Abstract

The thesis entitled, *Colonialism, Cultural Dominance and Cultural Conflict: A Comparative Study of Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao*, is divided into six chapters, chapter one and chapter six being the introduction and conclusion respectively. As represented in the works of Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao, two celebrated writers in English from Nigeria and India, this study focuses on the subjugation and victimization of common people of Africa and India during the colonial rule.

Introduction

The thesis is an extensive analysis of colonial and postcolonial works of these two writers. It also attempts to study how socio-cultural issues of Africa and India of colonial and postcolonial periods have been mirrored in these texts. Both the authors have drawn in plenty from the historical happenings of Africa and India in the period of colonization and also from the events when the colonizers left these colonies. However, the novels and short stories which are discussed here, cannot be considered historical in true sense of the word. The unsteady socio-political history of the native countries of Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao had been marked by colonial invasions, power tussles, mass uprisings, armed revolts, cultural dominance of the colonizers and the native elite classes alike during colonialism. Such events had direct impact on the fabric of socio-cultural setups of these colonies, which are echoed efficiently in these novels and short stories. Colonial history stands testimony to the fact that the problems associated with marginalization and oppression of common people have been responsible for the disintegration of indigenous native culture and identity. A brief examination of colonial history of Africa and India exposes that weakening of common people and their culture led to ultimate chaos and degeneration of native cultural identity and society.

A brief historical account of foreign annexation of Africa and India, and its far-reaching impact on the native people and culture is given in this chapter after explaining the terms like, ‘colonialism’ and ‘postcolonialism’, and examining their impact on native societies. Advent of colonization derailed the social, cultural, religious and ethnic identities in these colonies. The native societies were self-reliant and self-contained before colonial powers encroached these lands. Their age-old systems of cultural norms, social hierarchies, class divisions and collective
relationships ensured smooth operation of the social systems in the colonies. However, they received a blow and were stymied in their evolution and progress with the colonial intrusion. Such a profound experience of social change, identity crisis of individuals, cultural clash and cultural hegemony could not but find a reflection in the works of writers concerned. The research work focusses on their selected works.

**Chinua Achebe’s Novels: The Colonial Period**

The title of the second chapter is ‘Chinua Achebe’s Novels: The Colonial Period’ and Achebe’s three novels of colonial period called, *Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* are analyzed here. This chapter examines how Achebe identifies colonial invasion in Africa and it also reflects on the cultural hegemony of external rulers in these novels. *Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* are set in the colonial era and are read as the representation of colonial rule, cultural conflict and cultural hegemony in Africa. It is evident that cultural dominance of the colonizers is propagated through the means of violence and oppression in native societies.

The novel *Things Fall Apart* is a depiction and narration of the colonial clashes that took place in the nineteenth century when Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria confronted the White Christian missionaries for the first time. This novel is studied to explore what happens when Western colonial powers come to Igbo land in the form of trading organizations and then as White missionaries with the pretext of enlightening the native society and its people. The native ethics of the protagonist Okonkwo and his society constantly struggle to survive when challenged by the Western invasion. But ultimately, the native society fails to sustain. Okonkwo’s suicide symbolically represents self-destructive trends in the culture and society of Igbo people when faced with the cultural domination of the colonizers.

The colonial rule completely suppresses the Igbo culture and social traditions and increasingly starts replacing all kinds of native uniqueness and way of life. In *Arrow of God* the ethnic philosophy and traditions of the native people of Igbo land slowly disappear when the colonial alternatives are imposed by the colonial forces. Ezeulu, the protagonist in *Arrow of God*, aspires to control both his tribe, and the influence of Western invaders and their culture on his society. But he fails in his attempt. Ezeulu’s tragedy in *Arrow of God* cannot simply be declared a personal disaster.
The tragedy of Obi Okonkwo, the hero of *No Longer at Ease*, authenticates how colonial hegemony often leads the youth of Africa to eventual disorientation and failure. He is lost in the process of shifting from native Nigerian social norms and culture to the alien but apparently mesmerizing lifestyle of the Europeans. That is why he finds it immensely challenging to realize an ethnic individuality of self while meandering on the crossroads of native and Western cultures.

The violent clash between the native people and the Christian missionaries was an outcome of missionary incursion in Africa. This conflict is discussed as one of the major themes in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. However, these three novels document the colonial hunger of establishing Christianity as the supreme religion and Western culture as the dominant one in Africa during colonial period. Achebe paints Christianity as a dividing power in Igbo society. Achebe’s novels of colonial period also emphasize that the foreign power implements the ‘divide and rule’ strategy whenever required to colonize African people. Therefore, Christian missionary activities are responsible to a significant extent for the eradication of the communal way of life that had conventionally kept the Igbo communities united.

*No Longer at Ease* describes the social condition of the natives once the colonial administration establishes itself in the Igbo land. Eventually local populace finds itself in an unequal relationship with the colonial dominance that threatens their ethnic and racial identity. However, the clash is not only about the strained relationship between the natives and the colonizers in these three novels. Colonial rulers and their influence further antagonize a section of natives who convert to Christianity against their own people. The fight, in terms of cultural and spiritual existence, is rather between the native people who try to save their erstwhile religion and culture, and the new converts to Christianity from the Igbo society. This new native middle class was primarily a creation of the missionary enterprise and the colonial government to serve their colonial interest of draining the native resources and wealth to make their mother countries prosperous.

The native communities are generally represented as a homogenous and shapeless crowd without any evident individuality by the Western writers. Achebe wishes to break this stereotype and presents native people, their culture and societies with all their complexities and individualism. He attempts to rewrite the colonial encounter from an African perspective using the colonial language and narrative.
Raja Rao’s Fiction: The Colonial Period

Chapter three examines how Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* and the short story “The Cow of the Barricades” perceives colonial rule in India and how Indians raise a socio-political resistance to colonization and cultural hegemony.

The peaceful Indian rural set up that has been self-reliant to a large extent before getting disturbed by colonial intrusion, is depicted in *Kanthapura* in the traditional manner of storytelling. The acts of cruelty and vindictiveness of the colonial government to overpower resistance from the local people are issues of thematic preoccupation in this novel. It is also observed in this masterpiece of Rao that even women are not spared when it comes to colonial cruelty. Hence, it would not be an overstatement to say that this novel documents an important episode in the history of Indian freedom struggle, taking place in a rural area in South India under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy.

"The Cow of the Barricades” is a short story that talks about Gandhian philosophy of life, or what Gandhi considered as social evils, prevalent in Indian society, like casteism, child marriage and ban of widow remarriage. This is a tale of a myth-like cow which aids ‘satyagrahis’ (Gandhian freedom fighters) to initiate a non-violent drive against the colonial rule in India. The story represents Raja Rao’s perceptions of Indian freedom struggle in the light of socio-political resistance of Indian common people against Western dominance.

*Kanthapura* is a fictional representation of the economic exploitation of the colonies by the European rulers and how people put up a courageous struggle against the oppressive and exploitative mechanism of these alien forces. The short stories in *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* draw readers’ attention to the rampant social ills in India, which can be eradicated only through social revolutions, as suggested by the author. One of the issues that Raja Rao is concerned with is the fact that majority of colonized people accept the ‘greatness’ of Western culture during colonial rule in India. This is a noticeable example of colonial hegemony when the colonized people accept that they deserve to be reigned since they are inferior to the rulers- socially, culturally and economically.

There are two layers of cultural hegemony in *Kanthapura*: one is the hegemony of the colonizers’ culture and the second, the hegemony of the upper caste and class over the untouchables and the underdogs. The domination of the colonizers’ culture was resented by one and all, except a selected few who were hand-in-glove
with the foreign rulers. But the hegemony of the Brahmins against non-Brahmins, including Muslims did not become a mass movement in India. Although, there had been an acute caste-based inequality among local people in the indigenous society, the common people surrendered all their differences and united with all in the freedom struggle against the colonial power on demand of Mahatma Gandhi. The supreme success of Gandhian approach was that people came together and put up a nonviolent form of freedom struggle against the powerful colonizers. Struggle against cultural hegemony is a thematic thread that runs through Kanthapura along the lines of freedom struggle. It is, in fact, a resistance to social disparities, discriminations and the hierarchized organization of Indian society.

Raja Rao’s fiction covers both colonial and postcolonial period in Indian. He has been a prolific writer, like Chinua Achebe, writing during colonial and postcolonial times. Raja Rao was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle of India. Therefore, his novels and short stories of colonial period highlight the Gandhian movement to free India from the colonial oppression.

Raja Rao perceives colonial invasion in India as detrimental to the social, economic and political growth of India as a nation. He recognizes that colonialism can be held accountable for most of the evils present in Indian society. In addition to draining wealth from India to England, colonialism has left indelible marks on the psychology of the colonized. Cultural hegemony of the colonizers has reduced the natives to mere nonentities and assaulted their self-esteem, which has made them lose faith in themselves. Colonized people even lost their sense of belonging to the native society and also their faith in their native cultural values.

The colonial mechanism of governance was established in India to serve their economic interests. The colonizers barely cared for the well-being of people, and commonly gave free access to the landlords to exploit the common masses, so that they could continue receiving revenues on a regular basis. The cultural practices of the rulers in India were based on caste and class conflict, and hierarchy among people. The fight for freedom of India, as represented in the selected novel and short story, takes the form of a movement to free Hinduism from all evils that came from other cultures around it.
Chinua Achebe’s Postcolonial Fiction

The title of the fourth chapter of this thesis is ‘Chinua Achebe’s Postcolonial Fiction’. This chapter analyzes Achebe’s perception of postcolonial African society in general and its fictional representation in particular in his postcolonial novel *A Man of the People*. The new social middle class that was established in the colonies, could speak and interact in English language. They assumed more power within the native communities. Such people had different attitudes in two different phases of colonialism, that is, colonial and postcolonial Africa. On one hand, resentment against colonialism was largely voiced by this middle class during the time of colonial rule. On the other hand, the same social class had occupied the power vacuum that was created after the departure of the colonial government. Hence, such native people substituted the ‘White’ masters in the same power positions, keeping intact the master-slave narrative. This is illustrated by Chinua Achebe in *A Man of the People*, as discussed in chapter four of the present thesis.

Achebe was upset with the attitude of his countrymen after Nigeria gained independence. He was surprised by the level of corruption, deceitfulness and pretence of native politicians who governed the postcolonial Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Colonialism ended, but the colonial consciousness did not discontinue after independence. In *A Man of the People*, the postcolonial predicament of identity crisis gets clear in the analogy that native politicians always identify themselves with the Whites and treat other Black men as their slaves; but these same people go fuming when they are represented in a different and subdued vein by the Whites.

If his novels of colonial period depict the reality of colonial dominance and cultural hegemony and how colonizers perpetuate their rules in Africa, his postcolonial novels illustrate the sad truth of native social life after independence in African countries. *A Man of the People* portrays the postcolonial socio-political scenario in an imaginary country of Africa. Achebe believes that postcolonial native identity is just a new version of the erstwhile colonial Africa. Because, the novel presents the notion that nothing much has changed in native people’s lives, except the ruling faces. The Whites have been replaced by the powerful and corrupt native politicians, with equal powers to perpetrate violence upon common people if they oppose the new rulers. *A Man of the People* highlights the devastating influence that colonialism has left on the consciousness of native people of the colonies. Achebe also suggests a solution to this social menace. He believes that mass revolutions
against corrupt native politicians and governments are the best way out to eradicate this social evil, as happens towards the end of this novel. The central character in this novel, namely, Odili remains one of the main faces of the mass revolution against the native governance that takes place in this novel. However, as unfolded in this novel, he has his own share of flaws, which in real life may hinder the progress of a social uprising, which is based on the principle of equality for all native men and women alike.

**Raja Rao’s Postcolonial Fiction**

The novels *The Serpent and the Rope*, *Comrade Kirillov* and *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India* are studied and discussed in the light of postcolonial effects in Indian societies. Rao’s vision of culture, cultural conflict and cultural hegemony in post-independent Indian identity are analyzed in this chapter.

Some important questions are discussed in details in this chapter to find out the impacts of colonization after the British colonizers left India. How has Rao interpreted the conflict between Indian culture and Western culture, the first being the culture of the colonized while the second, the culture of the conqueror? What happens when these cultures confront each other? What is the condition of common people when the colonial culture displays hegemonic arrogance as regard to their native culture?

The examination discovers that Raja Rao’s vision of Indian culture is chiefly coloured by the conventional Hindu way of life of mythical India. Raja Rao is all for the restoration of so-called glorious Hindu traditions of the past in postcolonial identity of Indian democracy.

In these three novels Raja Rao has also given glimpses of the postcolonial social setup in India. It appears that Rao believes that post-independent India is engulfed with hybridity, alterity, ambivalence, moral and ideological conflicts, and such other postcolonial issues, which are residues of colonial past. Like Chinua Achebe, Raja Rao is also sceptical of post-independent identity of erstwhile colonies. But his viewpoint is that India has primarily suffered in the postcolonial age, because Indian people have not accepted the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi and the path that has been also glorified in ancient Indian philosophical traditions, like *Advaita Vedanta* and *Vishishta Advaita* of Ramanuja.
The *Serpent and the Rope* epitomises a postcolonial Indian society where native populace is in sheer confusion as they have not yet come out of the inertia of the colonial period. Even after the departure of the colonial rulers, the common people are still subjugated by the Western but seemingly attractive culture that has left its farfetched impact on indigenous identity.

*The Cat and Shakespeare* has a humorous overtone and most of the actions of the protagonist Govindan Nair are entertaining and funny. But the postcolonial predicament and ambivalence of India’s new democratic identity is hidden under the cover of humor. This is not the kind of democracy freedom fighters 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 own idea of post-independent India.

*Comrade Kirillov* is a good example of the postcolonial dilemma of identity crisis. The central character Padmanabha Iyer cannot cease to be Padmanabha Iyer, a staunch Brahmin, and at the same time he cannot reconcile with the fact of being comrade Kirillov, a communist and atheist. The novel is a good satire on Indian diasporic communities, living in foreign lands who are lost in the process of keeping both the indigenous native idealism and newly found Western way of life alive at the same time in the postcolonial setup.

The concluding chapter has highlighted different layers of cultural conflict, cultural dominance and impact of colonialism, as analyzed and examined in the earlier chapters in the writings of Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao. A comparative study of these two writers has also been undertaken to clarify the point of views about colonialism, cultural dominance and cultural conflict. Both Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao have come up with almost parallel depictions of the effect of cultural conflicts, cultural hegemony and political dominance of the colonizers in their fictional works, despite differences in their race, county, religion and language. Colonial domination is a major theme in the writings of both these writers. Cultural hegemony is described in unique ways in their novels and short stories, and yet their methods have resonances of each other’s approach. Raja Rao believes in the greatness of ancient Indian traditions, mythology and Gandhian ideologies to fight against evil forces. Likewise, Achebe also believes in the importance of Africa’s native way of life, traditions, values and community living.
Chinua Achebe stresses on social reconstruction through education and awareness in the postcolonial African identity. Raja Rao also desires to rebuild Indian society through instruction and self-evaluation. Through their novels and short stories, both the writers ignite hope for the future after the exit of colonial powers. Thus, keeping in mind all the similarities and differences in the styles and attitudes of Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe in dealing with the colonial and postcolonial era in their fictional works, it would not be an overstatement to say that colonial experiences have provided the thematic meeting grounds to the two writers who represent two entirely unique socio-cultural settings.