks to refine and unify the political and cultural imagination of Africa by influencing its mindset, language, and other artistic values, and this is how Afrocentricity plays a crucial role in promoting collective agency and facilitating free conversation in support of diversity. Preserving African culture and society is crucial, as it should complement Western civilisation instead of being subservient to its core principles. As a result, many African writers hailing from both the culturally transformed African hinterlands and the Caribbean exhibit a similar process of mechanisation in their efforts to reclaim African identity and promote African narratives. The historical context of the Caribbean, where the importation of sugar plantation workers from various parts of the world created a colonial environment, is responsible for this phenomenon. For instance, Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer, has endeavoured in his writings to promote African-centric viewpoints and revive African traditions and cultural expressions to prevent their disappearance from global awareness. Accordingly, his works aim to imbue young Africans with a sense of pride in their rich cultural heritage and tradition, with a particular focus on Afrocentric themes, because empowering the oppressed and marginalised is the

fundamental principle of Afrocentricity. In this context, another notable writer, Ngugi, holds the view that African play derives its origin from several sources, which are as follows:

- a) harvest rituals, such as the rite to bless the magic power of tools.
- b) fertility rites and ceremonies that celebrate life oozing from the earth, or from between the thighs of humans and animals.
- c) ceremonies to bless spears, warriors, and other defenders of the community. These songs and dances would act out battle scenes. They had a story and a chorus to underline the fate of evil doers, thieves, and idlers.
- d) rituals to mark different stages of life, such as the ceremonies for birth, circumcision, marriage, and burial of the dead. These rituals could appease the occasionally hard-hearted gods, who were represented in these rituals by men in masks. (36)

In light of this, literature and the many different discursive aspects it contains may be of assistance in re-establishing a more profound comprehension of archetypes, which the African students of today may be lacking in knowledge of. Soyinka's plays, such as *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), *The Swamp Dwellers* (1963), *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), *The Road* (1965), *Madmen and Specialists* (1972), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *From Zia, With Love* (1992), etc., explore African mythical themes using contemporary nuances. They also confront the anti-egalitarian ideologies of dominant powers that hinder Africa from assuming a prominent position.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o shares a similar focused objective of advocating for the representation of African dialectics in the postmodern world. He employs history as a tool for imaginatively creating the past, with the aim of nation-building, through the recollections of his characters. For him, history is a continuous path of competition and disagreement where the struggle for recognition persists. To highlight such an ethos, he uses several combinations of nationality, ethnicity, religion, education, memory, folklore, and myth to provide a solid foundation for his home within the context of history with a view to foreground genuine lived experiences that arise directly from the individuals themselves, transforming into tales, narratives, fables, and melodies. *Mau-Mau*, the Kenyan insurrection, consistently serves as a unifying element or framework in Ngugi's works, scrutinising the characters' self-conceptions and power dynamics. Ngugi writes realistically in his first books, but his later works adopt a stylistic approach that incorporates fantasy and allegory.

Gradually, his writing shifts towards expressing Marxist ideas. Interestingly, the author aims to cultivate a fresh African awareness, liberated from past extremes, and weaves new narratives, specifically Afrocentric discussions, through his fictional portrayal of Kenya's violent history.

Achebe's literary works, like Soyinka's portrayal of Yoruba culture, represent Igbo culture. His works depict the impact of European colonialism and modernism on African heritage, particularly the many Igbo cultures. In the novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the community of Umuofia experiences a tumultuous upheaval characterized by intense internal conflicts upon the arrival of White Christian missionaries. Sam Okoli engages in a dialectical conflict because his Westernized schooling prevents him from reconnecting with society's stories and traditions, unlike the character Beatrice. European individuals mostly exert colonial influence on the Igbo people in Achebe's novels, but institutions and urban offices also play a significant role in this regard. In the novel *No Longer at Ease* (1960), the protagonist Obi falls victim to the corrupt practices prevalent during the colonial era in the city. The allure of his position proves to be too much for his sense of self and strength of character. In *Things Fall Apart*, the courts and the role of District Commissioner conflict with the customs of the Igbo people, depriving them of their capacity to engage in decision-making frameworks. The conventional Achebean conclusion culminates in the annihilation of a person and, through synecdoche, the collapse of society. Odili's progression into indulgence in corruption and hedonism in *A Man of the People* (1966) serves as a representation of the postcolonial turmoil experienced in Nigeria and other similar regions. Achebe's primary objective is to familiarise the younger African population with Igbo customs and other indigenous expressions to create fresh narratives about Africa.

African writers from both mainland Africa and the diaspora, including Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite in the Caribbean Islands, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Amiri Baraka, and others in America, have promoted Afrocentric philosophy in their literary works. Amiri Baraka's plays and poetry advocate for the fundamental importance of Afrocentricity, as he examines the self-negating state of being within the African American generation in America. To achieve balance with the language of white Americans, the younger black generation has degenerated into a mere copy of it. The essence of Baraka's body of work is exemplified in Woodson's assessment, wherein he states, "the educational content currently being imparted to African Americans fails to align their cognitive faculties with the realities they are bound to confront" (38). Baraka's remarks have

significant weight when considering their profound impact on the lives of Africans in America and on the African continent. Similarly, Walcott and Brathwaite's poetry endeavours to reclaim the lost African identity and confront the Eurocentric practices that have marginalised individuals of African descent in the Caribbean. The endorsement of Creole as a means of African creativity and cultural resurgence, which challenges the dominance of British or American English, is a significant advancement in fostering Afrocentric awareness in the West Indies. Caribbean poets who wrote in Creole, which was originally the language or dialect used by slaves on plantations to communicate, expressed their refusal to conform to the standard forms of the English language. This also marked a break from imitating the English poetic tradition that was introduced by the colonizers. The poetry of the two prominent figures focuses on expressing a form of collective awareness of the nation, serving as a rhetorical practice for the development of a new sense of national identity. Brown evaluates Brathwaite's poetry in the following ways:

His historical imagination, as mediated through his poetry, is informed by his experience of living for many years in Ghana, and, on his return to the Caribbean, by his recognition of the submerged presence of Africa in the cultures of the region. Much of his work has been a kind of reclamation of that African inheritance, a reclamation that has inevitably involved a process of challenge and confrontation with the elements of the mercantilist/colonial culture that overlaid and often literally oppressed African survivals. (Brown 126–127)

Thus, the poetry of Brathwaite and Walcott aims at the creolization of Caribbean literature, which serves as a metaphor for its cultural syncretism and furthers the steps towards Afrocentricity. Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and several other Black American women authors' works aim to further a certain objective in African discourse, namely, empowering African American women by giving them a voice. Gender has deprived Black American women of their creative thinking abilities. They have faced several acts of aggression because of their skin colour and the shared history of black people in America. Both racism and sexism have damaged their reputations. While individuals experience racial prejudice from the outside world, they also face gender-based discrimination inside their own families. The dual challenge has contributed to the vulnerable and strained perception of African American women as they strive to establish their sense of self. Wade-Gayles acknowledges the disparate experiences

of black American women in comparison to white American women, emphasizing the dual victimization of black females:

There are three major circles of reality in American Society which reflect degrees of power and powerlessness. There is a large circle in which white people most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from them there is a smaller circle, narrow space, in which black people regardless of sex experience uncertainty, exploitation and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third small enclosure in which Black women experience pain, isolation, and vulnerability. These are the distinguishing marks of black womanhood in White America. (Wade-Gayles 45)

Black-American women's experiences are significantly overshadowed when compared to white women, who, despite being women, encounter at least one fewer obstacle in their pursuit of identity and uniqueness. The white female must confront the challenges posed by a sexist agenda, while the Black-American female must also face the obstacles of both gender bias and racial discrimination. Numerous literary circles worldwide have scrutinized the prominent Afrocentric rhetoric in Morrison and Walker's books.

In summary, Afrocentricity aims to revitalise the stagnant African conversation surrounding aesthetics, politics, and cultural interactions. It is imperative for the future generation of Africa to have a fresh perspective on these renowned writers to avoid the negative perceptions of backwardness and lack of civilization. The postmodern literary works of the postcolonial era have empowered these writers to discover their own voice and critically examine the many pressures and limitations imposed on their cultural forms, such as literature. However, it was postcolonial literature's literary rally and subsequent layer of Afrocentricity that African and African-origin writers needed. This rally also provided them with the courage to create something that could assist their entire culture in breaking free from the established patterns and generating something that questions the fundamental, underlying aspects of negative European cultural ideas and actions towards African people. The Afrocentric concept aims to restore the collective mental well-being of African individuals, both in the Americas and on the African continent.

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