CHAPTER IV

CHINUA ACHEBE’S POSTCOLONIAL FICTION
In colonial and postcolonial writings from the continent of Africa, Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) has been a very influential signature, described by Nadine Gordimer as “gloriously gifted with the magic of an ebullient, generous, great talent” (1). He was born and brought up in Nigeria and spent most of his lifetime there till 1994 when he was forced to flee the country by a repressive regime because they threatened to imprison him for his subversive writings, radical political stance and activism. Apart from teaching at the University of Nigeria, his teaching career spans the University of Massachusetts, University of Connecticut and Brown University. He was a poet, novelist, professor and critic of high worth. Achebe’s writing is mainly focused on the impact of colonialism on the culture, traditions and living conditions of the people of his country in particular, but also on the lives of the people of Africa in general. He celebrates the strong storytelling tradition of Africans in his writings, using a similar narrative technique, style, proverbs and close-knit tribal cultural ties in his novels. *Things Fall Apart* is the best example of this style of storytelling. But, Achebe was frustrated too with the behaviour of his countrymen after Nigeria got independence. He was shocked at the corruption, dishonesty and deceit of the country’s politicians. His postcolonial works deal with this devastating influence colonialism had left on the psyche of his people.

Chinua Achebe is a realist. He may be considered as a leader of the major realist writers from the continent of Africa who gave a thoroughly new direction to African literature written in English, especially through their life-like representation of the socio-political environment of the continent and the aspirations as well frustrations of their people. Achebe, in particular, appears to be, as visualized by Carroll, constantly nostalgic about the “rediscovery of Africa’s past” (11, 26). All of his work is a testimony to the continual struggle of his people to make adjustments with the past and the present, or to put it in the words of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, “to sensitively register his encounter with history, his people’s history” (39). Achebe himself states this fact in his collection of essays in *Morning Yet* that his mission has been to help the “society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (qtd. in Gikandi). Achebe has been very upset that the White man has obliterated the past history of his people and therefore they do not know anything about the glorious history of African more than what the White man gave them. That’s why projecting local history has been one of his
conscious efforts in his novels. In his own words from the essay "The Novelist as Teacher", “I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past with all its imperfection was not one long night of savagery from which the first European acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (qtd. in Gorlier 51).

Achebe’s novels – *Things Fall Apart* (1959), *Arrow of God* (1964), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) are examples of his perception of the postcolonial African society and its struggle to create its own identity different from the colonial era. In this chapter a comprehensive attempt is made to trace, through one of his postcolonial novels *A Man of the People*, Chinua Achebe’s perception of the postcolonial African society, its difficulties, and the struggle it has to go through to create its own identity different from the colonial era, and most importantly, its failure in doing so. *A Man of the People* dramatizes the struggle of an individual against the political stalwarts in his country. Though the protagonist loses the battle in the end since he does not get enough support of his people, his struggle ignites a revolution in the country. The novel also highlights the neo-colonial influence that British and American business ventures continue to exert on the fragile economy of the country, and the story ultimately ends in a military coup d'état giving the required respite to people from a decade of misrule.

**A Man of the People in Brief**

*A Man of the People* is Chinua Achebe’s fourth novel and his second most popular fictional work after *Things Fall Apart*, but in this novel Achebe has gone for an entirely different theme from *Things Fall Apart*. The novel was first published in 1966, six years after Nigeria got its independence from the British colonial rule. But, surprisingly, the acute sense of Achebe to smell the political atmosphere in Nigeria is just astonishing as the novel foreshadows the events to take place in his country the very same year. The fictional military coup he depicts or rather predicts in *A Man of the People*, really took place, raising even doubts among the army officers that perhaps Achebe had foreknowledge of the things to come. Nigeria became independent on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of October 1960 and became a republic on the same date in 1963. On 16 January 1966, in a military coup d'état Major Kaduna Chukwuma
Nzeogwu came to power dismissing the nascent democracy in Nigeria (Omotosho 28). Later ‘the most senior military man by that time, Major General Thomas Aguiyi Ironsi’ (Omotosho 28), took control of this land. Soon the country fell in the grip of civil war which continued for three years. Then Ironsi was killed in a counter-coup and the country witnessed another mutiny which helped a young northern military leader named Gen. Yakubu Gowon take control of the region. The Military rule continued till 1970 (Dickovick 127). Although the novel is set in an unnamed state in Africa (the major setting of the events is a small town called ‘Anata’ and the capital city is called ‘Bori,’ but they do not refer to any particular nation state), yet it is obvious, through the postcolonial political developments in the country and the storyline in *A Man of the People*, that Achebe is writing of Nigeria. It is equally true that the narrative and characterization in *A Man of the People* holds good for most African states since most of them have toed the similar policy lines and suffered the same fates as did Nigeria.

The protagonist in the novel, Odili Samalu, is a school teacher at Anata Grammar School, aspiring to go to England for higher education on a scholarship programme. His former teacher, referred to as Mr. M. A. Nanga, MP, and also as ‘Chief Nanga,’ is Minister of Culture of the country. He visits their school and recognizes Odili and invites him very warmly to come to the capital city. Odili and his colleague as well as friend Andrew Kadibe, make fun of him, “Just think of such a cultureless man going abroad and calling himself Minister of Culture. Ridiculous. This is why the outside world laughs at us” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 23). And when Chief Nanga infuriates Odili by having sex with his girlfriend Elsie, the Chief offers him, “…If you like I can bring you six girls this evening. You go do the thing sotay you go beg say you no want again. Ha, ha, ha, ha!” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 74). To this Odili responds, “What a country!” I said. “You call yourself Minister of Culture. God help us.” And I spat; not a full spit but a token, albeit unmistakable, one” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 74).

The minister has also promised Odili all help for his higher education, has urged him to stay at his home in the capital city and he has assured him to arrange for his scholarship abroad. What is clear from the attitude of the minister Chief Nanga, portrayed in the beginning of the novel during his visit to Odili’s school, Odili does not like the man since he thinks he is one of the gang of MPs who are responsible in
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bringing the country down the slope of inflation and introduced bad policies, and still Odili wants to make the most of the opportunity. After the Minister’s visit, his views about the man have undergone a change and he has started liking him. There are two more other reasons too, that make him decide to stay with the Minister, one of them being his attraction for a beautiful girl, Edna, who came to the school along with the Minister’s entourage, and the second being Elsie, his girlfriend from his university days. Elsie works as a nurse in the capital city now. After reaching the capital city, he comes to know that Edna is going to be the Minister’s second wife. Chief Nanga’s wife goes to her village Anata to spend a few days with her parents, and this gives Odili an opportunity to bring Elsie to the house of Chief Nanga with a clear intention to spend the night with her. But to his dismay, she is raped by Chief Nanga, or maybe she sleeps with him on her own accord. This incident enrages Odili, but Chief Nanga is surprised as to what makes Odili angry at such a normal affair. Odili confronts Chief Nanga and challenges him:

“Look here, Mr Nanga, respect yourself. Don’t provoke me any more unless you want our names to come out in the newspapers today.” Even to myself I sounded strange. Chief Nanga was really taken aback, especially when I called him mister.

“You have won today,” I continued, “but watch it, I will have the last laugh. I never forget” (Achebe, A Man of the People 73).

He decides that he will seduce Edna to take revenge against the Chief.

The first step towards taking revenge against the Chief would be to remove Chief Nanga from his position and replace him, and ultimately to replace the current ruling party. So, Odili gets involved in raising a new political party with the help of his friend Maxwell Kulamo. The members of his party strongly believe that they will be able to provide a more honest, effective and reliable government. Kulamo makes the following speech to the crowd gathered at Odili’s house to explain how the hopes of better governance in the postcolonial period is destroyed in the hands of a few corrupt politicians who run the country now:

“They want to share out the wealth of the country between them. That is why you must reject both; that is why we have now formed the C.P.C. as a party of the ordinary people like yourselves…. Once upon a time a hunter killed some big game at night. He searched for it in vain and at last he decided to go home
and await daylight. At the first light of morning he returned to the forest full of
expectation. And what do you think he found? He saw two vultures fighting
over what still remained of the carcass. In great anger he loaded his gun and
shot the two dirty uneatable birds. You may say that he was foolish to waste
his bullets on them but I say no. He was angry and he wanted to wipe out the
dirty thieves fighting over another man’s inheritance. That hunter is
yourselves. Yes, you and you and you. And the two vultures – P.O.P. and
P.A.P. …” There was loud applause. (Achebe, A Man of the People 125-126)

The analogy that the speaker draws here is pertinent to expound the postcolonial
scenario in Nigeria. Two vultures here represent the corrupt politicians who are
looting the wealth of the homeland; however, the true beneficiaries in the post-
independent Nigeria should have been the common people who are represented in this
analogy by the hunter. Kulamo tries to instill the sentiment among the native crowds
that it is their duty to uproot such menaces like these corrupt politicians from their
society, so that they could welcome a better tomorrow for one and all. This conflict
between the politicians and the youth of the native society also reiterates the sort
dominance of one section of the native society over the rest- the hegemonic
relationships between different sections of natives as witnessed from the beginning of
postcolonial African identity.

Odili is gradually becoming more and more opposed to the Chief and at this
point, he decides to run for office to take Chief Nanga’s position. But, in this political
process Odili realizes that his countrymen are not just corrupt, they are cynical too.
Almost all the people believe that politicians are there to take bribes and make
themselves rich every day. Odili learns the disgusting fact of the psyche of his people
that they are primarily interested in their share in the booty of loot heaped up by
corrupt officials. In a shocking turn of events, he is offered money by Chief Nanga as
a payment to withdraw his candidature from the election, and at this crucial juncture
of his political campaign he has to make several moral decisions. He not only out
rightly rejects the offer but also insults Chief Nanga calling him a “Bush man”
(Achebe, A Man of the People 120) at his face. He makes serious attempts to
convince people that the present government is lying and stealing from the people, but
none cares for his rhetoric. He is rather shocked when Max tells him he should have
accepted the money from Nanga and should have used it for party activities. Max
himself have accepted a thousand pounds from Chief Koko, whereas he still continues party campaign. Odili feels that it is a dangerous move, a threat for the life of Max. His village and his family, especially his father, suffer for his actions and he is also threatened and bullied in course of his election campaign. This laidback attitude of the commoners in the native society, as witnessed in this novel, also existed largely among the natives after the colonial powers left the African continent in the 20th century. Such attitude and ignorance of the masses have always been detrimental in the progress of a nascent democracy, like Nigeria in this context. And, as could be found from the postcolonial history of Africa, this lack of awareness and poor attitude towards corruption in general have been one of the reasons why a country like Nigeria did not progress quick enough after the colonizers left them. During the colonial period the colonizers were extracting the native wealth and natural resources to their motherlands, whereas in postcolonial African scenario the colonizers were replaced by the corrupt native politicians. The main difference was that the native wealth was sent to these politicians’ homes now which used to be the colonizers’ countries previously. The overall economic condition of the native society remained the same in colonial and immediate postcolonial period after independence.

In the midst of all this happening, Odili feels he loves Edna genuinely. It is not just because he wishes to take revenge from Chief Nanga, but Edna tells him that she is obliged to marry Chief Nanga because her family is under debt and financial pressure. Chief Nanga has given money to her family, and because of that her father is exerting pressure upon her to marry him. Such incident from this novel states the fact that how common people of Africa and their weaknesses were exploited by the dominant section of native society, represented in this narrative by the corrupt politicians of Nigeria, for personal covetous profits in the post-independent Africa. The rulers of the natives continued to be the same after the Europeans left the country- only their skin colour changed.

In another twist of events, Odili attends the election rally secretly where Chief Nanga is going to launch his election campaign. But he is recognized and betrayed by the outlawed trader, Josiah, to the Chief who then beats him up severely, to death almost. At that moment the police people posted there, actually the party thugs in police uniform, turn and quietly leave the place. He recuperates at the hospital and now things start changing in his personal life. Edna stands by him through his
recuperation period, and his family finally makes arrangements for his marriage to her. Things are changing fast in the country too. Eventually, Chief Nanga’s party wins the elections, but there is utter chaos and total unrest in the country in its aftermath, leading to a military coup d'état and imposition of martial law with the dismissal of the constitution of the country and arrest of all political leaders. Chief Nanga was arrested trying to escape in a canoe dressed as a fisherman. Now the same people who have supported the overthrown elected government that was in power come forward to criticize it and say how terrible and corrupt the government officials have been. Odili’s friend Max is killed by one of the officials of the previous government, Chief Koko, but his girlfriend Eunice shoots Chief Koko on the spot. Odili is very sad over his friend’s death, but at the same time he reflects that in such a corrupt country to die in an honourable manner is the best option. In a country where people cannot be moved to action by truth, a person like Max ‘died a good death’ because his life inspires “someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest – without asking to be paid” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 150). This also reflects Achebe’s outlook at all the chaos and corruption in postcolonial Africa. He is optimistic that all the elements of darkness in his country are going to vanish soon and he expects the new light of dawn to shield his country from all the preexistent negativities. He foresees that this light of hope is going to be brought by some sort of military coup and exactly same thing happened in Nigeria the year *A Man of the People* is written, as discussed earlier.

**A Man of the People: A Portrait of the Postcolonial African Society**

As discussed previously, in *A Man of the People* Chinua Achebe reflects upon the condition of African societies in the aftermath of post-colonialism in Africa. The readers invariably get the feeling that Achebe believes that African post-colonialism is an altered version of colonialism; the colonizers have left the country but colonialism is still there. And it is not that now colonialism is strictly imposed by the native elite; but the sad truth is that postcolonial African governments are still run by the former colonizers and their allies to derive the maximum material benefits from their resources. While in the heydays of colonialism, the colonizers ruled the countries being physically present there through appointing local people to help them run the
administration, while after their independence the same colonizers indirectly appointed heads of states who functioned like puppets in their hands for a few pieces of silver. They exploited the common masses for the benefit of the former colonizers, exactly like the local people appointed by the colonizers were exploiting the common masses for the benefit of their White masters. Now they pushed their expensive products into the markets of poor countries and took cheap raw materials from them, thus, making double profit. To carry out this one-sided trade, they threw a few pieces of silver to the hungry politicians of the poor countries. Just a few examples from the novel will suffice to prove the point. The trading company named ‘British Amalgamated’ (Achebe, A Man of the People 101) conducts extremely large and varied business with the unnamed country in the novel. The company bribes Chief Nanga to get a road construction contract in the country worth millions of pounds, and in lieu of this favour the company supplied him six luxury buses that would run on this road, generating good personal revenue for the minister. Then there is this story in the newspaper Daily Matchet:

...Chief Nanga, who had himself held the portfolio of Foreign Trade until two years ago, had been guilty of the same practice and had built out of his gains three blocks of seven-storey luxury flats at three hundred thousand pounds each in the name of his wife and that these flats were immediately leased by British Amalgamated at fourteen hundred a month each. (Achebe, A Man of the People 101)

The same British Amalgamated pays out four hundred thousand pounds to the ruling party called People's Organization Party (P.O.P) whose corrupt politicians are well-known, to fight the election, and Max informs Odili that, “...we also know that the Americans have been even more generous, although we don’t have the figures as yet” (Achebe, A Man of the People 128). When Odili appears to be a threat to Chief Nanga, he wants to buy him. He comes to his father’s house with an offer of the British scholarship desired by him initially and two hundred pounds in currency. About the funds Odili’s party Common People’s Convention (C.P.C.) is getting, he drops a hint that the money comes from foreign countries. It is not surprising that there are several foreign interests, competing with each other for the slice of cake in the newly emerged democracy:
“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. We will show them. As for you my brother you can eat what has entered your hand….Your good friend Maxwell Kulamo has more sense than you. He has already taken his money and agreed to step down for Chief Koko.” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 119-120)

Thus, nothing has changed in the erstwhile colony. Only the skin colour of the masters has changed, and yet those black masters also run errands for their invisible White masters and in lieu of their favours they themselves live a luxurious life at the expense of the tax payers. In the following pages some of the factors and evidences that corroborate this feeling of the author are looked at.

The Hegemonic Misrepresentation of Africa, Native Weaknesses and the Role of Politicians in Postcolonial Africa:

Chinua Achebe feels that the culture and the identity of Africans is still being underwritten and Africans are still represented as noble savages, and the numerous so-called ‘African intellectuals’ themselves play a leading role in this game of the Whites. Whites, typically represented by Americans in the novel (in fact, the neocolonialist agenda is now run by American imperialists for the exploitation of the natural resources of Africa) claim to help and represent Africa to the world in a good light and they study them as subjects of their scientific study, as did Joseph Conrad. But it is obvious that the Western writers can never accord the Africans an equal status, not even the status of an equal human being. Africans, to them, are still lacking in civilization, and therefore, need the help of the progressive White civilization. One classic example of this tendency is noted in Joseph Conrad. In *Heart of Darkness* it is Joseph Conrad who masquerades as Marlow, and in *Lord Jim* again it is the narrator’s personality that plays a crucial role. Conrad is considered a great champion of the cause of the Africans, advocating their freedom from the colonial rule. His representation of the reality of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* is touted as a great turning point towards a change of attitude of the Whites towards slavery. Chinua Achebe, however, opines that Conrad was a racist White man at heart, that he could never
stand the sight of a black man without feeling disgust. Achebe’s particular reference is to Conrad’s excessive use of the word ‘black’ in *Heart of Darkness* and his other novels set in Africa:

Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Sometimes his fixation on blackness is equally interesting as when he gives us this brief description:

*A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms...*

as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to have white arms! (Achebe, "An Image of Africa." 125)

So, the Western sympathizers of the colonized people are pretenders to a certain extent as they have never treated the natives as individuals. There are several instances in *A Man of the People* indicating this bitter truth, but two instances are worth taking a special note of. The one is the visit of Jean and John at Chief Nanga’s house, and John talks to Odili. Their conversation runs as follows:

“America may not be perfect,” he was saying, “but don’t forget that we are the only powerful country in the entire history of the world, the only one, which had to power to conquer the others and didn’t do it.”

I must have looked more surprised than I felt. The claim did not as yet strike me with its full weight. I am thinking that this unique act of magnanimity must have happened in a small corner of the world long ago.

“No,” said John, “in 1945 we could have subdued Russia by placing one atom bomb on Moscow and another on Leningrad. But we didn’t. Why? Well, don’t ask me. I don’t know. Perhaps we are naïve. We still believe in such outdated concepts like freedom, like letting every man run his show. Americans have never wished to be involved in anyone else’s show...." (45-46)

While, on the contrary, the author hints, that the opposite is the only truth.

The other incident is Odili’s conversation with some White men and women at the party thrown by Jean and John. The reference is to an art piece put up at a public square in Bori, the capital city. People from different walks of life have liked as well as criticized the art and the artists’ sense and understanding of their own culture. The Englishman criticizes the piece saying it lacks something or other.
“I was pleased the other day,” he said, “as I drove past it to see one very old woman in uncontrollable rage shaking her fists at the sculpture…”

“Now that’s very interesting,” said someone.

“Well, it’s more than that,” said the other. “You see this old woman, quite an illiterate pagan, who most probably worshipped this very god herself; unlike our friend rained in European art schools; this old lady is in a position to know…”

“Quite.”

It was then I had my flash of insight.

“Did you say she was shaking her fist?” I asked. “In that case you got her meaning all wrong. Shaking the fist in our society is a sign of great honour and respect; it means that you attribute power to the person or object.” (Achebe, A Man of the People 50-51)

This demolition of the ideas of the White art critic helps the reputation of Odili soar quite high and he gets the attention of one and all at the party, particularly the American couple. They “…wanted to know whether I had trained in Britain, what I had read at the University, what I taught at the Anata Grammar School, had I been to the United States, what did I think of America? etc. etc” (Achebe, A Man of the People 51). The implications are so clear that they cannot be missed. Nigerians trained in Nigeria cannot make sense of their art creations. It is, as projected in this comment by the American couple, only through training in Britain and at British universities that they get some sense of their own culture. Britain has given them the sense of their own culture, also the sense of what human civilization is, but, left to their own devices. They have been savages, they are savages and they would remain savages.

Odili’s identification with the British intellectuals is so pleasing to his hosts that the hostess, Jean, drools over him and when all the other guests leaves, they have sex before his departure back home. Otherwise, he is looked down upon as an unwanted guest, as Jean and John have invited only Chief Nanga. But since he is busy elsewhere, he instead sends Odili to attend their party. Odili can easily sense sarcasm in the words of Jean at his unwanted presence in the party, as if he were a gatecrasher:

“If you ask him if he is coming to dinner he says I will try.”
“How sweet!” said a middle-aged woman, I think British, matching her words with a gentle sideways tilt of the head in my direction. “I just love _pidgin_ English.”

“I will try,” Jean continued, “can mean a whole lot of things. It may mean that he won’t come – like tonight – or that he might turn up with three other people.”

“How intriguing,” said the other woman again. And it was only then I began to suspect she was being sarcastic.” (Achebe, _A Man of the People_ 50)

Achebe’s postcolonial novels in this sense can be interpreted as a strong critique of the suffering of his people for reasons they may not be aware of, as well as a critique of the postcolonial construct which directly invites the reader to rewrite the past, to write back to the empire and to keep the colonial narrative go on so that the common people realize the high value they had paid for their independence. Achebe is not just an interesting storyteller, but a storyteller with a definite purpose. His fictional works have brought to light the hegemonic misrepresentation of African people, their culture, obliteration of African history and the dominant narrative of Africa that existed in the pre-colonial days- in the colonial discourse. Achebe also delves deep into the politics of knowledge, power of knowledge and the power of representation. He has himself put his own knowledge of his culture and of his people to use in the critique of Euro-centric perception of the world, to critique the grand narrative of modernity. It is not to say that Achebe is against the idea of modernity or modernization of Africa, but his idea of modernity takes along the age-old tradition of brotherhood, love, respect, and humanitarian attitude that avoid the ruthless exploitation of people as well as of the natural resources of the land. Thus, storytelling in Achebe does not achieve only aesthetic satisfaction but the other side of it is always revolutionary challenging all kinds of authority, whether of the West or of African people. Odili Samalu in _A Man of the People_ challenges the White man’s narrative of a helpless Africa, but at the same time he finds faults with his own people too. To him, all the blames of the present ills in post-independent African nations cannot be just shifted to colonialism.

Similar is the opinion of some of the influential critics of the time, especially the authorities on Achebe’s writings. They believe that Chinua Achebe does not put the entire blame for the failure of the political system in his country on colonialism.
Achebe’s intentions are not to just castigate colonialism in an attempt to shift all the blame of all ills in his nation on it. He advocates for introspection and through the constructive intervention of the intellectuals in the country he wishes to highlight the faults and fissures within the national fabric. A good example of such intellectual intervention from *A Man of the People* is the attempt of the disgruntled youth, like, Maxwell Kulamo, Eunice, Joe, Odili, an unnamed trade unionist, a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher and a newspaper journalist to forge a new political party to fight rampant corruption in politics and in public life.

It is true that cultural and social conflicts in *A Man of the People* have colonial legacy since prolonged slavery and abjection have engendered political, moral, cultural and social decay in the country. So, is not it the responsibility of the politicians to take the nation towards progress in the post-independent scenario? And if they fail to deliver, isn’t it the responsibility of the national intelligentsia to bring them to their senses? Onyemaechi Udumukwu views the treachery of the politicians as the “negation of the hopes of independence” (472). Udumukwu says:

It is not as if history has remained immutable from the colonial era to the new dispensation. There has been a transition from one historical phase to another. But the irony is that even though the old colonial order has been replaced by the new, the nascent political system in Africa has proved incapable of guaranteeing the satisfaction of needs (473).

In a sense, *A Man of the People* is a sort of sequel to Achebe’s earlier colonial novel *Things Fall Apart*. The first novel tells the story of the disintegration of African countries and their indigenous cultures under the hammering impact of colonialism and how colonialism ruined that beautiful, close-knit, self-sustaining tribal culture of Africa where simple, honest, and sincere people lived with dignity and self-respect, having enough food and drink for all. From European standards Africa was a poor continent. But from Africans’ own standards, Africa was never poor because none went to bed on a hungry stomach there, even without a ruthless exploitation of the nature because the nature was worshipped by the Africans as a mother. This story is like the story of the Holocaust – the Holocaust of a culture, along with genocide and mass slavery. But the story does not end there. The story is incomplete just with the narration of what happened in Africa after the arrival of the colonizers. The story of the Holocaust survivors also needs to be listened to. *A Man of the People* is the story
of the Holocaust survival. What happened in Africa after the colonizers left the continent is narrated in *A Man of the People*, and that’s why the novel is a sequel to *Things Fall Apart*. It is the continuation of the same story after a long hiatus, in a different context. The context has changed because colonialism has changed the people of Africa. Disintegration of the ancient culture, tribal brotherhood, kinship and cultural affinities have wreaked havoc on some people’s thought patterns. They are no more the same simple, honest and sincere people who lived with dignity in comparatively poor conditions. People of African countries, especially some people like, Chief Nanga and Chief Koko, have lost the old model of simple living and acquired the ways of their colonial masters - the ways of deceit, treachery, dishonesty, luxury and exploitation of their own countrymen. *A Man of the People* is the other half of the story that was in *Things Fall Apart*, and therefore, it wouldn’t be an overstatement to say that *A Man of the People* as another story of colonialism makes the circle full.

**Nation and Narration in Achebe**

As mentioned earlier too, Chinua Achebe’s fictional works are not just stories; they are the means of weaving a fabric of African nation and their national pride, not confined in narrow boundaries. The notion of African cultural identity is crucial to Achebe and Achebe’s fictional narratives take the reader on a journey through Africa and see through his/her own eyes the conditions prevalent in post-independence Africa, though in a narrow sense he writes only of Nigeria. The readers also feel being guided by a teacher as he draws their attention to the homework, that is, to realize the problems and difficulties of people in postcolonial situations. This is one of the reasons that any critics have maintained that Chinua Achebe provides alternative ways of narrating the nation.

Many of the postcolonial writers engage themselves in the construction and contestation of the nation in a major way. Their notion of the nation has been generated by the anti-imperialist struggles when the idea of a solid, single-boundary nation in most of the postcolonial countries came into being and took a tangible shape. To most of such writers, Chinua Achebe being one of them, the notions of ‘nation’ goes beyond the political meanings of it. The idea came from the West, but it
embraced the entire cultural construct since it encompasses other national concerns
too, like, race, religion, linguistic affinities, ethnic ties, tribal affinities, ancestral
inheritance, geographical region, and even imperialism. It is important here to briefly
discuss the idea of ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’ as put in by said in Culture and
Imperialism. ‘Colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’ are often used as reciprocal, and in this
chapter too, they are used in the same manner. Said has used the terms ‘imperialism’
to explain “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan
center ruling a distant territory;” (8). The argument in this context is that the outlook
of White characters, like John, Jean and Elsie, depicted in A Man of the People, is that
of speaking from the vantage point of this “dominating metropolitan center.” This
conclusion is derived from their conversations, intentions and dealings with the
Nigerians directly as well as indirectly, though such instances are just nominal in this
novel. The point is that though these people exhibit much liberalism in their expressed
ideas as regard to equality, racial tolerance and social justice, they fail in their fair
representation of the erstwhile colonial subjects, of the so-called ‘uncivilized
aboriginal people’ of the colonies, and that representation appears to be deliberate.
The complete enterprise of colonization was founded and justified upon the concept
of ‘representation’. The so-called ‘civilizing mission of the empire’ was essential to
justify their presence in the colonies, and which still justifies the presence of
numerous aid agencies and UN missions in the erstwhile colonies. It would not be
improper to quote Edward Said again who says that, “almost all colonial schemes
begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be
independent, ‘equal’ and fit” (Said 96). The problem to be noted here is that it is
possible to have liberal and egalitarian views as regard to people and culture at home.
Unfamiliar cultures and people are always alien and it is hard to find examples when
someone gladly accommodates the idea that aliens can also be treated the same. Thus,
a nation is not a product of a few years of struggle, but a narrative legacy of
continuous flow of the past into the present. Chinua Achebe has achieved great
success in presenting the continuity of the narrative of the nation, in terms of the lives
of people, and not just states, through his works like, Things Fall Apart, Anthills of
the Savannah and A Man of the People. His works encompass the idea of Negritude
and Pan-Africanism, the concept that are essential to grasp the idea of ‘nation’ in
African contexts. Ania Loomba makes the point clear that ‘nation’ “… takes on
another meaning, a sense of shared culture and subjectivity and divisions of nations as political entities” (176). Both the movements, that is, Negritude and Pan-Africanism, were aimed at articulating pan-national racial solidarity and demand for the end of White supremacy and imperialist domination of the world. Both the movements celebrated blackness in a positive way ‘as a distinct racial-cultural way of being’ (Loomba 176). Achebe’s works too are aimed at articulating the similar Pan-African consciousness, not just confined to one postcolonial nation, as has been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

Negritude has been an important phase in the development of African consciousness all through the world, in the USA, The UK, France, Canada, and of course, in the continent of Africa. The Movement took off in Paris with the assertion of pride in African culture and cultural values by African students in the 1930s. They aimed at contesting the inferior status Africa and the Africans have been accorded in colonial discourses prevalent in the narratives of travelers, writers, historians and missionaries in Europe. It is assumed that Pan-Africanism was inspired by the success of Harlem Renaissance that promoted the richness and values of African cultural identity and thus numerous writers and narrators of African origin in the US were recognized as geniuses. The small movement started by a small number of students in Paris took everyone by surprise as it associated itself with the Sub-Saharan African nation’s struggle for independence and in that attempt stressed upon the unity of all Africans, wherever they may be. It also made serious efforts to unite the entire African continent in order to promote cooperation among its nations. Although the movement did not achieve what it aimed, yet it has been a successful step towards raising the black consciousness, and writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Frantz Fanon took up the cause further.

The discussion on Negritude and Pan-Africanism would be incomplete without taking into consideration the ideas of Frantz Fanon. Fanon was the first to set the stage for the development of political consciousness among the colonized. His *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Mask* are phenomenal works towards raising the black consciousness, especially to fight for their rights. The concept of a “national literature” was proposed by Fanon that would engage in the formation of national consciousness. The same idea has been taken up by Achebe too, or at least the influence of such an idea is clearly visible in his writings. All of his novels are
focused on the formation of a national consciousness in his people. In *A Man of the People*, he stresses upon the idea of a nation that the people of that unnamed nation should have; regional and tribal affinities should be kept aside in such a situation. Fanon’s national literature would also be committed to the struggle for national liberation. Is an echo of the same idea found in Achebe’s literature too? The answer is yes. National liberation also means liberating the people of the nation from corrupt politicians as well. Odili Samalu in *A Man of the People* has his own weaknesses, but he is ready to lay his life to save the nation from hypocrites like the powerful politician Chief Nanga. Formation of national consciousness begins with the rediscovery of the rich past of Africa, and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* too is a first step towards achieving this goal.

Fanon writes, “National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (*Wretched of the Earth* 247). And interestingly, as Fanon’s critique and ideas on Pan-Africanism are not confined to only African conditions but can be traced to possess universal or international dimensions, Achebe’s notion of nation, blackness and Africanism are not confined to mere African nations. Another echo of Fanon, found in narrating the nation by Achebe, is that Fanon also stresses upon the role of the national intelligentsia. Achebe himself assumes an important role in this struggle, not only as a writer but also as an activist. In fact, Achebe assumes several roles as one of the Nigerian intelligentsia – as a storyteller, critic, teacher and as a political commentator – to instill a sense of pride in their culture among the people of Africa. Thus, in *A Man of the People* Achebe reinvents Africa as a continent that is proud of it rich heritage but that is also ready to punish the villains in the continent.

**Identity**

Identity is a highly problematic issue in *A Man of the People*. The most severe toll colonialism brings about is loss of identity of the colonized people. They fail to identify themselves with their own culture and cultural identity since, under the impact of cultural hegemony, their own culture appears to them outdated, obsolete, regressive and decadent. At the same time, they cannot acquire the identity of their masters as the masters maintain a distance, superiority and distinction. Colonialism
Chapter 4  Chinua Achebe’s Postcolonial Fiction

creates a culture of exploitation as it is in itself founded upon exploitation. The hungry but smart people who replace the colonizers continue with the exploitative mechanism of the colonizers in the postcolonial setting. To justify their acts, they assume superiority over their own countrymen. Under postcolonial conditions, the new masters identify themselves with the colonizers in every possible way. They discard their own cultural practices as oppressively primitive. Chief Nanga’s children go to expensive public schools and receive superior education. They do not speak their mother tongue. They only speak English. And they have also developed a disliking for everything that is native— even their relatives and friends, too. The younger one, Micah, calls his maternal grandmother, ‘a dirty, bush woman’ (Achebe, A Man of the People 39). Chief Nanga always speaks English, but Mrs. Nanga never spoke anything other than her mother tongue. She identifies herself with Africa and African culture, but to everyone’s dismay, her African identity proves to be false, only a pretense since towards the end of the story when Odili goes to meet her after filing his nomination papers against her husband Chief Nanga, she is unbelievably rude to him. Though her behaviour may be ascribed to her lack of independent personality, only toeing the line of her husband’s footsteps, but still she does not recognize him as her African brother as she does in the beginning of the story. She appears to be as corrupt as her husband.

All the corrupt leaders acquired the identities of their colonial masters. But the White masters knew how to put them in place. The protagonist Odili narrates how the exploitation of Africa and its people in the hands of Westerners and as well as corrupt native politicians are evident everywhere. After their rendezvous in bed, Jean takes Odili on a drive through the streets of Bori in her car and she takes him through the filthy, dirty streets as well which reminds him of the City Clerk’s notice about distribution of pails to the residents of Bori for collection and disposal of excrement. Odili was ashamed of his own city and then he wonders:

I began to wonder whether Jean actually enjoyed driving through these places as she claimed she did or whether she had some secret reason, like wanting me to feel ashamed about my country’s capital city. I hardly knew her but I could see she was that kind of person, a most complicated woman. (Achebe, A Man of the People 54-55)
The narrator seems to comment that being ‘complicated’ is the distinctive feature majority of the White women. Odili gets angry at the judgmental comments of Jean about his countrymen. The incident was small, but significant and Odili gets offended:

We were now back in the pleasant high-class area.

“That row of ten houses belongs to the Minister of Construction,” she said.

“They are let to different embassies at three thousand a year each.”

So what, I said within myself. Your accusation may be true but you’ve no right to make it. Leave it to us and don’t contaminate our cause by espousing it.” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 55)

The incident is a reflection on the identity crisis of the leaders and an attempt of the native intelligentsia to restore their national identity. At the same time, the incident gives an opportunity to peep into the double identity of the White men- as saviors of the doomed on one hand but as sarcastic commentators on native cultures, leaders, lifestyle and daily practices on the other hand. It is not merely an identity crisis since the same White people assume their real identity as soon as they return to their homeland.

An important aspect of identity is how one negotiates one’s identity to derive full benefits out of it. Chief Nanga is the Minister of Culture of Nigeria, but to the Americans he is still a Nigerian, a low creature, and he happily accepts this; although it is an issue of cultural differences as in American culture there exists the concept of equality of all and no master-servant relationship. But the point to note here is that Chief Nanga accepts the concept of equality from the Americans. They address him by his Christian first name, “These two people were no older than I and yet had the impudence to call Chief Nanga his now almost forgotten Christian name” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 44) even if his guests are very young people compared to his age as difference matters a lot in Nigerian culture and younger people should show respect to the ones older to them. But the same Chief Nanga would never accept the similar behaviour from his countrymen.

“But what shocked me even more was his reaction. I had turned quickly and anxiously to watch his face contort with fury. But no. He had replied sweetly, “Hi Jean, hi John.” I couldn’t understand. I was dead certain that if I or any of our people for that matter had called him Micah he would have gone rampaging mad. But perhaps I shouldn’t have been so surprised. We have all
accepted things from white skins that none of us would have brooked from our own people.” (Achebe, A Man of the People 44)

Identity and Representation

White men still represent Africa as a dirty, uncultured country to justify their presence there as a civilizing mission. They wish to prove that without them Africa wouldn’t move an inch towards progress. They seem to say that they were forced to leave Africa by international circumstances and the changing scenario in the world around. But their presence in Africa is essential as in their absence, African countries have rather deteriorated and that postcolonial African countries cannot manage their affairs on their own. Representation of Africa by White men to their relations back home who did not have the good fortune to visit the continent in person was done as an interesting place, a place that was represented as an exotic location with exotic people who lived in exotic jungles, in bushes, and who used leaves to clean themselves after excretion instead of water-closets. The place has been represented as a “must-see” place. Odili resents all this:

Now I guessed I knew why she took so much delight in driving through our slums. She must have taken hundreds of photographs already to send home to her relations. And, come to think of it, would she – lover of Africa that she was – would she be found near a black man in her own country? (Achebe, A Man of the People 55)

Odili’s anger is legitimate, and the only way he can think of taking revenge on the Whites who reduce him to be a subhuman creature is by having physical intimacy with their women. After his first physical encounter with Jean he asks her:

“When do you expect John come back?” I asked, burning with anger.
“Wednesday. Why?”
“I was wondering whether I could see you again.”
“Do you want to?”
“Sure.”
“Why not? Let me call you tomorrow?” (Achebe, A Man of the People 56)

But the irony of the situation is that even during the sexual encounter he is not in a superior position. Odili negotiates his identity against her standards and during
physical encounter also he is still a slave to her. He is merely a pawn being used by her. The White woman is exploiting his body to her full satisfaction in a similar fashion as the White colonizers have exploited the rich resources and the mineral wealth of the African continent. In terms hegemony, she is still a winner and he is still a loser.

To Chinua Achebe, love of Africa and love of the Black people (and making them falsely believe that they treat them on equal footing) is a sort of hypocrisy of the Whites. The same woman who was ready to flirt with Chief Nanga and Odili at a moment’s notice would turn her face away at the sight of a Black man back home, treating him as an inferior creature not worth being in company of. This is clearly not a sign of equality. One such instance is given in the novel. A Negro writer, present at the party hosted by Jean and John, tells them the story of a White American man who came up to him at his lunch table at the International Hotel which he tells, “as everyone knows, is a kind of international mart for the sale to our people of all kinds of foreign wares, from ideologies to tractors” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 51-52).

This White American came up and said, full of respect:

“May I join you, sir?”

“Sure,” replied the other.

“What do you think of the Peace Corps?”

“I’ve nothing against it. One of my daughters is in it.”

“You American?”

“Sure. I came over…”

I thought this was good. I could see the other man promptly excusing himself and searching other tables for *authentic* Africans. (Achebe, *A Man of the People*, 52)

A Black man in America is a not an authentic African because he demands equality, social justice and abolition of racism. The same Black man in Africa is authentic because he is not a threat to their self-congratulatory image as the saviors of mankind. They are not obliged to share their private space with him on equal footing. In Africa they can treat him as a Black man in need of help and show to the world that they are on a charity mission.

But the problem is, as Achebe perceives it, that some of the Africans themselves are not ready to treat their fellow Africans as equal since they want to
make the most of the opportunity that the departure of the colonizers has given them. They are not ready to grant their fellow countrymen the status of true citizens. They have retained the system of the ruler and the ruled that was established by the colonizers for the exploitation of the natives. That system was the system of distance, distinction, hierarchy, of master-slave relationship, of cultural superiority and of knowledgeable vs. ignorant, established in order to maintain their rule in the colony. How could the native populace who replaced the colonizers keep the same system intact? How could they treat their less fortunate fellow countrymen as slaves? But they did. They did it shamelessly. They did it because, like the colonizers, they wanted to maintain their hold on power to go on enjoying the life of luxury without sharing the comforts of life in a democratic manner. One instance from the novel is worth mentioning here. Odili visits the hospital where his girlfriend Elsie works as a nurse. It would be remarkable to look at the description of this visit:

In our country a long American car driven by a white-uniformed chauffeur and flying a ministerial flag could pass through the eye of a needle. The hospital gateman had promptly levered up the iron barrier and saluted. The elderly male nurse I beckoned to had sprinted forward with an agility that you would think had left him at least a decade ago. And as I said earlier, although it was against all the laws of the hospital they had let me into the female nurses’ quarters and waked up Elsie to see me…

“If you are looking for flattery from me this afternoon you won’t get it,” I said stooping at the door which the chauffeur had been holding open since I first emerged from the night nurses’ dormitory.” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 57-58)  (Emphasis added)

An African man expects the other African man to salute him and would be angry if the other does not. He expects him to stand in wait for him and he enjoys if he is treated with deference, distinction and high respect. Colonialism has ended, but the colonial mindset lingers on. The postcolonial dilemma of identity is that some of the clever Black men identify themselves with the Whites and treat other Black men as their slaves. The same people get angry if they are represented in a different, lighter vein by the Whites.
Chapter-4 Chinua Achebe’s Postcolonial Fiction

Postcolonial Strategies of Control

Chinua Achebe’s major focus in *A Man of the People* is on a critique of the postcolonial culture of control in Africa. Achebe is highly dissatisfied with the political developments in most of the African nations, a situation where the politicians have betrayed the trust of people. Achebe agrees that more than a century of oppression has changed people’s perspective towards life and they hungrily fill their coffers before throwing small pieces to others, but that was not and is not the real Africa. In any case, Achebe in this novel provides a graphic image of the strategies of mass control used by the current politicians, the strategies used by their colonial master in a different form. Some of such important strategies are discussed here.

A) Suppress the Dissent

It is a dictatorial strategy. In a democratic setup only a corrupt government would resort to this strategy. The government in whose Cabinet Chief Nanga is a minister uses this strategy since the government assumes absolute power and they are afraid of subversion. The narrator in this novel muses how the newly appointed masters of native people declare even the legitimate questions of people against corruption as dissent:

> The trouble with our new nation – as I saw it then lying on that bed – 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 left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase – the extension of our house – was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house.

*(Achebe, *A Man of the People* 37)*

In postcolonial Africa the voices of individuals were suppressed just like in the colonial period. The common people still suffered and oppressed, as they were in the colonial Africa. Only the White masters were replaced by the native politicians at the
top, but the way of life of the less fortunate commoners— their sufferings and subjugations did not get better in the postcolonial African fabric.

**B) Control the Media**

Media is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy. But if the democratic rights of the people are to be suspended, control over the media should be the first step in order to carry on the propaganda that whatever the government is doing it is doing for the welfare of the people. This was what happened under the rule of African politician after the colonizers left this land. For instance, in his inaugural speech at a book exhibition, a journalist comes to Chief Nanga asking for a copy of his speech and then the minister gives him a five pound note. He explains this gesture to Odili in this novel:

> If I don’t give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me. They say it is the freedom of the Press. But to me it nothing short of the freedom to crucify innocent men and assassinate their character. I don’t know why our government is so afraid to deal with them. I don’t say they should not criticize – after all no one is perfect except God – but they should criticize constructively…. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 68)

In a country ruled by a corrupt and suppressive government even the electronic media is controlled by the regime. Odili is surprised that despite the fact that they had provided full information about the activities of their party C.P.C. to the radio station, there was no coverage of their activities at all. Odili says, “...I wanted to keep a close watch on the antics of our radio system which incidentally had not so far said a single word about the existence of our new party even though we had kept them fully informed of our activities” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 132). Whereas, Chief Nanga and his party are mentioned every five seconds in the news:

> But also I had been missing Boniface’s “Tief-man”, “Foolis-man” and similar invective aimed at Chief Nanga and his ministerial colleagues whenever their names came up in the news – which was about every five seconds at normal peaceful times and much more frequently in these critical days...

> But once more I listened in vain. Instead they announced Chief Nanga’s inaugural campaign which had not even taken place! It was to happen on Monday week in Anata. Perhaps I should go and see it. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 132-133)
Even the local church is used as a medium of control by Chief Nanga and his thugs. The church crier announced that a decision has already been made by the elders and councilors of Urua that in the present election “they should make it known that they knew one man and one man alone – Chief Nanga” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 135).

C) **Torture the Opponent into Submission**

In *A Man of the People* suppression of dissent is followed by silencing the opponents into submission if they do not bow to the desires of the dictator. This is achieved through arm-twisting techniques and terrorizing the family members and close relatives- strategies common villains generally use. Odili Samalu is dismissed from his post at Anata Grammar School because he has dared to challenge the local Member of Parliament (MP), Chief Nanga. The proprietor of the school calls him, hands him a month’s salary along with the notice of his dismissal and comments, “I see that you have grown too big for your coat,” (Achebe, *A Man of the People*, 103) to which Odili responds, “You have grown too small in yours, Mr. Push-me-down” (Achebe, *A Man of the People*, 103). His father is also dismissed from his post as the local chairman of People's Organization Party (P.O.P.) at Urua:

> I was dully thinking about this when my father's name coming out of the radio stung me into full life. It was announced that that Mr. Hezekiah Samalu, chairman of P.O.P in Urua, had been “ignominiously removed from his office for subversive, anti-party activities, according to an announcement received this morning from the P. O. P. Bureau of Investigation and Publicity”.

(Achebe, *A Man of the People* 133).

The matters does not stop at that. He is sent notice of reassessed tax assessment from local council Tax Assessment Office which implicates him in tax fraud. In the evening three policemen come to arrest him who are stopped from manhandling only as Odili bribes them with twenty-four pounds. Their leader makes it clear that the action is a consequence of Odili’s fight against Chief Nanga: “If I be you I go take am down too, when I done finish take am up. Turn you back make I see the nyarsh you go take fight Nanga” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 133).

The strong man in power abuses his position and uses all sorts of arm-twisting techniques to subdue his opponent in this novel. The Public Works Department’s trucks are sent to the village of Urua to cart away the pipes they have deposited there.
several months ago for the Rural Water Scheme project (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 133-134). This is done to suppress Odili and his newly formed political party called Common People’s Convention (C.P.C) which is going to contest against Chief Nanga and his party in the forthcoming election. Achebe here tries to present the gloomy African picture in general and the Nigerian scenario in particular in the hands of native administrators after the colonial powers left this continent.

D) Politics of Propaganda

Dictatorial regimes in postcolonial period resorted to propaganda politics to keep their hold on power. This was another form of hegemony to forcibly have people’s consent in favour of the powerful ones. There is one such incident in *A Man of the People*. At one point of time the country has faced financial crisis because coffee prices has slumped while the national economy heavily depends upon coffee. To stay in power, the Prime Minister does not listen to the sane advice of his Finance Minister who has an intellectual background. The two-third of the Cabinet is in support of the Minister. But the Prime Minister sacks all of them and calls them the ‘Miscreant Gang’ (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 4). All of these sacked Ministers received their education at British universities and well qualified men. But the Prime Minister spreads a propaganda that these men “were conspirators and traitors who had teamed up with foreign saboteurs to destroy the new nation” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 4). The newspapers, under the control of the ruling party, points out that “…even in Britain where the Miscreant Gang got its “so-called education” a man need not be an economist to be Chancellor of the Exchequer or a doctor to be Minister of Health” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 4-5). So, the propaganda is that “What mattered was loyalty to the party” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 5). The official newspaper of the P.O.P named The *Daily Chronicle* writes in an editorial:

Let us now and for all time extract from our body-politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book 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… (qtd. in Achebe, *A Man of the People* 4)
The Prime Minister gives a speech at the Parliament for three hours and he is applauded non-stop by his followers. “They deserve to be hanged,” shouted Mr. Nanga from the back benches” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 5) and, “Mr. Nanga pronounced death sentence at least twice more but this was not recorded, no doubt because his voice was lost in the general commotion” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 6). This incident is reminiscent of the story of Napoleon and Snowball in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Napoleon declares Snowball, who is very intelligent and works for the betterment of the Farm, as a traitor and declares, “…the death sentence upon Snowball” (Orwell 62), as Snowball’s hard work could be dangerous for Napoleon’s power and position in the farm.

However, the hypocrisy of such politicians is visible to one and all in *A Man of the People*. Chief Koko, one of the Cabinet Ministers, does not even digest home grown coffee. He chokes on it and cries they have killed him; that his cook poisoned his coffee. The cook explains:

> “Why I go kill my master?” he asked of a now considerably sobered audience. “Abi my head no correct? And even if to say I de crazy why I no go go jump for inside lagoon instead to kill my master?” His words carried conviction. He proceeded to explain the mystery of the coffee. The Minister’s usual Nescafe had run out at breakfast and he had not had time to get a new tin. So he had brewed some of his own locally processed coffee which he maintained he had bought from OHMS [Our Home Made Stuff]”. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 34-35)

Chief Koko identifies himself with the ruling class that has left the country. The common masses are barricaded off his residence as he fears that they can bring harm to him for what he has done to them being in power.

**E) Rule of Terror**

In *A Man of the People* Achebe denounces all the tactics that the governments in newly independent African countries started using to subdue their own people after they got independence from the colonizers. The elected African representatives did not want to see any opposition to them, and in most cases elections were rigged. There was widespread violence in elections and a virtual rule of terror was established by the powerful in post-independent Africa. Achebe paints a very realistic picture of this culture of terror in *A Man of the People*. For instance, as Odili decides to stand as
a candidate in the general election against Chief Nanga’s seat in the constituency, Chief Nanga employs the tactics of terror against his opponent. Terrorism is hidden behind the propaganda at the surface level. He is pumping more than enough money to create something called Nanga’s Youth Vanguard or Nangavanga in short:

New branches of this Nangavanga were springing up everyday throughout the district. Their declared aim was to “annihilate all enemies of progress and “to project true Nangaism.” The fellows we ran into carried placards, one of which read: NANGAISM FOREVER: SAMALU IS TREITOR. It was the first time I had seen myself on a placard and I felt oddly elated. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 113-114)

This group is nothing but the groups of goons. In post-independent Africa such groups were formed by corrupt politicians to guard their safety and more importantly to terrorize and torture those whoever tried to raise any voice against these powerful ones.

The native people of Nigeria had to face quite a few problems and difficulties in their homeland under postcolonial conditions which they did not experience directly before the advent of imperialistic powers in their land. Following are some of such common difficulties and troubles that the native people had to face in their motherland during postcolonial period.

**Contrasts between Lives**

The ‘tactics of control’ in post-independent Africa, as witnessed in the foregoing pages, were in fact aimed at creating a seamless system of flow of wealth in one direction. The new masters made sure that they lived in all luxury controlling all the wealth of the nation, even being in collusion with foreign forces who conducted trades with the nation, so that they could extract as much money as possible from them in exchange of trade contracts. The common masses were the worst sufferers in such scenarios. As described in one incident in this novel, the common people have only a restricted access to basic needs like, proper toilet and waste facilities. Odili, the narrator, refers to the following notice by the City Clerk of Bori, as printed in the daily newspaper the *Daily Chronicle*:

The attention of Public is hereby drawn to Section 12 of the Bori (Conservancy) Bye-laws, 1951:
(i) Occupiers of all promises shall provide pails for excrement; the size of such pails and the materials of which they are constructed shall be approved by the City Engineer.

(ii) The number of such pails to be provided in any premises shall be specified by the City Engineer.

The Public are warned against unauthorized increases in the number of pails already existing on their premises.

The surprises and contrasts in our great country were simply inexhaustible. Here was I in our capital city, reading about pails of excrement from the cozy comfort of a princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming, silent action water-closets! (Achebe, A Man of the People 41)

This notice for the common masses is in sharp contrast to the luxurious life of politicians:

There was one man I noticed particularly. His robes were made from some expensive-looking, European woolen material – which was not so very strange these days. But what surprised me was that the tailor had retained the cloth’s thin, yellow border on which the manufacturer advertised in endless and clear black type: 100% WOOL: MADE IN ENGLAND. In fact the tailor had used this advertisement to ornamental advantage on both sleeves. I was struck once again by our people’s endless resourcefulness especially when it comes to taste in clothes… He also wore a gold chain around his neck. (Achebe, A Man of the People 65)

Abuse of Power by Politicians

Some famous international native movements such as Negritude and Pan-Africanism, and Harlem Renaissance are briefly discussed in this chapter. These notions assert that all Africans are equal. As they oppose White supremacy over the Blacks, they should be opposed to Black supremacy over Blacks too. But, the irony is that this concept simply remains a hollow ideal. It is recurrently reminded in A Man of the People that no sooner have the native citizens of the homeland acquired power, they begin abusing it. The worst form of this abuse of power is that Blacks treat their Black brethren as inferior and worthless creatures. Chief Nanga takes Odili to the abode of another minister, Chief Koko. Chief Koko is drinking coffee when suddenly he got up and shouted ‘they have killed me’ (Achebe, A Man of the People 34). All
the people present there are in panic, and Chief Nanga is trying to call the doctor. Chief Nanga behaves as an all-powerful master with his own countrymen. It is worth noting how he talks to the person over the phone: “This is Chief the Honourable Nanga speaking,” he was saying. “I will see that you are dealt with. Idiot. That is the trouble with this country. Don’t worry, you will see. Bloody fool…” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 34). As if the Chief does not belong to the country; he is somewhere superior to all the toiling masses. But at the same time he is afraid of the masses though since he knows that politicians like him are cheating the country. Odili contemplates:

But I was saying within myself that in spite of his present bravado Chief Nanga had been terribly scared himself, witness his ill-tempered, loud-mouthed panic at the telephone. And I don’t think his fear had been for Chief Koko’s safety either. I suspect he felt personally threatened. Our people have a saying that when one slave sees another cast into a shallow grave he should know that when the time comes he will go the same way.” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 35-36)

*A Man of the People* is Chinua Achebe’s bitter remark about the postcolonial state of Nigeria in particular, and of African postcolonial countries in general. African people fought for their independence in the hope that independence would bring better days and good life for them, but surprisingly, independence has brought days even worse than what people had in the colonial era. Colonially educated people of African countries who took over from the Colonizers did nothing for the common masses. Rather these powerful natives treated them as if they were their new masters. The master and slave narrative continued as it was during the colonial period, and over and above that, the people at the helm of affairs took every opportunity to fill their coffers as the hungry masses slogged to death. Every post and position left vacant by the colonizers was quickly filled by clever and powerful people and they established the system of the colonizers as it was. This is obvious from the discussion of Odili and Max when they talk of the political situation in the country:

“It is a favourite of my father’s who, by the way, still thinks we should never have asked the white man to go.”

“Perhaps he is right,” I said.
“Well, no. The trouble is that he hasn’t got very much out of Independence, personally. There simply weren’t any white posts in his profession that he could take over. There is only one bishop in the entire diocese and he is already an African.” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 82-83)

Politicians in postcolonial Africa took advantages of their position to make extreme profit for themselves. Chief Nanga in this novel in discussion wants a particular road in his constituency tarred because he is going to have his ten luxury buses plying on this road generating huge personal revenue:

But none of these things was real news to me, only his saying that he had ordered ten luxury buses to ply the route as soon as it was tarred. Each would cost him six thousand pounds. So he had two good reasons for wanting the road tarred – next elections and the arrival of his buses. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 43)

In the postcolonial period of Africa, politicians also accepted bribes from foreign traders who sought favours from them for their commercial activities. Politicians abused their position and gave the foreign traders absolute freedom which ultimately caused the commoners to suffer. In *A Man of the People* it is narrated that Chief Nanga is building a four-storey house in his ancestral village, and the narrator reveals:

“It was, as we were to learn, a “dash” from the European building firm of Antonio and Sons whom Nanga had recently given the half-million-pound contract to build the National Academy of Arts and Sciences” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 97). It is very clear from this excerpt that the native politicians in postcolonial Africa like Chief Nanga of this novel, were greatly engaged in filling in their personal reservoirs from the foreign traders by exploiting the wealth, resources and post-independent hopes African masses.

### Disillusioned Youth

The youth in Nigeria are portrayed in this novel as completely disillusioned with the ruling government because it is run by corrupt and inefficient politicians like Chief Nanga. The voice of sensible and intelligent people who could have taken the country to the path of progress was suppressed when these politicians came to power after the colonizers left the country. Such people were maligned, subdued or deposed.
That is one of the reasons why Odili hates Chief Nanga in *A Man of the People*. Also because Chief Nanga has been one of those MPs, instrumental in harassing and suppressing honest politicians. The common people were also responsible to a certain extent for their suffering caused by these corrupt politicians in the postcolonial African set-up. Because they were either ignorant or somehow did not find the corruption of politicians as improper and thus detrimental to the growth of their society in general. Here is an example from this novel to prove this point in discussion. The narrator Odili describes:

> 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. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 2-3)

The youth of the country is disgusted at the corruption of the politicians. So, when Odili floats the idea of forming a political party, all of his young and educated friends welcome the idea, as they could clearly see what damages these corrupt politicians have been causing to their homeland which has recently got independence from the colonial rulers. “Max and some of his friends having watched with deepening disillusion the use to which our hard-won freedom was put by corrupt, mediocre politicians had decided to come together and launch the Common People’s Convention” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 78).

The general public in postcolonial countries like Nigeria, and most of the African nations, was so used to being suppressed, silenced and subjugated that they had completely forgotten that there could be something like organized resistance to corruption, malpractices or atrocities against the masses. In Chapter 12 of this novel Maxwell Kulamo launches his election campaign in Odili’s village by speaking to the crowd gathered before his house, but Odili is astonished or rather sad that the people
do not have any conscience and consciousness left in them to realize that they could bring a change:

…As he gave instance after instance of how some of our leaders who were ash-mouthed paupers five years ago had become near millionaires under our very eyes, many in the audience laughed. But it was the laughter of resignation to misfortune. No one among them swore vengeance; no one shook with rage or showed any sign of fight. They understood what was being said, they had seen it with their own eyes. But what did anyone expect them to do?

The ex-policeman put it very well, “We know they are eating,” he said, “but we are eating too. They are bringing us water and they promise to bring us electricity. We did not have those things before; that’s why we say we are eating too.” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 125)

This lack of initiative and action, this inertia and the attitude of resignation to misfortune is the most dangerous impact colonialism has left upon the psyche of the colonized. This is exactly what Chinua Achebe resents that not only the effects and legacy of colonialism continue to exist in postcolonial nations but neo-colonialism continues in those nations in various forms. As the author puts it forward here, it is because of the inaction of the masses that educated people like Odili, Max, Eunice and Joe fail to bring about any changes in the system. In the climactic scene the heroic figure in the novel is killed, the protagonist’s skull is crushed and the heroic girl Eunice faces jail term. Through such a climax Achebe conveys the feeling that change is impossible without the support of the masses since villains can easily overpower the intelligentsia. However, there is some consolation in store for the protagonist in the novel as the country is taken over by the military and the villainous politicians are punished; his friend is declared the Hero of the Revolution and Eunice is freed from jail.

Achebe seems to suggest that in a postcolonial country like Nigeria it was futile to expect a revolution from the common masses since centuries of oppression had turned them extremely docile. They came to believe that anyone who got a chance to exploit the nation for personal benefit had every right to do so and that it was rather his good fortune that had placed the marauder in a position to enjoy the loot. They were also made to believe that times changed and accordingly fortunes also changed, so, possibly in near future it could be anyone’s turn in power to enjoy the
loot. Therefore, the common natives assumed that it was futile to lose one’s life in any struggle against villains. Achebe discusses this pessimism of the natives to social development in details through the voice of Odili:

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. And where is the all-powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went. But we are still around. The important thing then is to stay alive; if you do you will outlive your present annoyance. The great thing, as the old people have told us, is reminiscence; and only those who survive can have it. Besides, if you survive, who knows? It may be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring home your share.” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 145)

Under the given circumstances, there can be a revolution only at an individual level, like what Max has done. Max becomes a hero overnight. After the army seizes power, their “most touching gesture as far as I was concerned was to release Eunice from jail and pronounce Max a Hero of the Revolutions” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 148).

Achebe also believes in the collective power of the intellectuals in a nation. National interest must be given supreme importance as opposed to self-interest. Achebe’s ideals are the ideals of Odili Samalu, the protagonist in *A Man of the People*. Some critics are of the view that this has been the primary goal of numerous African writers. As, for instance, Thiong’o asserts that it is a means to assert their African identity. He believes that, “…the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country and sing a new song” (50). *A Man of the People* also portrays the betrayal of the people by their Black rulers. Leaders have become pawns in the hands of foreign vested interests and put their country to ruins. But intellectuals like Odili Samalu and Maxwell Kulamu bear the responsibility to restore people’s lost faith in democracy since they must not give up; their country will grow only if they make sacrifices. The solution suggested by Achebe in this novel is that intelligent people should join politics to keep the inefficient ones out.
However, it is also true that in the current scenario African writers have started going for different themes as well. Today many African writers are not interested in writing about their colonial past. Disillusionment of the youth with the ruling class in their nations is a common phenomenon found in the works of not only Achebe but also in the writings of major African writers, like, for example, Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah, to name only a few. Thiong’o notes that, “the disillusionment with the ruling elite is to be found in the recent works of most African writers” (47).

Propagandist Ambivalence and Status of Black Women

The clever politicians in this novel display a hypocritical ambivalence in their behaviour typically oriented towards propaganda in favour of themselves. Corrupt politicians like Chief Nanga and Chief Koko call themselves nationalists while they hardly use home-grown products. They speak English even while addressing the native populace, their children go to expensive public schools and Chief Nanga drinks whisky with soda instead of home-grown coffee. The same Chief Nanga is one of the gang members of the Prime Minister and when the Prime Minister sacks the university educated Ministers in his Cabinet for the sake of retaining power, and calls them traitors and declares that true public leaders are not those who intoxicates with their foreign education but those who speak the language of the people, Chief Naga supports him unquestionably. But the same Chief Nanga sends his children to expensive public schools and his children know no ‘language of the people’ but only English and call their grandmother, “a dirty, bush woman” (Achebe, A Man of the People 39). He himself speaks in English (the language of foreigners according to the Prime Minister) while addressing the common people at Anata Grammar School:

The Minister’s speech sounded spontaneous and was most effective…He would have preferred not to speak to his kinsmen in English which was after all a foreign language, but he had learned from experience that speeches made in vernacular were liable to be distorted and misquoted in the press. Also there were some strangers in that audience who did not speak our own tongue and he did not wish to exclude them… (Achebe, A Man of the People 13-14)

Also, Chief Nanga does not drink coffee or tea (both the products are home-made) but prefers to have whisky with soda, the products of alien culture which he
identifies himself with. "I no follow you black white-men for drink tea and coffee in the hot afternoon," said Chief Nanga. “Whisky and soda for me and for Mr. Samalu” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 33).

Similarly, the ambivalent characteristics of most of the people, depicted in the novel as regard to the status of women, are worth discussing. White women command respect, equality and awe from one and all, without exception. As witnessed in this novel, even when they indulge in physical relationship with a Nigerian man, they do it on their own terms which are readily acceptable to the man. Black native women, on the other hand, are accorded an entirely different status, or no status at all. Portrayal of African women in *A Man of the People* is highly problematic– they are presented as weak, dependent, foolish, frivolous, jealous, seductive and totally spineless commodities. Elsie is easily seduced by Odili, and then simply raped by Chief Nanga. Chief Nanga promises to bring six girls to his door at the shortest possible notice if Odili wished so. So, native women are nothing more than commodities for these powerful native politicians.

Edna is just a purchased girl – her father has taken money from Chief Nanga and therefore she has to marry him even if she does not wish to. Edna explains this to Odili in her letter to him:

I have noted carefully all what you said about my marriage. Really, you should pity poor me, Odili. I am in a jam about the whole thing. If I develop cold feet now my father will almost kill me. Where is he going to find all the money the man has paid on my head? So it is not so much that I want to be called a minister’s wife but a matter of can’t help. What cannot be avoided must be borne.

What I pray for is happiness. If God says that I will be happy in any man’s house I will be happy. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 111)

Mrs. Nanga is just a helpless woman and she has to follow what her powerful politician husband commands. And the irony of the behavior of the idealist Odili is quite baffling, too. To take revenge on Chief Nanga for snatching his ‘good-time’ girlfriend Elsie (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 60), he desires to seduce Chief Nanga’s fiancé Edna, and perhaps would rape her as Chief Nanga did to Elsie. As if Edna has no independent personality of her own, as if the ego-battle of the two opponents is to be fought over the body of a woman, “In flesh and blood terms I realized that I must
go back, seek out Nanga’s intended parlour-wife and give her the works, good and proper” (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 77). Could Odili think of doing the same to a White woman who was known to both of them? Probably he would never do it. Black men in *A Man of the People* are depicted to have this cultivated cultural prerogative over their women as a means to force them into allegiance and subservience. The practice also has accorded men legitimacy in exercising their power over women to bring them to subordination and perpetual marginality. Hussein’s views are in agreement on this issue and he says that the native society “tends to cultivate men’s prerogatives to the allegiance and subservience of women, and legitimize men to exercise their power over women to sustain the latter’s subordination and marginality” (qtd. in Dwivedi 7)

Women have no values in the eyes of powerful politicians like Chief Nanga, who run the country. He has the following to say about women:

“But that woman na waa,” I said. “Who put that kind sense for im head?”

“Woman?” rhapsodized Chief Nanga. “Any person wey tell you say woman no get sense just de talk pure jargon. When woman no want do something e go lef am, but make you no fool yourself say e left the thing because e no get sense for do am.”

How true, I thought. (Achebe, *A Man of the People* 61)

To sum up, *A Man of the People* is the story of the courage of a single individual to challenge the people responsible for decades of misrule playing puppets in the hands of the neo-colonialists. Achebe referred to the novel as, “a rather serious indictment of post-independence Africa” (qtd. in Dwivedi 3). At the time of writing the novel Nigeria was plunged by its villainous politicians into a cesspool of corruption. Achebe brings the story of the struggle of an individual against the system, and in a significant way the novel turns into a metaphor for the heroic struggle of the Africans against White supremacy. The writer laments that the Africans have to be reminded of their past, but he also suggests that the intellectuals in a country should take their duties seriously. The novel throws a light on the disturbed era in the post-independence history of Nigeria highlighting how corruption had taken roots in the country. But in a covert manner the story of corruption of the local political leaders is also linked to the neo-colonialist agenda of the US and the UK. It is interesting to note how identities are negotiated and reconstructed in
postcolonial nations, in different situations, creating a culture of hybridity, ambivalence and alterity. The erstwhile colonizers as well as the colonized both live with an identity crisis, or double identity, one for their own people and the other for their others.

*A Man of the People* represents Achebe's perception of postcolonial African society and its struggle to create its own identity different from colonial era. The message to a large extent is that the Africans have failed in this attempt as their independence has been usurped and the African societies have been pushed into chaos and anarchy. The common masses in the novel display an unprecedented lethargy, inaction, inertia, cynicism and resignation to their fate, giving enough clues to the reader that nothing has changed in Africa and the identity of the Africans and Africa, created through the colonial narrative, as a ‘heart of darkness’ with lack of knowledge and action is still intact. But, the narrator gives some hope in the end that there are African heroes like Maxwell and Eunice whose sacrifices can ignite revolutions. Whatever attempts the neo-colonial stakeholders make to destabilize Africa, African unity cannot be shaken now. This is what the new identity of Africa is.
Works Cited


