CONCLUSION

Apart from an uncovering of the tribal life-world in Achebe’s novels from a postcolonial perspective, his works have also been discussed as the novelist’s response to a series of difficult and critical periods that the Igbo tribe had experienced in the history of Nigeria since 1890. The main issues and problems that he problematizes in the village novels include the colonial encounter with the west and the imposition of European culture and law in Igboland. In the city novels Achebe deals with the critical period preceding Nigeria’s independence, the end of the First Republic accompanied by the Civil War and the series of military coups and the struggle to understand and resist dictatorship. Throughout his works, his continuing concern has been to understand and depict ‘the trouble with Nigeria’. Born at a crucial time, Achebe’s works embody his experience and that of his forefathers, examining in a sustained way its significance in terms of individual lives and cultural history. In confronting colonialist writers like Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary, and the tradition that they belong to, Achebe was aware that he was confronting a culture, a system of values, a complex of power-relations which produced and was produced by colonialism. Drawing upon the strength of his Igbo political and cultural system and its oral traditions, Achebe reconstructed a picture and a narrative of the Africans caught in
particular moments of history. He also recreated the form and technique of the novel to carry the full weight of his African experience with particular respect to the relation between author, subject and reader.¹

The theme of conflict between the individual and the community had been explored at great depth and complexity, with the novelist’s focus set on the clash between social responsibility and individual feeling or self-expression that emanates vastly from the fateful colonial encounter with the individualistic West. Unlike the protagonist of Western novels, Achebe’s central characters gained their significance not as eccentrics or outsiders, but as types – they are products of the society which has formed them, and they seek to reform and conserve it. All wish, above all, to be insiders, to become significant and acknowledged members of a viable community. The tragedy of Okonkwo and Ezeulu arises both from their failure to safeguard the sanctity of their native culture and traditions in the face of the threat posed by foreign domination. Their failure arises partly from their contempt for the opinions of others. The depiction of their characters as members of a specific society, formed by the values of that society and by their particular family and social circumstances, having in them the potential to change in a given changing circumstances, is one important way in which Achebe challenges the colonialist depiction of Africans. Achebe firmly
shared the Igbo belief that no single man or character can or should assume full knowledge and judgment that overrides all other views. For Achebe, arrogance and pride is the worst of all sins which account for the failures of his main characters. These vices according to Achebe is inherent in the colonial system of domination and so a critique of these vices also reproduces his indictment of British Imperialism.

Achebe’s novels are remarkable for their variety of perspectives and involvements; the reader is given the chance to participate in the questions and issues central to each novel. *Things Fall Apart* begins with a kind of ‘collective voice’ reminiscent of oral story-telling, moves flexibly to suggest a point of view and consciousness of characters. The basis of the continuity of individual lives and its cultural history in the novels rests on Achebe’s sense of the world which he derives from his Igbo heritage. He conveys this explicitly in his writing and implicitly in his asides and essays, his humour, his style and the way he constructs an argument. Fundamental to the understanding of the Igbo world is the idea of duality in all things, be it religious, socio-political or otherwise. Nothing is absolute but is counterbalanced in the tribal world of Achebe’s novels. For instance, the idea of ‘*chi,*’ or ‘the presence of God,’² (which is in attendance of every man and is more powerful in the affairs of that person than any local deity or the conspiracy of any number of such
deities against that person) controls a man’s fate but if a man says ‘yes’ his chi agrees; and no man howsoever great cannot win judgment against the clan. Again, there is a mutual dependence between the people and the gods; the Igbos worship or appease their gods and the gods also need worshippers. One truth is always corrected by another, a phenomenon which Achebe has called a typically Igbo dualistic mode of thought: “Wherever Something Stands, Something Else will stand beside it.”³ The tribal world of Achebe’s novels is assembled on a dualism based on an acknowledgement of interdependence between man and gods, individual and community which encourage tolerance and openness in a world which can never become a closed system and this fosters a certain kind of scepticism of large claims and stoicism in the face of an uncertain reality.

The truthful depiction of tribal life in Umuofia of Things Fall Apart and Umuaro of Arrow of God is also the recognition and celebration of the existence of tribal values at large, practical and valid in its own right. A vibrant communal life retains and feeds its vitality by acknowledging and exploring alien values and customs beyond its boundaries and frankly discussing conflicts and tensions within. Some of these conflicts, especially those between personal and communal life, cause suffering and hardship but the flexibility of their custom seek accommodation and resolution within the clan. The clan can also deal
with the larger changes that threatens its very existence; Umuaro was formed from six villages in the face of such a threat and the god *Ulu* was created. But gods can be replaced when they have fulfilled their purpose or are unable to deal with the new crisis. Culture is safeguarded when the alien is acknowledged so that the movement into the next cycle of history will not be a too violent reversal. That was true until the arrival of the white man.

The two novels depict the periods of crisis when the clan was threatened from without by forces which it can neither assimilate or defeat, and from within by the powerful leaders who in the face of this danger wish to free themselves from the uncertainty of life and establish a more fixed, dogmatic set of values. The two leaders are very different in tackling the crisis affecting the clan: Okonkwo, the rash virile warrior who seeks to sweep aside Igbo shilly-shallying in order to act decisively in the defeat of the white man, and Ezeulu, the intellectual, who understands better than anyone the danger facing the clan but allows himself to be forced into an extreme, inflexible position. Each is defending what he sees as an essential value of the community but Okonkwo dies committing the final sacrilege of suicide while Ezeulu destroys the god of which he is the Chief Priest. They achieve their tragic status by rising above the sceptical relativism of their people, asserting in
their actions that certain things are absolute. The careers of these strong-minded characters coincide with and are accelerated by the arrival and settlement of the colonial officials and missionaries. These are extreme circumstances which call for extreme measures. At such moments the strength and single-mindedness which are needed imperil the very values of the clan they are defending. The Igbo world of the two novels is a classic example of open, flexible society faced with powers more monolithic and unscrupulous than themselves.

That Okonkwo and Ezeulu read the danger threatening their communities correctly is confirmed by Achebe’s next three novels with contemporary settings. Here the values and customs of Europe representing the next phase of Igbo history have established themselves and are inextricably mingled with the traditional way of life. But as the career of Obi in No Longer at Ease shows, no stable synthesis has been achieved. At the apex of his career, his assimilation of life and character of Western values are both dismembered as all the unresolved conflicts reassert themselves. The values of Europe and those of Umuofia have both been perverted in this unstable amalgam: individual conscience becomes supercilious detachment and clan solidarity turns into blatant nepotism in the modern city. Obi’s feeble attempt to bring Europe and Umuofia together shows how a vital dialectic has become an ineffective
compromise. At the end just before he is imprisoned he rediscovers a stoical Igbo pragmatism: ‘We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace. The most horrible sight in the world cannot put out the eye.' But what could be seen as a healthy realism within the community appears as bleak alienation outside it.

The next stage of this progressive disintegration of old values under the pressure of alien social and political structures is depicted in *A Man of the People*. It completes the depressing movement from Umuofia to Umuaro to the Umuofia Progressive Union, and finally to Nanga’s constituency waiting for its share of the national cake which makes a mockery of the ethics of the clan which had been already perverted by the politicians for their own purposes. This cynicism and disintegration is reflected in the structure of the novel. Obi’s attempted compromise in the earlier novel has been abandoned and his character is here divided between the rogue politician Nanga and the detached narrator Odili. The separation of the tribal individual from the community therefore turns both into caricatures of themselves, and is in violent opposition to the worldview of the community. The people, robbed of their communal ethics, are helplessly becoming the ‘blind buyers’ of the politician’s ‘wares’. Value comes to reside finally in the single futile, symbolic gesture as the inevitable military coup fixes society in its grasp.
Achebe’s most ambitious novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, the political crisis continues and deepens under the military rule; the random sequence of events is encompassed within the larger perspective of myth and legend. The storyteller, in the shape of the poet Ikem, is entrusted with the task of articulating an alternative to the world of corrupt power politics. He becomes Achebe’s model for a revolutionary leader for inspiring the people who reel under the mess created by the political Nigerian elites to determine their own future.

In the exploration of his major themes, Achebe deploys the resources of the English language to embody African experiences. The wise ancestral narrative voice of *Things Fall Apart* gradually loses its calm confidence on the face of the advancing strangers. This is a triumph of style in the same way as the contrast between the panache of Nanga’s pidgin and the narrator’s Standard English takes the reader effortlessly to the heart of *A Man of the People*. Then there are the other varieties of English in the novels which are used by the author to cover the whole kaleidoscope of African and European attitudes – the polysyllabic jargon of the politicians, the stiff-upper-lip rhetoric of the colonial administrators, the extempore prayers of the converts with their admixture of African proverbs and Christian doctrines, the demotic English of the servant and the court messengers.⁶
Above all else it is Achebe’s representation of the uncontaminated Igbo ways and its unique tradition which stays in the memory of his readers. With complete conviction he persuades the reader that this is how his people spoke, thought and viewed their world. To achieve this he has made two major innovations in the form of the novel in English. First, he has created a new form of English with an African coloration. He has done this so successfully that, by a strange reversal, his Igbo characters establish their speech as the norm against which the language of the white men seems bizarre and unnatural. His second innovation is to devise ways of presenting in fiction the wide range of Igbo rituals which embody the values of traditional life. These ranges from the great public festivals like that of the Pumpkin Leaves through to the minor festivals in honour of their ancestors or village gods, to the rituals carried out to mark special occasions in the life of individuals, like the rites of second burial and the passage of the night spirit associated with it. Finally, at the other extreme from the public festivals are the repeated daily rituals of greeting and farewell, the drawing of chalk lines and the sharing of kola nut. Nothing similar had been done before in the novel in English. The main difficulty is that for most readers the life of an Igbo tribe is remote and alien, and the task of describing it has usually been left to the anthropologist. With great skill Achebe in his traditional setting combines the role of novelist and anthropologist, synthesizing them in a new kind of fiction. This is
where his essential genius lies. A fine example of this is the opening scene of *Arrow of God* which presents in intimate detail what an anthropologist might call the monthly yam ritual of the chief priest of northern Igbo village group. But the reader’s attention is on the individual Ezeulu, an old man in a troubled state of mind, and in trying to understand him one also absorbs the way of life and its details which he takes for granted.

These innovations should not be viewed merely as a matter of language and technique. Just as his novels question and dismantle the European view of African history and culture, so they also challenge and provide the alternative to many of the assumptions upon which European fiction is based. It is true, of course, that Achebe employs many of the conventional resources of the English novel, but he is constantly transforming these in accordance with his own Igbo world view. This is something which the non-Igbo reader has difficulty in grasping since, as Achebe acknowledges in an essay that this world-view can only be approached indirectly:

Since Igbo people did not construct a rigid and closely argued system of thought to explain the universe and the place of man in it, preferring the metaphor of myth and poetry, anyone seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own way. Some of these ways are folk-tales, proverbs, proper names, rituals and festivals.7
For an outsider such a search is inevitably circular. He looks for the meaning of the myth and poetry in Igbo society, and the values of Igbo society in the myth and poetry. But the novelist contextualizes these expressions of the Igbo world in his fiction, providing, as it emerges as a view of life based on duality, relativity and a binary in a variety of forms.

In his novels, Achebe calls upon the reader’s continuous participation and judgment. It is in his refusal to allow readers to suspend judgment and disbelief that Achebe rejects most firmly Cary’s concept of the relationship between reader and writer. The variety of language and points of view, the frequent dislocation of the story line, the movement from past to present and present to past, the questions or deliberately unsatisfying answers which end significant episodes, all call upon readers to involve themselves not merely in understanding and sympathizing with the characters concerned, but in thoughtful awareness of the complex problems they face and the evaluation of the responses made to those problems. Achebe argues in ‘Truth in Fiction’ that Fiction must ‘insist upon its fictionality’, constantly reminding readers that it is a pretence, though a serious one, for only then are they free to entertain a variety of possibilities, learning to tolerate the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of existence, while rejecting the ‘one-eyed’, literal-minded vision which produces prejudice and injustice.8
In particular, Achebe has striven to make the reader conscious of language, speech and written discourse. He is convinced of the inexorable connection between corruption in language and corruption in politics. In an interview during 1983 elections in Nigeria, he is quoted as saying, ‘Language is crucial to our integrity, but here it has been contaminated. If you want to say something in English, you have to learn it properly.’ In an earlier speech, ‘Language and the Destiny of Man’, Achebe had elaborated on this message, referring to T. S. Eliot’s as well as Orwell’s ‘concern and solicitude for the integrity of words’. Achebe said in an interview in 1981:

> The language of man is in fact the best guide you have to his character. If you don’t listen carefully enough, then all kinds of charlatans and demagogues will steal the show, which is what is happening not only in Nigeria, but in many other parts of the world.

In that sense, every nation or tribe is able to achieve authenticity, obtain a historical place, and engage as a human subject and agent. Cultural essence, world-view and assumptions combine to form how each person assesses and evaluates his reality. Tribal people can sustain their continuity by ‘being’, ‘doing’, and ‘becoming’, through culture, language and values. The legacy and connections have endured across time, space, and place through the culture, language and values. Symbols, words, proverbs, poem, songs and stories that are told, heard, written and read conceptualize language.
Achebe believes in the decolonization of the African mind as an important tool for self-recovery from the colonial negation of African identity. This involves the ability on the part of the native elites to intellectually, politically and culturally ‘leave... Europe.’ The only way the colonized elites can decolonize their minds is by plunging themselves into the depths of those elements of thought, culture, and traditions – pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial – which can possibly aid them to develop the real tribal identity. He talks of writing as an activity through which the African can define his identity and recover his historical roots, and of the novel as a vehicle of self-recovery.

In his portraiture of tribal life-world, Achebe’s representation of the Igbo life world is meant to convey that the cultural roots of his people can be recovered through a self critical examination of one’s past. His novels become a re-narrativisation of a past which was lost, suppressed and rendered invisible by colonial machineries. Achebe makes two major innovations: First, he has created a new form of English with an African coloration. He has done this so successfully that, by a strange reversal, his Igbo characters establish their speech as the norm against which the language of the colonialists, the white men, seem bizarre and unnatural. The spare, supple English which represents Igbo has a metaphoric immediacy, and yet it is clear that the idioms, the proverbs and the
images are not those of the colloquial English. Achebe’s construction of the English language contests the white man’s English, modifying and at the same time enriching it in accordance with the needs of his characters. Achebe also creates new imageries like the imagery of the ‘path,’\textsuperscript{14} which is significant in order to understand the dreams of Chinua Achebe for his people. According to him, the ancestral path that signifies the basic principles governing the daily lives of the villagers need to be given space to ensure the survival of the village and well being of the tribe.

One is tempted to make a comparative reading between the Igbo tribal community which has been studied at length and some tribal communities like Khasis, Mizos and Nagas in North-east India which share similar experiences of displacement in terms of their religion, cultural past of orality and communitarian identities. The Mizos, Khasis and Nagas of the North eastern region of India also experienced a loss of their original script, adopted Roman script, faced conversion into Christianity and still suffer from an ambivalence resulting from a conflict between indigenous cultural values and values brought in by the new faith.\textsuperscript{15} This is the predicament of all tribal communities of the world particularly those colonized in their own land. A comparative reading between tribal communities of North East India and that of Africa like the Igbo community is prompted by the nineteenth century explorer’s
imagination of a bewildering colonized geography which extended from Africa to the north-eastern frontiers of India and beyond.\textsuperscript{16} The construction of the ‘others’ who inhabited such geographies was primarily a colonial and racist construction which gave birth to disciplines like Anthropology and devised mechanism for assessing civilizations. Colonial imagination stretched beyond geographical maps to territorialize people with similar histories and cultural practices. A reading of Achebe’s novels from postcolonial perspective, having its bearing on the Igbo tribal society thus, also inspires a study of other tribal societies in the world which suffer from a similar predicament.

Like the Igbos, the tribes of Northeast India undeniably benefits and at the same time suffers from contact with the British culture. For instance, the missionaries followed the heels of their colonial government providing the needful political stability and indirectly abetting its civilizing missions by running schools thereby supplying clerks to buttress its administration. The traditional centres of power (chiefs or headmen) were dethroned by the surging power of the new elites. As a matter of principle, the Christian faith leaves little or no room for the traditional culture to exist side by side with the new faith as the latter was considered unclean or unreal. This notion has been retained till today by many Christians of the region. Besides, the early converts, in their
inability to distinguish between the white man who ruled and the white man who preached, looked upon British rule as solely beneficial. Like the experience of Umuofia elders, the designs of the white man was incomprehensible to the colonized tribes. Due to their military might, they were looked upon with superlative veneration, and their thought and knowledge systems were considered to be filled with wisdom. The consequences of such gullible attitude of the elder natives piled up a plethora of social conditions which the literary elites had to grapple with.

Achebe uses the term decolonization as the sure means to tribal self recovery. In some cases he also uses its equivalent term ‘education,’ of the kind that he had in mind. Decolonization is the logical consequence of colonization. It means to intellectually, politically and culturally ‘leave’ Europe. Colonialism as a doctrine inherently gives colonized elites an inferiority complex. In order to initiate the process of decolonization, the anti-colonial intellectuals must radically rapture their relationship with their (neo)colonial (mis)education and retract their true self by the twin faculties of memory and forgetting. This does not necessarily mean that the Igbos should go back to their ancestral religion, but rather be at home in their own culture and tradition while at the same time professing their Christian faith. In other words, the colonized intellectuals must ‘decolonize’ their minds as Ngugi (1986) puts it, and become
revolutionary intellectual-activists. The only way the colonized elites can decolonize their minds is by plunging themselves into the depths of those elements of their indigenous thought, culture, and traditions – pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial – which could potentially aid them in their efforts to develop revolutionary theory and praxis (practice or translating an idea into action). They must, however, do this without losing sight of those positive contributions from the oppressor’s culture and other cultures.

In juxtaposing the Igbo experience with that of the Mizos of North east India, one finds that colonization and Christianity are the major socio-political, religious and historical realities, although experienced differently and viewed from slightly different perspectives. One could also make a comparative reading of Achebe’s novels and R. Vanlawma’s autobiographical records of the political history of Mizoram in Ka Ram leh Kei (My Country and I), to see how a cultural history of a people can be recreated through a reclaiming of the past. As insiders to the lived experiences of their respective tribes, both the authors expressed their concerns mainly with their own tribe or nation. On his part, Vanlawma sought to bring all the Mizos under the same political and geographical unit which had been separated by national and international boundaries both during and after the British rule:
After the British suppression and their rule over us, they divided our land substantially; some areas were administered from India while other parts were ruled from Burma for their administrative convenience, and this is very unfortunate and tragic for us. Being the strongest power in the world, our defeat in their hands is not a thing of shame. But the extent of damage done to the Mizo country is unthinkable. Even those administered from India, some of us are in Manipur, some in Tripura and still others in Chittagong. No doubt, such arrangement is beneficial and convenient for them. When they were about to leave India and Burma, they should have reviewed our condition which was not such a difficult thing for them to do. Their very act of leaving us at the lurch and turning us over to a bigger nation to live in perpetual domination has been very difficult to understand. It is uncertain when the divided tribes will unite again, as there is nothing much we can do.18

The Mizo narrative in Vanlawma’s book Ka Ram leh Kei (My Country and I) and Achebe’s novels share many things in common, especially because they both reveal the insider’s concerned projection of the painful political and cultural history of their respective countries. While the former is the historical records of a tribal nation in their struggle against the onslaught of western imperialism, Achebe’s work contains the cultural history of the Igbos, fictionalized but based on historical facts. Unlike Achebe, Vanlawma prefers to use Lushai as his message is primarily intended for the people group who speaks or knows the language. For this reason translations of some important portions of his text into English are made in order to reproduce his words. And like Achebe, he thinks he has a message for his people:

The Mizos are not good in keeping historical records; there are very few who remember what had happened to them in the past...it is intended that the very promising young generation will study (the
In the case of the Mizos, the first direct contact with the white man came in 1871 in response to the killing of James Winchester and the kidnapping of his eight-years-old daughter, Mary Winchester. The establishment of tea gardens in Alexandrapore and the surrounding areas was perceived by the tribal chiefs as an encroachment of the Mizo kingdom. In the words of Vanlawma:

During the early part of 1871 Dokhuma, the chief of Chawngthleng, the grandson of Lalpuithanga and son of Sangvunga decided to raid the tea gardens along the Tlawng River. With the help of Bengkhuasia’s village, the combined forces raided Alexandrapore tea garden, killing many people and taking some of them as slaves. They killed James Winchester who was working as a medical doctor in that garden, and kidnapped his eight years old daughter, Mary Winchester. All these took place after Suakpuila’a successful raid in the Chittagong Hill Tract, Tripura and Sylhet.²⁰

The Alexandrapore Tea Garden episode marks the first instance in which the white man recognized the Mizos as a threat to their interest. Prior to the raid, they maintained silent indifference to the internal matters of the tribe. From then on expeditions were sent to suppress the wild tribes of the Lushai Hills. Since, the Lushai Hills for long had been a buffer state between the British interests in India and Burma, the annexation of the Hills provided them the passage way for their war with the Burmese kingdom.
The use of brute force was a common phenomenon in British imperial policy to suppress native tribes. The expedition against the Mizo chiefs is found to be very much similar to what has been recorded about Abam village in Achebe’s traditional novels. The Igbo resistance to British colonialism is downplayed in Achebe’s fiction in that no substantial damage was done to the invading nations. Unlike Achebe, Vanlawma records meticulously how the Mizo chiefs and warriors resisted the forces of British colonialism, killing many of their officers and soldiers. On their part, the colonial soldiers burned down tribal villages to forcibly subdue the native people.21

During the British expeditions in the Mizo kingdom, most of the colonial military and police personnel posted in and around the Mizo occupied areas were involved and this combined military might forced the natives to accede to the demands of the invaders. But after a temporary truce, the pride of the native tribe was provoked again by unexpected turn of events. When the colonial army searched the village of Zakapa, one of the Police Officers, named Murray, demanded for a Mizo girl that was flatly refused by the people. Murray then warned Zakapa saying: “If you cannot find a lady, give me your wife.”22 This was taken as the highest form of insult to the Mizo sentiment. So the infuriated Mizos suddenly attacked the British forces again which
eventually ended in their complete subjugation of the Mizos. As a measure to prevent such sudden uprising, all the guns in the Mizo kingdom were seized. From Tiaural alone, about 8000 guns were seized highlighting the vast number of guns owned by the Mizos then. The plentiful availability of guns among the Mizos was partly credited to the Mizo chiefs who encouraged procurement of guns by gifting the choicest jhum lands for cultivation. Thus the siege of guns concluded the independence of the Mizo nation. And this respect and fear of the imperial power has been attributed by some to be one of the main reasons for the fast spread of Christianity and modernity in Mizoram. Had they not been subjugated by the mighty empire, the proud Mizos would scoff at the adherents of the Christian faith.23

The different names given to the Mizos by outsiders became both a source of history and a cause for disunity. Vanlawma traces the origin of his people from a fictitious place called Chhinlung (which literally means ‘Stone Cover’ as in the case of a big stone used as cover for tomb or cave) believed to be a place somewhere in China. As they moved from China to their present settlement via Burma, they were given various names:

While in Burma all the Mizos were called ‘chin’. After British occupation of the Mizo kingdom, those living in the east of Tiaural particularly bear the name ‘chin’. It is said that the word ‘chin’ means ‘basket carrier’...
When we set foot on Indian soil for the first time, the Bengalis who never saw us before asked among themselves who we are. From then on we were called ‘kuki’ which means ‘What kind of people?’ For this reason, all the Mizos living within the dominion of India bear the name for a long time. But for those Mizos living under the suzerainty of the Sailo chiefs later identified themselves with the ruling class and called themselves Lushais. The white man even called us Lushai-Kuki which itself lost popularity with the passage of time... But the Mizos of Manipur still bear the name for a long time. They themselves did not like the given name and so only the Thados now bear the name which they are most unlikely to use it for long.24

After the defeat of the Burmese in the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1887, both India and Burma were governed by the Governor-General of India. As such, the Mizo kingdom, though not formally acceded to the Empire, which was earlier governed as an Excluded Area like Burma, came under the direct supervision of the governor of Assam.

After having placed their trust in the white man and their administrative system, the Mizos felt their hope for unification and self-rule belied with the divide-and-rule policy of the colonial government by which the whole Mizo kingdom was split and were made subservient minorities in their own land in India, Burma and Bangladesh. Vanlawma squarely placed the blame on the white man for this division and the subsequent disunity among the people constituting the Mizo nation. His concern with the ever-widening gap among the Mizo clans, both geographically and psychologically were reflected in his writing. Vanlawma admitted the role of both the central as well as the Mizoram state government for the divisive trend among the Mizo society:
Even after being included in the Indian Union, the Lushai Hills itself is treading the path of endless divisions. They created the Pawi and Lakher Regional Councils, include minor dialects in the AIR programmes thereby popularizing our differences. If we are not careful, such unhealthy politics will further divide our society.25

The word ‘Mizo’ has been used by Vanlawma as an inclusive term for all the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of people. So, it is his utmost desire to maintain the unity of the tribe, and all his life he had been labouring for the re-unification of all his people. For this reason, he explained in the book why the term Mizo was coined to replace Lushai by which those living within and without the present Mizoram were known among themselves.

Like the Igbos, the Mizos were fond of giving local names to the white people with whom they come into contact. The Mizos use the term ‘sap’ as a honorific title for all the white people and ‘vai’ for all outsiders including Indians and Englishmen. Among the Political Officers posted in Mizoram, Captain Browne (1890) was given the name ‘Hmaireka’ which literally means ‘a face that terrifies.’ He was killed by the combined forces of the Mizo chiefs at Chansil in 1890. A. W. Davies (1892-1893) was known to the local populace as ‘Hmuihmulhanga’ (the man with black moustache) during whose term of office the greatest resistance to colonial advance was met with gun battles which resulted in the complete suppression of the Mizo chiefdom. In keeping with his age, Col. C. H.
Loch (1893-1906) was called ‘Sap Putara’ meaning ‘the Old white man’. These given-names reflect the perception of the white man by the local people. And some endearing names were given to the missionaries and a few good political officials.

Like Achebe, Vanlawma aims at objectivity in presenting his facts while at the same time admitting rooms for subjective views and opinions overriding facts. In his preface to the first edition of his book, he writes:

“This book is intended to reflect the common view of the general public. So saying this, my own view cannot be dismissed in some instances. For this reason some commonplace events may also be looked upon as a serious matter.”

Again, the benefits of the British rule in Mizoram have been recalled by Vanlawma, making mention a few of their officers who did much good to the people. One such officer was A. R. H. Macdonald (1943-1947) of whom he records:

We are very fortunate to have this gentleman as a Political Officer... who is a brave white man... He disallowed army officers to ask for local porters, especially during the planting seasons of crops... Knowing the untold miseries we would undergo without the timely intervention of Macdonald, it most appeared that he is God-sent.

Macdonald demonstrates a mixture of kindness and fear to the local people. Because of his great concern for the common people, he was unsparing with the excesses of the Mizo chiefs; he even seized the chieftaincy of many which was unthinkable before. On his sensitivity to
the needs of the people, Vanlawma continues: “While talking to people, he instantly sees through their intentions. In matters of conflict, he is a past-master in resolving them immediately. To his every decision there was nothing objectionable.”

For the goodness a few white men like Macdonald, Vanlawma regrets the politics of hatred played by a section of the community who thought that fighting them was the answer to their problems. He fully believed that through the creation of enmity, the Mizos forfeited their chance to be helped unreservedly by the white people.

Soon after the British left Independent India, no changes were made regarding the administrative set up, except that the positions of power were manned by Indians. S. N. Barkataki, a learned Assamese, was made to succeed the white people as the Political Officer from 1952 to 1953. Not many good things are recorded about him; he was known to the Mizo people for his fondness for wine and women. Vanlawma records: “As an excessive drinker, he popularized drinking culture among the youths. He even initiated local ladies into the habit of drinking.”

In this connection, mention may be made of the limited contributions of tribal Deputy Commissioners who largely worked under the interest of India. For this reason, the hopes and aspirations of the local people find no
fulfilment in their hands. Instead of helping their fellow tribal, they acted as hammers of the Assam government to the people.\textsuperscript{30}

The continued suppression of the interest of the Mizos finds its full expression during and after the famine of 1959. Mautam or the flowering of bamboo caused food scarcity throughout the length and breadth of the Mizo kingdom. The great need to help the famine-stricken masses gave birth to the formation of Mizo Famine National Front, an organization spearheading the relief operations during the famine. Though the organization did not achieve much in terms of providing food, their very presence gives the needful consolation and optimism to the common people. Its members helped approach the government authorities in obtaining relief materials. After the famine was over, the organization was converted into a political platform and later turned into an insurgent group fighting for the independence of the Mizo kingdom. It was during the term of R. Natarajan as ‘Bawrhsap’ or Deputy Commissioner (1966-1968) that the amalgamation of villages was done in reaction to the anti-national activities of the MNF. Many villages were combined together to ensure ‘national’ security and for administrative conveniences. To prevent the MNF volunteers from receiving help from the people, all the abandoned villages were burnt down by the security forces. This seemed to have considerably weakened the Mizo assertion for Independence.
Vanlawma’s dream for Mizo unity stretches beyond the boundaries of present Mizoram. It includes all the Mizo-occupied areas in Manipur and Tripura in India, and Burma, Bangladesh and Chittagong Hills. On the question of the Lushai hills becoming a council within Assam, he writes: “I had desired a common administration for all the Mizos, because of which I never wanted to be clubbed together with Assam Hindus under one administration.”31 The Mizos were aware of their difference from the people of India, and therefore dreamt of an independent country under the protectorate of the United Nations. They unequivocally stated their positions with strong words: “We are not Indians, and we don’t want to live under India.”32 But the early surrender of the MNF leaders and the conferment of statehood to Mizoram left the dreams for Mizo unification short-lived and their fight for independence unfulfilled.

Unlike the Igbos in Achebe’s novels, the Mizos have deep-seated problems with regards to the formation of a common nomenclature which in many ways thwarted the hope for Mizo unification. Though the entire kuki-chin-Mizo group may not deny the fact of their belonging to the same family, the process of identity formation on the basis of clan or dialect leaves much room for internal differentiation within the tribe. To the people in Manipur, the term ‘Mizo’ is equivalent to ‘Lushai’. One of the main reasons behind their refusal to accept the name comes from a
sense of betrayal felt by those living in Manipur. Hoping for a unified Mizoram under the MNF leadership, the Mizos in Manipur fought alongside their brethren. But when the MNF leaders agreed to accept statehood from the Indian Union, it dashed the hopes of the Mizos of Manipur against the wall. For this reason, the people refused to either use the name or identify with the Mizos. Vanlawma explains this identity differentiation within the Mizos by citing his experience as a student in Shillong. When they formed the Young Lushai Association (YLA) in Shillong, a young paite friend from Manipur refused to attend their meetings citing his not being a Lushai as the reason. This extremely infuriated the writer until he gave a clear thought about it. He then explains understandingly:

The British people gave the name Lushai Hills. I know full well that it was named after the Lushai clan but we got used to being called Lushais... but for those who fought tribal wars against the Lushai chiefs, to bear the name of their old enemy can be a very difficult thing to accept. .. After this incident, I find it imperative to change the name of the association with Young Mizo Association because Mizo was the name by which we had been identifying ourselves for generations.

The Young Mizo Association (YMA), known previously as Young Lushai Association, was established in 1935 in the fashion of YMCA, having as its office bearers a white missionary as the president and the other members selected from among church elders. Its activities include employment-related training, conducting sports and popularizing hygiene.
Since the younger generations later found the leadership of the missionaries and church elders inconvenient to run the social organization, they were replaced with younger Mizos. Since its inception, the YMA caters mainly to the social and economic needs of the people under the ever watchful eye of the church. The political needs of the people were not addressed by the organization. So, this led to the formation of the Mizo Common People’s Union with the motto: “To help the Mizos live as they used to live and help them develop as they ought to.” With the establishment of the Mizo Union, campaigns were organized successfully to eclipse the privileges of the chiefs who became a hindrance rather than a help to the ‘westernized’ people. In the process, tribal chieftainship which was one of the most important symbols of Mizo culture was done away with by a stroke of rash actions. In his appendix, Vanlawma expressed the great loss the Mizo people incur after the abolition of tribal chieftainship among his people:

I would like to write more on the Mizo Tribal Customs. The last British Political Officer of Mizoram, Pu A. R. H. Macdonald expressed the adequacy of our customs for our people. Since I have entered politics, he advised me saying: ‘In the manner you made use of your customs, it is good for your people and there is no need for any change. But some of you may find fault with it or do not like some parts and try to make changes in that area. The problem is that such changes in one aspect can disturb the smooth working of the other parts. You had been making good use of it for generations; your customary practices were suited to your people’s needs... For this reason, even if you wanted to make simple changes, be very careful.’ This advice made me think about the abolition of our chiefs, which was not even the core of our
custom and the great loss that follows. They were the custodian of our
tlawmngaihna ... not even the schools can take their unique place... 36

The negative changes brought to the society by the abolition of
chieftainship include the utter lack of respect among the youths for their
elders, increasing drunkenness, lawlessness in the society and so on. The
author expressed his concerns at the rapid rise of women drinkers and
rampant drug addiction among the youths which he blame upon the ‘new-
found freedom’ in the absence of legitimate authority in the society. For
this reason, he considered the promotion of culture and customs as one of
the highest duties of a Mizo. 37 The importance of the office of the village
chief is also expressed by O. Rosanga:

In the pre British period Mizo chief was the dynamic symbol of
political institution of tribe. The chief held the highest authority
whether social, economic, political and cultural activities. The chief
was regarded as the protector of the village and its inhabitants.
However, the institutions and practices inherited from the past and
some of the customary practices were absorbed into the new way of
life by the new ruler. 38

To Vanlawma, the British rule brought comparative peace to the
people of Mizoram and as such there was development in a modernist
sense. The inter-tribal wars which had taken tolls in terms of loss to
human lives and properties have been replaced by people’s involvement
in gainful activities putting aside their war implements. Since the English
people belonged to a very highly ‘civilized’ culture, they are sensitive to
the needs of the tribal people; they make appropriate laws to prevent their
assimilation by bigger nations. The white missionaries and their activities were looked upon as altogether beneficial, in spite of their initial hesitation to embrace the religion. Ever since the first western missionaries set foot in Mizoram on 31st August 1894, the material and spiritual benefits abounds for which the common Mizos expressed their thankfulness. Among the material benefits, mention may be made of educational and medical advancement. Faith in Christ transformed the tribal beliefs and practices, with the Christian belief system acting as the bedrock upon which the modern Mizos build their lives and society. The success of the mission school can be seen in the percentage of literacy in the Mizoland when compared with other areas of India. Within a short span of twenty years of missionary activities in the area, in 1921 the Mizos are known to have achieved the highest literacy rate in India. Vanlawma added: “This is the fruit of the labour of the white missionaries. We are indeed thankful to the missionaries for preaching about Christ to us. Had they not come and had we not been Christianized, we may not find any interest in education and hence be very low in our status. For this reason, Christianity has advanced us into a little paradise even here on earth. We are very grateful indeed.”

The contemporary cultural and political experiences of the Igbos and the Mizos share lot of similarities as well as differences, but the
differences are only in terms of degree or intensity. One could draw on Achebe’s vision for understanding a possible reconciliation between a past and a present. Achebe shows the path of reconciliation through the various images, stories and concepts that he uses in the novels. And one such image is that of ‘the path’ running through a mission school compound.

So, the imagery of the path is significant in order to underline the unstated wishes of Chinua Achebe in his novels. The benefits of western culture, instead of putting a stop to all the traditional cultural practices, should give the chance to mingle with it and get itself transformed in the process of cultural interaction whereby the positive effects of both cultures be retained. The older generation, especially the elders, were offended by the closure of the old path that runs through the mission school compound. In “Dead Men’s Path,” the elderly priest confronted the young jealous headmaster of the mission school who closed the village path that passes through the school compound: the path was there since time immemorial, and the ‘whole life of the village depends on it’. The path is important for all the village clansmen including the living, the dead and the unborn. The misguided zeal of the headmaster was made responsible for the death of a young woman and the subsequent destruction of the school. The novelist’s projection of the fence as
needless and unnecessary provides an alternative course of action to the headmaster: the healthy accommodation of the traditional ways.

The importance of the path in Achebe’s thinking can be explained further by referring to his last novel. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the naming of the baby girl born to Ikem and Elewa significantly contributes towards the theme of cultural conflict and change. The boy-name AMAECHINA that is given to the girl means ‘May-the-path-never-close.’ As against the traditional patriarchal practice, it was Beatrice who gave the name and who became Achebe’s answer to the fragmented Igbo society in the modern society: she accommodated and organized the broken society left behind by the destructions of the male chauvinistic government. The first sign of the crack in the close Igbo social relationship happened under the divisive impact of western culture. To the westerners, fences are necessary for the protection of their interest in Igboland. But the traditional society wants to preserve the free movement of people and ideas within the village without any hindrance. For this reason, the village elders debate among themselves and with the western missionaries about their respective religious beliefs. On the question of the subversive activities of the Christian converts, the elders forbade direct attack on them for the simple reason that they are still their brothers. The novelist believes the inclusive nature of the Igbo culture is
worthy of preservation. As in the past, the communitarian nature of Igbo villages necessitate the preservation of the whole even at the cost of a few individual wishes and desires.

Achebe consistently highlights the importance of group solidarity within the Igbo society. The formation of the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos and other cities hints at the importance of cultural preservation. The erring members of the society like Obi reap the benefit of the opening path afforded by the union. The financial and emotional supports provided unequivocally by the society entitled them to embark upon corrective measure upon the error-prone member. Western-educated elite often insist upon their individual privacy in the line of western cultural practice which runs completely contrary to tribal life-ways. Characters like Oduche, Nwoye and other new converts initiated the centrifugal movement from their parents, the society and their true selves, which are rather the most unnecessary steps towards their spiritual growth. The western-educated elites exacerbated the division between the ruling class and the masses by continuing the system employed by the imperial government for satisfying their own greed. Okonkwo’s failure to meaningfully bridge with his wives and children were due to his lopsided insistence on the manly principles. Ezeulu’s rejection of tribal protocol in siding with the enemy in the land dispute with Okperi drew suspicion and
resulted in his eventual expulsion from authority. Sam’s detachment from the masses as a result of his shrunken image in public sphere costs him his leadership. The novels, therefore, indirectly provided the alternatives for the man-made ills that infected the Igbo society and the Nigerian nation.

The unceasing interaction of the traditional and the Christian worldviews calls for moderation on both sides. The abrupt closure of the ancestral ways and practices at the height of religious fervour and in the name of a new-found religion ought to be carefully checked. The ancestral path that signifies the basic principles governing the daily lives of the villagers needs to be given space to ensure the survival of the village and of the tribe.
Endnotes:


5. Ibid., pp. 188-89.

6. Ibid., p. 190-91.


10. *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, p. 34.


14. The imagery of ‘the path’ is taken from *Arrow of God* and a short story bearing the same name from *Girls at War and Other Stories*, in which the ancestral path that runs through the mission school compound was closed by the overzealous headmaster. The path signifies uninterrupted communication.


16. Ibid.

17. Frank Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 311.

19 Ibid. pp. v-vi.

20 Ibid., pp. 52-53.

21 Ibid., p 63.

22 Ibid., p. 54.

23 Ibid., p. 67.

24 Ibid., pp. 67-68.

25 Ibid., p. 69.

26 Ibid., p. vi.

27 Ibid., p. 78.

28 Ibid., p. 79.

29 Ibid., p. 80.

30 Ibid., p. 81.

31 Ibid., p. 80.

32 Ibid., p. 262.

33 Ibid., p. 284.

34 Ibid., p. 102.


36 Ibid., p. 417-418. The term *tlawmngaithna* means ‘other-centred fulfilment’.

37 Ibid.

