

CHAPTER 2

Achebe: The trailblazer

2.1 Chinua Achebe and his times

It is generally accepted that history of a people is not merely story of their military exploits and expeditions, their conquests and defeats, or a chronicle of events or an account of successive intrigues and power politics, but more importantly the knowledge of how people lived: their family life and social relationships, religious beliefs and customs, rituals and festivals, myths and legends, arts and crafts. It is in brief, a study of their cultural ethos which constitutes the internal resources of a peoples psyche shedding light on their failures and achievements, their ethics and aesthetics. It is here that we find an intrinsic connection between history and literature and discover the strengths and weakness, the heroic and cowardly in a people, the light and shade of life.

It is in the context of the horrendous colonial experience, and the legacy of corruption and misrule in its aftermath that the African is impelled to seek his roots in the pre-colonial past.

The basic aim in relating to the postcolonial in relation to literature is twofold. It carries with it the intention to celebrate 'new literatures' that emerged from former colonial territories and it asserts the need to analyze and resist the continuing colonial attitudes.

The question as aptly posed by Chinua Achebe as how does a writer recreate his past? This shift in the perspective is demonstrated when Chinua Achebe says "At the

university I read something appalling about Africa and decided that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or how well intended.” (Achebe: 1975:123) The temptation to idealize and romanticize the past was great in the militant Negritude movement of the forties and the fifties which celebrated ‘blackness’. There has been since a growing realization that the past had its good as well as its bad points. There was as much a need to renounce elements in the African tradition that impede growth and at the same time preserve values that makes life fortifying. Attempts to define Africa in the modern context needs incorporation of specific aspects of western science and technology which is obligatory for its sustenance and growth, modify them so that they go hand in hand with the positive and buoyant features of African cultural legacy.

Chinwe Okechuku states the relevance and effectiveness lies in Achebe’s endeavor to produce a new epistemological framework to study African cultures which can be observed in the power of oratory, distinctive in all Achebe’s fiction. The shift of colonial powers from the British monarch to the governors who were the heads of the colonies or dominions in the formation of the ‘Common Wealth of Nations’ resulted in an abrupt change in status of the colonized states. Politically and socially it was apparent that the colonizer and colonized shared an equal platform though it was far from true. The literature of that period provided distinct echoes that called for attention: the attention to recognize cultural difference in the unified status of Common Wealth literature. This is an indicator to recognize the emerging voices of post coloniality, a paradigm shift in literature from canonical writings.

Chinua Achebe, the doyen of African literature was born in Ogidi in 1930. His early childhood in a village named Ogidi an Igbo village near Niger, 400 kms east of Lagos

was one of the first centers of the Anglican Missionaries in the Eastern part of Nigeria. He was the fifth of six children, he was baptized Albert Chinualumogu. His father, Isaiah, was a Christian convert and evangelist. He and Achebe's mother, Janet, were keen followers, but not fanatics; while the family sang hymns, Isaiah's relatives offered food to what he considered idols. "An accommodation with the church developed after initial struggle," says Achebe. "Common sense and the strength of Igbo culture slowly reasserted themselves".

His parents were great believers in education; with minimum resources, they sent their children to school. Chike Momah, a classmate, recalls Achebe was a brilliant conversationalist a trait Achebe shared with his father and says his headmaster predicted "he would make the rain that would drench us all".

Achebe states, "We lived at the crossroads of cultures", who learned English at eight and whose passport declared him a British Protected Person. He contrasts the slow, quiet education of his home village with the louder, formal education of mission school. "I knew I wanted to understand the life of the society, the stories and masquerades," he says. "It's curious how brainwashed we were; quite a bit of my growing up was discovering that fact."

In a 1973 essay, Named for Victoria, Queen of England, he describes *Things Fall Apart* as "an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son". He says: "It's that fascination with the scraps and pieces of information I could gather about my ancestors that developed into a desire to write my story. Colonial education was saying there was nothing worth much in my society, and I was beginning to question that, to see there were things that were beautiful even in the heathen".

Enrolled at Ibadan University to study medicine Achebe switched to the arts. In the new essay 'Home under Imperial Fire', he describes how he was spurred to write partly by being made to read Joyce Cary's 1939 novel *Mister Johnson*, with its 'bumbling idiot' of a Nigerian character: "It began to dawn on me that although fiction was undoubtedly fictitious, it could also be true or false." He explains: "I'd read so-called 'African novels' in school, by Rider Haggard and John Buchan, in which white people were surrounded by savages but managed to come out on top. But I didn't recognize them as relating to me until I read *Mister Johnson*: this book was not talking about a vague place called Africa but about southern Nigeria. I said, 'wait, that means here; this is our story'. It brought the whole thing home to me: this story is not true, so is it possible the others are not either? It opened up a new way of looking at literature."(Guardian)

Achebe credits Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) with opening "the floodgates to modern west African writing" in the 50s. "It's as if this thing was waiting to be told; the time was ripe," he says.

He completed his graduation from University College, Ibadan and in 1954 Achebe applied for a scholarship in Cambridge, which was summarily rejected in 1957. Achebe first ventured out of Nigeria to study briefly at BBC Staff School in London. The first passport that he procured defined him as in 'British Protected person.'

His early career in radio & Broadcasting as a Director External Broadcasting in Nigeria came to an end abruptly in 1966 during the Nigeria- Biafra conflict. Achebe joined the Biafran Minority of Broadcasting and Information.

2.2 Things fall apart

Achebe's monumental work published in 1958 has been critiqued as the hallmark of African literature. A book which he wrote as a resistance to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that perpetuates the idea of colonialism and its inherent discourses. It was an attempt to write back to the center on the part of Achebe about an Africa beyond the Eurocentric discourse. His impact was not limited to Nigeria. He rehabilitates African history and culture which was at one point of time was denied, dispossessed and subjugated within their land and presents a real picture of Africa distorted by colonialism '*Things Fall Apart* is an atonement with his past, the return and homage of a prodigal son'. His work is considered to be a trailblazer in the world of post-colonial literature as he wanted the world to know that Africa had a rich history, culture and tradition that the Europeans never acknowledged.

Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka comments that *Things Fall Apart* is the first novel in English which spoke from the interior of an African character rather than portraying the African exotic, as the white man perceives him. (Guardian)

The text abounds in a myriad of folklore that eventually became the African literary cultural trope. Writers and creative artists felt that an allegiance to such an 'Achebean model' would earmark them as a writer in African literature. These cultural matrices had become the yard stick to gauge the quality of work that came from Pan-Africa. He drew upon the oral culture of the land and its indigenous people.

His English was 'new english', a variety in complete harmony with African sensibilities and culture, a medium of delivery imbued in native culture, cloaked in native understanding and dried in absorbed perspectives, notwithstanding that it was a European language.

Chinua Achebe is widely known as ‘the father of African novel in English’. He is one who played a decisive role by which he profoundly influenced the form and content of modern African literature in his novels. In his novels he chronicles the precolonial history, the imperialist demonization and the colonization of Nigeria by Great Britain and the aftermath of its independence.

Chinua Achebe’s work form the new writings that resists colonial attitudes and asserted that “the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intended. It was precisely the project of ‘Things Fall Apart’ to resist and reject this assumption, by telling the story of the colonized to retrieve their history and more than that to regain an identity”. (Achebe: 2012) Achebe wrote out of a commitment to rectify the distorted versions of Africa as a ‘dark continent’. “I believe it is impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment... some kind of protest... because there were people who thought we didn’t have a past. What we were doing was to say we did... (Achebe:1997)

The primary theme in Achebe’s writings is the impact of European imperialism on psyche of the indigenous African communities and their African consciousness in the twentieth century. The publication of his novel *Things Fall Apart* is a path breaking work in the annals of African Literature.

Achebe’s has been judged as the finest novelist of the twentieth century whose works have been considered as a benchmark for judging other African literary works. His creative use of folklore in his novels is of much interest for researchers and scholars and has been widely studied. Achebe like an oral artist managed to capture and convey the rhythms, structures, cadences, and beauty of the native Igbo language through the novel. Achebe is widely known for the significance of proverbs in his

construction of vernacular speech patterns and social conventions that give distinguished identities to his fictional characters. Scholars also have focused on how the proverbs provide thematic control to Achebe's narrative structures. Achebe's innovative fusion of Igbo folklore with Western political ideologies and Christian principles gives his works a distinctive appeal and has a wider significance beyond postcolonial Africa. It encompasses a wider plane taking the concerns of humanity at large. As Achebe has said, "My politics is concerned with universal communication across racial and cultural boundaries as a means of fostering respect for all people.... As long as one people sit on another and are deaf to their cry, so long will understanding and peace elude all of us." (Osei-Nyame: 1999)

Things fall apart has become a standard in anthologies of world literature and had its double effect of bringing attention to African literature. This monumental and path breaking work published in 1958 has been critiqued as the hallmark of African literature. A book which he wrote as a resistance to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that perpetuates the idea of colonialism and its inherent discourses. It was an attempt 'to write back to the center' on the part of Achebe about an Africa beyond the Eurocentric discourse. His work is considered to be a trailblazer in the world of post-colonial literature as he wanted the world to know that Africa had a rich history, culture and tradition that the Europeans never acknowledged. "...the modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind". (Iyasere: 107).

2.2.1 Synopsis of the novel

The setting of the story is in the late part of the nineteenth century, when the European colonial government had already spread its tentacles in a large part of

Africa and Nigeria in particular. It depicts the clash at different levels between the indigenous Igbo people and their culture on one hand and the imperialists on the other.

Among the member of the Omuofia clan Okonkwo is a brave, strong, wealthy warrior who is admired and respected by his kinsmen. His conscience is constantly troubled by the action of his cowardly lazy father Unoka who died a death of disrepute as he, left huge debts in the village. This made him emerge a strong character of extraordinary qualities. He constantly worries for his twelve year old son, Nwoye whom he sees taking all the qualities of his dead father. On an agreement of squabble Okonkwo wins a virgin and a young fifteen year old boy. Ikemefuna Nwoye immediately develops a strong likeness and emulates Ikemefuna ways which pleases Okonkwo.

During the annual Week of Peace Okonkwo earns the wrath of the members of his community for beating his youngest wife mercilessly. By doing so, he has broken the sacred code of conduct his community. This he compensates by performing some rituals.

Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo for three years when on one occasion Ogbuefi Ezeudu a senior respected clansman comes to tell Okonkwo that the Oracle had said that Ikemefuna should be killed and Okonkwo must not participate in the killing as Ikemefuna calls him 'father'. Accordingly facts are misrepresented by Okonkwo to Ikemefuna, he is informed that he should be returned to his village. The day comes and Ikemefuna bids tearful farewell. On the way he is attacked by men with machetes. Ikemefuna turns towards Okonkwo for protection. Okonkwo takes out his machete and beheads him despite the oracles forbidding. Okonkwo goes into depression and

seeks the company of Obierika for solace. Okonkwo's daughter Enzima falls sick and he seeks the help of a *dibia* a folk medicine woman who cures her.

One day the news of Ogbuefi Ezeudu death is announced. His elaborate funeral lead to a sudden explosion of the gun in Okonkwo's hand causing tragic demise of Ogbuefi's sixteen year old son. Killing one's kinsmen is a grave sin. Consequently Okonkwo is banished from his village for seven years. He goes to Mbanta village of his mother and is welcomed by his uncle Uchendu. Ogbuefi's clansman burn Okonkwo's house, belongings and compound to purge Okonkwo's of his sin.

Uchendu helps him to establish. He lends him yam seeds to cultivate and start a new farm. During the second year his friend Obireika comes to meet Okonkwo with bags of cowrie shells after selling Okonkwo's yam and decides to continue to do so till Okonkwo's return. He also bring bad news of the missionaries incursion of neighboring villages. Mbanta also is visited by six missionaries Mr. Brown the leader condemns indigenous worship calls it superstitions and the worship of native gods to be idolatry. The villagers fail to comprehend Mr. Brown's concept of the Trinity. He leaves without antagonizing them and his ill health gets him replaced by an intolerant missionary Reverend Smith. A new convert named Enoch, an *osu* (outcaste) and a religious zealot tries to prove the traditional beliefs of his clansman illogical by unmaking an *Egwugwu*, who earns the wrath of the villagers. They burn down Enoch's compound and Mr. Smith's Church.

This incident disturbs the District Commissioner who requests the representatives of Omuofia to assemble for a meeting. On meeting they are put behind bars, punished and finally released. After the villagers are released they again sit for a meeting with six messengers from the Commissioner's office and are warned against such

assembly. Okonkwo kills one of the messengers, while the rest of them are allowed to leave. This was a surprise and betrayal for Okonkwo.

The District Commissioner comes to locate Okonkwo and finds him hanging in his compound. His clansmen declare that Okonkwo has committed an abomination, a grave sin against *ani* and no one would ever touch his body. The District Commissioner is writing a book on Africa and he feels that the Okonkwo element can be incorporated in the book which will make interesting reading. He has already chosen the title 'Pacification of the Primitive tribes of the Lower Niger'.

Things Fall Apart provide a cinematographic view of a pre-colonial life of the Igbo community in transition. One is transported to a time and culture which is pristine and unpolluted. The cultural backdrop that it provides with the '*ummna*' or community is the lynchpin of the entire cultural ethos. The sense of responsibility towards kith and kin, the rituals and customs associated with it that govern life, social interaction and one's position and place in society. Achebe is the pioneer of cultural nationalism in Nigerian literature an attempt he made for a total rehabilitation of the image of Black man distorted by colonial master.

2.2.2 Analysis of the novel

Customs and traditions

The novel opens with a wrestling match between Okonkwo and Amalinze the Cat. The wrestling match is an ancient sporting event which draws tremendous attention amongst villagers. It is usually played as an annual event to prove one's strength, power and masculinity, as physical fitness was revered and considered to be an important element in the makeup of a complete man.

Amalinze the cat- The cat as a nickname highlights Amalinze's felinity. It is a customary to use an appendage to a name which gives an indirect commentary to a person's traits, qualities or idiosyncrasies.

These bouts were followed with beating of drums, playing of flute and other musical instruments which also enacts a war like situation which the crowd/folk attend to cheer and applaud. The distinct image of wrestler as a warrior is portrayed and for a smooth conduct of such events spirits are engaged. Hence, a spirit of the wild was engaged for seven days and nights. These bush spirits offer support in war, hunting and wrestling. Most shrines feature a central male figure holding weapon and wearing bullet proofing medicines. (Encyclopedia).

Polygamy was the norm in Igbo society where people had numerous wives and children. The status and success of a man was gauged by the number of wives and children. Here we also come to know about the vernacular architecture of village dwellings. Okonkwo's wives and children lived in their respective outhouses with an independent kitchen. Food from every kitchen would go to the patriarch. The outhouses along with the *obi* (main house) which belonged to the affluent owner who stayed all by himself was surrounded by a thick wall made of red earth with a lone exclusive gate and the *obi* stood immediately behind the gate. The out houses formed a half moon/a semi-circle behind the *obi*. The yam barn was built on one end against the red walls. The opposite end of the compound had a shed for goats and each hut had an attachment for hens. Near the yam barn was the medicine house/shrine where wooden gods and ancestral spirits were kept. These were worshipped with sacrifices of kola nut, food, palm wine and prayers were offered on behalf of oneself, wives and children.

Unoka, Okonkwo's father was a lazy man who loved to play on the flute. Playing a flute is considered to be a weakness, because only a weakling could afford to play on it and while away his time without doing anything constructive. Unoka bought gourds of palm which indicates that palm is a staple plantation in this part of Africa from which wine is prepared. It was also stored in a gourd made from a hard shell of the vegetable gourd and the mode of financial transaction was cowries.

Unoka's happiness came in the form of two/three moons after the harvest. This also shows the calendar followed by the Igbo people was a lunar one. A preliterate society had agents of nature to fall back on in order to calculate time.

The determination of the calendar year was of vital importance to people all over the world. Times for migration planting, harvesting and hunting needed to be exactly determined and implemented; an exact calendar was mandatory. Since few cultures understood or practiced mathematics necessary to calculate the parameters of Earth's orbit around the Sun all calendar must have been based on years and sometimes generation of observation of natural phenomenon. Thus determination of calendar relied upon recognizing and recording celestial events. However, the method of preserving the knowledge varies. (Encyclopedia)

Unoka would go to teach the village folk the art of playing the flute on their invitation and the villages would play host for three to four market days. The flying of kites that came annually with the advent of dry season would be welcomed by children by singing songs.

Amongst the Igbos it is customary to sit round fire places, burning logs during the time when *harmattan* was severe. (4) The living houses comprised of a mud dwellings and palm fronds for the roof. Hence Unoka slept on a mud bed (earthen bed), furniture was unheard of and wherever people went they carried their own sitting arrangement which was a rolled sheet of goatskin conveniently secured under their

arms. Visitors were greeted with kola nut, alligator pepper and a lump of white chalk which was offered on a round wooden disc that served the function of a plate. The offering was accepted with a ritualistic utterance and chant, 'he who brings kola brings life'. The kola nut is to be broken and shared. The lump of chalk is used to paint the toe and lines are drawn on the ground is broken with a prayer to the ancestors. This is an act of veneration to the ancestors to seek their blessing for health wealth and prosperity. Music featured in Unoka's conversation and he refused to talk about impending wars with other neighboring villages and preferred to engage himself talking about *ogene*, *ekwu* and *udu* and which are stringed and wind musical instruments. On the contrary, conversations between the kinsmen centered around the effect of weather on crops i.e. yam the staple food, the ancestral feast or any enmity or dispute with other neighboring villages.

A man's success was measured in terms of barns of yam, number of wives and children and the title that comes with his success. *Idemili* title is the third highest one in the land. To take a title one has to spend a substantial sum. An important conversation is ensued with a few proverbs 'Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.' (TFA: 5) Anything that is likely to hurt is rarely stated in a straightforward manner. Euphemism and circumlocution is used with mild hints.

Unoka's writing on the red earthen wall with white chalk is symbolic of the amount of debts which he owes to many people. A society which did not have a writing system had some sort of graphical representation to keep financial accounts which was purely individual.

It is an important part of traditional spiritual practices of culture and religion in West Africa particularly Niger and Nigeria. They are religious objects considered sacred for

offering during prayers, ancestor veneration significant life events like births weddings, funerals. The kola nut has a hard shell when broken it reveals a dozen square or round seeds/lobes that develop into a white seed. (Kola Nut: Wikipedia).

Alligator Pepper is an African spice. It is a symbol of energisation, stimulating intensity in preexisting close friendship or reverence to deities and ancestors. In Igbo traditional worship it is offered to stimulate charms amulets and deities.

‘White chalk is used as a symbol of happiness spiritual power or retreat depending on how and where used’. (Reuben)

Unoka’s reply to Okoye about the money that he owes is also proverbial and he replies *‘our elders’ say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who knell under it. I shall pay my big debts first.* (TFA: 6)

In Igbo society a man is assessed according to his individual worth and value and not on his father or grandfather’s credential. Okonkwo had two barns of yam, had three wives, taken two titles, was a wrestler of repute wealthy and proved his bravery in two wars in inter-tribal clash. Age was respected but achievement and success was revered. As the proverb goes. *‘If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings’* (TFA: 6) i.e. A person’s birth was immaterial, hard work and success was always respected. Human sacrifice as ordained by the oracle is a practice that the Igbo’s followed to appease the spirits in order to avoid impending or future conflict amongst villages.

Dark moonless nights had a sinister connotation. Children are advised not to venture as evil spirits lurked around in the vicinity. A snake was not called by its name, it was called a string. A moonlight night was always looked forward to as the proverbs goes *‘When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk’.* (TFA: 8)

A war meant bloodshed for the brave who would bring slaughtered human heads symbolic of bravery and victory and the funeral ceremony of a village celebrity would be followed by drinking of palm wine from the first human head by the slayer. In a congregation which necessitated to decide important matters the crowd faced four different directions and roared. Ogbuefi Ezeugo bellowed 'Umuofia kwenei' and each time the crowd answered 'Yaa.' In a dramatic manner, momentum was built up by the people of Umuofia to wage war against the neighboring village of Mbaino because they had killed the wife of Ogbuefi Udo. Hence emissaries were sent to decide if they wanted war or they would go for a truce by compensating for a virgin and a young lad. The elders decide that the virgin goes to Ogbuefi Udo and the young boy would be taken care of for some time till the Oracle decides his fate.

The Oracle was the oracle of Hills and caves. It compelled obeisance from the village inmates. For any important event the Oracle was consulted. If anyone disobeyed, his wishes were not fulfilled. Wars were never waged without its permission. People of Umuofia used medicine men, priests, magic and sorcery; witchcraft for all their activities which was considered to be highly potent and powerful. The war-medicine was considered effective and powerful as the active agent was an old woman named *Agadi nwayi* with one leg which had its shrine on a clear spot in Umuofia. And it was said that anyone visiting the old woman was sure to find her moving around. (TFA: 10) It was also called *Agbala* and people visited it to consult for any misfortune or consult their ancestral spirits.

Fear in Igbo society existed in many forms, fear of evil, of magic of forest, forces of nature and capricious gods. Okonkwo's fear was fear of failure he feared to be called

an *agbala*. An *agbala* is a man who failed to take a title. *Agbala* also had other connotations; it also meant a woman. Hence woman is associated with weakness.

Farming was practiced collectively by all family members. During the planting season it is customary to sacrifice a cock and offer it to *Ani*, the earth goddess and spirit, the owner of the soil in the shrine of *Efejioku* 'the god of yams'. The yam is a male crop, the staple diet which requires tremendous physical work and endurance.

Okonkwo took the first seeds of yam from *Nwakibie*. He carried palm-wine as a token of respect and a cock. The cock has a special meaning in Igbo culture. A visit to announce a special event like marriage or to create a good rapport is conveyed through gifting a cock. It is also a symbol of fertility and conveyed the purpose of his visit by a Igbo saying

'A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness' (TFA: 14) Prior to this offering of kola nuts take place and prayers are said for safety, security and prosperity for the family. A proverb is said to negotiate dealings.

'Let the kite perch & let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wings break'.

The palm wine was taken in drinking horns from goatskin bags and the wine was first offered to Okonkwo by the youngest member of the group because it was Okonkwo's wine. *Nwakibie's* wives also participated in drinking palm wine, but they were not able to take before the eldest wife had taken her share. The eldest wife also has the privilege to wear her husband's title, in the form of an anklet.

Colonialism secures authority by means of force and literacy. The Igbo conference revolves around rites of delivery, performance, dialogue making proximity and communal life necessary elements for self-governance.

Achebe's use of Proverbs:

Achebe states that in Igbo society which is predominantly oral, art of conversation and oratory is highly looked up to. Thereby, a good conversationalist resorts to a dignified use of language liberally sprinkled with proverbs. Accordingly an Igbo comments 'proverbs are like palm oil eaten with words'. Akoporobaro defines proverbs as short popular saying usually in the form of a moral advice, or truth expressed in a concise form. Moreover it comes as a coded message to reiterate a belief or custom, to sort out a conflict euphemistically and drive home the universal truth. Proverbs have a desired goal. It is primarily philosophical in nature and the storehouse of wisdom, knowledge, moral codes, and values of a traditional society. As they have a deep root in traditions they can be used for any situation, henceforth, reaffirming its functions and values.

Oratory is one of the highest forms of expression in language available to non-literate people & what it has always demanded is high respect for language great attention and care in its deployment so as to release its latent energy. The closeness of poetry to magic. It is the careful deployment of the power of words. Hence, people learn to respect words & use words. And the safety of humans sometimes dependent on their integrity in the use of words. (Akoporobaro FBO: 2008)

Their literary value lies in the poetic representation in the form of brevity which they exercise in expression with a simple grammatical form, graphical image and symbols. Besides the elements of poetry which comes in the form of measured use of words to give rhythm and to aid memory is another important factor where the orality

component is firmly grounded as these proverbs are passed by word of mouth. They are highly stylized form of verbal art.

The proverbs that are to be located in TFA has been enlisted below.

(a) *Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten* (TFA:6)

The essence of Igbo way of life and culture is distilled in the proverbs. Conversation is an art. Proverbs are the basis on which words & conversation is made

(b) *When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.*(TFA: 8)

When the moonlight floods the surroundings the cripple also longs to walk and enjoy its bliss. The beauty of the surrounding is an impetus for a handicapped to participate.

(c) *A load does not run in the day time for nothing.* (TFA:16)

An unusual behavior definitely has some reason associated with it.

(d) *An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb.*
(TFA: 16)

Dry bone refers to a corpse/a dead body this reminds one of the impending death.

In this case Okonkwo was reminded of his father.

(e) *The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one did.* (TFA: 17)

Refers to self-praise for a stupendous feat achieved.

(f) *Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If no one says to the other let his wing break.* (TFA: 15)

Each of us is endowed with individual capacities. Let us recognize our differences i.e. strength & weakness to make room to prove our capabilities.

(g) *Eneke the bird says that since man have learnt to shoot without missing he has learnt to fly without perching. (TFA: 17)*

Adaptation is a way of life and man grows his skill accordingly to survive.

(h) *You can tell a ripe corn by its looks. (TFA: 17)*

You can identify a man's qualities by his disposition.

(i) *It was like pouring grains of corn into a bag full of holes. (TFA: 17)*

This means working with no result.

(j) *Looking at the kings mouth said an old man One would think he never sucked his mother's breast. (TFA: 20)*

(k) *When a man says yes, his chi says yes also. (TFA: 20)*

(l) *A chick that grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches. (TFA: 48)*

(m) *A child's fingers are not scaled by a piece of hot yam which his mother puts into its palm. (TFA: 49)*

A child cannot be punished for doing things that his mother has instructed him Okonkwo justifies his action for killing Ikemefuna as it was ordained by the Oracle to kill Ikemefuna.

(n) *When a mother cow is chewing grass its young ones watch its mouth.*

Like father like son.

(o) *If I fall down for you fall down for me it is play. (TFA: 53)*

Negotiation that come with the fixing of bride price. As the customs goes, to decide with sticks the amount to be paid as bride price. This is paid in the form of bag of cowries.

(p) *Wherever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight, then know that something is after its life.*

(q) *Those whose palm kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble. (TFA: 20)*

Distilled traditional wisdom

(r) *If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others (TFA: 91)* Okonkwo's crime would lead to the downfall of Omuofia.

(s) *I cannot live on the bank of a river & wash my hands with spittle. (TFA: 121)*

One must act according to one's fortune and not be a miser. Okonkwo says when he gives a feast to his mother's kinsmen during exile.

(t) *The clan was like a lizard, if it lost its tail it soon grew another. (TFA: 125)*

Practical wisdom shown indicating nothing is indispensable and every entity or element can be replaced. It is the reflection of the omniscient narrator.

(u) *A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness.*

Okonkwo justifying why he has come to seek Nwakibie.

(v) *The earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger. (TFA:67)*

(w) *Living fire begets cold impotent ash. (TFA: 113)*

Okonkwo's analysis of the conversion of his degenerate and effeminate son.

(x) *A man danced so the drums were for him. (TFA:185)*

Rev Smith feeling of hostility for anything traditional.

(y) *Eneke the bird was asked why he was always on the wing & he replied. Men have learned to shoot without missing their mark & I have learned to fly without perching on a twig.* (TFA: 147)

Okika deploys the same proverb that Nwakibie used to explain the reason for refusing to lend yams to young man. (17) The proverb points to strategies of survival one must adopt. However, this completely goes against what Okika meant that flying without perching is not possible by killing the men of the clan as it goes against the very essence of the of clan. Moreover the British have realized the ‘art of shooting without missing’ to a new plane. As a cultural guide/yardstick the proverb literally renders Okika’s rhetoric meaningless.

z) *His sweet tongue can change fire into cold ash.* (TFA: 145)

The power of rhetoric can douse the strongest of resentment.

As the Igbo’s mode of conference resorts to performance dialogues various rites of delivery to communicate negotiate and govern within themselves, the proverbs as observed above play a major role in an Igbo’s world view and philosophy. For every situation the Igbo has a proverb.

It is also interesting to note the gendered roles of the proverb. They are made only by the male members of the society, which indicates that the roles in the society are specifically defined. Not a single proverb is uttered by a female character indicating matters of governance negotiations and the art of conversation in a witty manner is the privilege of a man in Igbo society. This esoteric language is strictly confined to a few, and it is surely the men folk. Such sublime and sacred truth can only be spoken in a crystalized form which a female cannot, highlighting patriarchal hegemony, misogyny and the subsequent marginal status of the female.

Folk tales & stories

In a pre-colonial African set up, folk tales played a major role in entertainment and passing of knowledge and wisdom by word of mouth from one generation to the other. Besides it also provides insight into the Igbo philosophy and religion. They are significant cultural denominators which not only preserves the beliefs but also indicate the value system in a society.

The generic nomenclature for a folk narrative is a story told by the fireside where adults both male and female participate. These focus in instilling and imbibing a code of conduct told during leisure in the evening usually by females.

The folktales and stories in *Things Fall Apart* are enlisted below.

(a) The quarrel between the Earth & the sky (TFA: 39)

The sky withheld cooperation for seven years. The earth starved for rains causing drought and deaths. Finally vulture was sent as an emissary to the sky. Vulture sang a sad song of the pains of the Earth. Sky was moved and sent rain wrapped in cocoyam leaves. The talons of the vulture pierced the leaves and caused heavy downpour for days. The vulture flew away to another land where he saw fire. He approached the fire place and found a man was making a sacrifice. He waited till the man finished doing so and finally feasted on the entrails of the animal.

This tale emphasizes on the interdepending of masculine and the feminine aspects or to explain weather pattern or perhaps a lesson on exercising caution.

Further it also believes in the idea of being grateful and also merciful towards those who have faltered.

(b) *The Tortoise & the Birds* (TFA: 71)

The Birds were invited for a feast in the sky. They decided to take Tortoise for his skills in oratory. The cunning tortoise takes the opportunity to deceive and manipulate the situation ultimately deceiving the birds from their share. Birds take revenge by disabling him. The Tortoise drops from the sky thus cracking its shell. The reasons that lead to the cracking of the shell is narrated in the fable.

The Fable works as an allegory and also emphasizes on the Igbo necessity of good orature and conversational skills which is epitomized by the Tortoise. On the other hand the story is told by Ekwefi to her daughter Enzima which foreshadows the arrival of the white man (tortoise) who win over the natives by their sugar coated tongue. Ultimately cheating and exploiting them. This tale is a fine example to teach children about naivety, deceit, manipulation, exploitation and selfishness.

Trickster like the tortoise exist on the peripherals of the society who live only for their self-interest. Their selfish and non-conformist behaviors create chaos in the society which commands the attention of the listener to keep such elements in check.

(c) *The Mosquito & the Ear* (TFA: 53)

This story is about the Mosquito who wanted to marry the Ear. Ear rejects his several times as Ear find him unfit for her. Mosquito does not lose heart and is persistent in his proposal by buzzing around the Ear and telling her every time he is alive.

This tale was narrated by Okonkwo's mother which is didactic in nature. It lays importance on persistence and also cautions one not to be judgmental.

(d) The kite & her daughter (TFA: 102-103)

This tale was narrated by Uchendu, Okonkwo's mother's kinsmen with reference to the white man. Mother kite asked her daughter to bring food. Daughter swoops a ducking. When mother kite questions of the ducks reaction, daughter says that duck remained silent. She tells daughter to return it. Daughter does accordingly and brings back a chick. Mother kite asks the same question. Daughter says that hen raved and ranted. Therefore mother kite decides to eat the chick.

This is with reference to the missionaries. When one of the white men is killed they remain silent. The meaning constructed from their silence is that silence speaks volumes. It is difficult to understand the intentions of a silent man whereas one can read the actions of a person who reacts. This folktale has a message. The message of caution that need to be exercised. It has a universal appeal and can be used in all cultural situations and contexts.

(e) The story of the snake lizard killing its mother. (TFA: 61)

The snake lizard gave his mother seven baskets of vegetable to cook. In the end there were three so he killed his mother. Then he brought another seven baskets he cooked and there were three again so he killed himself.

This story was told by Ekwefi to her daughter Enzima, when she said that there were a lot of greens. Ekwefi narrated the story of the snake lizard which was earlier narrated to her daughter. The daughter continued with the rest of the story. The purpose of retelling served as worldly wisdom was ingrained in the story and her daughter remembered its significance.

(f) *The story of Unoka* (TFA: 13-14)

This story relates to Okonkwo's past. It is about Unoka, Okonkwo's father as narrated by his son Okonkwo. Unoka consulted the Oracle of the hills asking the reason for his failure as a farmer in spite of making sacrifices to *Ani* and the reasons for remaining poor. Chielo interrupted and stated that Unoka's fault lies in being lazy and he had been farming on exhausted lands that caused him earning the wrath of earth goddess leading to a swelling of the internal organs considered an abomination and consequent denial of funeral rites. His body was discarded and allowed to rot in the 'evil forest'.

(g) *The stories of the land* (TFA; 39)

Okonkwo told masculine stories about tribal warfare stalking victims overpowering them and how he obtained his first human head. The gory details of his bravery considered to be the mark of a man.

(h) *The arrival of the locusts* (TFA: 39)

As the elders say these locusts came once in a generation, reappeared after every seven years and then disappeared for another life time. They returned to their caves where they were guarded by stunted men. Then after another life time gates were opened.

(i) *The story of the medicine man* (TFA: 83)

The medicine man created a powerful medicine for the prosperity of Umuike. The medicine created such a charm that on market days it was overcrowded that led to its economic boom. This is also an indicator that occult powers are resorted to for prosperity and opulence.

The above stories are imaginative which strive to recreate reality and at the same time instruct and imbibe moral values. Some stories are narrated by women to instill a specific code of conduct in younger generation. The role of the elderly in such situations is underscored.

Stories that are true accounts of the place are narrated by men as they are anecdotes about land, power, rights which is a man's domain and a man's pride in Igbo culture. (Chukwuna) Tiny stories are woven into the fabric of the plot with such dexterity and adroitness and élan that the entire narrative becomes a long tale of storytelling. These tiny stories enumerate how people live their lives, how they behave, work, react to situations customs that are conditioned by local lore emerge with its unique weaving in the seamless fabric of the narrative which becomes a continuous exercise in storytelling.

Besides the above stories there are also a good number of fables and animal tales. All of them were narrated under certain situations to serve a purpose as coded message. It may be a daily phenomenon or a warning or a knowledge before action.

They are enlisted below.

(a) *The tale of Eneke the bird*

Eneke's tale is cryptically presented through the proverbs in different situations (i) To exercise caution (187) (ii) and also respect the hard work that one has put in a property. (38)

(b) *The tale of Nza* (TFA: 23)

Nza is a bird in Igbo folklore who ate too much and caused his doom. He challenged his *chi* which ultimately leading to his downfall. Nza forgets how little he once was and challenges the hunters to shoot at him.

This tale is narrated with reference to Okonkwo's momentary affluence, which made him giddy with pride.

(c) *The tale of Danda the ant;*

'Danda the ant holds court in splendor and the sand dance forever'.

Thus tale reappears in the form of song. Danda the (white ant) holds court; i.e. he is the judge and the sand i.e. the earth to which every being must merge is the ultimate winner.

(d) *Ikemefuna's tale (TFA: 44)*

Ezi, elina elina Sala
Ezi ilikwa ya
Ikwaba akwa oligholi
Ebe Danda nechi eze
Ebe uzuzu –ege
Sala

This is a song proverb and is based on a folktale and Igbo belief. It is the tale of a deviant head strong unconventional king who ate the hot yams without offering it to *Ani* which is a taboo. It also warns people about the dangers of non-conformity wherein one earns the wrath of god to be condemned to death by abomination. He is denied funeral rites and is allowed to rot in the earth where the white ants and sands give him company.

This is also the omniscient narrator prophesizing and illuminating the reader about the impending catastrophe of Okonkwo's future action of slaying Ikemefuna after he finishes the song.

'Sala' is a call response performative wherein the listeners equally participate in the song. However here we do not have any listeners as Ikemefuna sings to himself.

(b) *For whom it is well*
For whom it is well
There is no one for whom it is well (TFA: 99)

This song was sung Uchendu Okonkwo's maternal uncle towards the end of his deliberation where he wanted to pacify Okonkwo seeing him in grief. Sadness is a part of day to day living and comes to everyone in different forms.

(c) *If I hold her hand*
She says "Don't touch!"
If I hold her foot
She says, "Don't touch!"
But when I hold her waist beads
She pretends not to know.

This song/text is reserved for a special occasion i.e. a marriage ceremony. It is a specialized setting where men and women sit down together to see the bride perform. The participant audience which comprise the elders of the clan and the musicians who sing the song.

Rituals and ceremonies

African societies practice a number of ritual performances that have relevance to religion spiritual life customs belief social relationship, healing marriage farming, harvesting et al.

These rituals encompass ritual events, objects, and esoteric language in some cases, songs, dance performance, costumes. These represent and recreate key moral values and social relations. Ritual performance creates a sense of order where the existing organization set up is in order. It also becomes an occasion where participants mediate social conflicts.

Kola Nut Ritual (TFA: 5)

A traditional Igbo man's day of a traditional public ceremony begins with ritual examinations (folk prayer) in which the male head of the living invite and acknowledge the presence of the dead living ancestors with three ritual items i.e. kola nut (Nzu) white chalk and palm wine. With the wine he pours a libation on the ground which symbolically opens the earth through which ancestors enter the physical world from the spirit land under ground. With the chalk he draws lines on the floor to pray for and the symbolic safe cyclic passage of the ancestors to and fro from the spirit land.

The kolanut is to be broken & shared among the visible and invisible men after which wine is served. The kola is eaten and the wine is drunk as a sign of spiritual communion and the unity is intended to bring life and prosperity to the people. The ritual must also precede all traditional Igbo public events, weddings, naming ceremonies, meetings & public gathering. The breathing of kola ritual evidences Igbo traditional hospitality. The alligator pepper spices up the nut and white chalk pointed on the big toe is a sign of the safe arrival of the guest and wish for his safe departure.

Rituals and customs relating to marriage

(a) Bride price ritual (TFA: 53)

Fixing of the bride price in Igbo society is done with bundles of broomstick each stick symbolizing one bag of cowrie. This ritual includes breaking of kola nuts drinking palm wine and negotiating bride price with broomsticks. Things are euphemistically settled, without any bargaining. The bride also gets to interact with her suitor and the members of his family and kinsmen.

(b) The Uri ritual (TFA: 81)

The Uri ritual takes place after the suitor had paid more than half of the bride price. The groom and his kinsmen bring pots of palm wine for the immediate family and the Ummna i.e. the bride's kinsmen. It is primarily a ceremony meant for the female folk and children who participate collectively in working, fetching water and also bring food according to one's capacity as a present for the bride. Community cooking of yams, cassava pounding foo-foo or splitting fire wood, goats are slaughtered and a massive live goat is given as a present to the groom's family. After the arrival of the entire lot of palm wine the suitors, the elders of his family sit in a semi-circle/half-moon and the circle is completed by the hosts. The women emerged from inside. The bride's mother led the way accompanied by the bride and other female members. The married and unmarried were strictly categorized by their dress code. The married wearing the best and the girls in red and black waist beads and brass anklets.

The eldest male member broke the kola nut saying 'life to all of us' and let there be friendship between your and ours. This was followed by praising on the success of relationships established earlier between the two clans and also wishful thinking on future ones to come by. Food and drinks were served, musicians played on the drums and went to each elder singing about his worth and credentials. When it was completed they came from the inner compound followed by the bride holding a cock and began to dance to the beats of the drum. She wore brass anklets and her body was colored/painted with cam wood powder and danced to the latest wedding song. Finally when the night was spent, the bride left for her suitor's home for seven market weeks. Moreover, the affluent gift cocks to the suitor's family.

(c) *Isi-Ifa ceremony: Ceremony of confession* (TFA: 96)

This is one but last ceremony performed before marriage which necessitates presence of *umuada* (daughters who have been married outside the clan). All of them were seated in a circle with the bride seated in the center, with a hen along with the suitors father who held on to an ancestral staff during evening hours before sun set. Men stood outside the circle watching and the circle watched too. The eldest sister of the suitor asked the bride about her chastity and is made to swear by holding on to the ancestral staff. Any misrepresentations of facts would win the wrath of the spirits or dead during child birth. The suitor's father took the hen, slit its throat and allowed the blood to fall on the ancestral staff. This final ceremony being completed the suitor took the bride as his wife.

Rituals relating to funeral

The funeral ceremony (TFA:89)

The announcement of a clan member's death was made with a wind musical instrument *kwe* followed by firing of canons at regular intervals which travelled across all the villages that comprised the clan. Men and women wailed and finally the name of the dead is announced. Men of all age groups visit the dead with bodies painted with chalk and charcoal wearing skirts made from raffia, a kind of reed. Sometimes an *Egwugwu* (the masked spirits) emerged, visited the corpse and went back to the underworld signifying that a man's life from birth to death is a series of transitions and rites which bring him closer to the world of ancestor. The *Egwugwu* signifies that the living are not far removed from the domain of ancestors. The titled and powerful are buried after dark with full honors accompanied by dances and firing of guns and beating of drums.

On the other hand when a women dies she is buried with her kinsmen and not in her husband's kinsmen's village. (TFA: 98)

Moreover when a women dies along with her husband, her funeral rites are completed before the announcement of her husband death (TFA: 94)

A man dying of any form of swelling is considered to be an abomination and the person is denied all funeral rites. His body is discarded in the evil forest to rot and the insects and faggots feed on him. (TFA: 14)

(e) *Naming ceremony of a new born* (TFA: 56)

This is performed after seven market days.

Festivals

Week of peace (TFA: 22)

It is ordained by the ancestors that in the planting season before planting of any crops one is bound to observe the week of peace when a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor. On deviance called *nso ani* one is penalized to make sacrifice to *Ani* the earth goddess by offering one she goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. No work is done and people called on their neighbors, drank palm wine exchanging greetings. Earlier the punishment inflicted was serious, the man was dragged around the village till he died. Besides it is also ominous to die during the week of peace as it is considered to be an abominations and the man was denied burial rites. It to an important festival for the Igbo community, as it is a time of peace to solicit the blessing of *Ani*.

Yam Festival (TFA: 27)

This festival is held every year before harvesting began to thank *Ani*. Yams are offered to *Ani* and the ancestors before they are taken. On the night before the festival

the old yams are disposed as it also signifies a new year with new yams. It is an occasion for joy as it stands for the end of harvest signifying plentitude and opulence. Houses are cleaned vessels and mortars are washed, the walls of the huts are scrubbed with red earth and patterns drawn in white, yellow green and red earth. Women paint their bodies with cam wood, draw black patterns on their stomach and back while the children's heads are shaved into beautiful patterns. Relatives and friends are invited to feast on yam foo foo and vegetable soup.

The second day is the wrestling match which is performed in the *ilu* or the village playground. The match begins when the sun begins to sink yet fun fare builds up from noon onwards.

Simon Gikandi states that the Yam was integral to Igbo culture because of its location at the nexus of a symbolic economy in which wealth was connected to spirituality, ideology and desire.

The oral traditions are used to rhetorically enrich various discussions. Names are used with the conceptual meaning, identify specific ancestors, deities and indicate the significance of specific rituals to preserve the African flavor.

Language of Drums

Ruth Finnegan states that drums play a significant role in African societies. They are used in conveying messages which calls for attention of the community. Drums are used in the context of dances, entertainments wrestling matches/sports and festival.

The drums call upon the audience present to praise or applaud them.

Public announcements like war, death, marriage celebrations wrestling matches the festival of masquerades are incomplete without the accompaniment of drums. A typical colonial parlance goes that if you want to disempower an African take away his drum.

Beliefs

(a) When a person calls one by name at night it is customary to reply. Is it me? Rather than say yes; for the fear that evil spirit might be calling. (TFA; 30)

(b) Cocks symbolize fertility. They are offered as gifts during offering to gods or as gifts during weddings or on visits to a village elder to grease social relationships.

(c) *Ogbanjee* children (TFA:57)

In Igbo belief system these are children who are considered wicked. They do not live for long. They die soon after their birth and return to the mother's womb to be born again. The process continues hence remedial measures are taken. A medicine man mutilates the body of the dead child holding it by its ankle and is dragged and buried in the evil forest. Sacrifices are made to come out of this cyclic process. A woman is sent to her people to stay during the entire period of pregnancy.

(d) Young children are not allowed to eat eggs as it is believed that such food tempted them to steal. (TFA: 56)

(e) If an *ogbanjee* child survived for some time it would be of delicate health subject to various ailments. Remedies were sought and one form was burying the *iyi-uwa* a shiny pebble wrapped in a rag and buried deep in the earth. All these were conducted by a medicine man.

The unearthing symbolized the snapping of connection with the *ogbanjee* world.

(f) At night children are not allowed to whistle for the fear of evil spirits. (TFA: 8)

(g) At night a snake is never called by its name. It is called a string.

(h) Oracle of the Hills and Caves (TFA: 10)

When a man faced problem he consulted the oracle of Hills and caves which is also called *Agbala*.

(i) Spirits of good children lived in ancient cotton trees any young women who desired children came to sit under the tree (TFA: 34)

(j) Discarding of twin children in the evil forest. (TFA: 91)

Giving birth to twins is considered to be a crime (abomination) as decreed by the *ani* and if any one falters the entire clan earns wrath of the earth goddess.

(k) Evil Forest (TFA: 109)

Every village has an evil forest where bodies of people were thrown who died of evil diseases, like leprosy small pox, ogbanjee children or twins.

(l) Rainbow was called python of the sky (TFA: 120)

The python is revered in Igbo culture.

(m) Village rain maker (TFA: 25)

The help of the village rainmakers is sought to bring & stop rains.

- Rain magicians can induce thunder, lightning and rain. These specialists are decedents of wealthy & polygynous personalities (Encyclopedia: 212-213).

(n) It is customary to offer a thanksgiving feast to kinsmen from the mother's side for their support in times of distress.

(o) There is also a custom where a person is dedicated to god and becomes taboo forever. He is called *anosu*. He could neither marry nor be married by a free born. He lived in a special area of the village close to the Great shrine. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden caste long tangled and dirty hair. A razor was a taboo for him. He could not take title and when he died he was buried in the Evil Forest.

Naming ceremonies and names also are believed to influence a person's life. Igbo names are highly connotative (54) some names reflect the qualities that the parents wish to bestow on a child. The naming ceremony of a new born takes place after seven market days. This is to be observed primarily while naming OGBANJE children for example.

ONWDMBIKO- Death I implore you.

ZOEMENA- May it not happen again.

ONWUMA- Death may please himself

However names like IKEMEFUNA mean my power should not be dispersed Okoye implies man born on OYE market day, NNEKA Mother is supreme also represent ideas associated with mother & motherhood.

Religion

The Igbo believe in a pantheon of gods. Amongst them *Chukwu* is the supreme god who appointed smaller gods to help him. *Ani* earth goddess is the daughter of *Chukwu* who is the goddess of fertility and morality. During the season of planting and harvesting *Ani* has to be appeased.

Besides *Chi* is the personal god or guardian spirit soul and spiritual double: A person's other identity in the spirit land.

In the Igbo cosmology the Oracle of hills and caves is consulted for any problems and solution is sought. The goddess or the Agbala speak through a priestess who is Agbala's mouth piece named *Chielo*. Only when she is possessed speak an esoteric language, otherwise she is like any other normal women from the village.

Governance

The Igbo society has no kings, but elders' *ndichie* (10) titled men. The elders sought out all kinds of problems. People fall back on them for advice or settling disputes. It is a utilitarian form of society. (109)

Village disputes are the sorted out by masked spirits (*egwugu*) who speak in an esoteric language. (64-65) Each Egwugwu actually is a representatives of every village belonging to clan.

A person committing homicide is banned from his village and remained in exile for seven years. He lives with his mother's kinsmen (91) and this decision is taken by the elders and men of wisdom.

Enoch the *osu* who converted to Christianity was the son of the snake priest. He challenged the traditional religion by killing and eating the sacred python (135). He had also unmasked an *Egwugwu*. Revenge came in the form of *Egwugwu* punishing him.

Interestingly the judicial system had great semblance with the western tradition. A quintessential democratic set up.

Achebe resorts to 'group accounts' (Vassina: 19) which are typical oral traditions. They are the oral memories of groups as they express the identity of group in which they are told like various kinship groups which substantiates rights over land, resources, women and offices which are institutionalized to a certain extent.

Trade & Commerce

Market days

There are four days in a week in Igbo culture namely *nkwo, eke, afor, orie*.

Eke is the day when livestock are purchased at various Eke markets.

Orie is the day of slaughter and feasting.

Afor is the day of more merriment and masquerade displays.

And *Nkwo* is the carnival day when all new, old and ceremonial masquerades assemble at the central arena

Afor is the formative market day *eke* least favored. Any important event is avoided on this day.

Moons (4)

It is also customary to calculate time on the lunar calendar. Hence months are counted on the basis of the member of moons sighted.

Bags of Cowries (4)

In a pre-colonial society cowries were the currency or the only standard medium of exchange.

2.3 Language as Identity marker

The 'Achebe look' can be a rewarding strategy for cultural nationalism Writing is a responsibility that one undertakes for such an endeavor to rehistoricize, rewrite, remap and reconstruct the lost and distorted identity. The nation in Africa being a fictional creation the African writer's relation to nation is slippery as a determinate relation between maps and nation does not always exist.

The question of language as a constant in among the other variable as a marker for identity and nationhood has been a matter of debate in post-colonial studies. Chinua Achebe felt that writing in English was the only choice he had and he intended using

it and made the borrowed tongue carry the weight of his African experience. Ngugi has strongly commented about such a factor in the process of decolonizing the mind.

As a writer he believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible.

“I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as a medium of expression. I have endeavored in my words to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, from a group of words, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and value of people”.
(Ngugi: 8)

However Achebe’s dexterity according to Izenbaye in the creation of a fictive language in shaping ‘English into the English of an ethnic experience far removed from the English homeland. The stylistic device employed had been a dream for African writers but looked down contemptuously by English scholars. Interestingly the literary English devised was receptive to foreign lexical items but protective of its imperial prescription of the metropolitan standard for syntax and idiom (Dan Izenbaye: 32) Charles Nnolim had called the writers who followed the Achebean model as ‘sons of Achebe’.

Chinua Achebe has taken the western narrative form and appropriated it to an oral tradition in the form of fables, myths, proverbs, stories, tales to project the native Igbo culture, King states that *Things Fall Apart* has become the standard form to gauge the African norm for African literature. However, Achebe was not the first person use oral tradition in his writings as opined by Susan Arndt (1998:20). In fact there were writers who had used orality in literature Yet, Achebe had explored such a tradition in its fullest form to give rise to the Achebean model. The success of the writer in

African literature depends on the capacity to imitate Achebe. Achebe opines that a writer has a duty towards the society being a modern griot.

Achebe has used the Igbo idiom and captured its essence by employing Igbo words. The choice of the Igbo word '*harmattan*' was a deliberate attempt to invalidate premises on cultural and racial inferiority which was imposed by the colonizers. Achebe wanted to display that African diction, their customs, have their own virtue. The cadence of the Igbo speech rhythm has been manifested during moments of excitement or emotional outbursts or public address *Go-di-di go go di go. Di go go di go.*

Achebe also has demonstrated the influence of pidgin after the arrival of missionaries. Construction of phrases as *yes sah!* A very fine intrusion to show the subservient role of the native in a colonizer colonized set up in a changing society. Moreover, *kotma* another pidgin construction meaning a white court messenger has been dexterously woven into the fabric of the story with the changing story line from the first to the second part. This also shows the mastery of Achebe's skill as a narrator. The pre-colonial Umuofia does not have a single pidgin word. They make their appearance only with the intermingling of cultures which maps the subsequent emergence of the variety of pidgins across Nigeria. The changing identities from pre-colonial to colonial is sharply reflected in such language use.

In spite of mapping of culture and the historiography embedded in orality, his work stands in sharp contrast to colonial documentation of history. Achebe's literary success lies in the aesthetic content of his work prioritizing aesthetics and knowledge over history.

Achebe has been successful in choosing a mode of expression which reverberate strongly with oral practices. Oral traditions of Igbo's conveyed without compromising with the authenticity. When African culture entered literary text it entered as a European idea as a sign of lack which Achebe invented, reinvented to an affirmative culture. The thundering success lies in his mastery of English language and extension of frontiers to accommodate African experience. In spite of the language being in English the nuance, thought, imagery, sentiments, and ideas resonate Igbo. The task of adopting orality to the English novel has been described as an 'African palimpsest' by Chantal Zabus with the multiple forms of orality.

2.4 Anthills of Savannah

The last of the novel out of the five Achebe has written was published in 1987, more than twenty years after the publication of his fourth novel 'A man of the people. (1966)

Chinua Achebe is well known for his critique on culture and political situation. *Anthills of Savannah* is one such novel wherein he delineates the picture of a post-colonial Nigeria. A Nigeria where the colonial experience persists even after the withdrawal of colonial forces and the continued existence of the colonial imprint with prolonged strategic and economic power of the colonizing country, Britain. In *Things Fall Apart* he had portrayed a society on the verge of collapse: collapse of a culture threatened by colonisation and imperialism the fraying fabric of a society with the advent of the Bible and the gun. Consequently, this old ways of thought had been overhauled by new ideas on religion, culture and education giving rise to a new local social elite who have had their education in the West. With western education, new ideas were brought demanding self-determination and self-rule paving way for

independence. The creation of the new nation state of Nigeria with its independence in 1960 made the Africans dream of an enlightened and utopia where the suppressed indigenous values would thrive. However, this dream remained a far cry as the rulers who were a group of neo local social elites mimicked the colonizer thus frustrating and depriving the suffering multitudes. This was the case of most postcolonial African states which were kept under the thrall of the colonizing countries subsequently reframing the notion of postcoloniality from linear historical development to a marker of cultural and social change. Achebe narrates the new social ills and mores that have beleaguered Africa since Independence.

2.4.1 Synopsis of the novel

Anthills of Savannah was published in 1987, tells the story of four western educated friends Chris, Sam, Ikem and Beatrice who in the post-independence Nigeria occupy important positions in the governance of the state and on whom the destiny of the nation lies. Sam is the President whose military regime is the alternative that the people welcome to counter the former corrupt leaderships. Sam fails to keep up to the expectations of the people and falls into the same vicious cycle of playing the new colonial master. Achebe's goal is to bring into the forefront the reasons of failure of a nation due to failure of leaders like Sam who prioritise personal gains. Chris a writer who becomes the minister of Information and Ikem the Editor of the National Gazette run by the Government in Nigeria.

The setting of the novel is Kangan, a fictional African state in the eighties. Before Sam assumes power as a leader in a coup Kangan leads a placid life. Of the four provinces of Kangan, Abazonians oppose Sam's proposal of life Presidency, for which hostile steps are taken against them. Sam orders for closing all water holes to

teach them a lesson and declines to meet a delegation of elders who come to him. He believes that detachment can only give him the aura of power. On the other hand Ikem Osodi, the editor of The National Gazette empathises with the Abazonians and becomes their voice and decides to lead the dissatisfied masses for which he loses his job and subsequently his life. Sam, in his lust for power adopts all evil and unfair means. Absolute power corrupts him and he gets Ikem killed. He becomes a dictator plays puppet to the British Government and unleashes a reign of terror, instability and corruption. Deception, false promises becomes the order of the day. Sam's state of intoxication due to power further intensifies and pursues Chris the minister for Information for his life. However, Chris lives to see the death of Sam get killed in a counter coup which gives a ray of hope.

The fictitious state of Kangan, is a metaphor for the Nigerian nation in a state of turmoil. A new regime is established but offers little hope. The myriad problems which plague the society are complex in nature have little direct solutions. A collected effort from every quarter of the society can help in tiding over such crisis.

Achebe, the master story teller used his powerful narrative style in the form of short stories myths and songs. A liberal sprinkling of words of wisdom encoded in powerful proverbs in the form of quotes that are deeply rooted in Igbo culture has flavoured the novel with a distinct aroma of the African life and culture. The maturity of the novelist is the fine blend of orality and literacy which has placed *Anthills of Savannah* to be one of the best in his artistic integrity. He has been successful in representing Africa to the outside world; the African aesthetics and sensibility that are depicted in the role of myths, stories and narratives which are the repository of African education, culture and knowledge system to which one falls back upon. Achebe uses myths which

have been derived from traditional Igbo lore that work as distinct pointers and have clear relevance to the post-colonial crisis in the society which at the same time indicate the universal application of myths.

The concept of power and the tyranny unleashed by absolutism is times immemorial and has its application universally. These thoughts are crystallised in the oral tradition in the form of powerful myths and proverbs.

2.4.2 Proverbs

Achebe stated: I have often said that one of the most important genres in Igbo, is oratory that is not preserved in the same way that proverbs anecdotes and stories are preserved. This is a matter of individual excellence. It is a part of Igbo culture. There is no way of preserving unless you record peoples voices. All that to part of the inheritance. I feel I am working with proverbs are just a portion of this inheritance. (Makward: 24)

The proverbs and the regular occurrence of such in *Anthills of Savannah* are replete with cultural philosophical religion and psychological beliefs of the Igbo people.

(a) *We are like children washing only their bellies as our elders say when we pray.* (AHS: 17)

This was said by Prof Okong to President Sam. Okong's compliance with Sam wherein he acknowledges him as his teacher and mentor in the corrupt regime. The depiction of such character in farcical light and an ironic role shows the state of decadence in these so called institutions of power and agency.

(b) *A man must not swallow his cough because he fears to disturb others.* (AHS: 18)

This proverb was told by Prof. Okong who indirectly states that he must maintain silence inspite of the trouble that he sees brewing up i.e. the action of Chris and Ikem which call for concern.

(c) *To paddle my own canoe*(AHS: 18)

Okong's statement wherein he talks of minding his own business.

(d) *One finger gets soiled with grease and spreads it to the other four.* (AHS: 18)

The blame of one brushes off to the other in a state of collective identity.

(e) *It takes a lion to tame a leopard.* (AHS: 20)

This is an allusion to a narration from the Old Testament.

This was said by Sam with reference to Chris and Ikem who are being considered as opponents and threats to Sam. He reveals in his intoxicated state of power and considers himself to be a lion who is known for its community and collective living which is indeed a misgiving.

(f) *The goat owned in common that dies in hunger.* (AHS: 33)

This was stated by Ikem with reference to the upswept common stair case that was nobody's property.

(g) *If Ogili was such a valuable condiment no one would leave it lying around for role to stumble upon and dig into.* (AHS: 84)

This was stated by Beatrice with reference to an unmarried friend of hers. The unmarried friend was insulted by her fiancée's aunt who made fun and sneered at her marital status by giving a sarcastic comment. This proverb underscores the attitude towards women and the institution of marriage. Ogili is a West African fermented protein used as a condiment for soups.

(h) Our people say that an animal whose name is famous does not always fills a hunter's basket. (AHS: 116)

Refers to Ikem's physical built.

A strong animal need not be big enough to fill a hunter's basket.

(i) But don't forget that our wise man have said also said that a man who answer every summons by the town crier will not plant corn in his fields. (AHS: 117)

(j) The cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household but his voice is the property of the neighbourhood.(AHS: 117)

Proverb *(i)* and *(j)* are said by a wise elder from Abazon with reference to Ikem Osodi. The Abazonian elder is a dedicated man and spoke for its residents. Ikem should not be troubled for all petty things that he has been doing. If he answers to every cry the basic duty will remain undone. In fact the Abazonians should take pride in the fact that the cock (Ikem) belongs to them as Ikem represents the common man.

(k) If your brother needs to journey for across the Great River to find what sustains his stomach. (AHS: 117)

This is in continuation of the proverbs embedded in the speech made by an elder. A reiteration of the need to spare him of petty things.

(l)We can all see how handful of words can save him from the ache of four hundred handshakes and the headache of remembering a like multitude of praise names. But it does not end there. It is saying to us: Every man has what is his do not bypass him to enter compound. (AHS: 118)

The proverb epitomises the Igbo manners and customs in matters of public address and speaking. Oratory skill passed from the elders which saves one from unnecessary display of customs. It emphasises on the power of oratory.

(l) Waiting like a dormant seeds in the dry season soil for the green fingered magicians, the first rain. (AHS: 134)

A highly figurative language to talk of the imminent changes that are expected by Ikem Osodi to set in.

(m) Charity is the opium of the privileged. (AHS: 147)

(n) The unexamined life is not worth living. (AHS: 151)

(o) If you want to get at the root of murder they said you have to look for the blacksmith who made the machete. (AHS: 151)

(p) It is like going to arrest our village blacksmith every time a man hacked his fellow to death.

Ikem states this with reference to the innumerable problems that ails today's Nigerian society that one need not blame it on colonialism and imperialism for every problem.

(q) A man where horse is missing will look everywhere even in the roof. (AHS: 170)

The officer who came to search for things of Ikem Osodi in Elewa's house replies in the proverb when he is questioned by Elewa.

(r) One should not look at a gift horse in the mouth. (AHS: 177)

When a favour is done one is not supposed to make too many queries. Beatrice wants to know the name of the anonymous caller and the caller replies with the above proverb.

(s)Digging a new hole to get sand to fill an old one. (AHS: 181) said by Emmanuel Obete.

This is a not an Igbo proverb. Chris is asking Emmanuel to substitute an Igbo proverb with a non-Igbo one. This proverb is an indication of the needs of assimilation amongst different ethnic groups to fight a common enemy, oppressive forces and corruption.

(t) But age gives a man some things with his right hand even as it takes away others with its left. (AHS: 118)

This is with reference to the recounting of various incidents in the life of the old man who talks about wisdom that comes with age.

(u) I tell you he is like the puppy who survey's himself around and farts into a blazing fire with the aim to put it out.

(v) Itell you it is the almighty has divided the works of the world. Everyone and his own.

The bush fowl her work the farmer has to some of us the gift to tell their fellow that the time to get up has finally come .To others he gives the eagerness to rise when they hear the call out on their garbs. And then there are those whose part is to wait to take own and recount its story. Each is import in its own way.(AHS: 118-119)

Achebe mixes traditional proverbs with Christian ones which enlightens about the spiritual gifts that a man receives from the Almighty.

Besides the use of the proverbs there are other occurrences of coded messages and indirect representation of facts. As in the case of Emmanuel when he was making his journey towards the North he had befriended Adamma and tried his best to impress

her. However, he failed to captivate her interest. On her rejection he mentions to Chris that *I did my best but she wouldn't bite*. (AHS: 202)

In another instance the Attorney General reflects.

(w) This giant iroko is not scaled every day. So I must get all the firewood it can yield me now while I am atop.(AHS: 22)

This is a state of Attorney General's mind. He wants to win over the President and this was his best opportunity to gain his confidence.

Sayings as in

Procrastination is a lazy man's apology. (AHS: 206) which was said by a drunken man to Chris when Chris tried to rationalize the conversation by postponing it to some other time speaks about the nature of the character as it is construed that the drunken man was used to exercising authority and wielding power earlier.

The various proverbs sayings also underscores the situation and the character who utter them on the basis of the context. They have been successfully used by the writer and they contribute significantly to the situation.

Bolorun durostates that a single proverb is not superfluous and it functions as one of the styles of expression among the many styles of Achebe he uses in a novel that best suits his subjects. (1974).

Some of the sayings sharpen the characterisation whereas some point at the values and customs inherent in the contemporary society.

The use of metaphoric language by as a whole adds to the richness of the literary form as they give a poetic quality to prose in the form of imaginative form. This literary device employed by Achebe enhanced the clarity of the message that he intends to

convey. The lucid style and diction makes his work an archetype for many of his followers who tried to approximate to his style making him the torch bearer of African novel.

2.4.3 Story telling

Storytelling is an integral part of African culture. The griots who engaged themselves in the performance of storytelling made it a community affair engaging the audience who also become a part of the performance and the creator of art.

The griots who are the representatives of the traditional age old stories. With the age of information and modernity a new story teller emerged. These are the writers of the print or electronic media: modern griots who evolved in the form of journalist's, writers or information bearers. They are the written stories which create a fictional myth for healing. Achebe felt the need of retelling the stories as distorted stories were presented about the African's and this action could only be possible with the writer who is also a teacher. He had embarked on the mission of performing the imaginative act of storytelling to bring about a synthesis of tradition and modernity. He has aptly lived up to the duty of the novelist as a teacher where the significance of literature is not merely for art for art's sake but also for political and social ends.

The act of storytelling is also an alternative to historiography which is a hegemony constructed by the West to realise their agenda of imperialism. Achebe employs storytelling to show a resistance; the alternative to history. Story telling is oral history indeed.

In *Anthills of Savannah*, Achebe resorts to the idea of storytelling. It contains a string of stories from multiple narrative points. Each story has its own individual role in the polyphony of voices that emerge to form a larger narrative for the cause of national

interest. It makes a move towards a future in a positive light. The optimistic tone that Achebe takes is that he gathers from the stories that are told.

Hymn to the sun (chapter: 3)

This one such retelling of a tale told by the modern griot, writer Ikem Osodi. It is a repetition of the earlier folktale motif the Quarrel between the Earth and the sky in *Things fall apart*. However, the transcoding of the story metaphorically refers to the ruling elite who are at the core for the misfortunes that have come to the people of Abazon. The dictatorial regime of Sam, a symbol of absolutism is the cause for the suffering of the common man. The Hymn itself is an irony and the essence of the story lies in the process of eternal retelling of the tale crystallized in the title *Anthills in the Savannah* where the retelling would be done by the termites eternally year after year about the bush fires in the savannah. The efficacy of the Anthills lies in the memory, it is a durable construction made by the termites; a perpetual reminder to what has gone by. Anthill is indeed a storyteller which creates memory for a survivor which is a must to make significance for the generations to come. The retelling is necessary a continuous process, as a reminder and warning.

An interesting aspect of the structural device used in 'Hymn to the sun' is that other stories and legends are embedded within the Hymn itself. In Africa the key problem is drought. The recurrence of the drought in the contemporary time has taught the dwellers of Abazon to shed their old activities and negotiate through a delegation to meet the people at the helm of affairs and find a solution. This is a reference to changing tactics to the changing times that mutual negotiation and not domination is the answer.

The hymn itself is written in a highly poetic language replete with images and metaphor. It binds legends about founding of the region of Abazon the seasons of suffering: suffering through perpetual drought and suffering caused by hostile nature and symbolically by the regime.

Ikem Osodi has written Pillar of fire: Hymn to the sun in the National Gazette to describe the state of Abazon. A Hymn is a song of religious nature, reads like a prayer. The stellar objects which includes the sun as well, is a part of lives, events and literature in Africa. In African imagination, power is an aspect of beauty and sun is representative of it. In traditional religion of Africa 'Sun' is emissary to the Almighty, the eye of God, a messenger, mediator of Chuku, and carrier of sacrifice. This hymn is also an allegory of the political situation. Moreover, Pillar of Fire: Hymn to the sun is mentioned again (201) Chapter XVII which Chris takes out from his pocket when he makes his journey towards the South. He preferred to ignore it earlier but now he realises the accuracy and aptness of the hymn which is based on fact and not on fancy. The Hymn reads like a prayer providing him with reassurance Achebe in one of his interview with Charles Rowell state that the same story is used in different situation to create laughter and 'hide the glint of steel' and within this folds of laughter, the hint of the concealed weapon will be used when time comes.(Rowell: 1990)

Chapter 9 titled 'Views of struggle' elaborates the function of a story and the need for storytelling in the form of traditional proverbs and parables. Here Achebe performs the role of the novelist as a teacher and illuminates on the necessity of a story. This is deliberated through the character of an Abazonian elder. '*Only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior*'. (AHS: 119)

The story is our escort without it, we are blind. It is the story that owns us and directs us... neighbours. (AHS: 119)

He further goes to highlight the fact that in the modern context the story teller is the mediator and the stories they create validates their social organisation, political system, ideology and also command changes in the society.

Stories by the Abazon elders Chap. 9 and Chap. 12. The Abazon elders (AHS: 117)

The man of wisdom speak in a profusion of proverbs and narrate small stories which refer to the necessity for change in a society that is in transition.

Stories of Chris, Ikem Sam and Beatrice

These characters are story tellers. Chris is the minister of Information, Ikem the Editor for National Gazette and Beatrice who works for the government and writes stories. Sam, Chris and Ikem think that the story of the nation are the stories about them: grossly misconstrued. They belong to the ruling elite who have distanced themselves from the common man. Chris and Ikem are initially dispassionate but with time are able to feel the pulse of the common man to write a common story, connect with the mass and in the process perish which is the political climate emphasising that a certain level of culling is necessary to be heard.

On the other hand Sam is the transgressor, as such he perishes, whereas Beatrice emerges as the 'female power' who negotiates her difference and ways to write the final story coded in Ikem's daughter *Amachina*, 'May the path never close'. Participating in the naming ceremony she adds to the final touches of the story.

The trope of storytelling that Achebe adopts in *Anthills of Savannah* is a new kind of storytelling a new story teller on which the future generation can chalk out their path.

It is a story telling with a twist where intermediality plays a vital role to bind common concerns and envisions an emerging contemporary African nation.

Stories emanate knowledge and power, it is changing the world through apt words, it is an endeavour in selecting and using varied methods of storytelling and the successful story teller is the one who takes the past, recognizes the present acknowledges the varying and contradicting elements which he/she amalgamates by preserving its identities and chalks out a future for the common good.

2.4.4 Myths and Legends

God Agwu (AHS: 119)

(a) Emphasizing on the function of a story by an Abazonian elder, he makes a reference to God Agwu and symbolically refers to the position of Agwu that Ikem has taken. Agwu is the traditional god of healing. The larger spiritual force embodied in Agwu works through an individual for a collective wellbeing. One cannot be political by being partisan or communal, hence taking account of individual stories be it the perpetrator, supporter or victim the story necessitates that it is heard and thus works as a rite of passage for future. It transforms history.

Agwu is believed to be closely associated in man's search for fulfilment in his society. This is because he enforces determination of all sorts.

“Agwu exercises intellectual and volitive faculties and is beloved to exercise immense influence in human affairs.”(AGUWA:279)

(b) The myth of Cherubim and Seraphim (AHS: 108 and 109).

A reference to the angels in the Old Testament. Cherubim stands for cherub angels. Seraphim for angels who worship God.

Beatrice prefers the priestess Chielo: The prophetess of the Hills and the Caves, one who has the Oracular voice. This is further extended when she takes the role of representatives of Idemili (chap 8) titled Daughters of Idemili (AHS: 97).

(c) Myth of Idemili

Idemili is the creation myth in Igbo land refers to the evolution of mankind. The creation of rivers, streams and land. The necessity of rituals and the role of daughters in such situations.

Idemili is the python revered and worshipped in some parts of Igbo land. It derives its name from the Idemili River. The descent of Idemili like a 'Pillar of Water' which has become a legend. Any person willing to take a title has to appease Idemili. It requires a female to act as a mediator. Achebe's using the Idemili myth is to assert the role of woman in the Igbo society which was patriarchal in the colonial times, highlighting the fact that patriarchy is a colonial construct and females in precolonial Igbo society had a superior status demythifying patriarchy. Beatrice is the representative of the strong emerging women who are capable of playing 'women of substance'.

The myth of Idemili is narrated in league with Beatrice Okoh's background. Achebe makes a conscious effort to merge the oral and the written to form the oracular voice.

A single story that the Tortoise needs to tell necessitating the control of one's destiny. The Abazon elder wants a single story democracy overriding political struggles differences.

(c) The story of the Leopard and the Tortoise (AHS: 122)

The age old enmity of the leopard and the Tortoise made leopard to way lay the Tortoise. The Tortoise before dying wanted a wish to be granted. The leopard complied. Tortoise raises a lot of dust by scratching his hand and feet on the ground.

This folk tale emphasis on the category of sameness where the tortoise despite his smallness wants to create a story that they fought on the level of equality till the last breath.

This tale was narrated by an Abazonian elder who instructed the common people on the need of telling stories to inculcate the spirit of endurance on one hand and highlight on the power of stories.

(d) The Tale of the Bed-Bug (AHS: 191)

The tale of the Bed Bug underscores its patience and endurance Man tried to destroy her newly hatched brood of the bed bug by pouring a kettle of water. The little ones were about to give up the struggle. The mother bed bug told them whatever is hot will become cold implying, the law of nature will take its own course.

This tale was narrated by Chris when he had to spend the night with Beatrice in Braimoh's house. The shelter of an urban poor. Achebe's uses the tale to highlight the living condition of the poor, their daily engagement and struggle with such living conditions. In fact it is a way of life for them. Beatrice and Chris were not used to such conditions, hence ignorant about it. This provides them to participate in the act of living with the poor though unintentionally.

(e) The story of the Booab tree. (AHS: 200)

The booab tree is an iconic of the African savannah. It is called the tree of life. It has an unusual shape. The circumference is around 50meters. It is a succulent during rainy season it absorbs and stores water in its vast trunk. It is the only tree that has adapted to live all-round the year in the arid and dry savannah. Plenty of folklore is associated with this tree of life.

The story of the elephant looking for water in the arid savannah know the source of water to replenish its thirst and seeks for the boob tree.

2.4.5 Songs

A song is also interwoven into the fabric of the story which is a short narrative by itself. It is used to justify the story of the three i.e. Sam Chris and Ikem. Which they (conceited) think is the only story of the nation.

The one in the front spots evil spirits, the one in the rear has twisted hands and like one in the middle is the child of luck. (AHS: 62)

The one in the front is the go getter Sam

The one in the rear suffers is Ikem Osodi.

The one in the middle is the opportunist Chris

His selfish nature made him call himself 'child of luck'.

2.4.6 Curses

Stupid yam head (AHS: 126)

Though 'yam' is considered to be the kings' crop. A man holding the yam is considered to be one who wields power; whereas it is also interesting to note that Igbo culture exists in dualism. 'The Yam' is also used to signify a dullard.

(a) Make your mother hair catch fire.(AHS: 198).

It is worth noticing that many curses are spelt out in the name of mother. Striking the cord of duality; 'Mother is Supreme' is used to signify the worth of the mother.

2.4.7 Customs and Traditions

The continuity of life beyond the sublunary realm is subtly present in many contexts throughout the novel. In one instance the moaning of the rain against the ear making

the sound *UWAT'UWA* (80) is a replication of a world inside a world without an end.

A children game which Beatrice indulged in during a heavy downpour.

During the naming ceremony of Elewa and Item's daughter. Elewa sheds tears in grief. Beatrice consoles her by reminding that Ikem is very much around.

Watching with small boy smile of his. (AHS: 213)

The very name of the child Amaechina connotes 'May the path never close' (AHS: 213) is also indicative of the never ending cycle of birth and death and the connection that is established is African cosmology of the world of dead and living which find its manifestation in the dance of masquerades.

Likewise Agatha's food that comprises of garri and cassava flour, processed by filtering drying and frying *ube* (pear) are some of the ethnic food taken by Nigerian folks.

2.4.8 Use of language

Achebe like in TFA has used few Igbo words and resorted to relexification in AHS in a few cases like the *root branch attack* (133), *Yam headed* (126). These words are used by the common folk who represent the mass, which gives a unique dimension to Achebe's characterisation. Beatrice's experience at the London party with her boyfriend and consequent abandoning her to dance with the others made her feel like a *Kabu- Kaboo* (76) also carries with it significant cultural connotation as *Kabu Kaboo* is private car used for commercial purpose as to cushion the biting effects of the poor economic conditions in Nigeria. (Okunrimeta: 120)

Besides in a multi lingual set up. Code switching and mixing is a lived in experience as the domain of language use shifts according to its function. The motley crowd

representative of the common people use the Nigerian pidgin. English is used for purposes of official communication and the educated elite like Beatrice, Ikem, and Chris switches language codes to NPE (Nigerian Pidgin English). The lingua franca of the post-colonial Nigerian society as in '*Make I fix Madame something.*' (59). Spoken by Chris' cook who only spoke Pidgin.

2.5 Achebe's issues on identity

Chinua Achebe's has played the role of an African griot. It was an attempt on his part to use the novel form, a western tool with African aesthetic. His literary impact as a social critic is not limited to Nigeria nor Africa alone but to an entire global audience.

The loss of identity is the key factor that made him write his first novel *Things fall apart*. He declares the TFA was an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and the homage of a prodigal son. (Achebe 1976: 102). It is this the era of pre-colonialism and revelling in the past which makes him negotiate his ethnic and African identity.

In the process of the formation of identity, individual identity stands for one's own characteristics with which we define ourselves. However, such an identity is heavily dependent on a larger frameworks viz. culture & society. It is the commonality or the co-occurrence of certain features that enables us to connect with the larger framework giving us our collective identities. The way we think, our belief, manners, the food we take or the culture we practice is a shared experience and it simultaneously conditioned by the factors of the larger framework which is the collective identity. Thus it reflects the common historical experience and shared cultural codes which provides us, as one people with stable divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (Hall: 394) The aforesaid value enables us to see ourselves on which we build our individual identities.

Stuart Hall further emphasizes on the fact that identities are subject to change. It is not fixed. It is under a continuous process of evolving. History, culture, and power are in continuous play to define collective identity. Hence, identity never stands in terms of absolutes and is not a finished product.

The imperialist agenda made the Europeans straight jacket the Africans to be uncivilized, barbaric, without a history. The African has been pushed to the status of the other and create a stereotype. African identities were redefined by the colonizer, reinventing a logic that distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. (Fanon 1994: 37). This made the 'Black' despise everything about himself.

Achebe too had undergone a similar process of self-abnegation of his African identity. Which may be a conscious or an unconscious devaluation till he encountered Joseph Conrad's *Mister Johnson* who made him contemplate on his African identity. According to Achebe, overcoming Euro-centrism goes hand in hand with eradicating the destructive effects of racism and injustice. TFA is an attempt on the part of Achebe to relocate his thinking which he does by returning to the past, and trying to understand his culture, history, and the past glory. Amilcar Cabral claimed that the reclaiming of cultural history is the path for national liberation. Achebe has done similar things in TFA, an assertion of an African identity that is possible through negotiation of different cultural performances could one translate cultural meaning. For Achebe, it is in the nature of cultures to confront and negotiate changes or any form of crisis and contradictions to keep culture alive. According to Homi Bhabha, cultural engagement can be 'affiliative' or 'antagonistic' which need not be necessarily construed as fixed norm to define tradition. In the process of historical transformation, the hybridities that

emerge in the cultural set up is also continuous and ongoing negotiation in the establishment of identity. (Bhabha 1994: 2)

Igbo life and culture which Achebe celebrates is one among the many set up that colour the African Nigerian social cultural landscape. Hence he uses cultural history to regain the lost glory. The knowledge and history, to put oneself on the map of the history of mankind is a necessary element in order to establish identity as well as redefine emerging identities.

Though Achebe celebrates and glorifies the past yet he never falters to pinpoint the short comings that afflicted the society.

Both the novel *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of Savannah* were written at different times in Achebe's career as a writer. *Things Fall Apart* was written when Achebe emerged as a novelist before the independence of Nigeria whereas *Anthills of Savannah* during the post-Independence period (1987) when Nigeria was troubled by political unrest and instability. Several coups characterised the political climate. Each novel makes an attempt to recover the lost glory by reclaiming the past. TFA, through a cultural histography of the Igbo community. The cultural tropes that exists in the forms of customs, traditions, oratory and folklore are extensively dealt with, that go to enrich the life and the community at large. However, Achebe does not celebrate nor rejoices every practice custom or ritual. He is not biased about their influences.

As Achebe reflects on the way of a pre-colonial Igbo life, and the mode of governance where elders, masquerades and oracles played major roles in the social fabric indicating a society of a purely democratic in nature. They are the Igbo's political identity much like the democratic set up of the west maintaining a social decorum with the indigenous practises giving a social identity. However, Achebe did not

romanticize Igbo culture and through folklore has also pointed the drawbacks of the Igbo culture that conditioned social identity. The role of patriarchy and its impact on the society also had a role play in the disintegration of the society. Okonkwo the protagonist tried to live up to the expectations of the patriarchal norms yet was a failure in upholding certain customs for which he was exiled. Any traits that made a person soft was looked down upon was considered feminine. Love for music, listening to stories and songs from which one derived aesthetic pleasure never found favour with Okonkwo. In order to keep up to the expectations he kills Ikemefuna as showing love is considered feminine. Here, we observe an integral link between personal identity and social identity. Misogyny has been highlighted, females do not have a role to play in any important matters except domesticity. The *Egwugwu* frighten the females and children. Through the unequal representation of women in social matters, Achebe underscores the attitudes that condition the male psyche leading to undermining of females.

Besides certain social customs like exile from the village which Okonkwo experiences questions the contradictory laws in the society on which Obireika reflects upon. Disposing of *ogbanjee* (twins) for no fault of theirs is another custom that makes one ponder. The *osu* or outcasts find acceptance in the new religion whereas in the Igbo society they have been condemned. Through such examples the contesting identities are answered. Achebe emphasis on the need to negotiate identities in the face of changing times. The evil practices in the society creates fissures or fractures which leads to disintegration and erosion of a culture ought to be put to check and a new alternative arrangement that evolve with the changing times must become the guiding force. Okonkwo's suicide is a metaphor for the death of a culture. He was unable to move with the changing phases of the society. A society with a set of values

and culture which he thought was constant ignoring the fact that the only constant variable is change. In fact it was the betrayal of culture that made Okonkwo accept change. As an individual Okonkwo was also unable to abide by tradition as he had violated the customs the colonizers cultural hegemony amongst the Igbo's in particular and the Africans in general.

Characters like Obireika Uchendu and Nwoye were reflective, questioned the customary ways and laws that have frayed and become impractical and improper. They found their answers in other alternatives. This resulted in construction of multiple identities. Achebe stated that one can be an Igbo and a Christians as well. Embracing the new religion does not necessarily make a person less Igbo or an African.

Through his work TFA Achebe was capable of proving Ngugi erroneous, Ngugi expressed that the use of English language was a major setback to the development of African language and was used for a spiritual division of Africans by Europeans and that "language carries culture & culture carries the entire body of values with which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world". Achebe fashioned an English with an African experience and African aesthetic that was capable of changing the image of Africa in the global domain.

With *Anthills of Savannah*, Achebe delves on the problematic of Nigerians post-colonial identity, a transformation brought about by colonialism and independence and hits at the very crux of the problem which he attributes to failed leadership consequently a utopia denied.

The string between the leaders and the common man is snapped due to absolutism and partisan politics which unleashes tyranny and corruption. The leaders have distanced

themselves from the common man. They comprise the neo social elites educated in the west, who do not have any idea about their traditions which they have left behind. They play puppets to Britain and cross all limits to please the British to secure power. Cultural values of the colonizer is promoted. Contempt for tradition and disrespect for the values of the masses is perpetuated. This creates hindrance to the formation of a national identity as the leader's actions do not permit cultural parameters to have any form of intrinsic value. It is through the clash of cultures that the state of unrest begins. Achebe addresses the problem of a collective identity. He is optimistic and provides solutions through a good number of aspects that exist within the society. It is these alternatives that can bring about positive changes.

The inequality that exists in the form of social deprivation, marginalization and all forms of gendered constructions prevents formation of a collective identity is addressed. Inequality fosters materialistic individualism that prevents one to connect with the fellowman for the common wellbeing or '*ummna*' spirit. The community life of the African consciousness is threatened. Hence, the best way to come to terms in the formation of a collective identity is to bring about a change in individual identity.

The President Sam perishes as he is unable to come to terms with the collective spirit. Chris identity believed that the story of the nation was about Chris Sam and Ikem. Eventually realization dawns that his is only one of 'the twenty million stories' (AHS: 66-67). He is conceited and relies more on the game of power and takes an objective stand. He is neither passionate as Ikem nor as intelligent a Sam. The middle position that he takes prevents him from taking decision. It has always been a mid-way that negotiation that prevents constructive action. It is only after Ikem's arrest and death that Chris becomes committed and a transformation in his identity takes place. Ikem is

the oracular voice. He connects with the common man. In the editorial he writes 'The Hymn to the Sun' which is the metaphor to the nation, Nigeria. Ikem's hymn becomes the guiding force for Chris during his escape to the south. He is adept in the knowledge of folklore. The proverbs, myths, legends and stories specific to Abazon are within his repertoire of his knowledge. This connects him with the common man and the stories of the land. Achebe uses Ikem as a link to the traditional wisdom and society. Ikem's power lies in his passion 'Passion is our hope and strength a very present help in trouble. (38-39) Ikem's optimism pays. He believes in the power of stories, stories that can transform. Ikem's reverence for the Abazonian elders who function as story tellers during his mobilizing meets for the common man or his reference to the elders and their stories during his meeting with the university students project him as the 'man of the people'. Ikem's individual identity also undergoes change after he meets Beatrice, the powerful female voice.

Beatrice is the 'goddess prophetess' in Achebe's *Anthills of Savannah*. Achebe creates a well-rounded character. Beatrice is Nigeria's modern woman, an embodiment of the true spirit that can stir the nation to fulfil its promises.

Woman in Igbo society are marginalized they have no role to play in the society. In TFA, women are voiceless; living on the margins, patriarchy and misogyny was dominant. Proverbs were engendered. They like the children and the un-initiated look at things from the margins. In *Anthills of Savannah*, Achebe has created Beatrice the modern western educated, empowered Nigerian woman. She has been referred to as Cherubim and Seraphim; the myth from the Bible by Chris, a kind of a label to create a halo and exotise her for her virtues. However, Beatrice prefers the Igbo goddess Chielo, an Igbo identity which connects her with the masses.

She also has her own stories to narrate about her upbringing. Her father's iron ruler and disciplining and her name which was given to her as she was the girl child. Beatrice tried to give meaning to her name by living up to its connotation. Though it was an intended sarcasm when she was named. African society has various methods to subjugate women which is perpetuated by different myths and stories and male figures like Braimoh acknowledge the fact. Achebe is of the opinion that the gendered inequality is another factor that has prevented a collective unity. Thereby, he makes Beatrice the daughter of Idemili myth who is representative of redemption of the ongoing political crisis. It is feminine expression of peace reconciliation and modesty: an antidote for masculine power and violence. Beatrice was ignorant of her culture the myths fables and stories. Her desire to connect with her roots gives her the redemptive power. She is capable of bringing about a change in others as well as herself. Beatrice rebukes her domestic help and eventually apologizes for her behaviour. Beatrice's identity too undergoes a change towards the end of the novel Beatrice's participates in the naming ceremony of Ikem and Elewa's girl child whom she names Amacheina. (May the path never close) A woman's participation in the naming ceremony is total reversal of the Igbo tradition, a privilege otherwise enjoyed by males which Achebe feels that is necessary in the changing social milieu.

The naming ceremony is a 'microcosm within a macrocosm', as it has people from all strata and multi ethnic setup. This essentialises, in the future construction of nationhood the participation of all sections of people will take over which will be a melting cauldron into a unified whole that can give a meaning to the collective identity of a better nation which Achebe foresees. The parameter of national identity is not race or ethnicity. Identity must be equal to shared consciousness.

The NPE (Nigerian Pidgin English) spoken by the common masses is also a unifying factor to connect with the masses. Achebe uses it towards the later part of the novel with all its proverbs and folklore which is missing in the first part that narrates the regime of the elite. Proverbs are looked down upon indicating elite's insularity.

Achebe uses folklore to give an identity in TFA and re-invents identity through folklore to keep pace with the changing times. The 'epistemic and persuasive' power of oratory remains constant through Achebe's fiction whose ultimate purpose is the education of African people.

Thereby, we observe that there is nothing called a homogeneous or an essentialised African identity. Thus in the process, the competing voices need to be harmonized, accommodated which becomes relevant towards expressing a national consciousness.