CHAPTER - II

IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON THE NATIVE AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN
THINGS FALL APART AND ARROW OF GOD
In this Chapter attention is focused on the cultural conflicts as witnessed and recorded in two of Achebe's novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* in the advent of British colonialism and Christianity in Nigeria, and the decline of the native cultural values and heritage in the post-colonial society of Achebe. But before we start to discuss the issue seriously it will be pertinent to dwell on some general aspects of social and cultural milieu of Africa, and their tense relationship with and reaction to the Western stereotyping of the Africans.

Chinua Achebe, the doyen of modern African writing in English, is a socially conscious writer and has assumed the role of a teacher to re-educate and regenerate his society, to restore to Africa its pride, dignity and confidence lost
during the colonial period. For Achebe, the artist is a recorder of his people's history, and by doing so, he is able to cast light on his society's past and assist his society to better understand their present and future. For him history is a continuum. He also insists on the didactic role of the novelist as teacher to "help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement." In his essay, "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause" Achebe emphasizes his commitment towards his society as a mouthpiece of his culture:

It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant - like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.

To Achebe, all art including literature is a communal activity and must deal with the evolution of a people. He writes mainly about the destinies and aspirations of his people with an extraordinary sense of historicism - of what is past, passing and to come. As a conscious artist he is concerned with events in history, and how they affect the general stream of life especially when colonialism started
dislocating the native cultural values and mores. Here, C. Vijayashree’s statement may be mentioned:

He portrays the human dimension of history by showing how important historical changes affect everyday life, the effect of socio-cultural and political changes upon people who react immediately and violently to them, often without understanding the causes.³

Colonialism and colonial transactions and their effects on the native culture have captured the creative attention of Achebe. He explores the political, social, cultural and human dimensions of the post-colonial situations and portrays the resultant dislocations African people faced. The dislocations were bound to take place in the wake of the rapid and radical changes.

Portrayed and dubbed in the most denigrating manner as the “dark continent”, Africa reveals a woeful tale of human history. The presence of the Europeans in Africa is, of course, the origin of the “complexes”. Inflated with the civilizing zeal, the Europeans thwarted and distorted the history of Africa beyond recognition. In terms of human dignity and human relations, the encounter of the Africans with the Europeans was almost a disaster and it had warped the mental
attitudes and psyche of the Africans. The Europeans assumed that they brought history, enlightenment and progress to a people who had no valid social, political and religious traditions of their own. They even considered colonial rule as an agent of enlightenment to primitive peoples without a valid civilization of their own. Hence, Africa was seen as a dark continent, a symbol of the irrational, nourishing undifferentiated and childlike peoples governed by fear and superstition rather than reason; they were treated as the people fit to welcome and, indeed, worship the white man. To be precise, African society was labelled savage, and the destiny of those who dwelt therein was hell. This is the worst and the most painful thing that happened to the African. The destabilizing effect of colonialism is put up by Ngugi in this way:

... the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.4

Africa had a fair share of colonial experience, domination and subjugation, and the dignity and pride of its people had been robbed of by the colonizer. Achebe's
main concern is to restore this lost dignity and hurt pride of his people by recreating the society — its strength, weaknesses, triumphs, failures, and he is in desperate need to prove through his novels, once and for all, that Africa had its own history, culture and civilization so different and so unique in itself as against the colonial historiography. To cap it all, he wants to prove that Africa and its people have their own dignity and grace highly esteemed among the blacks. As a student at Ibadan, Achebe had read several appalling accounts of Africa in the writings of the European novelists, anthropologists and colonial officers who branded the African culture as inferior and primitive. Achebe instantly realized that it was a vital cultural necessity to deconstruct such a view. His task as a novelist is clearly stated when he says:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past — with all its imperfections — was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them.⁵

Again, Achebe was provoked by the Eurocentric version of the African portrayed in terms of “a savage” inhabiting “a dark continent” in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson*. He found the character of Mr. Johnson not only absurd but also it was rather very insulting. Hence, as an
insider, Achebe attempted to present an authentic interpretation of the African culture and tradition because he felt that “the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well intentioned.” Achebe provides a penetrating insight into the African history without any idealization and he poignantly captures the disruptive and devastating effect of the tumultuous colonial encounter of the African with the British colonizer in his novels.

I

Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, his Magnum Opus, was written as a fitting reply to the prejudices of the outsiders, Europeans in particular, who have misinterpreted, misrepresented and denigrated the Negro as a mindless people enamoured of the European civilization. Achebe wished to assert the strength of his people’s past, and to demonstrate, most of all, that the African people were not living in darkness and primitism or in a dark cultural ‘void’ when the European invader arrived to put a knife in their society and split it apart. *Things Fall Apart* is an attempt to reconstruct in fictional terms a definition of African identity. In this novel, Achebe as a cultural nationalist seriously interrogates and scrutinizes the western representations of the African past while at the same time accounts for the cultural conflict when Africa was colonized. He strongly projects and
revitalizes the Igbo culture and tradition by which he challenges, unmasks, demythologizes and exposes the racist ideology of the white man. The novel also has a clear message tagged on it – that Africa had a rich past and legacy. Achebe’s statement may be worth quoting here:

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. 

*Things Fall Apart* is a vision of what life was like in Iboland between 1850 and 1900. The novel faithfully records the crippling impact of colonialism on the African life. Achebe narrates the dignity, pride and communal solidarity of the Igbo. He very convincingly draws one’s attention to the cultural glory of Umuofia (the fictional locale of *Things Fall Apart*) and recreates the past of Africa in terms of its myths, rituals, beliefs, superstitions, religion, customs and traditions without glorifying or romanticizing the past of Africa. Achebe admits that like other people’s past it has its own shortcomings and imperfections, not at all, a “technicolour ideal”. What he emphasizes is that African past, with its
imperfections, never lacks dignity. *Things Fall Apart* beautifully depicts the socio-cultural ethos of pre-colonial Africa which came into oblivion when Africa was culturally disrupted by colonial forces. With that all cultural values, traditional institutions, social ties and above all the vital sense of self-identity in Igbo society were rendered insignificant. Furthermore, this going back in terms of time becomes necessary for Achebe because he views life as a continuing experience, the present going from the past and containing in itself the seeds of the future. The past for the novelist is the concrete pre-history of the present; he wants to show to his people "where the rain began to beat them." The central theme of the novel is the tragic consequence of the African encounter with Europe – the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white man and his culture into the hitherto self-contained world of African society, and the disarray in the African consciousness that has followed.

The novel's structure is based on the historical cycle of the rise and fall of civilization. The title of the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is abstracted from W.B. Yeat's poem, "The Second Coming." Achebe couldn't have chosen a better title than this to awaken his people with a sense of time - history and end of civilization. The Yeatsian title aptly suggests the predicament that befalls Africa. Achebe's major concern in *Things Fall Apart*, like that of Yeats in his "The Second Coming", is with the decline, disintegration and the fall of
human/western civilization. Yeats is of the view that no civilization can ever beat the laws of time and change despite its frantic efforts for perfection and permanence. Ultimately, every civilization collapses paving the way for a new one which will be antithetical to the one it seeks to replace so that a totally new order comes into being. In this regard, A.G. Stock's point may be substantiated:

No civilization can either remain static or evolve forever towards a more inclusive perfection. It must both collapse from within and be overwhelmed from without, and what replaces it will appear most opposite to itself, being built from all that is overlooked or undervalued.¹⁰

The novel, having a well-knit structure, is neatly divided into three parts, focusing on logical sequence and thematic development. The first part of the novel consisting of thirteen chapters attempts to celebrate “the ceremony of innocence” symbolized by the Umuofians. This part of the novel is devoted to the depiction of the life of the inhabitants of Umuofia in terms of their political, cultural, sociological and anthropological aspects. This part aims in asserting the validity of the Umuofian religion and their cultural life, the affirmation of the African past which is complex, proud, dignified and faith-bound. A totally unspoiled and unalloyed African civilization before the coming of the white is
beautifully portrayed in the first part of the novel. The second part of the novel, having only five chapters, is a sort of “formless darkness” on account of the intrusion of the European missionaries in the land of the “innocence” and the beginning of the social and psychological conflicts as well as disintegration. It deals with the depressed life of the protagonist, Okonkwo, enduring emotional turmoil during his exile in his mother’s place at Mbanta.

The third and last part of the novel assumes the shape of an “anarchy let loose” on the Umuofian world to destroy the native institutions and traditions. This is a stage where the missionaries collaborate with the colonizer or the alien administration to give a destabilizing effect on the Africans. This final section accounts for the tragic end of the protagonist, following his return from exile after a period of seven years. The story of the novel moves from peace to disruption and from disruption to disintegration. It is a kind of logical regression in the history of the Igbo tribe.

What gives the novel its strength is the way how Achebe maintains intellectual integrity and emotional poise in his approach to his cultural heritage. As an artist he is able to powerfully curb two irresistible impulses: the impulse of nostalgia and the impulse of idealization which could have disturbed the emotional and intellectual equilibrium of the writer in him. Achebe displays a
very strong and detailed picture of Igbo life and society in its entirety since the main theme of the novel is how this society has undergone a process of disintegration, through its exposure to and subjugation by an alien force. The novelist's overriding desire in the novel is to establish the Igbo society as a reality.

One understands that Umuofian society is a closely-knit one where each cares for the other and all live together in harmony subordinating self-interest to the communal good. The tribal society is based on sound moral and spiritual values. It believes in toil and achievement and the people live in constant harmony with nature. The traditional culture is a very forceful and vital aspect of life. The society is bound by laws of nature, good and evil, beliefs and superstitions, myths and legends, rites and religion, and all these strongly shape the life and mind and consciousness of the people. It is also noteworthy that the well-knit ethic of Umuofia guarantees social, cultural, religious and economic well-being to all. The social and cultural life of the Igbo in the novel is governed by the belief in the numerous gods and goddesses whose message the clan tries to carry out. Here, Mani Meitei's point may be noted:

This faith is inscrutably set in the psyche of the culture and it is their past, present and future. Therefore at all costs it has to be preserved.11
This religious faith of the Igbo is at the centre of their culture and civilization and history, holding them together along with their ways and values of life. It can be said that Igbo society has a strong spiritual dimension, controlled by gods, ancestors, personal spirits or Chi. Thus, they have a pantheon of gods and oracles with which they establish a complete agreement. The very continuity of the Umuofia culture has been assured by the firm and unbreakable bond it has with a number of deities that keep the cosmos of the tribal world in order, being protected from the war, disorder and bloodshed. They obey the Oracles of the Hills and the Caves in times of peace and war or “they would have been surely beaten”(12). They also consult the Oracle when they want to know about their future or what their ancestors want.

Achebe’s Umuofia is a civilization in miniature, a well-organised placid world, and in order to evoke African atmosphere and lend local colour to the narratives, he gives a very realistic descriptions of a cycle of traditions, customs and festivals of Igbo society such as the offering of Kola nut to guests, sacrifices to Ani, the Earth goddess, the observance of the Week of Peace by the community before the sowing of seeds, traditional feast like Uri and the New Yam festival. All this means to cement the unity of the tribe, and their relationship with nature. The main reason why Achebe depended heavily on anthropological details is to show and prove that Africa has its own past of each
African can be proud. Achebe, thus, shows that his people, before the advent of the Europeans had not been uncivilized in any sense of the term.

What happens to this traditional tribal world in the wake of the European colonization constitutes the content of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The fate of the community revolves around what the protagonist, Okonkwo, does: when he is prosperous his society is also prosperous, but when he falls the society falls, too. The first paragraphs of the novel indicate the deftness and certainty with which Achebe establishes not only the character but also the ethical and moral basis of his life, and by extension, the ethical and moral basis of the life of the clan.

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on social personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the greatest wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino .......

In the end Okonkwo threw the Cat (3).

At the outset of the novel, Achebe lets the reader know about the premium which is placed on wealth, courage and valour among the Igbo people. As a wrestler Okonkwo had earned his reputation by beating Amalinze, thereby bringing fame
to himself and his village; as a warrior he had taken the approved symbols of his prowess, the heads of five victims by the time he was twenty-one years old and as a man he had achieved personal wealth symbolized by his two barn full of yams, his three wives and most importantly, he had taken two titles which can only be acquired when wealth has been achieved and his quality proven. His resilience of mind is also put to the test during the time of drought. An epitome of the values of his community, he is lionized by the Igbo people and he is even considered as one of the greatest men in Umuofia. Okonkwo is indeed a self-made man. In fact, Achebe presents the stature of Okonkwo as heroic. And it is definitely an irony of fate that makes Okonkwo starts off with a disadvantage on this score – the failure of his own father to satisfy this social norm, which adds an urgency to his known particular position. It was really unfortunate that “with a father like Unoka, Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young man had” (17). Unoka was a failure in life, poor and lazy and he was a loafer. So, Okonkwo “had no patience with his father”(4). He had to start off his life from a scratch to register his fame and success in an aggressive and achievement-oriented Igbo society. Hence success or achievement becomes the ultimate value of Okonkwo. At first, Okonkwo struggled hard to erase from history the possible memory of his father’s poor and shameful upbringing and tried to live down the shame of his father so much so that he was compelled to an excessive adherence
to the social code to an extent which in fact, transforms a value into a weakness. Look at him:

Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength (26).

What is important to note here is that Okonkwo doesn’t only have patience with his father, but also he even develops a pathological hatred and allergy to all that his father represents in terms of indolence, indebtedness, easy way of living with no care and concern for fame and success. The memory and fear of his father’s contemptible life stands as a constant reproach, and the fear becomes the secret demon that destroys, the best part of him. He is so much obsessed with the failure of his father that this sense of failure injects a fear-psychosis in him as if he is possessed. Achebe writes:

... his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo’s fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within
himself. It was a fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father (12-13).

As a result, Okonkwo hates which his father had loved – gentleness and idleness. His hatred for his father and the values he represents – love, compassion, delicacy and tenderness is so wildly pushed on to the edge of a precipice that the hatred is turned into his tragic flaw. To him his father represents the feminine principles much to the shock of Okonkwo. The hatred for his father’s lack of masculinity has assumed such a vigorous dimension in his character that he ultimately alienates himself from his clan. Misfortune befalls him; he undergoes suffering and while he suffers, his culture suffers too. As a tragic hero he has some flaw in him. In this connection, G.D. Killam’s view of Okonkwo’s tragic flaw is worth mentioning:

Achebe suggests as well the flaw, or flaws in his nature – his inordinate ambition and his refusal to tolerate anything less than excellence, taken in conjunction with an impulsive rage to which he easily gives way and which produces irrational responses to situations.
His flaw is a result of his fear of having become an 'Agbala' which means an old woman. His father was called Agbala. In order to overcome that fear, Okonkwo has tried to judge everybody and everything from the angle of masculinity or manliness. In his case, manliness, as opposed to weakness, is nothing but fierceness and violence. Charged with fierceness and violence his actions at crucial moments are dreadful and his people look at him with dread, for he violates social customs and taboos. He cannot control himself on many occasions and thus behaves irrationally like a mad man. This is, indeed, the seed of his downfall and death which sprouts with the passage of time. Okonkwo, thus becomes a loaded cannon of bottled-up emotion, which easily ignites into a roaring flame, often by trivial happenings and seldom with due regard to circumstance or ceremony.

Okonkwo's downfall and eventual banishment from the tribe at the end of the first part of the novel result from one sin to another committed against the earth goddess, his clan and so on. What is significant is that these sins – the first being his beating of his third wife Ojiugo during the Week of Peace, the killing of Ikemefuna and the accidental killing of Ezeudo's son during the funeral – are hierarchically schematized in which the degree of the evil effect increases with every succeeding incident. For Okonkwo character is destiny in which character and cultural forces are in conflict. Thus, culturally he is the accursed soul drifting
into his suicide. For somehow, whenever there is a communal festivity, a public gathering, or an observance of some sacred rites, Okonkwo commits some kind of indiscretion or violence which blights the occasion and draws public disapproval upon his head. For instance, his first offence is the infringement of the Week of Peace when he beats his third wife for her fecklessness. Characteristically impulsive, Okonkwo “was not the man to stop beating somebody halfway through, not even for fear of a goddess” (27). Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess, very well brings out the enormity of the crime:

You are not a stranger in Umuofia ... Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a greater evil to beat her. The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall perish (28).

As mentioned above, his second offence relates to the killing of Ikemefuna, a boy hostage taken from a neighbouring clan, placed in Okonkwo’s household. The boy’s fate was to be decided by the clan and therefore he lived with Okonkwo during the period as per plan. Ikemefuna, after three years in Okonkwo’s household has become the apple of the family maintaining a strong
emotional attachment with Okonkwo and Nwoye. A dramatic twist takes place when the oracle announces the death of Ikemefuna. The strong emotional attachment of Ikemefuna with Okonkwo and his family renders the eventual decapitation of the boy by Okonkwo even more horrifying than it would normally be. Achebe further heightens the cruelty of the situation by making Ezeudu, an elder of the clan, repeatedly admonish Okonkwo to dissociate himself from the ritual sacrifice: "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (57). Okonkwo nevertheless disregards Ezeudu’s advice and accompanies the men in their brutal task. The deep-seated sense of fear of being classified ‘weak’ and ‘effeminate’ made him participate in the brutal act of murder which is upheld by the community as justice but acknowledged as a heinous crime at the individual level. Okonkwo walks behind the others and gradually draws to the rear as the execution is botched; indeed, he looks away when one of the men raises his matchet to strike the boy. But he is forced by his dogged insistence on masculinity to deal the fatal blow. No sooner, Ikemefuna, instinctively, turns to Okonkwo for safety and Okonkwo, dazed by fear, then he drew his matchet and cut him down because he is “afraid of being thought weak” (55). So extreme is his desire that he might not appear weak, that he might not be like his father, that Okonkwo blinds himself to wisdom. His friend Obierika disapproves of what he did:
If I were you I would have stayed at home ... if the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it (60-61).

Obierika, adds that his is “the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families”(61). No episode in the novel dramatizes Okonkwo’s desire to assert his manliness more clearly than the killing of Ikemefuna. Okonkwo has had to steel himself against ordinary human feelings that he becomes completely dehumanized. He glorifies in trampling on his private feelings in the name of public virtue. This inherent dichotomy present in the Igbo society is so brilliantly depicted by Achebe in his rigorous attempt to reconstruct an unidealised past. His unflinching stand “to point out the flaws”13 inscribed in African societies, is crucial for an objective understanding of the past. It reveals the extent to which Achebe as a writer attempts to place things in proper perspective.

The killing of Ikemefuna by Okonkwo to appease the cultural god has such a great psychological effect on Nwoye that “something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow” (55). Nwoye finds his father’s action unbearably inhuman and morally outrageous and the sacrifice of Ikemefuna and his father’s participation in it is the focal act which finally alienates Nwoye from the clan and leads him to seek a more humane community
among the Christians. Okonkwo’s rigidity and firmness in his perception of things in terms of ‘manly’ and ‘womanly’ find no place in the Igbo society which is characterized by adaptability and flexibility. The final breaking of the filial bond is directly related to the killing of Ikemefuna. The hymns of the missionaries seem to provide answers to the problems that Nwoye’s puzzled mind has been looking for.

It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul – the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. Nwoye’s callow mind was greatly puzzled.

Nwoye, deep in his heart, develops a negative attitude towards the rigid customs of his own society and embraces the new religion that stands for universal love and brotherhood. In his submission to Christianity, Nwoye not only defies his
father but also rejects his entire society. Thus, Nwoye "stands as a symbolic
negation for his father, the living denial of all Okonkwo accepts and stands
for". This foreshadows the clash of the traditional value and Christianity which
ultimately leads to the doom of Umuofian traditional way of life. It must have
been very shocking and tragic to Okonkwo that his son Nwoye becomes the first
convert to Christianity. Okonkwo himself views his son's gesture:

Now that he had time to think of it, his son's crime stood out in
stark enormity. To abandon the gods of one's father and go about
with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very
depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children
decided to follow Nwoye's step and abandon their ancestors?
Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible
prospect, like the prospect of annihilation (139).

It would not be wrong to say that Okonkwo's egocentric failure to recognize or
respect the humanity of Ikemefuna and Nwoye, is symptomatic of those
weaknesses which have made his society vulnerable to the false promises of
Christianity. Moreover, Okonkwo's individualism shatters the foundation of the
society he represents and the fragile universe he had built for himself had crashed
in ruins. The killing of Ikemefuna by Okonkwo has so strongly affected the
psyche of his culture and Okonkwo is mentally disturbed. His gentle qualities surface intermittently inspite of his effort to choke them. The humanity locked inside Okonkwo struggles to express itself. He could not eat for two days, drank heavily to avoid self-condemnation and even tried to cast off the thoughts of Ikemefuna from his mind. He felt “so weak that his legs could hardly carry him. He felt like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito”(57). But still the fact remains that what is more heinous a crime than the killing of Ikemefuna is the destruction of Okonkwo’s inmost self. In this regard R.S. Sharma’s view is worth quoting:

What evokes the highest quality of compassion in Nwoye, leads only to a further hardening of Okonkwo’s soul. Though touched by the incident, he considers his belated feelings of remorse to be expressive only of effeminate weakness and reflects:

How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed (59).15

The tragic climax of the novel is reached when Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudo’s sixteen year old son when his gun goes berserk during the funeral rites
of Ezeudu, a village elder. He is exiled from the community for seven years. Suggesting that Okonkwo's misdeed is more than an accident, Palmer argues:

It exemplifies his predisposition to violence which at last finds an outlet, and is the climax to a cumulative process. 

Okonkwo, thus commits a series of offences the consequences of which are social, moral and cosmic of which he is not aware and which ultimately pave the way for the social and psychological conflict in the later part of the novel. Okonkwo's tragedy results from his emotional vacuity. His exile to his mother's village in Mbanta which he bears with bad grace, has not only brought him a setback, but has also added to his ambitious drive the sharp edge of frustration. It is during his exile that Okonkwo learns, from his friend, Obierika, that the new religion, Christianity, has made many inroads into the traditional stronghold of Igbo society. We are told, quite matter-of-factly:

The missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there, won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages (130).

At first, their appeal is to the wrong kind of the people and they do not give up and, moreover, the people of Umuofia are sufficiently secure – perhaps too
secure—in their cultural life to feel unduly disturbed by the sudden appearance of a small group of people preaching what must have seemed to them a mad religion. The Umuofians do not immediately recognize the extent of the threat posed to their religion and culture by the Christians. That explains why they treat the intruders with light-hearted buffoonery. The traditional culture has reached that level of self-confidence and stability at which fear of subversion ceases to be an instinctive response. But, the impact of Christianity, in all cases, was devastating. Not only had it alienated the converts from their traditional loyalty to the ancestors but also it could make the converts question and leave their earlier faith. The missionaries began to question the very basis of tribal society and insisted that the gods that the tribesmen worship were “false gods, gods of wood and stone” (131). They preached that “Before God there is no slave or free. We are all children of God and we must receive these our brothers” (142-143). Ironically, the hollow ring of this pious statement of brotherhood is devastating because as Cecil Abrahams states:

It is Christianity which proves more restrictive in the final analysis. The Christian refuses to accept the essential truth of another religion, and hence, he begins to employ “the sword” of the colonial administration to bring the recalcitrant in line. European civilization, then, which had, from a naïve liberal view, set out “to
bring civilization to a primitive people”, begins to show its greater primitiveness in administering its cruel and hypocritical Christian justice (TFA. p.176). It is with the pernicious help of Christianity that the soul of a once proud people is destroyed.\textsuperscript{17}

Christianity was indeed the harbinger of colonialism in Africa. Colonialism is/was never a perfect project without converting the natives. For Nwoye it becomes a safe heaven and emotional crisis at the death of Ikemefuna is resolved when he hears of love and brotherhood, which his father’s gods do not say of. The inhuman practices and irrational taboos that are part and parcel of the conventions and assumptions of the Igbo, epitomized very specifically in the treatment of the osu and the abandonment of twins nevertheless have haunted Nwoye’s mind long before he finds his own escape route into the new church, as an oversensitive refugee from his own environment. But ironically enough, the impact of the new religion was indeed catastrophic and tragic, for it affected the most fundamental and cohesive factors in the traditional system. When the catechist Kiaga, welcoming Nwoye to church, says, quoting the Bible, “Blessed is he who forsakes his father and mother for my sake”, he is pronouncing the doom of filial piety, the cornerstone of the stability and ordered continuity of the traditional way of life. Through Nwoye’s conversion, or disaffection, Achebe focuses the wider social conflict between the two different ways of life. Nwoye’s
conversion is symptomatic of the way in which Christianity strikes at the very heart of tradition. The new religion has shattered and undermined all the traditional beliefs, superstitions and customs, and the new forces are choking to death the old society that Okonkwo has so firmly loved. The death of the old religion is confirmed by such happenings as the building of the church in the Evil Forest, bringing up of twins and the cutting off long hair by the missionaries without mishap. For the first time doubts spark off among the natives about their religion and they begin to realize that a strong streak of anarchy is present in their culture itself.

The killing of a sacred python by Enoch and his further unmasking of an ancestral spirit, egwugwu have crossed the very limit of provocation because such actions strike at the very heart of traditional authority, ritual and religious sanctity, the society has preserved for generations.

Obierika beautifully sums up the collapse of the tribal civilization when Okonkwo asks:

'Does the white man understand our customs about land?' 'How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his
religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay' (160).

The same gravity is reiterated by an elder while thanking Okonkwo for his dinner. He says:

I fear for you, young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice and what is the result? An abominable religion has settled upon you (152).

These passages indicate the bitter truth that the clansmen are as much responsible as the white men in turning the odds against the Igbo society.

Okonkwo gradually discovers that even his clan has undergone a profound change, and people at large are attracted to the white man’s government and their religion as well as to the trading stores, schools, hospitals and other facilities they
have made available. He also feels that his return from exile has gone almost unnoticed. He is deeply grieved. But it is not just a personal grief. He mourns the clan's fall which he sees breaking up and falling apart of things and he is utterly shocked to see the change in the warlike men of Umuofia, who have "so accountably become soft like women" (165). He sees a crack in the wall of social life of the clan and even in his household, his hope and dream.

The coming of the white men marks the end of a heroic era. Fear of the white man's power robs the natives of courage and manliness. With the disappearance of a proud clan, a new set of 'ezelefe' or worthless men sprouts all over Umuofia dancing to the tune of the wish of the pale faced strangers. The integrity and innocence of the natives give way to greed for money and a craving for paid jobs. Kinship, the unifying force disappears with the disintegration of the family ties. Spiritual values are eroded by material comforts which in turn lead to the breakup of the traditional society. The people of Umuofia "are caught in a situation which seems to offer no meaningful choice: they have to play out a game wherein they have no choice either to determine or to challenge the rule".18 But Okonkwo still remains firm to his old values and traditional way of life. He will brook no compromise and resolves, however, to fight against the white men with all his might because as C.D. Narasimhaiah states:
... if someone comes to insult their age-long ways of life, insult their gods, and seek to impose them with their exalted notion of themselves there comes the rub.\textsuperscript{19}

Okonkwo, in his attempt to uphold self-respect and dignity of his tribe, remains unswervingly loyal to the old order and he calls upon his people to take up guns and matchets in their hands to fight. His men destroy the red-earth church built by Mr. Brown. The spirit of the clan is pacified but for a few moments. Okonkwo has a feeling of elation, pride and happiness little knowing that the destruction of the church will bring them face to face with a force they only dimly know about — the white government, incomprehensible, uncomprehending and invincible and completely unsympathetic towards the old native ways. The District Commissioner best represents not only the power of the British Empire, but also this indifference of the process of change; he tells Okonkwo and others in the community:

\begin{quote}
We shall not do you any harm ... if only you agree to co-operate with us. We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy ... in the domain of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world (175).
\end{quote}
The moment of the heightened ecstasy of destroying the church suddenly slips into dust. Okonkwo and five other persons are arrested by the District Commissioner, beaten and humiliated by shaving their head which to Okonkwo is the most insulting thing in his life – the loss of his dignity and self-respect. The impact of this incident on Okonkwo’s mind prepares the last phase of his tragedy:

As he lay on his bamboo bed he thought about the treatment he had received in the white man’s court, and he swore vengeance. If Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they chose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself (179).

Okonkwo makes up his mind that the new forces must be rooted out or they will destroy the structure of traditional life. The situation is so tense that the village of Umuofia looks like “a startled animal with ears erect, sniffing the silent, ominous air and not knowing which way to run” (177).

The coda to the tragic episode is supplied by Okonkwo’s single handed defiance of British authority, followed by his despair and suicide. As Okonkwo reflects on the glorious past of the Igbos where wars featured prominently, the present makes him feel bitter. The climax is provided when Umuofia decides to
discuss the worsening situation. When Okonkwo gathers the remnant of the clan to hold a meeting in order to decide which line of action is to be taken against the alien rule, a messenger from the District Commissioner shows up with an order to halt the meeting. Okonkwo, "trembling with hate, unable to utter a word," (183) kills the messenger in a huff. The people are frightened not angry. His action seems unreasonable to the villagers. He hears voices asking: "Why did he do it?" (184). Instead of supporting Okonkwo, the people are unresponsive to his lone cry of war against the colonizer because they realize the futility of their confrontation with such a powerful and destructive venomous force of colonialism. In this cowardly act of submission of the large crowd to the colonizer, Okonkwo senses the death of his tribe, the end of dignity and self-respect of the Igbo society. The world he knew has gone: the world that is coming has no place for an uncompromising man like him. He cannot, single handed, take on the new powers that have destroyed the old. So he opts to join his ancestors, the men of the old order, the warriors he reverse. Realising the conspicuous rejection of the will to fight and struggle collectively against the colonial forces, Okonkwo is left with no choice but to take his own life in the face of the inevitable consequences. He chooses to commit suicide, the most shameful way to die, abominated by gods and men alike. He becomes a taboo to his people to touch at all. The things he has known have fallen apart and have
dragged him down with them. Okonkwo’s suicide is a gesture that symbolizes his refusal of a new order, as well as the collapse of the old order which he represents. His suicide is, indeed, the crowning irony of an end he had struggled against all his life. Staring hard at the dangling body of Okonkwo, Obiereka tells the District Commissioner:

That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and he will be buried like a dog (187).

This furious remark beautifully sums up what the novel so realistically dramatizes – the tragic consequence of Colonialism. What is pertinent to be noted is that Okonkwo’s tragedy lies in the fact that he responds to everything with a tragic misdirected energy. His emotional vacuity and his inflexible will which is incapable of taking any new change in his stride bring his own downfall.

The conflict between Okonkwo and the clan arises because Okonkwo remains true to the ideals which gave him heroic stature while the clan changes its loyalty.20

Okonkwo is not resistant to change at all – he is only against a change which is not operated by his society but one that has been cruelly imposed on them. His
suicide, therefore if it has any validity, and consequently underscores Obiereka’s observation is a final monument to the tribe to take heed of their failure and to search for different approaches to overcome the colonial dominance. Okonkwo mirrors the tragedy of the oppressed, and his actions affirm the essential power and aspirations of the oppressed.

Thus the African things fall, because the centre cannot hold them together. Much anarchy is loosened upon the African world.

Achebe’s Things Fall Apart is indisputably a deeply moving tragic novel that exposes the insidious process of colonization and the consequent traumatic impact on the Nigerian psyche. Madhusudan Prasad opines that Achebe wrote this novel

... basically for humanity at large with a view to enlightening all the people, including all those who colonized and those who were colonized and also those who stood by nonchalantly or helplessly watching the show, about what Africa was in the pre-colonial era and what ravages at individual, social and political levels were caused to it in the colonial one.21
The novel also conveys a very clear social message that culture, like life itself is dynamic and it should have a healthy organic growth. Here, Aurobindo’s view may be worth mentioning:

Any culture that gives up its living separateness and neglects an active self-defense will be swallowed up and the nation which lived by it will lose its soul and perish.22

Umuofian culture collapses because of the lack of ‘living separateness’. A culture can retain its identity only if it is flexible enough to take in changes and assimilate from other cultures. On the other hand, if it becomes inert and rigid, then, though tragic it may be the scourge of disorder sweeps the society off leaving behind mere anarchy. While Achebe is not against adaptation, he is indignant, however, at the loss of dignity of his culture. As a disinterested and neutral observer, Achebe succeeds in exposing the good and evil prevailing in the native African culture and an alien culture. As David Cook points out:

He prefers to reveal the darker side of both traditions as well as the better side and leave us to draw our own conclusion.23

Achebe’s work appears to be a plea to the Nigerian society to meaningfully review its roots and origin without sentimental idealizing, and to attribute proper
value where it is due, and to see how far these values can be appropriately restored or reasserted in the context of the present day.

II

Achebe's third novel *Arrow of God*, set in the 1920s, explores at greater depth and insight than *Things Fall Apart* the qualities of Igbo life, the myths and traditions of Umuaro and how the forces of colonialism, too powerful to resist, disturb and destroy the whole way of Igbo life. It beautifully and poignantly portrays the fragmentation of the hitherto self-contained Igbo society. The cracks in *Things Fall Apart* grow into chasm in *Arrow of God*. Thematically, the novel takes up exactly where *Things Fall Apart* has left. Cultural contact and the consequent (cultural) conflict emerge as the major thematic strand in *Arrow of God*. The society of Umuaro portrayed here is more or less the same as that of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart* except for the fact that the white man is now accepted as a painful but unavoidable fact of life and the disruption brought into the close-knit Igbo world has become deeper and the white colonizer has gained greater strength and force. The tribe's submission to the political domination of the British, and their reconciliation to the values of an alien culture are accompanied by intense psychological stress as exemplified in the novel. Achebe, as a novelist, is concerned with this aspect of colonial history.
Colonialism was not only just the physical conquest of a land, but more importantly, the conquest and occupation of minds, selves and cultures. It was a denial of all cultures, history and value system outside the colonizer's frame. Like Asia, Africa also experienced the violent 'Otherness' of colonialism traumatically. The colonizers made the colonized see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement. Colonialism resulted in the loss of confidence in self which aggravated into death-wish, despondency and despair. The oppressed or the colonized were made to move from their worlds to the other worlds leading to social and self-alienation. As it was practically impossible for European Imperial powers to maintain physical control over their African colonies, political and economic colonization had necessarily to be sustained by cultural imperialism as the mind of the oppressed is the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor. The most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves. Achebe tries to confront the colonial 'Other' threatening Africa to enslave it at all levels including cultural and ideological arena. His people have been objectified and represented as the dehumanized 'Other' and they have been totally negated and marginalized. The Africans were always the objects of someone else's, indeed, someone else's history. It was precisely the project of *Things Fall Apart* to resist and reject this assumption by telling the story of the
colonized to retrieve their history. Achebe’s third anthropological novel, *Arrow of God* is a serious and sincere attempt to dismantle the historical catalepsy imposed by the Europeans and it shows the Native culture in shambles due to the intrusion of an alien western culture. *Arrow of God* captures the socio-cultural milieu of the Igbo people prior to British occupation. The celebration and glorification of the Igbo culture is realistically portrayed and Achebe is simply not interested in the description of the daily round of social and religious life, but he is rather interested in showing how the forces of colonialism promote change and how the power and influence of the white man shape the destinies of the Umuaro villagers. The theme of the novel returns to the uprootedness, disorientation and destruction of the tribal world. The novel is a fictionalization of an actual incident documented in *The History of Umuchu* by Simon Nnolim. According to an account in this socio-historical pamphlet, Ezeagu, the high priest of Uchu declined the offer of chieftaincy by the colonial administration. He was imprisoned for his defiance for two months and he refused to consume the sacred Yams which he was to consume as part of his ritual meal.

The novel revolves round Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, a god created at the time when the six relatively antagonistic villages – Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuago, Umuezcani, Umogwugwu and Umuisiuzo unwillingly united due to years of victimization by the fierce warriors called the Abam. This unity, forged
by fear, made Ulu great because the united villages succeeded in resisting the Abam, and Ulu was beyond challenge as long as the Abam were to be feared. The responsibility of ordaining Ulu was given to the weakest of the six tribes, and the chief priest of Ulu became the chief of Umuaro superseding the other tribes. The function of Ezeulu is mainly religious, and he has to perform the rituals periodically, offering prayers and sacrifices, keeping the agricultural calendar of the community and, most importantly, he names and conducts the two most important events of Umuaro: the festival of Pumpkin Leaves — a ceremony of Purification before plantation, and the New Yam Festival or the Harvest Festival which marks the end of the old year and heralds the new Year. Apart from this, the security and other secular problems of the people are also always under the supervision of Ezeulu.

With the exception of No Longer at Ease, all the novels of Achebe are political in orientation. Arrow of God is not only a political novel, but “also a study in the psychology of power”.25 The immediate context of the novel is based on the result of the altered power equation. As the Abam raids ceased, strife in Umuaro emerges with the challenge against the traditional authority of Ulu. Ezeulu and his authority are under attack by the priest of Ezidimeli through his wealthy and titled clansman Nwaka who is a great orator. Influential and
eloquent, Nwaka tries to destabilize Ezeulu’s position which is increasingly becoming irrelevant in the virtual absence of Abam threat:

We have no quarrel with Ulu. He is still our protector, even though we no longer fear Abam warriors at night. But I will not see with these eyes of mine his priest making himself lord over us. My father told me many things, but he did not tell me that Ezeulu was king in Umuaro. Who is he, anyway? Does anybody here enter his compound through the man’s gate? If Umuaro decided to have a king we know where he would come from .......... And we have all heard how the people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them. Did they not carry him to the boundary between them and their neighbours and set fire on him? (27)

This dangerous demagogic incitement finds a parallel in the equally dangerous speculations of Ezeulu, whose role as the defender, time and conscience keeper of Umuaro has made him bold enough to take certain decisions against the wishes of his clansmen in general. Fanciful thought and wild imagination border dangerously on autocratic impulses:
Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival – no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare (3).

This passage prefigures the inevitable conflict between the aristocratic and democratic principles inherent in Igbo culture as well as the conflict caused by the desire for personal power and social obligation. Here, Abdul R. Jan Mohamed’s remark is worth mentioning:

Achebe infinitely complicates Ezeulu’s portrait by connecting his pivotal cultural position with his deep thirst for personal power,
which ranges from petty egoistic games he plays on younger members of his village ... to what he considers the sacrifice of his son Oduche, who is commanded to become a Christian in order to master the secrets of Western culture and technology.26

Major dramatic conflict and action in the novel are consistently informed by two related basic concerns. The first, which is essentially philosophic, relates to the general quality of Ezeulu’s personal apprehension of the highest purposes of the Ulu priesthood. And the second, ultimately of a more dramatic and political upshot, concerns the depth and consistency of his practical adherence to the fundamental principles and circumstantial dictates of an Eze-Ulu’s historic destiny. No doubt Ezeulu’s desire to test the magnanimity of his power is ridden with dangerous potentialities. Emmanuel Obiechina is of the view that Ezeulu has “within him undoubted authoritarian urges at odds with the republican outlook of the people.”27

The outbreak of the impending strife within the community was ignited by a land dispute with the neighbouring village Okperi. Trouble started when a man of Umuaro, Akukalia was sent as an emissary to Okperi. Akukalia, impulsive and hot headed violated a traditional custom by breaking the Ikenga, or symbolical embodiment of a man’s strength and life force, of an Okperi man and was
subsequently killed by Okperi. As a result, war was certain between the two villages, when Ezeulu as the chief Priest of Umuaro stepped in and testified against his people, much to the chagrin of his people. Ezeulu’s move against his people was misinterpreted by his rivals like Edemili and Nwaka as a potent sign of his ambition to become king. The quarrel with Okperi over a piece of land provided the much awaited opportunity to the District Officer, Winterbottom to interfere in the internal matters of the community. Consequently, the community came under the grip of the white imperialists. As Obiechina stated:

... The presence of the colonial administration has the effect of increasing the need for collective security, since the colonial authority has taken away from the traditional authority and people their rights to exercise judicial or non-legal violence. The exercise of judicial coercion and violence belongs solely to the colonial regime ...²⁸

The presence of the white man is acutely felt and acknowledged by the villagers of Umuaro. Moses Unakchukwu sums up the situation:

I have travelled in Olu and I have travelled in Igbo, and I can tell you that there is no escape from the white man. He has come.
When Suffering knocks at your door and you say there is no seat left for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool. The white man is like that (85).

Nweke Ukpaka is also of the opinion that the white man is like a hot soup which must be taken with lots of care slowly from the edges of the bowl and that guile is needed in dealing with the white colonizers who consider the villagers of Umuaro fools. In Umuaro the English are thought amusingly foolish, even though their power is acknowledged. The best way in dealing with them is to try to learn what they know and take advantage of the new states of affairs their presence creates, in the church, in government service or even in trade. This is the main reason why Ezeulu scrutinizes the painful realities with great insight and vision. He feels that the white man has come with a new religion which is like leprosy highly harmful and contagious. Ezeulu knows very well that it will not only be foolhardy but also be almost impossible to confront the white man and that change is inevitable and benefits can be extracted if he befriends the white people. In this connection what Bu-Buakei Jabbi says may be quoted:

According to him (Ezeulu), a people do sometimes come up against unprecedented but inescapable challenges of existence or history, fraught with discomfiture and dilemmas, during which only acts of
extraordinary courage or imaginative daring are likely to ensure their survival and the possible assimilation of the new force.\textsuperscript{29}

Now, he sends his son, Oduche to the mission school:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow (46).

Unfortunately, Oduche commits a blasphemy by attempting to kill the sacred python of Idemilli by boxing in a locker. The use of biblical imagery is very significant here because the python is a snake that stands for evil in Christianity, symbolizing the snake god Satan that deceived the first mother of mankind, Eve. This undermines the traditional Igbo belief which upholds the python as a sacred entity. G.D. Killam puts it this way:

The symbolism here is clear enough: just as the python struggles for survival, so the old gods struggle against the new religion.\textsuperscript{30}
This incident gradually sharpens the already existing antagonism between Ezeulu and Nwaka. Nwaka is given a great chance to prove to the entire community that Ezeulu's actions are always directed and calculated to subvert their age-old customs and traditions. Ezeulu's moves are always misequated with his love for power and his desire to exercise it. And it is because of the misinterpretation of Ezeulu's action that makes the people confounded and reluctant to lend a supporting hand to Ezeulu when he is invited to Okperi. Ezeulu's strategy boomerangs as none in the villages endorses Oduche's act against the sacred python. It is this kind of conflicting impression of Ezeulu's attitude and actions that creates an intricate interplay of significance throughout the narrative.

The British colonial officials try to subjugate and control Igboland by trying to introduce the colonial policy of indirect rule. Captain Winterbottom receives a memorandum from the Lieutenant Governor which directs all political officers to develop an effective system of indirect rule. This policy creates chaos and confusions among the native people and it also hurts the pride and sentiments of the Igbo people who are unaware of the autocratic rule be it either through kings or chiefs. This colonial policy is meticulously employed by Achebe in the novel to highlight the theme of cultural clash between Europe and Africa. As Winterbottom cannot ignore the order of his superiors, Ezeulu strikes first in his mind because of the testimony he gave against his own people five
years earlier. This further leads the Umuroans to the belief that Ezeulu is an ally of the white man. The exacerbation of the widening chasm between Ezeulu and his community finds a final outlet in the meeting of the council of the elders of the village summoned by Ezeulu to inform and discuss the message by which he has been called by Winterbottom. Nwaka tries to challenge the moral uprightness and integrity of Ezeulu and finds a chance to prove Ezeulu a man hungry for power and status. Nwaka skilfully tries to exploit the situation in which the sincere intention of Ezeulu to discuss the issue has been interpreted as an aristocratic streak in the latter's personality.

The white man is Ezeulu's friend and has sent for him. What is so strange about that? He did not send for me. He did not send for Udeozo; he did not send for the priest of Idemili; he did not send for the priest of Eru; he did not send for the priest of Udo nor did he ask the priest of Ogwugwu to come and see him. He has asked Ezeulu. Why? Because they are friends. Or does Ezeulu think that their friendship should stop short of entering each other's houses? ... a man who brings ant ridden faggots into this hut should expect the visit of lizards. ... You tied the knot, you should also know how to undo it. You passed the shit that is smelling; you should carry it away (144).
Totally embittered, Ezeulu makes no effort to mobilize support within his clan and goes to Okperi to face his fate. In Okperi he is immediately imprisoned by Winterbottom who finds it hard to tolerate the idea of a blackman showing any sign of respect for the colonial administration. By that time Tony Clarke takes charge of Winterbottom as Winterbottom gets sick with a mysterious disease and is hospitalized at Enugu for more than a month. As instructed by Winterbottom, Ezeulu is detained in the guard room by Tony Clarke because the colonial administrators feel that Ezeulu has dishonoured the imperial favour of being raised to a paramount chief when he is supposed to show gratitude. Tony Clarke finds hard to understand the reason why Ezeulu refuses to become the warrant chief. He feels that Ezeulu has made a mockery of the British colonial administrations.

Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody’s chief, except Ulu. What Cheek! A witch-doctor making a fool of the British Administration (174).

Ezeulu’s refusal to become the warrant chief spreads across Okperi and Umuaro and very few people in Umuaro believe how he could ever deny and refuse the very thing he had been hankering after and scheming all the years. Meanwhile, however, his rejection of the offer of chieftaincy incidentally earns him some
invaluable vindications as he is thereby practically acquitted of the crude secular megalomania his enemies in Umuaro had always suspected either from his natural haughtiness of character or from their own sheer malice. The ill – timed imprisonment by the white lays bare a deep-seated irascibility and vengefulness that the chief priest has hitherto barely managed to suppress. They undoubtedly get the better of the priest, befuddle his clarity of perception, and upset his balance of public judgment. The imprisonment shows Ezeulu, in fact, a true victim of history, a non-ritualized enactment yet again of his vocational fate as scapegoat. No doubt, his rejection of the chieftaincy is perhaps the finest moment of his entire career. By the time of his release from detention, however, he has already started on his heedless plunge into vengeful betrayal of that sacred trust of public destiny with which his priesthood is charged. Still embittered against those who cast him out, Ezeulu sallies to make a quick plunge heading towards a fiasco with his clansmen. Bu-Buakei Jabbi explores the mental state of Ezeulu:

His new state of mind as he returns home is an ominous mixture of an erasable persecution, mania and vengeful sado-masochism.31

While detention, Ezeulu almost consumed by his own meditative ritualizing of the suffering self, resolves to hit Umuaro at the most vulnerable point – the New Yam Feast. The crisis of the novel reaches its zenith with Ezeulu’s return to
Umuaro. As a spiritual guardian of his community, it is Ezeulu's customary function to announce the beginning of each new moon and to consume one of the ceremonial yams which signifies the passing of the month. During his imprisonment in Okperi, Ezeulu missed two occasions meant for consuming the sacred yams. Ezeulu defers the naming of New Yam festival causing a deep concern and scorn among the villagers who become apprehensive of an impending starvation as the Yam begins to rot in the earth and gets locked in the old year. It is pertinent to note that at their juncture Ezeulu's act is not out of personal grudge against his clansmen. No doubt, he has been hurt by the attitude of his villagers when his best intention and effort to safeguard the sentiments of the people of his community is simply scoffed at. If that had been so, Ezeulu wouldn't have been so much mentally disturbed and the thoughts would not weigh so heavy in his mind.

... the heaviest load was on Ezeulu's mind. He was used to loneliness .... What troubled him most – and he alone seemed to be aware of it at present – was that the punishment was not for now alone but for all time. It would afflict Umuaro like an ogulu-aró disease which counts a year and returns to its victim. Beneath all anger in his mind lay a deeper compassion for Umuaro, the clan
which long, long ago when lizards were in ones and twos chose his ancestor to carry their deity and go before them challenging every obstacle and confronting every danger on their behalf (219-220).

Meanwhile, the general famine unleashed on Umuaro by Ezeulu later on intensifies; and it deepens a growing popular hostility against him and his household. Ezeulu toys with the idea of revenge and reconciliation when he hears the voice of Ulu barking in his ears:

"Ta! Nwanu!" barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the year of an impertinent child. "Who told you that this was your own fight?" Ezeulu trembled and said nothing ......... "I say who told you that this was your own fight to arrange the way it suits you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he-he!"

Only the insane could sometimes approach the menace and mockery in the laughter of deities – a dry, skeletal laugh. "Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you! Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, whose envy seeks to destroy me that his python may again come to power" (191).
The fatal decision of Ezeulu not to name the New Yam festival gives a brutal blow to the Umuaroans. Even a group of ten elders of the clan – most of them are titled and men of considerable influence – visit Ezeulu and persuade him to eat the Yams and declare the Festival so that the villagers can harvest the crop. The ten elders even try to convince Ezeulu how certain “customs ... had been altered in the past when they began to work hardship on the people” (209) and even a calamity of any kind can be dissolved by way of sacrifice to the deity. Ezeulu remains consistent in his stand and his only reply remains: “the gods sometimes use us as a whip” (208). This stand of Ezeulu makes the villagers doubtful whether he stands by his people or against them when they are in utmost need of him. The conflict between the individual and the community that runs through *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* resurfaces again in a very perplex and destructive form.

At last, Ezeulu agrees to consult the deity to find a solution to the crisis. Ezeulu, throughout, has acted according to the truth as he sees it. But, in most cases, he is shown as a priest who has failed to act appropriately and responsibly – for he is a stiff-necked and uncompromising person, but nevertheless there is no shade of hypocrisy in his conviction that in all his actions he has been merely ‘an arrow in the bow of his god.’ Ezeulu returns from the shrine to inform the elders that there is no response from the deity. The great irony in the novel lies in
the fact that Ezeulu directs his psychological hurt against the community and there is nothing as disastrous as this.

The climax of the novel is reached with the sudden and tragic death of Obika, Ezeulu’s most favourite son while performing as Ogbazulobodo, the night spirit who chases away evil spirits. The death of Obika is just like the last straw on the camel’s back. The tragic events that happen in Ezeulu’s life have “left a crack in Ezeulu’s mind” so that he, in his last days lives “in the haughty splendour of a demented high priest and spared ... [the] knowledge of the final outcome” (229). “The final outcome” is offering of sacrifices in the form of Yams and other things to the alien god of Christianity in exchange for their harvest and the promised security against the possible wrath of Ulu. The crops were harvested not in honour of Ulu but “in the name of the son” (230). The mass defection to the Christians which follows must be seen as the result of the failure of the old dispensation to provide security, and the availability of an alternate source of security. The conclusion of the novel presents an irony of a kind present in *Things Fall Apart*:

So in the end only Umuaro and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the
wisdom of their ancestors – that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgment against his clan ....

The Christian harvest which took place a few days after Obika’s death saw more people than even Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in the fields was harvested in the name of the son (230).

The collapse of the traditional culture is poignantly depicted in the final lines of the novel. Even the god he loves does not save the protagonist who in his ire alienates himself from his people, community, and finally he disintegrates himself to his final doom.

It is, indeed, ironic that Ezeulu fails to strike a rational equation between himself and his deity and the community. He behaves as the helpless agent of his deity, rather than the representative of the clan. C.L. Innes observes that “Once Ezeulu sets himself and Ulu apart from and against his community, both lose their primary role and meaning.”32 It is very unfortunate that Ezeulu turns his social responsibility into personal power disguised in a religious garb. This moral error of Ezeulu leads to the destruction of the united and close-knit structure of Igbo
society. According to the traditional customs, only one yam per family should be offered to the deity but the missionaries ask the people to bring "not only yams, any crop whatsoever or livestock or money" (215). This introduction of monetary fluidity into the traditional socio-religious system is a certain mark of its disintegration. The displacement of Ulu by the Christian god and the replacement of yam that stands for symbolic values by money which is bereft of any symbolic or intrinsic value is a reflection of the end of the traditional culture. Thus, a society with a well-organised system of beliefs – social, political and religious which govern the lives of the people crumbles while Ezeulu, tormented by guilt for his actions, gradually drifts towards madness leading to his social alienation.

Achebe paints his African brethren as they appear in the eye of the European colonizer. Captain Winterbottom the District Officer in Arrow of God is not prepared to credit the natives with any human trait. For him the natives are liars. He says:

Like children they are great liars. They don’t lie simply to get out of trouble. Sometimes they would spoil a good case by a pointless lie (37).

Winterbottom can never see the better and finer aspects of the life of the natives. Even the road builder Wright has a worse opinion of the natives. For him, the
natives are no better than animals. According to him, they are “as loyal as pet dogs” (76). Racist overtones are implicit in all the remarks made by the European characters in the novel. And this undermining of the native values and customs highly esteemed by the Africans is challenged by Achebe for he does not see any reason why Africa and its people and their culture be treated as inferior to the Western values and culture. He tries to repudiate the hegemonic colonial misrepresentation of Africa and the Africans which depicted the Africans as barbaric and primitive with no history and culture of their own. Thus, the two novels discussed in this chapter, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are a sharp and witty racist agenda of colonial rule as exemplified in the work of, say, as for instance, Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary.

Achebe, in fact, is not against change; what he vehemently denies and challenges is the forceful conversion and total jeopardizing of the traditional life of the Igbo land. His primary task is to correct the faulty, self-righteous, and arrogant attitude and Eurocentric notions of the colonizer that paved the way to tremendous amount of pressure and conflict in the minds of the Africans making them demoralized and imbecile. What is very significant in the two novels discussed in this chapter *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* is that these novels not only highlight the clash of two dissimilar cultures – the native African culture and the Western culture but also succinctly lay bare Achebe’s adherence to facts
which, in a way, compel him to expose the savagery, superstitions and cruelty of his society – the qualities that had been over-hyped by the Colonizer as the only reality of ancient Africa.

Achebe’s skilful projection of the African past obliterated and dilapidated by repeated colonial injunctions generating catastrophic results is full of poignancy. Oblique attempts have been made by the novelist to subvert, resist and repudiate the stark and blatant forms of exploitation brought by colonialism which are responsible for the change of contours of traditional close-knit African society.

*Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* poignantly respond to the traumatic effects and upheavals generated by the clash of two conflicting cultures and the social changes that Africa has been subjected to because of the insidious and vicious colonial rule and the disintegration that set in African society find a beautiful expression in the two novels discussed in this chapter.
NOTES


6 Ibid., p.38.


Ibid.


28 Ibid., pp.171-172.


