CHAPTER - II
The contribution of African writers, more specifically, the Nigerian writers, to African literature in English has been remarkable. Chinua Achebe, one of the influential writers emerged as the doyen of modern African writing in English with the publication of his first major novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Chinua Achebe was born on 15th November in 1930 at Odigi near Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria, now a part of Bendal State. After his graduation from the University College at Ibadam in 1954, Achebe joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation as Talks Producer. He resented the massacre of Igbos in Northern Nigeria in 1961 and relinquished his position as Director of External Broadcasting in the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, to join the new publishing Venture 'Biafra', with Christopher Okigbo and others in Eastern Nigeria.

In 1971 Achebe published his first volume of poetry *Beware foul Brother and other poems* about the
horrible things he witnessed during and after the Nigerian civil wars (1967-70). He was awarded the Commonwealth poetry prize in 1972 for his second post-war book, *Girls at war and other stories* (1972). Achebe’s *Morning yet on creation Day*, a volume of the cultural and literary essays covering the period 1961-74 appeared in print in 1975. He received the Neil Gunn Fellowship of the Scottish Arts Council in 1977, among the other recipients of which were Heinrich Boll and Saul Bellow, both Nobel Prize Winners. Till recently Achebe was a Professor of English at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, NSUKKA, Nigeria and as the editor of OKIKE, African Journal of New writing.

The first four Igbo quartet novels of Achebe *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which was awarded the Margaret Wong memorial prize, *No longer at Ease* (1960) which won the Nigerian Trophy for literature, *Arrow of God* (1964) which received the Jack Campbell New Statesman award for literature and *A man of People* (1966) - are critiques of colonisation and constitute a chronicle of life in Eastern Nigeria. These four novels of Achebe depict the Negerian situation in different eras - pre-colonial (*Things Fall Apart*), colonial
(Arrow of God), Pre-independence (No longer at Ease) and Post-independence (A man of the People).

Chinua Achebe’s fifth novel Anthills of the Savannah published in 1988 reflects the life in Kangan, an imaginary African State in the Nineteen eightees and attempts to re-establish proper relationship between the ruler and the ruled. When the early Nigerian prose fiction was dominated by Amos Tertuló’s fantastic folklore romances and Cyprian Ekwensi’s stories of city life, Achebe introduced psychological crisis into Nigerian literature. The success of Achebe as a novelist is attributed to his ardent desire to delve deep into African tradition.

Achebe writes about Igbo life from within as an Igbo. He, very objectively, mirrors the strengths and weaknesses of Igbo society in his works. The Igbo world is ‘masculine, coherent and in a curious way classical’. The title of the first novel comes from W.B. Yeats’ poem ‘The Second Coming’ where Yeats discusses the collapse of the two thousand year old tradition of Christian civilisation in Europe. The story in Things Fall Apart takes place an imaginary but typical village Umuofia and Mbanta-of the
lower Nigeria in the period between 1850-1900, just before the arrival of the whiteman. The theme of the novel is the irremediable impact of the West on the native society. Okonkwo as a matchless wrestler, 'a roaring flame' and a flaming fire' and a proud and imperious emissary of war' embodies the traditional values of Igbo society.

The first part of the novel *Things Fall Apart* depicts 'the ceremony of innocence' in Umuofia before the coming of the whiteman. But, Achebe does not sentimentally idealize the traditional society. Umuofia with all its barbarism is stable dignified and governed by a set of traditions. In the second part the scene shifts to Mbanta when Okonkwo is exiled for seven years by the tribal law for accidentally killing a village boy in a second burial ceremony with his loaded gun. And the whiteman arrives in the neighbouring villages with his new faith, education and governing and trading systems. The third section deals with the collapse of native tradition and faith as observed by Okonkwo on his return to Umuofia from exile. His attempts to drive the whiteman from his land prove futile because of denial of unsupport by his olan which he realises when he kills the whiteman's messenger.
Achebe's second novel *No Longer at Ease* has its title from Eliot's poem "The Journey of the Magi". The setting is modern Nigeria, a pre-independence situation showing how things have fallen apart in a new society. The protagonist Obi Okonkwo is the grand son of Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, a young graduate from England, full of idealism and appointed as Scholarship Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Education. In the beginning he resists all temptations but subsequently gives himself to the external trappings of European culture and living and thus faces his sticky end. Achebe introduces another related strand of the story i.e., love affair of Obi and Clara an osu whom he could not marry.

The novel deals with obi's, professional, social and moral decline. The central character is cast in ambiguous terms and is concerned with a Jamesian "Central Consciousness" around whom all events revolve. As there are a number of loose threads in the story, the hero's predicament not gradually and convincingly revealed and the portrait being vague, the reader only sympathises with Obi for having fallen a victim to the external trappings of alien culture'. Obi observes that
"in Nigeria the government was 'they' and also finds that "ours in ours and nine is mine" in his society."¹

He is forced to resort to this kind of dualism which was such a pervasive feature of Igbo life. In the words of his friend Joseph "his mission house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his society".

**Arrow of God** (1964) has a richer and more ample evocation of the Igbo society under the colonial administration. The novel is set in the period between **Things Fall Apart** and **No longer at Ease**, thus taking back to the period of colonization. But, the chief character is Ezeulu, the chief priest of Umuaro is unlike Okonkwo of the first novel in temperament, behaviour and attitude towards the colonists and their administration.

The tension in the novel springs from Ezeulu's defence of his diety Ulu and himself against European culture and religion. Nwaka, a wealthy chief and principal
supporter of Ezidemili, another chief priest of God Idemili, a deity displaced by Ulu, is set in opposition to Ezeulu. The relationship Ezeulu has with captain Winterbottom, the head of the colonial administration, is also responsible for the division in the tribe. The rivalry manifests itself in a land dispute with a rival village, and Ezeulu who does not understand his sacred duties overreaches in his personal ambition that eventually brings his disaster. Very ironically, the chief priest who considers himself as an arrow in the bow of god, falls a victim to the wrath of his own deity. When he falls, he brings his people and god down along with him. His friends has understood him well:

"------ A priest like Ezeulu leads a god to ruin himself. It has happened before. ------ or perhaps a god like Ulu leads a priest to ruin himself."²

Achebe’s first three novels form one continuous stream accounting to a trilology and they are unified by a common purpose to present the Igbo life under the colonial rule over a long stretch of time. On the otherhand, his fourth novel A Man of the People (1966) clearly presents the situation and life in post-independent Nigeria. The novel is
called prophetic novel of the Coup d'etat in 1966 in Nigeria when a civilian Government was overthrown by a military Junta. In the novel, Achebe, by exposing the modern Nigeria society, appears to attack the crippling and corrupting powers of privilege, position and money.

The man of the people is chief Nanga and the hero is Odili, the narrator. The novel is about the legacy of the whiteman, and it documents the acquisitiveness and avarice of the people and the rampant corruption in Nigeria. The novel is a brilliant satire where the interest lies not so much in chief Nanga's corrupt practices but the process whereby the supposedly idealized Odili gradually succumbs to the temptations of political success who starts to resemble the attitude at least chief Nanga himself.

In the beginning Odili has contempt for Nanga's political prominence but later he himself falls a prey to it. His proximity to Nanga and his high office that corrupts his ideals and his soul. The extravagant life at the court lures him away from the path of virtue; apparent moral and monetary corruption and exploitation of masses by
the politicians in power leads to the overthrow of civilian government by the Military Junta.

Nanga is a fraud, not only in political and commercial terms but also culturally. When Odilic receives severe blows from Nanga's supporters we are encouraged to see this climax from the two extreme points of view represented there. Odili himself with no moral conduct, is at pains to clarify that the people had nothing to do with the coup which swept away the Government.

"No, the people had nothing to do with the fall of our government. What happened was simply that unruly mobs and private armies having tasted blood and power during election had got out of hand and received their masters and employers. And they had no public reason whatever for doing it. Let us make no mistake about it."  

Achebe, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, is unfolding developments of Nigerian history through autobiographical
accounts, poems, traditional myths and legends, folklores and lectures to document the specific social predicament in kangan, a fictional military state in African closely resembling modern Nigeria. As in other novels, *Anthills of Savannah*'s political theme is rooted in post colonial compulsions. Addressing itself to socially relevant problems in Nigeria, the novel appears to aim at the social change instituted within the Nigerian "Coreality". An old man from Abazon, who is the story teller, at one level takes the reader into the contemporary world of African power politics and also to experience that world, both as victim and victimiser, narrating about the major characters especially - sam, Chris, Ikem and Beatrice. The novel, in some parts of it, emphasises the significance of not writing but of story telling. Even the old man is arrested and held in solitary confinement in Bassa Maximum Security Prison (BMSP) for speaking out against military dictators.

*Ikem Osodi narrates to Bassa University students the same traditional story of tortoise and the leopard to tell of the risk involved of story teller in challenging the power groups-political, religious and academic.*
"Storey tellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit-in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever -----

Ikem Osodi too like the old man is arrested and is killed in a fake encounter with the security men. The novel tells, using traditional oratory skills, the story of Nigeria, its tyrannical political history, and of its women in need of freedom and dignity.

In Anthills of Savannah the controlling motive is struggle against authoritarian regions while the selfishness of the educated elite and its compliance with those in power is the ancillary theme. Achebe clearly believes that nation-state might be artificial, it is essential. Anthills of Savannah is an attempt to resolve the potentially disastrous discrepancy between state and nation. It is Achebe's discrepancy between state and nation. It is Achebe's response to the challenge he described in an interview in 1975.
"If you create out of a number of what you call tribes another unit which might call state or nation, then what you should do is to think about what you should put into it so that all these people that you have drawn into the new unit will have a state in it."5.

Girls at War and other Stories (1972) in the words of Achebe 'a pretty lean harvest' is a collection of thirteen stories written over a period of twenty years ranging from his early ingenuous student pieces of the civil war. The collection is a bitter vignette of Biafran disillusionment in the civil war and is considered a post-script to the quartet about the social and moral retrogression. Achebe has slightly modelled two of his stories - 'The sacrificial Egg' (1959) and 'Uncle Benn's Choice' (1966) - on Oritsha and set them in Umuru and has explored the 'Zone of Occult instability' and embodied the natural and supernatural within one reality. The purpose of the other stories, which deal with politics and the civil war and its repurcussion, is partly satirical.
'The Voter' (1965) presents the world of A man of the people and shows the foul means adopted by the corrupt politicians to remain in power. The two longest stories 'Vengeful creditor' (1971) and 'Girls at War' 1972 analyse the document. The corruption of both private and public morality. 'Civil Peace' (1971) records the after effects of the civil war and constitutes delightful and touching comment on human resilience. Achebe, like most of the Post-colonial writers resrepresenting first generation believed in the functionality of short story in re-educating and transforming the society to look to their past as to make progress into future. He observed:

"So important have -- stories been to mankind that they are not restricted to accounts of initial creation but will be found following human socieities as they recreate themselves through vicissitudes of their history, validating their social organisations their political systems, their moral attitudes and religious beliefs, even their prejudices"6
Achebe's short stories logically bear a closer relationship to the oral tradition. Oral literature distinguishes between the 'Primary orality' of a culture "totally untouched by an knowledge of writing or print" and the "secondary orality" of "present day high-technology culture". His shot stories highlight his superb presentation of devices of Igbo and narrative tradition.

Achebe's skills in telling a story ably and in the process of making subtly, and often overtly, all the points that a sensitive Nigerian post-colonial would wish to have been praised by all. Achebe's short stories thrust to relocate themselves in the orality/literary porality and in the genre criticisim of the short story and thus by extension, to critique a significant body of neglected post-colonial writing. J. de. Grandsaigne opines that Achebe's short story must be seen in a wider perspective as reflecting modern life.

Beware, Soul Brother and other poems (1971) speak about the horrible things of the civil war and its aftermath. The collection is a moving account of the poet's traumatic experience of the war period and poet's
consciouness of his role. The poems included in this volume possess an overall unity achieved by the relationship. Each of its poems bears to an examination of the speculation on the nature of individual human and extra-human existence. The poems are divided into five sections. The first four poems of the prologue portend the emergence of formidable forces and suggest their final resolution. In the next, about war is a mixture of hope and despair. The fourth section 'Gods, men and others' closely examines the Igbo trinity gods, ancestors and men. And the epilogue provides a dismal close to the recollection trying to define the role of the poet in a hostile world. Some of the interesting poems of this volume are: 'Mango seedling', Christamas in Biofra 1969', 'Rememberace Day', 'Love story', 'Those Gods are children', 'Their Idiot. song', 'Dereliction' and 'We loughed at him'.

In *Beware, Soul Brother*, he gives his ancestors a final rite de passage in solemn pace of dance which itself is called abia (dance) and is danced by dead man’s peers while he lies in state and finally by two men bearing, his coffin before it is taken for burial. 'Misunderstanding'
exposes the Igbo peoples firm belief in the duality of things:

"Nothing is by itself, nothing is absolute. I am the way the truth and life would be meaningless in Igbo theology."7.

Man may worship one God for perfection and yet fall foul of another. Igbo proverbs bring out this duality of existence very well.

'Their idiot song' explains that the christian kind of victory over death is to the unconnected villager, one of the really puzzling things about faith. The poem 'Dereliction' is in three short movements. The first is the enquiry (agugu), the second is mediating diviner (dibia) who frames the enquiry in general terms and the third is oracle. We all choose our gifts, our character, our fate from the creator just before we make our journey to the world. The sacred python did not choose the terrors of the fang and yet received a presence more empowering than their.
'We laughed at him' refers to the story of tortoise and the miraculous food drum offered him in spirit land in return for his palm nut. After long use the drum ceases to produce any more feasts when it is beaten. Whereupon tortoise blatantly contrives a re-enactment of his first visit to spirit land. But the spirits take him to a long row of hanging drums and allow him to pick one for himself. The element of choice is a recurrent theme in Igbo thought especially in man's dealings with spirit world. We are not forced: we make free choice.

_Morning yet on creation Day_ (1975) is Achebe's volume of cultural and literary essays. In the essay where 'Angels Fear to Tread' of the book, Achebe suggests that the western critic of African literature must be purged of superiority and prejudice and cultivate humility to apprehend the African sensibility in the right perspective. His essay 'Hopes and Impediments' reiterates his stand on social function of a writer. His other essays 'The Novelist as a Teacher,' 'The writer and his community', 'What has literature got to do with it?' proclaim the writer's functions of providing guidance and becoming a responsible leader in his society.
In his essay 'The Novelist as a Teacher' which follows 'What do African intellectuals Read?' in 'Morning yet on creation Day' Achebe states that a pupil at school wrote about winter instead harmattan for fear that his class-mates would call him a bushman if he would write about harmattan. And also Achebe contended that early christian Africans preferred to perform the Muypole dance instead of their own Nigerian dances on festival days. But Achebe argued that:

'Needless to say, we have done our own sins and blasphenues recorded against our name. If I were god, I would regard as the very worst our acceptance of racial inferiority'.

He encouraged people to take pride in what is African and in their colour. Achebe’s essay 'Chi in Igbo cosmology' relates the tale of the arrogant wrestler who challenged his thin and weakly looking 'Chi' (Personal Spirit) and was brutally killed.
REFERENCES: