ABSTRACT

This study started out of a vague awareness of the richly different ways in which two major Third World countries have responded to an essentially contemporary situation. Though West Africa and India differ geographically as well as in the cultural assumptions that go into the creation of literary works, they do share some characteristics like that of a lively collective ethos and the experience of colonialism. It has been an interesting phenomenon of the past few decades that the large corpus of fictional works produced in these countries do take positions, speak for their people, defend individual stances and render compelling points of view in a manner not found in other literatures.

The main argument of the thesis, the emergence of powerful individual consciousness and a different mode of thinking in essentially collective social milieus, is developed based on a critical explication of five well known novels, three of them West African and two Indian. They are Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958) and Arrow of God (1964), Gabriel Okara's The Voice (1964),
U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* (1965, tra. 1978), and Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971). The motivation to group these novels together for detailed analysis to examine a particular theme came primarily from their common Third World heritage, each with its own distinct traditional system and values, and the presence of a striking similarity in the interaction between community and individual. It reveals a problem that one has hitherto associated mainly with the Western world—that of individuals faced with the experience of alienation from society, estranged from an inherited social and familial context. All the major characters discussed in this study, despite their integrity and the authenticity of their quest, eventually turn out to be isolated and severed from cherished communal bonds. They all reveal a strong desire to preserve their individuality by zealously guarding their freedom of choice and action. The fact that each of them belongs to a highly codified system in the form of the tribe, the caste or the social hierarchy makes this attempt to redefine their identity all the more poignant.

Chapter I is devoted to an analysis of the theoretical tools which form the basis of this study, and is divided into three parts. Part I refers to the
theoretical contributions made by leading critics of colonialism like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, O. Mannoni, Edward W. Said, etc. They refer to the post-colonial consciousness, construction of the colonized world by the colonizer and the imbalance it created in the different aspects of social life. These theories form a backdrop against which we may investigate processes of change. In the second part of this chapter, a detailed assessment of the sociological theories related to social transition is presented. The contributions of sociologists like David Riesman, Ortin E. Klapp, Cooley and Tonnies have been made use of to trace the characteristics of societies in transition, the process of change from traditional to a more advanced phase, and its impact on society and individual. The third part reviews in general the two distinct modes in which post-colonial social dynamics is portrayed by major African and Indian novelists.

Chapter II offers an analysis of the two novels of Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, focussing on the social glide from purely tribal to one which exhibits increased economic and educational awareness. It results in the gradual disruption of the
traditional structures, and increased individual self-reliance. Okonkwo of Things Fall Apart and Ezeulu of Arrow of God respond differently to the reality of change. Any kind of social change demands that its members go through a struggle, caught between the polarities of the preservation of certain cherished values and the eagerness to follow a different, more challenging path. So no matter what the outcome, the struggle for something is in itself suggestive of a fair measure of success. The capacity to endure the trauma of being different, and to go through its associated uncertainties with dignity, invest these characters with a heroic stature. And to that extent the struggle is worthwhile.

Chapter III attempts a reading of Gabriel Okara's The Voice as 'an extended parable', where the hero of the novel Okolo is portrayed as a prophet figure in the Judeo-Christian tradition. His incessant search for 'it' antagonizes the elders, and they in their turn expel him from their town to be drowned in the river. The obvious message of the novel seems to be that in the conflict between the individual and the community, collectivity wins, and the individual pays with his life for being different.
In Chapter IV the social scenario is shifted to a South Indian Brahmin community with its restricted physical space, very confined social relationships and well-regulated religious codes. This caste-conscious community is suddenly shaken out of its complacency by the death of Naranappa, an unbrahminic Brahmin, and the events that follow. What holds our attention is the inner turmoil of their priest Praneshacharya, and his attempts to redefine his image which entails a rejection of his earlier respectability in a collective religious milieu. The novel also seems to suggest the author's distrust in organized religion and ritualism placing it in sharp contrast against an individual's attempt at self-affirmation.

In Chapter V, the person who experiences the uncertainty and anguish of a wilful rejection of inherited structures is a modern, highly-educated youth. As he decides to leave the so-called civilized society with its pseudo-western values, Billy Biswas declares himself an outsider to society. In response to the primitive force that is at work in him, Billy disappears to the Saal forests of Central India, and is absorbed into the community of the tribals as a demigod. He is hunted down
for daring to step out of the stifling confines of the society, but the tribal world perpetuates the memory of this mangod by building him a shrine.

This makes the circle complete—beginning with a relegation of tribal values, passing through communities which receive socio-cultural advancement with its accompanying problems and profits, encountering political corruption and dishonesty, viewing at close range the stagnation of a traditional community, and finally disgust with the shallowness of the so-called civilized world compelling us to return to the primitive innocence of nature. It is unfortunate that all our major characters experience estrangement, isolation and expulsion in diverse ways, and meet with the disapproval of their respective communities. But we respect the values which guided them and the authenticity of their quest. And it has been a rewarding endeavour to observe these characters, advancing from a state of just 'being' to one of 'becoming'.
"...there is no outer reality, there is only human consciousness, constantly building, modifying, rebuilding new worlds out of its own creativity...."

Gottfried Benn
German Poet