CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
Chapter 6

Conclusion

The current study, “Colonialism, Cultural Dominance and Cultural Conflict: A Comparative Study of Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao” has been an attempt to read the colonial and postcolonial writings of these two writers and bring out the instances of oppression of the colonized people at the hands of the colonizers, and also of the marginalized sections of India and Africa at the hands of powerful and elite classes of each society. Human relationships and society are a wide area of study when studied in relation to cultural conflict and hegemony. An attempt is undertaken to examine and analyze at length how Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao have recreated in their colonial works the history of the cultural, religious, social, economic and political dismantling that colonialism had brought about in their respective countries.

However, the postcolonial fictional works of both these authors deal with the systemic failures in their newly emerged nations and the disillusionment of the native people with the native leaderships of the nascent democracies. It is not always possible to come to an absolute conclusion when the array of study is of such magnitude. The plight of the native Africans and Indians, as raised in the novels of Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao, is enmeshed with the culture and history of the respective countries in such a manner that it becomes an enormous task to wind up any discussion.

The present research is undertaken to investigate (i) the impact of colonialism on the social, psychological and political make-up of the colonized subjects and upon their colonial history, (ii) the description of this impact in the fictional narratives of two writers, Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao from two different colonies, and (iii) any points of confluence of ideas as well as of divergence on the impact of colonialism and postcolonialism in the works of the two writers in their specific cultural contexts.

The investigation into the narratives of the two writers selected for the present study reveals that though the narrative events, portrayed in the writings, are fictional in nature and display great aesthetic values as works of art, they also possess historical significance as their thematic contents are corroborated by historical facts documented in the two colonies.

The thesis started with an in-depth definition and analysis of the terms like, ‘colonialism’ and ‘postcolonialism’, and their meaning and implication in literary context. This was followed by a brief discussion on how colonial powers changed the fabric of socio-cultural identity by controlling the cultures, lands and wealth of the native people of Africa and India, as this thesis concentrates on Africa and Indian
Conclusion

subcontinent of colonial and postcolonial era, because they share a history of colonial
dominance and cultural struggle against that dominance in one form or the other. The
main emphasis of postcolonial studies is also discussed here. It studies and examines
how the ex-colonies had to grapple with the identity crisis of the indigenous people
and the clash of cultures as residues of the colonial period. The colonizers treated the
native cultures as substandard and constantly substituted them with the cultures of
their own. The consequence of such changes became an enormous task to deal with
when the colonies got independence. The common people of Africa and India were
neither able to go back to the cultural beliefs and practices of the time before the
arrival of colonial powers, nor could they accomplish and develop a new political and
cultural ethos to substitute the legacy of the invaders. Though Africa and the Indian
subcontinent experienced these unequal and hegemonic relationships between the
colonial rulers and the indigenous people of these colonies, and also between the
privileged section of the native societies and the marginalized ones, the colonial
relationships were more multifaceted than they appeared.

A detailed historical account of colonial invasion with a stress on the condition
of common people at different periods in the colonial history of Africa and India is
given in chapter one. Colonialism broke apart the social structure in the colonies.
Social classes, hierarchies and commune relations that ensured smooth functioning of
the existing social system in colonies went in disarray. This produced positive as well
as negative results for the common people. Such a deep experience of cultural clash
and cultural hegemony could not but find an echo in the literature of that time. A
study of selected literary texts from two entirely different colonies namely, Africa and
India, is undertaken and analyzed to find out how the colonial experiences are
reflected therein.

The extremely male-dominated Igbo society in Nigeria got disintegrated after
the advent of colonialism and gave way to a new structure providing some space to
women too. Chinua Achebe’s fiction works highlight all such complexities of Africa’s
social setup before and after the colonial invasion. The rigid caste system of Indian
society too showed signs of disintegration when confronted with colonial powers.
Raja Rao’s creative works are testimonies to such disintegration.

Chinua Achebe’s three famous novels during colonial period called Things
Fall Apart, Arrow of God and No Longer at Ease, has been analyzed in chapter two,
Chapter-6

Conclusion

titled ‘Chinua Achebe’s Novels: The Colonial Period’, to find out how colonial developments in Africa from the beginning of 19th century to the end of the 20th century are reproduced in these narratives. These three novels predominantly revolve around the theme of colonialism and cultural hegemony between the traditional African societies and that of the colonial masters. The settings, plots and characters are found to represent the eastern Nigerian life and societal condition in chiefly two different phases of Nigerian history— the pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria. Achebe’s attempt in his works has been to counter the colonial argument that there was no civilized life worth mentioning in Africa before the arrival of the colonizers. Thus, Achebe has showcased a rich history of African nations and a glorious past of his people through his works, and then put that in sharp contrast with the degenerating social conditions in Africa that emerged after the European colonization of the continent.

*Things Fall Apart* lives up to its title as things in African people’s lives fall apart after colonial encounter. The Igbo society, depicted in the novel, loses all the cultural values that defined them and held them together for centuries. The new culture of the colonizers is forced upon the people through intimidation and cultural hegemony, which eventually places them in a no man’s land. The novel *Arrow of God*, for example, relates the story of the loss of the native Igbo ethnic philosophy, traditions and cultural values owing to the hegemony of the Western cultural alternatives imposed by the colonial forces. The aspiration of Ezulu, the protagonist in this novel, to get in charge of his clan and regulate the impact of colonial invasion on his society brings his ultimate ruin in this novel. *No Longer at Ease* recounts the cultural alienation of native people caused by the colonial invasion in Nigeria. Obi Okonkwo, the hero of *No Longer at Ease*, gets utterly confused and ultimately fails in the transition from native Igbo culture and customs to the new and seemingly fascinating Western way of life. Obi’s catastrophe paints how colonial encounter in Nigeria in particular and in Africa in general had more often than not led the youth of Nigeria, educated in colonial education system, to eventual downfalls. Thus the people of Nigeria find themselves in an uneven equation with the colonial hegemony that threatens their ethnic individuality. These three novels illustrate the culture of violence perpetrated by the White men to protect their power over native people and force them into submission.
In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is forced to take his life because he could not bear the submission of the people of his village to the White men’s justice. The point Achebe tries to bring home is the ruthless domineering and cruel traits of the White people who do not perceive the native Igbo people at individual levels. They considered them as a united herd, and therefore, instead of punishing the individual responsible for the killing of one white man in the village of Abane, they killed and obliterated the whole village.

The Christian missionaries paved the way for further expansion of colonialism in the colonies. They pointed out the ‘weaknesses’ in the native culture and converted a large number of people to Christianity to help them in their colonizing mission. The natives were made to feel that their culture was no longer good and their customary titles had no value. Only, the things with the White men were great and of significance. Such ideas were sufficient to move some people to the other side creating a rift in the community.

Achebe also brings forth the preexisting prejudices in African societies that helped colonialism greatly. The emergence of the new middle class created a sense of identity crisis and hybridity, again helpful in colonial expansion. Achebe’s fiction works of colonial period emerge as attempts to counter the European Enlightenment legacy and White men’s civilizing mission, without unnecessarily glorifying the African past to reclaim their lost identity.

It can be determined that through *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* Achebe tells the world that the representation of his people’s past in erstwhile Western writings as an extended night of primitive darkness and savagery, in need of the authoritarian control and governance of the enlightened West, is prejudiced. And these novels stand against this Eurocentric discrimination and consciously illustrate how self-regulating and self-contained African society is dominated and subdued when comes in contact with Western colonial forces. The European attitude to colonies has been challenged by modern anthropologists on the premise that all expressions of human culture are equally powerful and meaningful. They also criticize the common native perspective that the Western culture and way of life is much superior to their own traditions and social setup. This is a great victory for thinkers like Raja Rao, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Ayi
Kwei Armah and Derek Wolcott, to name only a few, who have struggled much to decolonize the minds of their countrymen, while the struggle still goes on.

Chapter three discussed *Kanthapura*. It narrates in a traditional storytelling manner the idyllic Indian rural setup that was self-sustaining to a large extent but was disturbed by colonial onslaughts. The novel forms a small chapter in the history of Indian freedom movement taking place in one such small rural area in South India that gained momentum under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. "The Cow of the Barricades" is a short story that deals with Gandhian philosophy of life, or what Gandhi saw as problems in Indian, especially caste system, child marriage and prohibition of widow remarriage. *Kanthapura* is rife with the acts of brutality and cruelty of the colonial administration to suppress opposition from the people. When it comes to brutality, even women are not spared.

Prior to colonial encounters, people in India and Africa lived in isolated tribal islands and hamlets with very little sense of a unified ‘nation’ or a greater sense of nationalism. Colonialism introduced them to a new form of nationalism dismantling regional identities. It is noted in *Kanthapura* that the village of Kanthapura was an idyllic, self-contained rural society before Gandhi and Moorthy connect it to a larger entity called India.

*Kanthapura* is an account of the mechanism of the economic exploitation of the colonies and then people putting up a brave struggle against this oppressive exploitative mechanism. Through the stories in *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories*, Rao draws readers’ attention to the prevalent social evils in India and suggests a big social revolution. The majority of colonial subjects accepted the “greatness” of the culture of the rulers. This was the real instance of hegemony when the subjects accepted that they deserved to be ruled since they lagged behind the rulers in everything.

It is also noticed that though there are two layers of cultural hegemony in the novel, one, the hegemony of the colonizers’ culture and the second, the hegemony of caste Hindu culture over the culture of the untouchables and the downtrodden, Raja Rao does not directly recognize the later as hegemony. The hegemony of the colonizers’ culture is subject to resistance by one and all, except a selected few who are hand-in-glove with the foreign rulers. But the hegemony of the Brahmins against non-Brahmins, including Muslims who were called *mlechas* (untouchables), did not
become a mass movement in India. However, the fact cannot be denied that on the appeal of Mahatma Gandhi, the common masses renounced all their differences and united with all in the freedom struggle against the colonial power. The paramount triumph of the masses was that they reclaimed their consciousness, their self-esteem and put up a nonviolent form of resistance against the all-powerful colonizers.

Raja Rao’s perception of the colonized Indian masses, as observed here, is that of a people united in faith. For the Indian masses, as depicted by Rao, the struggle for India’s independence is not only a political struggle. They take this struggle to be a religious one, a dharmayuddha in which people are warriors fighting against evil for the protection of dharma and to reinstate virtue.

Colonial invasion changed the existing modes of production in the colonies. Dependence on British industrialization, export of raw materials and import of finished goods destroyed cottage industries in the colonies. People lost their employment opportunities and became poor and slaves. The colonial condition brought about a significant change in the economic relationship of people. Owing to capitalism, wealth began accumulating in a few hands and the majority of common masses started getting poorer every day. The trend continues to dominate the lives of people in postcolonial conditions too, in erstwhile colonies like India and Nigeria. The changed economic reality even altered the psychological make-up of the subjects: the colonized subjects suffered from identity crisis. They could no longer establish a relationship of equality either with the rulers or with their own countrymen.

Chapter four and five study and analyze the postcolonial novels of Achebe and Rao respectively. The new social class that emerged in the colonies equipped with the knowledge of English language and assumed more power within the native community proved to be a double-edged weapon. If resistance to colonialism was articulated by this class on the one hand, on the other hand, the same class filled the power vacuum created by the departure of the colonizers, in most cases replacing the White master in the same power positions, keeping intact the master-slave narrative. This is resented by Chinua Achebe in A Man of the People in chapter four, and by Raja Rao in his postcolonial works in chapter five of this thesis. Achebe suggests a solution of the menace through social revolutions, but Raja Rao appears to be resigned in his approach, turning to ancient Indian philosophy rather than being a man of action for modern Indian society.
Chinua Achebe is a realist. If his novels of colonial period portray the reality of colonial dominance and the cruelty of the violent colonizers to perpetuate their rule in Africa, his postcolonial novels depict the reality of life in post-independent African countries. *A Man of the People* depicts the post-independent scenario in an imaginary country, which to a large extent is Nigeria. It is realized that Achebe believes that postcolonial Africa is just a new version of the colonial Africa. The reason is that nothing much has changed in common people’s lives, except the ruling faces. The White man has been replaced by black man, with equal powers to perpetrate violence upon people if they oppose him.

It is also found that though the novel in discussion in chapter four is a true depiction of the reality in post-independent Nigeria and predicts a social revolution, the central character Odili has his own weaknesses which in real life may hinder the progress of a social revolution based on equality for all men and women. It can be discerned that Odili does not consider women to be equal to men.

But Chinua Achebe also shows fissures in the fabric, mainly because of corrupt politicians who are not ready to treat their fellow beings equal. They employ all the techniques, like, suppression of dissent, control over the media, propaganda politics, rule of terror, torture of opponent into submission and the likes to rule the common people, as they were ruled by the colonial masters. *A Man of the People* represents Achebe’s perception of postcolonial African societies and their struggles to create their own identities different from the colonial era. Achebe paints a dim picture as most of the nascent democracies have been usurped by vested interests. Still he does not give up and hope that the heroic struggle of a few awakened individuals will bring about larger changes.

In his postcolonial novels, *The Serpent and the Rope*, *Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India* and *Comrade Kirillov*, Raja Rao presents a glimpse of Indian society in transition. In *Serpent and the Rope* it is easy to see that Indian populace is in confusion as they have not yet come out of the stupor they were in during the colonial period. The common men are dominated by alien but materially attractive Western culture that has left its impact on the Indian mind. The undigested influence of political theories can also be seen in *Comrade Kirillov*. People in his novels find the hegemonic culture more progressive and scientific since they are indoctrinated to see only weaknesses in their own culture and only the greatness in the culture of the ruler,
so much so that, people have moved away from their ancient but equally dynamic, scientific and attractive culture which is not materialistic but spiritual in nature. *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India* has a comical overtone and most of the actions of the central character, Govindan Nair are humorous. But the postcolonial dilemma and ambivalence in India’s new identity is concealed under the cover of humor. This is not the kind of India nationalists like, Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh and Lokmanya Tilak had envisioned. Raja Rao also does not identify the ambivalence of Govindan Nair with his idea of post-independent India.

As noticed in these novels, Rao wishes to save Indian culture and tradition from the onslaught of foreign culture. But the state of transition, as found in Chinua Achebe too, does not give one any chance to reclaim his identity. In the state of transition the individual voluntarily gives up his cultural practices and acquires the practices of an alien culture. This leaves him in a severe identity crisis. Perhaps, Raja Rao, through his fictional narratives, warns Indian people of such an impending crisis if they give up their indigenous cultural practices, traditions, customs and values.

*Comrade Kirillov* is a great example of hypocrisy as Padmanabha Iyer cannot cease to be Padmanabha Iyer, a staunch Brahmin, and at the same time, he cannot reconcile with being comrade Kirillov. The novel is a good satire on the people lost in transition. But the question remains unanswered whether Raja Rao favours socialism and Marxism as a viable solution for the predominant ills in postcolonial India.

To Raja Rao, the impact of Western culture in India necessitated the conditions of personal conflicts since it affected people’s socio-economic situations bringing their lives to a screeching halt by introducing various sources of exploitation and also by destroying their traditional spheres of economic activities. It is found that Raja Rao puts Indian culture in contrast with the Western culture. He does not accept the hegemony of Western culture, rather he believes in the superiority of Indian culture, as the main characters in the postcolonial novels finally turn to Indian cultural traditions after their stints with the Western culture. Rao’s protagonists are deeply devoted to the service of Indian culture (specifically ancient Hindu culture of the Vedas, Upanishads, Vedanta and the likes); all of them live for Indian culture.
The Comparative Aspect: The Colonial and Postcolonial Perspective in Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe

Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe have only one thing in common- a colonial past of their respective countries India and Nigeria, which were colonized by Britain. Both the writers have come up with almost similar portrayals of the impact of cultural conflicts, cultural hegemony and political dominance of the colonizers in their countries, despite having significant differences in their race, region, religion and language. Raja Rao’s and Chinua Achebe’s writing span both the eras- colonialism as well as postcolonialism in India and Nigeria, and interestingly, their writings reflect the change in their perspectives with the change of time.

Oppression is a major theme dealt with by both the writers. The novels during colonial period of both Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe are centred on the oppression of the colonial masters and on certain evils in their respective indigenous societies. Pictures of brutal oppression are painted in Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God and No Longer at Ease of Chinua Achebe. Acts of violence are executed just to terrorize people in order to prevent any acts of uprising in the future. But oppression and brutality are not confined to only alien cultures. They are very much part of the native cultures as well. Chinua Achebe is not shy of describing certain evils in his community, for instance, people’s belief in superstitions and corrupt practices. Raja Rao is much critical of child marriage, practiced in India and a cultural ban on widow remarriage, which are forms of oppression of women. Two stories in the short story collection The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories deal with these issues.

The major difference between the two writers as regards oppression is that the postcolonial works of Raja Rao do not deal with this theme overtly as the works of Achebe do. In fact, Raja Rao has turned to philosophy in his postcolonial writings while Achebe relies on realistic technique. A Man of the People depicts corruption and oppression of the native leaders who have betrayed the masses. The leaders like Chief Nanga shelter hooligans and goons who create much havoc for common native people, though ultimately the same goons become the cause of their downfall when things go out of control.

Cultural conflict and cultural hegemony form the second major pivot around which the stories of the novels of colonial period of Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe
revolve. Cultural hegemony is countered in unique ways in their works discussed here, and yet their methods have resonances of each other’s approach. Raja Rao turns to ancient Indian philosophical traditions, Indian mythology and people’s faith in their heroes to fight against evil forces. Similarly, Achebe believes in the greatness of Africa’s recent past, its traditions, values and community living. He also believes in Negritude and Pan-Africanism. Colonialists obliterated the history of Africa and it needed to be rewritten, as the other side of the story is required to be told. Achebe takes up this responsibility in his creative works.

The idea of nationalism finds divergent voices in the two writers. Raja Rao’s writings, colonial as well as postcolonial, weave a narrative that holds on to the idea of an Indian nation seamlessly merging from the mythic past into the present times. In this sense, Raja Rao appears to be reinforcing the stereotypes about Indian culture and the people of India. Chinua Achebe, on the other hand, discards even the national boundaries drawn between communities in the postcolonial era. Thus, to him the cultural conflicts within a community are byproducts of the colonial era. The other difference is that Raja Rao, influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, discards the system of education introduced by the colonizers as a tool for the perpetuation of their rule, while Achebe, as found in his novels, encourages his people to take advantage of the education system introduced by the White men.

The novels, written in colonial period by Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe are accounts of people’s struggle for independence for their nations, and in both the countries people have fought the battles together. But the postcolonial novels of Achebe tell the story of betrayal of people by their leaders after independence. The disillusioned youth of the newly emerged democracies feels betrayed by their corrupt leaders. Raja Rao’s approach in his works seems to be more resigned as regards politics in the post-independent era in India.

Chinua Achebe’s emphasis is on reconstruction through education and awareness. According to him, people of Africa need to be taught various things they have forgotten or made to forget. His works are narratives with an educator’s point of view. Raja Rao also wishes to reconstruct through instruction and critique. But his instruction is more of a philosophical nature, seeking happiness through self-realization. Both the writers kindle hope for the future. Achebe’s hope lies in self-
sacrificing youth like Maxwell and Eunice of *A Man of the People*. Raja Rao’s hope also lies in the youth who are intellectually and spiritually enlightened.

Thus, keeping in mind all the similarities and differences in the approaches of Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe in dealing with the colonial and postcolonial era in their works, it can be said that colonialism has provided the thematic meeting grounds to these two writers coming from two entirely different cultural milieu. An analysis has been carried out with a socio-cultural approach in relation to the history of colonization in Africa and India, which forms the essence of this thesis. The novels and short stories of these two writers have been studied to find out the reflection of this history of colonization.