In this thesis an attempt has been made to examine Chinua Achebe's novels from the point of view of how the crisis of change in African society affects the traditional patterns of life in the Ibo community during and after the colonial encounter. While offering a thematic account of the "Ibo Quartet", attention has been drawn to Achebe's main concern with individual human character and his exploration of human fate in a transitional culture. For this purpose, Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God have been grouped together on the basis of their common preoccupation with the colonial experience, while No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People have been taken together as representing the post-colonial experience. It has been felt that this kind of organisation, although it involves a slight modification of the chronological order of the novels, brings out more sharply the novelist's sense of the past as contrasted with his sense of the present and the delicate balance which he maintains in rendering the reality of contemporary African life and character.

In Chapter I, a brief account is given of the back-
ground of Achebe's fictional work in terms of the ideas and forces at work in his milieu, his view of the function of the novelist, and his characteristic commitment to artistic objectivity in presenting the African way of life and the traumas of social change and psychological stress. It has been attempted to show how Achebe's fiction avoids the western distortions of the African image as well as the romantic excesses of the modern negritude movement, while lending social content and human context to his portrayal of the African reality.

In Chapter II, Things Fall Apart is presented as showing how the breakdown of the traditional Ibo society and its world-view under the colonial system leads to the loss of dynamic leadership and the erosion of the native genius for compromise and accommodation. In Things Fall Apart human character is presented in terms of the conflict between the African and western views and values and between the old and the new perceptions of reality within the tribal society.

In Chapter III, Arrow of God is discussed as an
extension of the historical theme in *Things Fall Apart*, in terms of the failure of the tribal god in responding to the needs of a society which had created him in the past. This is dramatised through the psychological conflict within the personality of the chief priest, Ezeulu, who is torn between his two roles as priest and chief, in reconciling which in the pursuit of power he fails himself and his god as well as his tribe and his people.

In Chapter IV, *No Longer at Ease* is examined as a social novel concerned with the contemporary reality of a society already changed by the western impact. The hero in the novel is seen not so much as a victim of change but rather as a product of change, in tracing whose career and character Achebe presents the unease and the malaise at the heart of post-independent African societies. The tyranny of an unusable past and the amorality of an expedient present conspire to foil the individual's attempt to reconcile personal integrity and public virtue in a creative direction.

In Chapter V, *A Man of the People* is examined as a political novel, in which the corruption of an entire
society is anatomised, underscoring a disillusionment which exceeds Achebe’s usual ironic vision. Both Odili and Chief Nanga are seen emerging as partners in a shared ethos rather than as antagonists seeking opposite and competing goals of power.

In Chapter VI, the pattern of Achebe’s Ibo quartet is presented as resting essentially on the interaction between self and society under the pressures of historical change resulting in the loss of a creative urge for mutual affiliation. Achebe’s fictional heroes are viewed as individuals tragically alienated from themselves and from their own social reality in the scenario of cultural change.

Growing out of its rudimentary concern for the main thematic pattern underlying Achebe’s Ibo Quartet, the thesis has not ventured far beyond the modest aim of content analysis. A comprehensive study of the formal and technical aspects of Achebe’s fiction and his narrative and stylistic strategies has not been attempted.

Working in a highly provincial situation as a Degree
College Teacher, the author of the thesis has had to pursue his studies under various handicaps, such as the lack of ready access to critical source materials and other scholastic aids, which have necessarily preconditioned the present effort. However, the encouragement given to him by his teachers and colleagues and the inspiration provided by Achebe scholars have enabled him to complete his job of the work within the framework adopted for the present study.

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