CHAPTER – IV

POST-INDEPENDENCE PREDICAMENT AND
POLITICAL MALAISE IN A MAN
OF THE PEOPLE AND ANTHILLS
OF THE SAVANNAH
The year 1960 is indeed the year of Africa. Many African nations became independent from the clutches of the colonial rule. But strange as it may sound, ironically enough, independence could no longer usher in the euphoria of a newly freed country with new hopes and aspirations of millions of Africans. Sadly, independence remained, both in theory and practice, simply the transfer of power from the whites to the Natives. The most alarming problem that loomed large in Africa after independence was the problem of 'failed leadership'. The problem is described by Achebe in his pamphlet, *The Trouble with Nigeria*:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate
or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.¹

Wole Soyina, in one of his interviews, made clear his bottled-up feelings against the deteriorating society of independent Africa. The socio-political situation became more and more reactionary and inhuman with each passing regime. Soyinka puts up the African situation in this manner.

... a lot of our energy has really been devoted to coping with the oppressive political situation in which we find ourselves. A lot of our energies go into fighting unacceptable situations as they arise while at the same time trying to pursue a long-term approach to politics such as, for instance, joining progressive – looking political parties, but of course each step is always one step forwards and about ten backwards. I find the political situation very, very frustrating, personally frustrating.²

Rampant corruption became the order of the day. Every segment be it political, social and even economic became the cesspool of corruption. The communal
ethic that held the people together lost its grip on the sensibilities and consciousness of the people as the society had no moral centre at all. Commenting on the state of political instability and domestic unrest that resulted from corrupt leadership, Achebe in an interview with Robert Serumaga explained thus:

The political machine had been so abused that whichever way you pressed it, it produced the same result; and therefore you wanted another force, another force just had to come in.\(^3\)

This very situation of independent African nations is what Achebe tries to capture with pathos, sometimes with satire in his fourth novel, *A Man of the People*. Achebe might have been inspired by the election campaign of Oct-Dec, 1964 and during that time Achebe was working in the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation and the newspaper headlines were pregnant with bribery, corruption, thuggery, etc. and he could observe the painful African realities at close quarters. The African societies of the 1960s had completely severed their ties with the age-old religious systems as shown by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In the society of Umuofia and Umuora, the one time all embracing girdle of religion collapsed and gave way. Robert M. Wren puts up the African post-independence predicament in this way:
Inevitably with independence came all the old abuses of public life, and to them was added a complex of needs that could best be met through newly-devised techniques of illegitimate behaviour.⁴

Political independence by itself didn’t and couldn’t bring any Midas’s touch in the lives of the Africans. The winning of independence didn’t mean that there were no problems for the people at all. Rather, the situation became more and more alarming as the country was confronted with the political and constitutional crisis which were, often formidable. In the new nation ‘Politics’ stands for access to the nation’s wealth and advancement of self-interests. The political leaders chalked out different programmes and policies, which by their very nature, impeded their own benefits and advancement. The leaders were ever ready to compromise their idealism for the privileges of power that neo-colonial politics offered. They exchange the collective interest of the society for the consolidation of power and amassing of wealth. In face of continuing suffering and misery of the people, the real meaning of ‘independence’ remained obscure. The residual effect of colonialism still persisted even in post-colonial era in Africa. Independence became paradoxical and ambivalent as the questions of fulfilling the aspirations and hopes of the people were completely sidelined and unaddressed as the politicians and leaders remained apathetic to the sentiments of
the people thereby perpetuating a tradition of exploitation and coercion. The despotic and arbitrary concept of political power which was the only visible reality during the colonial era became the colonial legacy in Africa. The indigenous elite, whom the people pinned all their hopes, manipulated the post-colonial governance as an unlimited storehouse of wealth and power. As is commonly agreed, Power corrupts man and in turn man corrupts and criminalizes society. Acquisition and retention of power and the luxury it provided became the sole preoccupation of the ruling class. Opposition entailed the risk of being charged with treason. As the leaders became power mongers, degeneration, chaos and confusion reigned supreme in the demoralized African society. Achebe has critically addressed these post-colonial realities in his last two novels, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah*.

I

*A Man of the People* reflects the ethos of the early heady years of ‘Nigerianization’. Hailed by many reviewers as a “prophetic” novel, Achebe’s *A Man of the People* published just nine days after the military coup in Nigeria corresponded so closely to the social and political upheavals of the country. Achebe, may on the surface level, seems to mark a sudden shift in the theme of his fourth novel with a different social commitment altogether, but the novel is in
no way different from the earlier ones in its essential argument: the moral relation of an individual with his society or to put in other words – the colonial conflict. The only difference is that Ahebe’s earlier novels particularly Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God tried to validate the social and cultural ethos of the African people and re-generate and re-educate his peoples so that they could come out from their acceptance of racial inferiority. In his earlier novels, he seemed to point out that here was a particular African society as it really was. But as a response to his rapidly changing society, Achebe no longer feels the need to teach and re-create his society, but rather he has turned his back on the European presence and is very much desperately concerned to look back and try to find out where they went wrong and discover the root cause of the political malaise that confronted his society. Now, in the new novel, Achebe heaped scorn and indictment on the new modern independent Africa with a satirical whip, of course, with anger, sometimes with pathos, but often with bitterness. Here, Ngugi’s point may be noted:

What Achebe has done in A Man of the People is to make it impossible or inexcusable for other African writers to do other than address themselves directly to their audiences in Africa – not in a comforting spirit – and tell them that such problems are their concern. The teacher no longer stands apart to contemplate. He has
moved with a whip among the pupils, flagellating himself as well as them. He is now the true man of the people.6

Despite the novel's unlocated setting, it realistically grapples with a generalized version of the political situation in Nigeria at the time it was written. The novel is more than a topical exposition and a historical record. The novel is satirical in tone but scathing in intent. Achebe laments the spiritual death of his nation in the throes of the marauding politicians for whom self-interest becomes the driving force behind their behaviour. Society has ceased to be the guardian of the moral well-being of the community and Achebe is highly critical of this new spirit in society which measures good only by the immediate benefits in cash or kind.

Set in the troubled independence of Nigeria in the 1960s, the novel narrates the story of two diametrically opposed characters Odili Samalu who is also the narrator of the novel and M.A. Nanga, a corrupt politician. The two men occupy opposite ends of the political spectrum and their roles define the basic problems of political morality. Detached and passive, Odili, a school teacher in Anata Grammar School, became cynical and skeptical in the face of the prevailing political realities and thus opted out of politics. The collaborated pursuit of both the elected and the electorate plunged the country into a morass of
corruption. The progressive disintegration of old values under the pressure of foreign social and political structures made Odili become pessimistic:

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you – as my father did – if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth (2-3).

Years later when Odili meets Nanga, ironically called “a man of the people” and also Minister of Culture, “exactly reflecting and epitomizing their greed and vulgarity on the infinitely grandiose scale made possible by his position”\(^7\), he gets embittered to see the villagers showing ‘primitive loyalty’ to Nanga. Odili becomes dumbfounded to see the attitude of the villagers who see
nothing wrong as far as they also have a fair share of the "national cake". This selfish rationalism forms the very matrix of all actions in the novel. Achebe focuses on the moral dilemma of the protagonist, the way in which his ideals conflict with the community ethic, and the extent to which he is true to his own beliefs. Odili's hatred for politics and politicians was intensified by an incident in 1960 in which Nanga played a decisive role in the political arena by trying to pull down the Finance Minister. Odili's idealism was shattered when he made his first and last visit to Parliament and saw the political assassination of the Minister of Finance who tried to solve a financial crisis in a truthful and sincere manner. The Finance Minister, "a first rate economist with a Ph.D. in Public Finance" (3-4), in order to check the impending disaster put up a policy with stringent measures but the government opposed him and his policy. The Finance Minister and his supporters were considered traitors by the Prime Minister and his ministers for the sole reason of avoiding the risk of "losing the election" (4). Political opportunism drove these people on the brink of corruption with no ethics of politics:

Let us now for all time extract from our body-politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in textbook economics and aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not
those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people ...(4).

Nanga, totally detribalized but imperfectly westernized, is a typical politician whose only concerns are self-interest and survival. Nanga's concerns are local and immediate with no concept of political morality:

In any case people like Chief Nanga don't care two hoots about the outside world. He is concerned with the inside world, with how to retain his hold on his constituency, and there he is adept, you must admit (23).

Known to his people as the most 'approachable' politician, Nanga is ever ready to listen to those offering bribes. What is most striking in his personality is that he has an instinctive art of how to find a way to people's heart without being sounded gullible or corrupted. It is this charisma the politicians are in dire need of. It is interesting to note that there is an ironical twist in Nanga's character as he strongly advocated Africanization denouncing the "hybrid class of Western-
educated and snobbish intellectuals" (6) but very eager to receive the honorary doctorate degree to be awarded by an American University.

Nanga's arrival at the Anata school is the beginning of Odili's real education in life. In a delightful comic reversal, for a minute Odili is scowling icily at the display of enthusiasm by Nanga's constituents, and next he melts in the sunny rays of Nanga's recognition by way of greeting him as a former pupil, 'Odili the great' a nickname by which he was known. A self-deluded Odili whose idealism placed him as a school teacher in life instead of becoming a civil service officer is deeply carried and his feet swept off by Nanga's charismatic charm and affability. Inspite of having a firm self-professed political idealism, Odili fails to resist the temptation when Nanga offers him a trip to the capital, Bori, along with a promise to provide a scholarship for studying abroad. Surprisingly enough, keeping aside his idealism, Odili readily accepts Nanga's offer. Odili's change is from "the political to the personal" as a critic observes. On his visit to the capital, Bori, Odili's moral equivocations cannot conceal the fact that he willingly lays himself open to temptation. His visit to Bori is an eye-opener for Odili as it opens to him the whole vistas of the corrupted political world in a nation with no national consciousness but a conglomeration of village or clan loyalties punctuated by ethnic complexity. True to his promise, Nanga takes Odili to Chief Koko, Minister for Overseas Training and Odili's notion of
public welfare receives a severe blow to the core. Odili’s main problem will be how to act without being involved in the ‘dirty game’ of politics. Odili cannot remain detached for long and once he gets involved, his idealism is tested twice by the pressures of public life. Power has its own fascination and Odili as a guest at Chief Nanga’s house is dazed by the material trappings of the extravagant wealth Nanga’s position brings. A curious fusion of idealism and self-interest is discernible in Odili. A strong feeling of gullibility crops up as he slides through the luxurious life of Nanga. His whole disposition is affected by mixed feeling of apathy and complacency as he is mesmerized by the extravagance and glitters of “seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms” (36) of the minister’s official residence. Odili admits:

All I can say is that on that first night there was no room in my mind for criticism. I was hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me ... I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one for ever (36-37).

Odili has now been under the magical spell of Nanga so much so that he reflects on how power tames a man and how men of power are tempted and caught in the tentacles of whirlwind of power:
A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation – as I saw it then lying on that bed – was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say “To hell with it”. We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us – the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best – had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in (37).

Through Odili’s experience at Nanga’s residence, Achebe is trying to show that there is no meeting point as such for the world of ideals and the world of power. They are always placed face-off to one another. Achebe, through a farcical episode, very convincingly brings out the hypocrisy of those in power. When Nanga takes Odili to Chief Koko, Minister for Overseas Training, the minister believes that he has been poisoned when he tastes the home-grown product his government promotes which is commonly known as the OHMS, instead of the minister’s usual Nescafe. This is, indeed, ironic because OHMS – Our Home Made Stuff is the over-hyped campaign launched by the government all over the country to promote the consumption of local made products. A sinister disparity
between the professed ideals and actual practice runs through the heart of the novel. The post-colonial African society has reached its nadir. Rosemary Colmer's comment on the predicament of post-independence Africa can be noted here:

In *A Man of the People*, the instinct to survive which led Umuaro to choose life and Christ over starvation and Ulu⁹ has produced the self-seeking spirit of Anata and Urua. Things have indeed fallen apart, and the community which was once the source of wisdom and law now apathetically endorses any corruption which will bring it food.¹⁰

In fact, the rampant corruption inherent in the system is the main focus of the novel. Odili makes an apt remark on the current political corruption: "A common saying in the country after Independence was that it didn’t matter what you knew but who you knew" (17). Achebe is at best in this remark over the state of his society that is passing a very difficult period of history. He lays bare the true picture of post-independence society so well in this manner:

The people themselves, as we have seen, had become even more cynical than their leaders and were apathetic into the bargain. "Let them eat", was the people's opinion, "after all when white men
used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?" Of course not (145).

The emasculation of traditional values, the colossal loss of the sense of values and even tribalism, for that matter, produced political depravity and debased materialism which became so blatant in Nigeria’s troubled society in the 1960s. For example, in traditional Igbo society offering ‘Kola’ was a sign of respect shown to a visitor and had a deep cultural significance but in the new colonial society, ‘Kola’ became a form of bribe paid for certain services rendered. With Nigeria becoming independent such value system disappeared, and the country headed for anarchy without historical and political direction of its own. The British-imposed political system could find no way into the hearts of the people but on the contrary, it intensified ethnic conflict. A great misfortune and crisis had befallen Africa much to the shock of the people. Lack of political wisdom and accountability on the part of the national leaders was at the root of this turmoil. Achebe observes thus:

A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers – a tendency to pious materialistic woolliness and self-centred pedestrianism.¹²
The parochial interests of the politicians plunged the country into the cesspool of corruption and left the people with no choice but to reel helplessly under the venomous system devoid of any bright prospect for the public welfare. The social and political malaise in the post-independent Africa is what Achebe tries to explore in his later novels and he became bitterly soured to see how corruption became so ravenous and rampant. The arbitrary and despotic power and authority inherited from the colonial past still persisted as a very powerful force in the post independence period. Odili philosophizes on the 'rain' imagery that suggests the helplessness of the Africans as they are destined to fight the internal enemies once the external enemies are driven out.

Odili’s short exposure to the world of luxury of the corrupt politicians which he experienced at Nanga’s mansion receives a severe blow when his girlfriend, Elsie, is seduced by the minister under his very nose. With a tinge of irony, Achebe lets the readers know that Elsie is the only girl whom Odili has succeeded in finding a way to a lady’s heart. Odili had taken Elsie to stay at Nanga’s mansion giving the impression to the minister that she was simply a very easy going girl. When Odili discovers that both Elsie and Nanga have played false, he leaves the place in disgust and nurtures in his heart a hope of taking revenge someday:
The heat and anger had now largely evaporated leaving the cold fact that another man had wrenched my girl-friend from my hand and led her to bed under my very eyes, and I had done nothing about it – could do nothing. And why? Because the man was a minister bloated by the flatulence of ill-gotten wealth, living in a big mansion built with public money, riding in a Cadillac and watched over by a one-eyed, hired thug (76).

This fatal blow to his ‘manhood’ forces Odili to take revenge by planning to seduce Nanga’s intended parlour-wife, Edna. Nanga no longer remains for Odili a politician with despicable values but a rival who must be paid back with same insulting force. Odili’s earlier idealism, self-deceiving as it was, finally reveals its true colour as he is shown to be capable of vicious and selfish actions at the level of personal relations.  

The launching pad for Odili’s revenge against Nanga is provided by Odili’s erstwhile friend in college, Maxwell Kulamo who forms a new political party, the Common People’s convention with an aim to bring integrity in politics. The political enmity is thus aggravated by the sexual jealousy. The new party, that is the Common People’s Convention promises to bring a change by cleansing the corrupt society. Idealism apart, Odili’s desire to hit back at Nanga
makes him visualize politics as an appropriate instrument in his arsenal. As a founder member of the new party whose professed ideal was bent towards purifying political life, Odili becomes more acceptable of reality when he gathers a vital fact that his new party is supported and patronized by a junior minister in the present government. To his utter dismay, he comes to realize that in the desperate struggle for survival ideological positions and philosophy do matter nothing at all:

"What is he doing in the Government if he is so dissatisfied with it?" I asked naively. "Why doesn't he resign?" "Resign?" laughed Max. "Where do you think you are-Britain or something? Don't be funny, Odili" (83).

Odili's personal hatred with a deep sense of ideological commitment against corrupt politics forms the matrix of his immediate concerns:

How important was my political activity in its own right? It was difficult to say; things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl. And perhaps it was just as well that my motives should entangle and reinforce one another. For I was not being so naïve as to imagine that loving Edna was enough to
wrench her from a minister. True, I had other advantages like youth and education but those were nothing beside wealth and position and the authority of a greedy father. No. I needed all the reinforcement I could get (109-110).

No doubt, contradictory pressures are at work on Odili but he has his faults. In this context, what Basavaraj says may be noted:

The chief mistake of Odili lies in his ignorance of the sophistries of politics. Neither he nor his party has sufficient money to squander on elections. He suffers because of his impractical approach to life.14

Odili’s father’s reaction to his son’s entry into politics provides a very interesting aspect as it exposes how everyone is concerned with their own share of the “national cake”. Never in cordial terms with his father who used to be district interpreter in the colonial days, Odili had an estranged relationship with his father since his mother died giving birth to him. Feared and hated by his own people who perceived him as the sole intermediary between them and the powerful white man, Odili’s father had never developed a close relationship with his son. Even in the post-independence era he still becomes a man of power and
authority being placed as the local chairman of the People’s Organisation Party – in his village called Urua. His initial reaction to Odili’s venture in politics was not one of discontent or disapproval but rather he was inwardly pleased with Odili’s proposition with full of prospect to amass wealth and riches soon.

The only comment I remember my father making (at the beginning anyway) was when he asked if my “new” party was ready to give me enough money to fight Nanga. He sounded a little doubtful. But he was clearly satisfied with what I had got out of it so far, especially the car which he was now using nearly as much as myself. The normal hostility between us was put away in a corner, out of sight (116).

A change in Odili’s earlier idealism is discernible as he loses to maintain a perfect balance between his public self and private one. For Odili, no doubt, the car had symbolically stood for the despicable, power hungry and corrupt elite in his society but he soon finds the car so indispensable.

Achebe also tries to show how foreign business becomes the mainspring of corruption in post-independence Africa. This is quite obvious given the fact that British Amalgamated, an overseas company, maintained a high level of
mutual understanding with the politicians. It pays a whooping amount of four hundred thousand pounds to Nanga's People's Organisation Party to fight the election. The nefarious connection between the imperialist and their agents in an excruciating display of neo-colonial politics is even made clear by Max's assertion that the American were even more generous in investment policy. British Amalgamated had been informed three months in advance of a twenty percent increase in import duties on certain textiles. A few years earlier, the same company had rewarded Nanga for such information by building three blocks of seven-storey flats for £300000 each, in Mrs Nanga's name, and then leasing the flats for £1400 per month each. This large package along with other gifts like the fleet of ten luxury buses Nanga gets from the company on a 'never-never loan basis' reveals the degree of social depravity in the post-independence era and all this expresses in part the dirty game played by the foreign investors and the corrupt politicians. Neo-colonialism operates so powerfully even after independence in Africa. The politicians and the foreign company surreptitiously legitimize the perpetuation of exploitation and looting of wealth and resources in the name of nationalism. It is indeed ironical that parochial nationalism or a blind 'Africanisation' was projected as the need of the hour in the diabolic sacking of the Minister of Finance for his stringent measures by which he was labelled a traitor. But Nanga and his ilk were instrumental in engineering the
neo-colonial exploitation. Odili's earlier remark expressing surprise on hearing the news of scandals and scams involving astronomical figures, which beyond the expectation of the poor common people, stands as a very glaring example of the nature in which the plunder of wealth and resources continues unabated in the aftermath of Colonialism. Josiah's act of stealing a blind man's stick to make potent magic to turn his customers blind and uninformed when they buy his wares finds a parallel in Nanga's repeated rhetoric of bringing 'a slice of national cake' for the people of his constituency. It is pertinent to note that in Josiah's case, the village was the owner and he was punished for his crime because, as the proverb goes, he had taken more than what the owner noticed it. Nanga went scot-free inspite of converting the traditional ethic to the ethic of 'national cake' because in the new society there is no longer an 'owner' to notice. This very loss of moral centre is what Achebe poignantly paints in his novel, Nanga and his ilk lead the people blind by giving false hopes. The close affinity between Josiah's act and the corrupt politicians provides the novel's moral parable.

When Odili decides to contest elections in Nanga's constituency, Nanga is surprised inspite of the big difference between the two in terms of wealth and influence. The harsh realities underlining political realities in post-colonial Africa make Odili difficult to keep his idealism untarnished during the campaign. The endless display of coercion, threats, bribery and deceit constitutes the
hopelessly dirty game of politics. Nanga even tries to lure Odili into stepping
down from his candidacy by offering him an overseas scholarship and a huge
sum of £ 250. Even Odili’s father who considers the mainspring of political
action should be some sort of material gain also expects some material advantage
from his son’s new political career. Nanga who wants to be re-elected unopposed
unscrupulously exhibits the level of his moral depravity:

“We know where that money is coming from”, continued Nanga.
“Don’t think we don’t know. We will deal with them after the
election. They think they can come here and give money to irresponsible people to overthrow a duly constituted government.
... Your good friend Maxwell Kulamo has more sense than you.
He has already taken his money and agreed to step down for Chief
Koko ... You stay in the bush here wasting your time and your friends are busy putting their money in the Bank in Bori. Anyway you are not a small boy. I have done my best and, God so good, your father is my living witness. Take your money and take your scholarship to go and learn more book; the country needs experts like you. And leave the dirty game of politics to us who know how to play it ...” (119-120).
It soon becomes apparent that under the sick and diseased political situation in the society, it becomes very difficult for Odili to remain a healthy element for long. Circumstances dictate that he should have bodyguards for self-defense. Later on, he unwillingly gives in to the pressure of carrying weapons. And worse still, he has to provide money for bribing important officials. In fact, the election campaign opens up a whole new vistas of a strange political world where all Odili's hopes and ideals become so inconsequential and brutally crushed by the corrupt and depraved situation of a post-colonial society. In such a situation, the question of free and fair election becomes something impossible. The politicians misuse power in their election campaign for they are in full control of the national radio, the press and even the police leaving no hope for a better political situation.

The climax of the novel is reached when Odili attends one of Nanga's overwhelmingly packed political meetings. Odili's naïve idealism combined with personal vendetta makes him take such a ludicrous and disastrous step. He attends the meeting in disguise but is identified by Josiah whom he had rebuked earlier by rejecting his request to campaign for Common People's Convention. The bottled-up feelings Odili nurtured against Nanga and the corruption he represents find a final outlet on this occasion. When Nanga offers him the
microphone, Odili grabs the opportunity to execute his long awaited plan as he says, "I came to tell your people that you are a liar ..." Instantly, Nanga as reported by Odili ...

...pulled the microphone away smartly, set it down, walked up to me and slapped. Immediately hands seized my arms ... The roar of the crowd was now like a thick forest all around. By this time blows were falling as fast as rain on my head and body until something heavier than the rest seemed to split. The last thing I remembered was seeing all the policemen turn round and walk quietly away (141).

Inspite of the absurdity and triviality behind this fatal act, Odili’s idealism mellowed by experience, has finally allowed him to perform this one ‘selfless public act’ which was unthinkable in the early chapters of the novel.

When Odili is in hospital, political melodrama takes its final form as a series of incidents happen one after the other. Max is killed by an election jeep belonging to Chief Koko. His death incidentally sparks off a spate of violence. Chief Koko in turn is again shot dead by Eunice, Max’s girlfriend. Endless fights and brawls continue between the bodyguards. Nanga tries hard to disband his
private army but anarchy prevails everywhere. In such a situation, political redemption becomes a far cry. When the prime minister inducts his old cabinet back to office, the military stages a coup and imprisons the members of the government. In a swift and decisive manner, the army intervenes to put a stop to the political malady that envelops the African society. In this novel, Achebe, without any fuss, shows how democratic politics crumbles and gives way to banditry:

No, the people had nothing to do with the fall of our Government. What happened was simply that unruly mobs and private armies having tasted blood and power during the election had got out of hand and ruined their masters and employers. And they had no public reason whatever for doing it. Let's make no mistake about that (145).

The depth of estrangement between the people and their elected governments can be measured by the immediate popular support given to the new military regime. Despite the military coup, the destiny of the people remains more or less the same, “the gap between the traditional social ethic and the national cake ethic will not be bridged [for] there is a disastrous fracture between the morality of the village and the affairs of the nation.”15
Amidst the political turmoil, Nanga is arrested while trying to escape disguised as a fisherman. The military regime abolishes all political parties in the country and elections are banned until the situation improves again. Achebe's satirical power is at his best when he clearly defines the acquisitive mental makeup of his people in a shocking tone:

"Let them eat" was the people's opinion, after all when white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?" Of course not

Now, he turns on his people who are responsible for the suffering of his country people. Achebe, again, with a tinge of irony records the general impression in the people's mind:

Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the last regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government; newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants – everybody said what a terrible lot; and it became public opinion the next morning. And these were the same people that only the other day had owned a thousand names of adulation, whom praise singers followed with song and talking-drum
wherever they went. Chief Koko in particular became a thief and a murderer, while the people who had led him on – in my opinion the real culprits – took the legendary bath of the Hornbill and donned innocence (149).

In this novel, Achebe is mainly concerned with the moral bankruptcy with which Africa was faced in the post-independence period. He is pained to see that the real problem threatening Africa in the post independence era is that in the new social set-up, there is no ‘owner’ at all and the new nation becomes an open prey to thieves (politicians), and people have no faith in politicians or any system of government any longer. The novel is an archetypal picture of political opportunism and corruption where the hard won freedom of African society is hijacked and perverted by native leaders and the present is marked by moral pusillanimity. In this novel, Achebe, as a powerful social and political thinker, has succeeded in portraying a picture of post-independence Africa with the utmost authenticity and realism. The social and political malaise of African society as we find in A Man of the People finds a deeper expression in Achebe’s last novel Anthills of the Savannah the discussion of which follows as under.
Achebe's fifth and last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*,\(^{16}\) shortlisted for the 1987 Booker Prize in 1987, published twenty-one years after his fourth novel, *A Man of the People* is a political novel that succinctly reveals Achebe's unflinching and unconcealed antipathy to the onslaughts of ideology. Achebe's disillusionment with ideology stems from his first-hand experience of Nigerian politics and society. Achebe in the novel lays bare the fact that politics in Nigeria has no direct relation to "the lives and concerns of ninety-nine percent of the population"(141). The term "public affairs" is a misnomer, for it refers to "nothing but the closed transactions of soldiers-turned politicians with their cohorts in business and the bureaucracy"(141). Achebe writes out of an acute social consciousness not as a historian who simply records the events but as an ideologue. Perhaps, Achebe tries to convey the message that "any form of government which is insensitive to the needs of the suffering masses is doomed to fail".\(^{17}\)

The post-independence disenchantment with native rule reflected in *A Man of the People* grows manifold with the rule of the military dictator in *Anthills of the Savannah*. *A Man of the People* ends with a military takeover abolishing all political parties; *Anthills of the Savannah* takes off from the point
where military coups have become the order of the day. Imperialism and colonialism had been regarded as the root cause of African problems. Ironically, with independence came all sorts of corruption and public apathy reaching an obnoxious level and as such early idealism in the days following independence gradually gave way to disillusionment and cynicism. The military had intervened giving a lease of hope to the people for a better Africa. But as the following events and trends testified, the emerging socio-political scenario belied optimism and expectation as the body politic revealed an insidious appetite for power in the form of military dictatorships. *Anthills of the Savannah* is a serious indictment of military rule. C. Vijayashree’s comment on the novel is worth mentioning here:

The novel offers a critical evaluation of the existing power structures in Africa, which are largely a legacy of their colonial past and rejects their obsessive drive towards centralization. Power is the central thematic motif in the text and what is of vital importance to Achebe is attitudes to power held by different classes of society. Ideology rather than history is the object of the text.\(^{18}\)

The novel is set in the fictional West African state of Kangan and it is crowded by a variety of characters drawn from various social classes ranging
from the Head of the State and his Cabinet colleagues to university students, impoverished rural populace, taxi drivers, lawyers and slum dwellers. Immediately after the earlier military regime has been replaced by the military coup, Sam assumes power as the Head of the State in Kangan. Chris, Ikem, Sam and Beatrice, the four protagonists in the novel are all “been-tos” and totally alienated from their roots by their western orientation and among them, Sam furnishes the most glaring example of a westernized personality. Like Chris and Ikem, Sam was also a product of Lord Lugard College in Nigeria but it was his training at Sandhurst and stay in England that shaped and moulded his personality. He admired the English “to the point of foolishness” and “his major flaw was that all he ever wanted was to do what was expected of him especially by the English” (49). Sam a Sandhurst – trained army officer finds himself insecurely guarding his newly found supreme political power which he takes possession of. Sam’s transformation into the “baby monster” (10) has been a smooth ride given the political atmosphere which is replete with apathetic masses, indifferent intellectuals and corrupt politicians. His Excellency’s often repeated pet expression: “Finish!” “Kabisha”(1) is expressive of his ultimate authority. Achebe beautifully presents a picture of a dehumanized political machinery of his demoralized society through the slavish subservience of the cabinet members comprising lawyers, professors, university graduates and
intellectuals who are likened to rats crawling in and out of holes sniffing their master's mood. Appeasing the master seems to be their only concern as their liaison with power spring from fear all through. Fear appears to be the inseparable twin of Power as those in power fear the loss of it while the powerless fear power. The state reaches its nadir under the hands of Sam and his sycophant colleagues sinking the state deeper into degeneration.

Christopher Oriko, a graduate of the London School of Economics, was the editor of the National Gazettee, an official state organ, before he became the Commissioner for Information in the Cabinet of Sam. His two years stint as the Commissioner for Information exposes him to the political manoeuvering of his state and makes him a detached and cynical observer. Long before Sam metamorphoses into a "baby monster", Chris was fully supportive of the grandiose project of His Excellency. Actually, Chris is not a man of politics and he becomes repulsive when Sam becomes a megalomaniac and egocentric despot. As the political crisis deepens, he becomes aware of the meaninglessness of his position in the cabinet and he becomes a mere distant and dispassionate onlooker of the absurd and ridiculous ways in which political life serves up in Kangan. The degenerating mood is poignantly captured by Chris's reflections on himself and his cabinet colleagues:
And so it begins to seem to me that this thing probably never was a game, that the present was there from the very beginning only I was too blind or too busy to notice. But the real question which I have often asked myself is why then do I go on with it now that I can see. I don't know. Simple inertia, may be. Or perhaps sheer curiosity: to see where it will all ... well, end. I am not thinking so much about him as about my colleagues, eleven intelligent, educated men who let this happen to them, who actually went out of their way to invite it, and who even at this hour have seen and learnt nothing, the cream of our society and the hope of the black race. I suppose it is for them that I am still at this silly observation post making farcical entries in the crazy log-book of this our Ship of state. Disenchantment with them turned long ago into detached clinical interest.

I find their actions not merely bearable now but actually interesting, even exciting. Quite amazing! And to think that I personally was responsible for recommending half of them for appointment (2).

Reality dawns upon Chris but he fails to rise to the occasion simply slipping into inertia.
Ikem Osodi, Kangan’s leading poet and novelist and another friend of Sam succeeds Chris’s position as editor of the National Gazette. He visualizes himself as a true defender of the poor and dispossessed but ironically, he “had no solid contact with the ordinary people of Kangan (39) because of his English education and the European values imbibed by him. Achebe projects his image as a ‘romantic’, ‘sentimental’ and ‘passionate’ kind but he detaches himself from the kind of masses he genuinely tries to defend. He launches editorial crusades against the policies of the government. The logic of power-hierarchy is denounced by Ikem who identifies it with ‘circus’. He says: “Following a leader who follows his leader would be quite a circus” (54).

Here, Indrasena’s view may be quoted:

Power-game in the novel becomes synonymous with circus. Just as the wild animals are tamed into submission in a circus show, people involved in power-game are sought to be rendered ineffectual and impotent by power-equations all along the line.19

The opening scene of Anthills of the Savannah is very significant as it reveals Achebe’s continued deep concern about the contemporary politics, especially
the exercise of power by the 'new rulers'. The political realities and the harsh military rules are unfolded—civil wars, the corruption of power and the toppling of governments, the sycophantic cabinet meeting, the coup and counter-coup which reflect the breakdown of law and order in everyday life in Kangan, the African fictional state in nineteen-eighties. What Achebe is mainly concerned with in this novel is not just exposure of the political and social maladies of the state but he is in dire need to teach his people how the intellectuals need to undergo a kind of re-education so that they should be able to get a hold of the core of their indigenous tradition and re-form their society “around its core of reality, not around any intellectual abstraction” (100). The novel underscores the need for the identification of intellectuals with the suffering masses because “this world belongs to the people of the world not any little caucus, no matter how talented” (323).

Cast against the backdrop of political chaos and social confusion in Kangan, *Anthills of the Savannah* is “a critic on the power apparatus in a neo-colonial situation. The novel also serves as an antidote to the ugly march of Power.”20 The novel tells the story how power corrupts man and how the corrupting influence of power blunts the finer sensibilities of those in power as “Power doesn’t so much corrupt as deaden sense of intuition, and turn energy
The predominant theme of the novel is power versus powerlessness, one representing rulers and men, and the other, the people of Nigeria and women. Achebe shows with poignancy how the three main characters – Sam Chris and Ikem, collectively known as the triumvirate fall out in a maze of resentment, hostility, mutual distrust and suspicion as soon as they occupy the apex of power. Chris’s remark is expressive of their intimacy”

We are all connected. You cannot tell the story of any of us without implicating the others. Ikem may resent me but he probably resents Sam even more and Sam resents both of us most vehemently. We are too close together (66).

Referred to as “three green bottles” (191), they share a common fate of falling and shattering into pieces like the bottles anytime. Misunderstanding and mistrust merge in alarming proportion as they become the men in power. Beatrice, the Western educated female protagonist, and also a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance sums up the whole implication when she says:

All three of you, are incredibly conceited. The story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you (66).
A sense of pride and temperamental differences create a chasm among the friends.

The novel is set against the backdrop of a delegation of six elders from Abazon who land up at the Presidential Palace unannounced. Hit hard by a drought, they have come to seek redressal and also to meet His Excellency to atone for their hostile stand against him when he sought to install himself as the 'President-for-Life' through a Referendum. Kangan comprises four provinces, out of which only Abazon voted against Sam in the Referendum or the life Presidency. The very acme of sycophancy is revealed by Attorney General, Prof. Okong's observation on the outcome of the referendum:

Your Excellency, let us not flaunt the wishes of the people ... three provinces out of four is a majority anywhere ... The people have spoken. Their desire is manifest. You are condemned to serve them for life (5).

Prof. Okong belongs to the breed of boot-lickers and praises His Excellency and equates him with Jesus by calling him the "Nation's Man of Destiny"(23). He and his colleagues in the Cabinet have no "problem in worshipping" (24) the Man of Destiny and they do not hesitate to bargain their self-respect with any
kind of privilege. Chris and Ikem can neither stand such kind of hypocrisy nor can they yield themselves to the trappings of power. Ikem tries relentlessly to persuade Chris to save Sam from the clutches of the boot licking sycophants. He reflects in a discerning manner:

I am sure that Sam can still be saved if we put our minds to it. His problem is that with so many petty interests salaaming around him all day, like the shyster of an Attorney General, he has no chance of knowing what is right. And that's what Chris and I ought to be doing – letting him glimpse a little light now and again through chinks in his solid wall of court jesters; we who have known him longer than the rest should not be competing with them. I have shown what light I can with a number of controversial editorials. With Chris I could do much more (46).

Sam gets jittery and the cold war between friends surfaces as a show-down with no prospect for the great affability they shared together before they occupy the positions of power. Sam relies heavily for advice and guidance on the Director, SRC (State Research Council) and the Chief of Army that he becomes morally blind to everything around him.
Achebe vehemently denies the kind of power structure that places itself outside of and above the people. Through an unlettered old Abazon man who leads the delegation, Achebe reprimands the notion of permanent authority or alliance in one's life time. He expresses that even marital alliance between husband and wife becomes null and void when one of the partners dies, besides other factors like separation and divorce. It is pertinent to note that Sam cuts a sorry figure as he becomes jittery and nervous inspite of the cordiality and gesture of goodwill shown by the Abazonian delegation. So, Sam fails to give a positive response to the delegation. Sam’s reaction is highly expressive of the ruler’s unwillingness to reach out to the rabble and they feel that only distance can protect the mystic of power. Perhaps, this is nothing but the Western orientation of the ruling elite who, like their former colonial master’s are more obsessed with questions of their own dignity and status. Govind Narain Sharma opines that “the contempt for the mass of the people is the main reason for [Sam’s] refusal to visit them or to listen to their grievances”.

At this juncture, Achebe narrates a very significant parable underscoring the futility of despotic power and the inevitability of persisting struggles through the voice of the leader of the Abazonian delegation. The parable serves as a metaphor for the ideological framework of the novel and it focuses on the age-old animosity between the leopard and the tortoise. As the story goes, the leopard
is always on the look out for an opportunity to attack and kill the tortoise. When the tortoise is finally caught and is about to be killed, it fervently pleads with the leopard for a few minutes so as to be mentally prepared for the forthcoming death. Seeing no harm in that, the leopard grants the last wish of the tortoise, but instantly the tortoise starts scratching with hands and feet, scattering sand in all directions. Puzzled at the strange behaviour of the tortoise, the leopard enquires about the meaning of the crazy act. The tortoise instantly replies: “Because even after I am dead I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here” (128). The inevitability of struggle forms the centrality of this parable in the scheme of the novel’s thematic framework. The metaphor projects a contemporary African reality where the oppressed and destitute mass are destined to tread the path of struggle for a better change and emancipation. The story undermines a very painful reality of how the struggle between an all powerful despotic state-power and common Abazonians entails nothing but doom. Nevertheless, what matters most is that as the old man insists, though defeated and crushed, their spirit cannot be dampened and the spirit of struggle lives on as a living testimony for the posterity to follow:

My people, that is all we are doing now. Struggling, perhaps to no purpose except that those who come after us will be able to say:

True, our fathers were defeated but they tried (128).
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purpose except that those who come after us will be able to say:
True, our fathers were defeated but they tried (128).
The importance of story-telling is paramount in the African context. As Ikem puts it:

... story tellers are a threats. They threaten all champion of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit – in state in Church or mosque, in party congress, in the University or wherever (153).

Story needs to be told and re-told in order to be reminded of the past and to cope with the pressures of the present. Story telling embodied in literature is not a mere creative exercise but an active expression of the daily struggle to survive. The act of story telling is a sign of resistance, a determined attempt to counter the myth of stability and justice and the promise of a better future the military regime ensures. The authenticity of people's story is expressed by Supriya Nair in this manner:

The story functions as one aspect of their political education, providing them with the necessary information and direction to empower themselves.\(^2^3\)

One instance of the story as an agent of change is Ikem's lecture delivered to the students of Bassa University titled "The Tortoise and the Leopard – a Political
Meditation on the Imperative of Struggle”, which is an adaptation of the elder’s anecdote. As Emmanuel, the President of the Students’ Union admits, “It wasn’t Ikem the Man who changed me. I hardly knew him. It was his ideas set on paper” (223). Ikem has been suspended by His Excellency for he thinks Ikem to be instrumental in performing subversive activities. The presence of Ikem among the Abazonian delegates makes Sam believe that it was Ikem who engineered the whole plot against him. The old man and his associates have been imprisoned at the Bassa Maximum Security Prison. This very step is the repressive measure taken by the autocratic military dictator who sees any kind of opposition as a threat to his power. The suspension of Ikem and even the old man’s imprisonment for that matter, the two official acts of silencing the mass do not become fruitful, nevertheless, Ikem's lecture becomes more explosive in its defiance and it acts as a powerful indictment of the sordid power game played in the whole African administrative set-up. Surprisingly enough, Ikem’s lecture which covers a wide range of topics and issues has a right revolutionary ring to the minds of the audience and it provides an urgency of the task of rebuilding the nation and redefining their goals after centuries of colonial domination. Achebe also makes clear the need to look and go beyond ready-made solutions like Marxism which have become the hallmark of pseudo-ideologues. He is not totally against change of any kind but change for him does not require any drastic
overhauling of social and economic organization but what is required is the rectification of “a basic human failing that may only be alleviated by a good spread of general political experience” (139). Ikem acts as Achebe’s mouthpiece and he says that in the Third World context, writers “must not stop at the stage of documenting social problems but move to the higher responsibility of preferring prescriptions” (161). The most vital part of Ikem’s lecture is his piece of advice to the students wanting them to “examine the condition of their lives because ... the unexamined life is not worth lining”. Ikem as a poet and a novelist, like Achebe himself, is committed “to widen the scope of that self-examination” (158).

What singles out *Anthills of the Savannah* from the rest of his novels is that in his last novel Achebe transforms himself from cultural historian to social critic. The novel so well keeps in pace with the unfolding developments of Nigerian history. It is perhaps the most explicit comment on the place and function of literature in the modern Nigerian context. The impetus towards decentering and pluralism dominates the novel. This is in keeping with the traditional Igbo philosophy of power that power flows in many directions. Achebe uses the myth of Idemili to project the traditional tribal attitude to power. The sustained symbolism surrounding the myth of Idemili carries the weight of the novel’s argument to do away with a centre holding reigns of power and
controlling the lives of the people and trying to resurrect the community-based indigenous power structures. As the legend goes:

In the beginning Power rampaged through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun, saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty (102).

Idemili came down as a pillar of water linking the earth and heaven. People in various parts of Africa worshipped her in the form of 'a dry stick'. To this emblem of the Daughter of Almighty, any rich and powerful man has to come and offer sacrifices and seek blessings in order to gain "admission into the powerful hierarchy of Ozo" (103). He must be accompanied, as mediator, by his daughter or the daughter of some kinsman. If Idemili finds the aspirant unfit, she sends death to smite him. If she approves of the plea, he will be alive in three years time. The legend of Idemili in the novel is narrated to explain the intricate Igbo philosophy about rulers. No individual, king or tribal Chief can go against the society and the punishment is severe for overdoings. Sam, the president suffers in the end for his "unquenchable thirst to sit in authority on his fellows"
(104) and for defying Idemili. C. Vijayashree’s comment regarding the use of myth of Idemili by Achebe in this novel is worth mentioning here:

This magic shift from the realistic to the mythic dismantles the world of unilateral power, colonial/military/paternal, and suggests possibility of an urgency for retrieving the models from the past. Remedy of the malady of contemporary polity is thus sought in myth and legend.24

Another important feature of the novel is the use of organic imagery by Achebe with such artistic refinement. The most significant instance of organic imagery, however, is the one contained in the title of the novel. The master symbol of the tale, ‘the anthills’, which survives “to tell the new grass of the Savannah about last year’s brush fires”(31) represents the venerable elders of Abazon who are the embodiments of the accumulated experience of the community, the instinctive wisdom of the race. “The new grass” is symbolic of the coming generations and “last year’s brush fires” stands for coups and counter-coups. Achebe also uses autobiographical accounts, poems, graffiti, lectures, folktales and even cryptic sign-writing on buses to convey the specific social predicament in Kangan.

In a patriarchal and polygamous African set-up, the image of women as individuals remains dwarf. Achebe hardly assigns any significant role to women
in his first three novels. To some extent, Eunice, in *A Man of the People* is an exception as she emerges as a strong feminist, and actively participates in the political events of the novel. She displays tremendous courage killing the culprit herself to avenge the death of her lover, Max. But even then, we find no proper development or progression in the character of Eunice as her bold actions came only at the fag-end of the novel. The image of women projected by Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah* through Beatrice is the most positive image of the modern woman so far. Beatrice comes out as a new woman of modern Africa with clear foresight to probe into the problem. Sensitive, shrewd and capable of visualizing the course of events to follow, she meaningfully comprehends the complexities more objectively than the other characters. She displays a critical understanding of the ugly march of power that tramples on the people who legitimizes their authority. Named at baptism as “Nwanyibuifi” – a females is also something” (87), she embodies the spirit of struggle and even does things which the tradition has enjoined on man. She earns the image of ‘a priestess’ and ‘a goddess’ by Ikem and Chris respectively. Her incisive insight is reflected when she foresees the destructive power of the political storm brewing up in Kangan:

I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first. No joking Chris. He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after
him it will be you. We are all in it. Ikem, you, me and even Him.

The thing is no longer a joke (114-115).

Beatrice reiterates her apprehensions about the lurking danger engulfing all of them and she warns her lover Chris beforehand the danger posed by his inertness and passivity in his association with Sam vis-à-vis in the affairs of the State. Her prophetic prediction almost comes true as she alone is left behind to survive the tragedy of reconstructing a demoralized society. Chris's comment before Beatrice left home for Abichi, where the Guest House of Sam located, becomes significant. Christ says to Beatrice on phone: "He [Sam] knows things are now pretty hopeless and may see in you a last hope to extricate himself. You may be able to help"(73). Beatrice, indeed, is a ray of hope not only for Sam but for others as well.

Like her other western educated fellows, Beatrice remains alienated from her roots and traditions for some time. But true to her sense of commitment and ideals, she is restored to her cultural, traditional and social roots after purging herself through a process of self-realization. Her acrid question she asks her young friends: "What must a people do to appease an embittered history?"(220) seems to be crucial in the context of Anthills of the Savannah. Towards the end of the novel Beatrice rises to the occasion and motivates Ikem and Chris to tread
the path of struggle and to resist the insane logic of brutal power. Mustering up courage to raise the child of Ikem and his mistress, Elewa, she undertakes the responsibility of conducting the naming ceremony of the girl-child which is an exclusive prerogative assigned to the males. The baby girl is Christened a boy's name – Amaechina – which literally means “May-the-path-never close”. Of the four protagonists, Beatrice alone survives to carry and complete the task left by Chris and Ikem. Overcoming her great personal loss (the death of Chris) she firmly declines the special invitation extended by the new Head of the State. In the continuing struggle for emancipation Beatrice stands as a great symbol of the new awakened woman with great endurance, zeal and strength.

In Anthills of the Savannah Achebe shows that the problem lies not in the failure of the masses but in the failure of those in power “to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation’s being” (141). The novel doesn’t merely expose the political malady of the state of Nigeria and the parasitic culture of the elite which is responsible for the loss of human values and humane governance of the people but it points towards a solution identifying people with a higher responsibility to re-define the goals of the society. Achebe develops a majestic vision of his country and visualizes harmony in the union of the elite and the people (Ikem and Elewa resulting in the birth of Amaechina – May-the-
path-never-close, the shining path of Ikem) symbolizing the new Nigeria free from social cleavage, founded on friendship and fraternity. Chris’s and Ikem’s deaths act as a catalyst to bring ‘a group’, a small company around Beatrice together, and this presages the possibility of a new beginning, a new dispensation.

In a searching analysis of Power, Achebe warns against its traps and pitfalls. In the final analysis Achebe seems to suggest that only an ever-vigilant culture of self-restraint and discipline can save the individual and the society from a slide into extremism and anarchy. The nefarious relation between the people and the leaders traps both in an endless circle of violence. *Anthills of the Savannah* is a scathing indictment of military dictatorship seizing power through violent coups which prove worse than the civilian misrule. The cautionary moral of the novel is that the continual pursuit of power without scruples causes disaster to the people who, shorn of all civil liberties, become the worst victims. Though hopeless as Nigeria may seem at present, Achebe is hopeful that Nigeria can change if the leaders have the vision, commitment and will to lead the people on.

Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* are a complex reproduction of the contemporary post-independence social, political
anarchy culminating in military take over several times when democracy and
democratic machinery fail to assuage the colonial experience in his country. First
it was the horrendous civil war then military coups that engulfed the young
nation that got independence in 1966. These novels or all his novels are an
indication of the painful journey from tradition to its loss, then coming to the
mouth of hell where all are fallen without redemption when corruption,
nepotism, violence, dehumanization and immorality reach a point of no return.
NOTES


18 Ibid.


23 Supriya Nair, "The Story and the Struggle in Anthills of the Savannah" in South Asian Responses to Chinua Achebe. op.cit., p.120.