



THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Chinua Achebe, the father of modern African literature, social and political activist, wrote novels on the post colonial social and political problems of Nigerian society. "Anthills of Savannah" deals with political corruption and moral decay in politics and "A Man of the people" does the same in military regimes. He is concerned with times and events from the Colony Rule to the getting of independence with special reference to cohesive principles of Igbo culture. Through the instances of several festivals and social customs of Nigerian society he reveals interaction between individual and community being essential for making balance clan's spiritual and material inclination.

KEYWORDS : Post-colonial, Decay, Igbo, Cohesive

CHINUA ACHEBE'S CONCERNS:

Chinua Achebe is rightly said the father of modern African literature. He made Nigeria's academic culture and took foundation of literary and political institutions. He was an editor and so began editing *Okike: Journal of New African Writing*. He founded a bilingual magazine named *Uwa ndi Igbo* in 1984. He was active in social and political fields from the 1960s till his death. He wrote many of his novels about the post-colonial social and political problems being faced in Nigerian society. His last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, being published in 1987 portrays the extent of political corruption and moral decadence in the civilian government in Nigeria. The novel, *A Man of the People*, exposes the political corruption and moral decadence of the military regimes. So, both of his novels are to expose that neither form of governments is free from this political and social malady.

His novel namely *Arrow of God* captures the times and events between the coming of the colonisers and the eve of independence. It reveals the harmonising principle in Igbo culture. There are instances of twin festivals of Pumpkin Leaves and the New Yam. They represent the interaction between the individual and the community which balance the clan's spiritual and material predilections. The novel presents a balanced version of how Christianity spread in colonies and the strengths and weaknesses of both Igbo traditional beliefs and Christianity.

Achebe takes into account the way the British administration used Igbo practices to make inroads into the traditional order. He is of the view that the colonizer imposed indirect rule in Nigeria. The British ruled over a people. But administrators like Captain Winter who live up to the white man's burden theory and works for the development of the district. On the other hand the new officers do not make any effort to understand the people. There are also the warrant chiefs and the local supervisors who turn corrupt and exploit their own people.

NO LONGER AT EASE:

Let us talk about his novel, *No Longer at Ease*. It is set at the threshold of independence. It raises questions on Nigeria's readiness for independence. The widespread corruption is cruel and brutal face of Nigeria felt by Obi. He thinks that tribalism had begun to divide people along ethnic lines. This gloomy scenario is presented by Achebe. Nigeria got independence in 1960. But at social ground Independence did not bring about a complete political integration as Nigeria was ravaged by a civil war. Several military coups took place when there was no civilian rule. *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* present a fictionalised debate on nation states. He deconstructed some key issues and concepts of nation such as unjust power relations, problem of the

integration of different tribes and communities, role of women, freedom of expression and press. *A Man of the People* examines Achebe's perspective on the future and meaning of the Nigerian nation. To Achebe, it is both failure of the national leaders and cynicism of the people. The novel talks on the viability of army rule. The author is of the view that major task before the nation is to build nation after independence. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe mentions "post-colonial" for the first time when he writes that it was "an absurd raffle-draw that apportioned the destinies of post-colonial African societies."¹

ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH:

Anthills of the Savannah deals with the issue of gender with characters like Beatrice and Elewa. It has a universal appeal of human suffering. There is a dictator, Sam, having his own fears, doubts and feeling of helplessness. He is tortured to death in a coup. Sam's lack of contact with the people of Kangan reveals the attitude of the government that does not have any aspirations of the people to realize. Even in the "failure of rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed" there exists "a stubborn sense of community."²

From the understanding of Achebe's novels we know that his main theme is the complexity of Igbo society existing before the arrival of the Europeans. He lights on intensively on the justice codes and the trial process, the social and family rituals, the marriage customs, food production, preparation processes, the process of shared leadership for the community, religious beliefs and practices, and the opportunities for man to climb the clan's ladder of success through his own efforts also. The Igbo cultural complexity has been in clash of cultures at the individual and societal levels. It is the cultural misunderstanding that cuts both ways. Smith views Africans as "heathens," the Igbo initially criticize the Christians and the missionaries as "foolish."

THINGS FALL APART:

Things Fall Apart has social, cultural and political cause. It describes Okonkwo's principal accomplishments that establish his important position in Igbo society. In reading of the novel we come across insight into Okonkwo's character and motivation. When he drives himself toward tribal success and recognition, he buries the unending shame for the faults and failures of his late father, Unoka. Essentially, Okonkwo exhibits qualities of manhood in Igbo society. Achebe structures *Things Fall Apart* in the tradition of a Greek tragedy, with the story centered on Okonkwo, the tragic hero. *Things Fall Apart* presents "stories of the land - masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" and "women's stories" which are "stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird eneke-nti-oba who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat."³

IGBO CULTURE:

Chinua Achebe makes ethnographic description of the Igbo society. The people of the Igbo culture area speak the same Igbo language. They constitute a speech community sharing grammatical, lexical and phonological features. The Igbo had not any centralised institution to govern them nor any powerful chief. Power has been divided among numerous small groups for dispersal of authority. It is reflected in the social structure. The basic social unit is the patrilineage made of a single hamlet of several homesteads or compounds. Each compound has the house of a man, his wives and his sons. David Carroll says that, "This scattered social grouping is symptomatic of a persistent feature of Igbo life which runs directly counter to the European stereotype of the African tribe with its rigid hierarchy and all-powerful chief."⁴

In the novel named "Anthills of the Savannah" a character named Ikem, too, talks about stories about Igbo legends and traditions and about their "... forbears and the divinities with whom they had evolved" (96). Ikem begins with the story of Idemili: In the beginning Power rampaged in the whole world, naked. So the Almighty looked at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun. He pondered and decided to send his daughter, Idemili that she would bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty. He travelled through the country in disguise of a hunter. She on her return sent a stream from her lake through the parched settlements all the way to Orimili that became would search out and rename the Niger in the generation to come. (93-94)

During troubled period being faced by the nation the spirit is lighted up by the story of the leopard and the tortoise. Once, the leopard finally chanced upon the tortoise on a solitary road after trying for a long time to catch him. 'Aha', he said; 'at long last! Prepare to die. And the tortoise said: 'Can I ask one favour before you kill me?' The leopard seeing no harm in that agreed. 'Give me a few moments to prepare my mind,' the tortoise said. Again the leopard saw no harm in that and granted it. But instead of standing still as the leopard had expected the tortoise went into strange action on the road, scratching with hands and feet and throwing sand furiously in all directions. 'Why are you doing that tortoise asked the puzzled leopard? The tortoise replied: 'Because even after I am dead I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here.'⁵

ARROW OF GOD:

Let us consider the theme of Arrow of God published in 1964. It elaborates the destruction of the tribal world through a more sustained character. Achebe in alternating chapters depicts the two worlds which would never come closer. Native folk tales and legends woven into the novel do not have much relevance to the plot but create the atmosphere to strengthen traditional life. The role of Whitman in the collapse of the traditional society is conceived as much symbolically as historically. Achebe has combined the two strands of the individual and social drama into perfect unity in his novel.

When we study his novel, No Longer at Ease, we find that Achebe has chosen a different pattern for it. The novel opens with Obi's trial scene in a court of law. The novel deals with Obi's crime and the reason behind it. The structure of the novel is so made that it provokes the reader to analyse motives of Obi's actions and examine every event responsible which is responsible for Obi's fall. The novel takes into account the confusion between good tradition and ugly superstitious tradition. Achebe describes the life in Lagos. He paints a moving picture of traditional rural life which suffers from the excessive influx of modernity. Finally, we can say that the ending of the novel is not merely case study of an individual named Obi.

CONCLUSION:

His novel namely *A Man of the people* was published in 1967. It is Achebe's new commitment to his nation in particular and society in general. The novel deals with the legacy of colonialism. It highlights the breakdown in the continuity and unity at tribal life due to the intricate balance between the pursuit of material things and observance of religious customs and tradition. The novel is written from the fastidious point of view of Odili Samalu, who is a school teacher. He intends to justify his own actions and values. He maligns the motives of Nanga. The narrator tries to analyze the events in which he is involved, as he does Josiah's eventful career. Achebe paints on a large scale the infectious nature of corruption in Nigeria- in politics, in the army, in civilian life and in the whole environment say rural and urban ones. The author appears to be cynical about his new Nigerian society. This novel is his first attempt to completely dissociate himself from the solutions and figures he creates. The greatness of the author lies in the conclusive fact that he does not take favour nor does he exhibit his preferences in the novel. He is rendering and not telling. The story is telling itself, it is dramatically telling the theme and substance of the author's society and the nation, too.

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