CHAPTER – I
INTRODUCTION
In this introductory chapter an attempt is made to highlight that racist-colonialist representation of Africa, and the African writing in English evolved primarily as a result of the Euro-African colonial encounter and its aftermath, and each of Achebe’s novels marks a significant moment in the growth of this relatively young body of literature. The chapter will also locate Achebe’s literary production within the framework of a larger socio-historical process of colonial domination, and subsequent movement for decolonization. The fictional work of Chinua Achebe penetrates deeply into the traumatic effect of colonialism on Africa and its people, and also produces a strong ‘counter-hegemonic discourse’ of resistance.
African literature which is conceived as a kind of 'social protest' and a medium of 'political reassertion' emerged in a big way in the 1950s. It is a well known fact that African literature is concerned with teaching the people and almost all the fictional works are tagged with a moral lesson on it. It is pertinent to note that African literature is, indeed, a never ending effort on the part of the writers to recover Africa's true character and place in human history. It aims at restoring the African past from years of European denigration, subjugation and domination. The crippling impact of European colonial domination and imperialist exploitation had damaged and ruptured the African socio-political and cultural landscape to a considerable extent and, as a matter of fact, it became a primary concern for the African writers to grapple with these fundamental African realities. To salvage the present - a ravaged Africa - from the bitter and harsh realities of the colonial past so as to envisage a vision for a new and meaningful African future remained imperative for these writers. The reassertion of “Unique African sensibility” becomes a “psychologically affirmative” function of the African writers. The writers aim at “regaining the African’s disinherited self”.¹ The social and political commitment exhibited by this literature makes it distinct and gives it a unique flavour in comparison with literatures written elsewhere. The conviction seen in the writers in their attempt to combat the crippling and dehumanizing effects of colonialism remains
unparalleled. Oblique attempts to deal with the colonial aftermath – the neo-colonial present with its objective to perpetuate the oppressive exploitation of the masses, and injustices done to the people remain a hallmark of African Literature.

Chinua Achebe, one of the most eminent, and distinguished literary figures captures the nuances and complexities of African life in various stages with his creative imagination. Achebe, notwithstanding his status as literary artist, has emerged as a powerful social and political thinker with profound insights and understanding of life in the paradoxical post-colonial situation. Born of Christian parents in Ogidi, eastern Nigeria on 16th November, 1930, Achebe was originally christened Albert Chinualumogu. As a boy in Ogidi, and later at Oweri, Achebe went to church schools where his first lessons were given in his native Igbo language with text provided by the Church Missionary society. He began to learn English at the age of eight. His formal education in British oriented schools never really took away his passionate interest for Igbo stories narrated by his mother, elder sister and elderly men of the village. The Igbo folk stories with vivid impressions of forests, rivers, sky, birds and animals left a deep imprint on his mind during his formative years and they continued to influence the rest of his life and literary career. In 1948, Achebe went to study medicine at University College, Ibadan, then affiliated to the University of London, on a
scholarship. Medicine could not generate enough interest in him for long and consequently he left it after one year to pursue a course in English Literature, Religious Studies and History with financial support from his elder brother John. As a student at Ibadan, he read some appalling novels like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* which enraged him and ignited in him his passion for novel writing. He decided to try his hand on novel writing as a fitting reply to the prejudices of the outsiders, Europeans in particular, who have misrepresented and denigrated the Negro as a ‘mindless people’. In 1954, Achebe was appointed as Talks Producer with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation giving him ample opportunity to scrutinize contemporary African affairs at close quarters.

Achebe views that the African writer cannot remain detached, indifferent and oblivious to the disturbing realities prevalent in his world. He feels that the writers should necessarily position himself as a cultural nationalist bent on asserting identity so as to create a concrete and complete identity separate from the image of the “Other” constructed as the European colonizer’s opposite. The debris of the shattered African identity, thwarted and distorted by the oppressive and draconian colonial apparatus needs to be restored in order to evolve a meaningful understanding of African cultural history. Achebe’s works are
invariably centred round the thwarted African history and culture, the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white man and his culture into the hitherto self-contained African cosmos. His novels are projected in such a way as to help his society regain belief in itself and obliterate the complexes of the years of denigration and self abasement. Achebe, through his work, aims at the “Rediscovery of Africa’s Past” and challenging and rejecting the “colonial hegemonic control” which is characterized by the “negation of identity through the denial of a collective history.”²

Colonialism in Africa had been an epoch making phenomenon. As Edward Said has stated, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized “is a relationship of power, of domination [and] of varying degrees of a complex hegemony”³, the questions regarding the status of the natives have been largely and conveniently ignored. The Europeans were woefully ignorant of the achievements of the Africans in the past. In a television broadcast in 1963, Hugh Trevor Roper, an Oxford Professor of Modern History made a bombastic comment stating that there was only the history of European in Africa. The rest was darkness and that darkness was not a fit subject of history at all, he insisted. This direct blurring of African history was made after Achebe’s Things Fall Apart appeared in 1958 with a clear picture that Africa has had its history,
tradition, culture and civilization rooted in the heroic past. The European colonizer was less ignorant of the apparent reality than refusing to accept what Africa was. The change brought by colonialism was, indeed, devastating. The Africans were politically, economically and socially exploited and they were totally dehumanized, reducing them to an inferior position in every respect. The mechanism of this strategy, obviously, worked through the importation and imposition of British or western ideas and institutions to and on the colonized land and people with an air of superiority, creating a psycho-pathological complex of racial, cultural and moral crisis. There were different types of colonial rule but they all had one thing in common, that is, the bringing together of two very different, often opposed ways of looking at things. The colonized saw the situation in terms of their own traditional cultures into which they sought to translate the mysterious ways of the powerful European intruders. This meeting of different ways of life created a baffling variety of problems. Whatever the system of colonial rule, the disruption of African societies was the ultimate result and the history of Africa had been effaced beyond recognition. Africa has suffered what Achebe has called ‘many terrible and lasting misfortunes’ from colonialism, but he also acknowledges that Africa has gained a lot too. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to separate the good from the bad. Achebe said in an interview that
What happens is that some of the worst elements of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added, and so on.\textsuperscript{4}

It is a well known fact that the colonizer consciously worked to break the native's spirit of rebellion against British Colonialism by educating him suitably and building in him a sense of inferiority and contempt for his own culture and traditional values. As the Africans oscillated between two conflicting cultures, they came to understand with mounting frustration the limitations that were being placed upon them.

By 1960s almost all the African countries became independent. But the promises of independence had turned out to be hollow. Though Africa became independent, the native still tried to look up to his former masters for overall guidance, financial assistance, technical advice and intellectual lead, so that, ironically, the economic-political equation between the former and the latter remained more or less the same as it was in the days of British rule. The African themselves failed to resolve the basic problems of poverty, unemployment, over population, hunger, illiteracy and disease. Politically also the native rulers had merely replaced the foreign rulers; the distance between the leaders and the people accentuating the fact that inspite of freedom, nothing had altered for the
common man. In the absence of dedicated leaders, the common people continued to be exploited as in the days of the colonizer, while corruption and self-interest weaken all ameliorative schemes - political, economic and social. The hope of the Africans that independence would usher in a new euphoria was all belied and the winning of independence did not mean that there were no further problems to solve. Here is an apt remark by Fage:

Each country had to work out how it wished to be governed, to consider if, or to what extent, the political and administrative legacies of its former colonial rulers could be adapted to give efficient and honest government, by its own men, suitable to its own needs.\(^5\)

But, nevertheless, independence made the Africans better off in that they now had freedom to concentrate on programmes of economic and social betterment, and freedom to choose what policies seem best adapted for the new independent Africa. This is the social and political milieu of Africa with which readers of Achebe's novels are familiar. The same is the case with his other works - short stories, and poems.
The present thesis is the serious attempt to study Achebe's novels and, of course, his short stories (as they reflect the contemporary African reality) in the light of the points highlighted and discussed above. For the sake of convenience and by way of an analysis of these works the thesis is divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter I : Introduction.
Chapter II : Impact of Colonialism on the Native African Cultural Heritage in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.
Chapter III : *No Longer at Ease*: Crisis of Hybrid Culture.
Chapter IV : Post-Independence Predicament and Political Malaise in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*.
Chapter VI : Conclusion.

**Chapter I : Introduction**

This chapter draws attention to the biographical sketch of Chinua Achebe highlighting his purpose and also brings into focus the effect of colonialism and how the traditional African culture was turned upside down by an alien
administration with an altogether different set of values. It also shows how latent or manifest, Colonialism has affected and continues to affect in one way or the other the whole African world at one point of time. What African Literature is all about and Achebe’s role as a writer in the African context are also fully discussed in this chapter.

Chapter II: Impact of Colonialism on the Native African Cultural Heritage in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*

In the next chapter (as the title given above) an attempt is made to explore in greater depth how Achebe tries to celebrate and glorify the Igbo tradition and age-old culture and how the horrendous colonial encounter of the African world with the West led to loss of values and dignity and how the encounter shaped the sensibilities and consciousness of the millions of Africans. Achebe tries to validate and glorify the Igbo traditional culture in the two novels discussed in the second chapter of the thesis.

Chapter III: *No Longer at Ease*: Crisis of Hybrid Culture

This chapter highlights the serious consequences of Africa’s exposure to the west, the cultural anarchy resulting from cultural interaction and subsequent hybrid culture. The protagonist of this novel, Obi Okonkwo is a hybrid man
unable to have any kind of social commitment with his society which itself has no moral centre. This chapter also attempts to bring forth the disastrous effect of western education on the African psyche that leads to alienation, undermining of native culture and loss of faith in the native tradition and the new ideas acquired through western education. In this novel, the cultural conflict between the two divergent system is depicted more powerfully and convincingly. The novel is indeed a conflict of values.

Chapter IV: Post-Independence Predicament and Political Malaise in A Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah.

Both the novels, A Man of the People and Anthills of the Savannah capture poignantly the socio-political predicament of post-independence Africa. The euphoria of achieving independence was nullified as ‘independence’ remained, both in theory and practice, a mere transfer of power from the European colonizers to the indigenous elite who emerged as the sole powerful social group exercising monopoly over the polity. A Man of the People is a serious indictment of post independence Africa. The novel presents a kaleidoscopic view of the new forces working in the newly independent Nigeria, and thus provides a satirical force about corrupt politicians cynically exploiting a political system – a legacy of imperial rule. Anthills of the Savannah, published
twenty one years after *A Man of the People*, documents the harsh realities of military rule, the public execution, the police searches, the sycophantic cabinet execution, the road blocks and counter coys all of which that create the texture of life as is experienced and recorded by the protagonist in a realistic mode. In this novel, Achebe conveys the idea that power needs to be curbed, checked, restrained and resisted lest it should trample and crush the very principles of liberty, freedom and human dignity and which finally mars the beauty and meaning of public morality.

**Chapter V: Girls at War and Other Stories: Unfurling African Issues and Experiences**

The short stories reveal the same sustaining interests as in the longer fiction. The short stories beautifully capture the social and cultural milieu of Africa. They fall into groups: those which show an aspect of the conflict between traditional and modern values – for example, 'The Sacrificial Egg', 'Dead Man’s Path', and 'Marriage Is a Private Affair' and those which display the nature of custom or religious belief without attempting to prove and explain their meanings. To these may be added a third classification – stories which deal with aspects of the Nigeria – Biafra War, one of which gives the volume its title, *Girls at War*. 'The Madman', the first story in the new edition, is about village life,
presumably modern village life. 'Marriage Is a Private Affair' is very closely related to the novel, *No Longer at Ease* where marriage becomes a communal affair. The background of the story 'The Voter' is the same as that of *A Man of the People*. The story shows how the leader and the people are equally corrupt and find no wrong in anything as long as ends justify the means. All the stories included in the volume, *Girls at War and Other Stories* beautifully account for the social, cultural and political milieu of African way of life.

**Chapter VI – Conclusion**

As usual, the last chapter of this thesis makes a final analysis of Achebe’s predilection on his novels and his purpose of writing. What has been discussed in the previous chapters is summed up in this chapter. A study of Achebe’s novels reveals the traumatic experiences of the colonial encounter of the African with the West. The thesis uncovers the colonial conflict and the effect of colonialism on the African psyche long after the colonial period was over, emphasizing the post colonial social, political and cultural issues and predicament of the African people vis-à-vis Nigeria.
NOTES


2 Ibid.

