CHAPTER - III
NEO-COLONIALISM

African novels of self-knowledge and propaganda explore the quality of contemporary African mind confronting outside forces and endeavour to project the distinct African personality. Achebe, as an insider and critic of his society participates in its future renovation via the past. As is the exposure to the west with its consequences dominant theme in African fiction, the novels of Achebe too, being situational novels deal with colonial, pre and post-independent situations and also with the legacy of the whiteman and the effects of colonialism on African psyche and traditional life. Colonialism is a baneful attack on African 'things' and living and value system resulting in years of denigration and self-denigration leading to serious cultural crisis and loss of individual identity. Achebe is highly emotional about this colonial confrontation and the Africa writers too are awareness of it.

"Without subscribing to the view that Africa gained nothing at all in her long encounter with Europe, one could still say, in all fairness, that she suffered
many terrible and lasting misfortunes. In terms of human dignity and human relations, the encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It has warped the mental attitudes of both black and white. In giving expression to the plight of their people, black writers have shown again and again how strongly the traumatic experience can possess the sensibility.\textsuperscript{1}

Achebe infused confidence in Africans and African writers to feel proud of their colour and rich cultural heritage as to counter complexes of years of debasement. Ama Ata Aidoo is one among several to be inspired by Achebe:

"Because of the colonial experience we still unfortunately are very much lacking in confidence in ourselves and what belongs to us --------- until quite recently we thought that a book was writtern by a whiteman."\textsuperscript{2}
Achebe inspired the writers to become conscious of their responsible and constructive role in re-educating and re-generating the society and in inserting the African into the main stream of life. Achebe emphasised that one of the "worst consequences of colonization is that one is utterly alienated from his community." 3

The imperial rule brought with it new faith, new education, and new economic, socio-political institutions and administrative systems and heirarchy and also opening up territories of knowledge to the so called 'primitive' Africa. And the British succeeded in replacing the old with the new and in his endeavour to civilize the people through christian missionaries. In Arrow of God Ezeulu, the chief priest of Umuaro sends his son to European school to learn new education and the secrets of whiteman's power and wisdom. No Longer at Ease dramatizes the intricacies of European individualism and African tribalism.

Achebe knew the importance of English as a medium of expression to address primarily his native audience and also to enlighten the readers outside Africa. In "The African writer and the English Language" Achebe writers of
the limited role of English:

"If it failed to give them a song it
almost gave them a tongue for
singing".4

But some Africa writers like James Ngugi, a
powerful and influential Kenyan writer have opposed the use
of English as medium of expression. They contended that it
was but 'Linguistic imperialism'. But Achebe argued that
the English language gave them merely an opportunity to
converse with other African speaking different African
languages and dialects and also to enlighten the outsiders
about their culture and 'things' African. Frantz Fanon
observed.

"To speak a language is to take on a
world, a culture (Black skins, white
skins) and refuse to speak a language is
to deny (and thereby denigrate) the
culture that language points to".5

Virtually Achebe's novels can be understood, at
least in part, "as analyses and products of the historical
problems created by colonisation," Things Fall Apart set in
the later part of the nineteenth century, deals with the situation in Nigeria just before and after the arrival of the whiteman. Colonization has initiated the process of cultural disintegration in a hitherto self contained traditional Igbo society. The 'things' have irreparably fallen apart as the white-man has "put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." The arrival of European is but a historic accident and there is mixed response to the colonial rule. While people like Okonkwo remained inflexible and violent to the whiteman's administration and to the alien forces beyond his control, others welcomed the change and accommodated the new value system.

Though *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are highly anthropological dealing with colonization and traditional change in Igbo society Achebe has subordinated the anthropological details to the human condition. For, his primary concerns are loss of cultural identity of African and his group identity because of 'cultural imperialism. *No Longer at Ease* depicts similar but with greater intensity in the Igbo society when the whiteman has fully entrenched himself with his new administration. Obi
Okonkwo is born in a highly traditional and spirited Igbo family, has his education in England, and has occupied a high position as Secretary of scholarships in the Ministry of Education. He too gives himself to the external trappings of European civilization. Unable to maintain high standard of living, he accepts bribes, is caught redhanded, convicted and sentenced to prison at the end. The novel records the professional, social and moral decline of obi in Lagos, a city of heady atmosphere, high life, aspirations and corruption.

Obi is presented as a product of hybrid culture with divided consciousness trying to be loyal to his family, especially to his mother even sacrificing his love for Clara, an osu, and unable to resist his temptations of modern life. He is forced to resort to a kind of dualism as a member of his community in Umuofia and as a civil servant in the white administration, which he fails to maintain for long. In the words of his friend Joseph "his mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his own community". He tries to live his own life uncontrolled by outdated tribal practices. He proposes to marry Clara, an osu but fails to get the consent of his
parents even. Nor could he be a successful officer with honesty and integrity. Through him, the grand son of Okonkwo, the novel has become a parable of modern Nigeria, a commentary on apparently universal corruption and on the colonial judgement of the new African generation. Obi's attitude to his fellow men is in no way different from that of colonists. He exploited his position and abused his power for material benefits representing the trend of 'neo-colonialism' adopted by the Africans themselves in the contemporary Nigerian society.

Achebe expects the reader to consider the novel as a reflection of Mr. Green's remarks, "the African is corrupt through and through" presenting the doubleness of the colonial situation in Nigeria in the novel. Achebe makes Obi as a symbol of new Nigeria anticipating the placid morality that would bring the nation to crisis in the 1960s. Achebe's prime interest in rendering the story of Obi is more a tortured psychology of alienation and he places Obi's passive, confused consciousness in the foreground of the narrative. Abiola Irele thinks that Obi is "Simply not the stuff of which a tragic character is made ......... a pathetic figure without a grain of nobility. Unlike his
grand father he is a passive sufferer of his fate and condition he inspires is not pity but antipathy". But from Obi's point of view, perhaps, the most fundamental betrayal exists in the way his tertiary education and experiences in England precipitate him into confusion after he returns to Nigeria.

Achebe’s *A Man of the People* is more a political novel depicting post-independence situation in modern Nigeria with new power structure of administration with a democratically elected government. It is a political satire where corrupt politicians corrupt their electorate to remain in power. Politicians have become power crazy and are anxious to devour their share of the 'national cake'. It is neo-colonialism, a legacy of whiteman where African poor is exploited by Africans themselves even after Nigeria became a sovereign country.

Neo-colonialism is reflected in the continued economic exploitation of Africa and Africa’s resources even after independence by the insiders under the influence of the west in a changed system of administration and economic structure. Chief Honourable Nanga, a complex character in *A Man of the People* who is with impressiva and frightening,
represents new ruling class in independent Nigeria. It is ironic that Nanga who has very little formal education, just standard six, becomes Minister of culture and Peter Odili's boy who too has completed standard six, is lucky just to find a job as a domestic servant. As a youth, Nanga's motto is 'not what I have but what I do is my kingdom'. In his early life he has recognised the need to work to achieve what he wanted and consequently has worked up to become even Minister of culture with his strong ambition and drive.

Achebe has depicted throughout the novel the politics in modern Nigeria in an ironical perspective. Nanga respects his orders and his old tradition. He insists that his wife take their children to their home village Ananta, at least once a year only to remind the children of their heritage. But Nanga has been portrayed as unimpressive, because of his unscrupulous nature. His rise to power is also unimpressive. As with other politicians of the day, he too climbed to power ruthlessly. To come to power and win the election, he tries to bribe Odili and when it fails he even goes to the extent of eliminating Max and causing injustice to Odili in a brutal attack on them. Eustace palmer argues of Achebe's characterisation of chief Nanga with ambivalence:
"The chief who was supposed to be the embodiment of corruption and ministerial incompetence, as actually a very charming and captivating man".7

He has further argued that Nanga's fate at the end of the novel is unsatisfactory:

"If Chief Nanga deserved to end on the rubbish heap, Odili did not deserve much better".8

But the purpose of the novel is different. Achebe takes every care to present A Man of the people as vivid political satire, exuberant in tone, but scathing in intent. It is a novel of corrupt politics bordering on the abuse of power, privilege, portion and money. Hence Nanga is a man who could remain in power unafraid of his people, afraid only of corruption his tool, turning against him and destroying him ultimately.

"Chief Nanga was a born politician, he could get away with almost anything he said or did ------- that was not a drop of ill will in his entire frame."9
A Man of the People has Odili Samalu, a sensitive, perceptive man representing the elite as a counterfoil to Nanga. He is unheroic, an anti-hero, with his peculiar designs and aspirations to contest the tendency of growing neo-colonialism in modern Nigeria. He is Achebe’s outraged narrator of the story in the novel, sometimes as the mouthpiece of Achebe when he hurls unqualified abuse at the cynical masses. Telling the story his way, Achebe is ironical is exposing the flaws of Odili. While Nanga uses bribery and other corrupt means to gain power, Odili appears to stand on his own merit, though suffers in the end ‘unlucky child’ as villagers called him when he was a child. Odili as a man of principles remains committed to his cause and we admire his integrity when he teases and humiliates chief Nanga when Nanga tries to brief him to withdraw from contest in election. Though Odili has some personal animosity towards Nanga because Nanga has taken away Elsie, his lover, the major motivation is his idealism and his desire to venture to unseat Nanga in the election, springs from his desire to cleanse the wretched politics of his time and the Government give a better rule, whatever be the circumstances. Odili, in the novel, is a vociferous critic of the expresses of the politicians in their
exploitation of the masses, their indulgences at the expense of the common man, and this spirit of neo-colonialism he vehemently criticizes. But the wretched corruption rampant in the society does not spare even the educated Nigerian youth like Odili. It takes him into its fold, detracting him from his usual idealism. In the novel Odili stands for more than a single character. Donald Weinstock is right in his observation that

"If odili's story indicates anything, it would seem to be that the amalgamation of British and Nigerian modes of life has effected no more than the description of the best in both countries ----------- and what is doubly disturbing the Africans, by partaking of the European experience have put on all of the contemporary spiritual problems of western man as well".10

Achebe's chief concern in the novel A Man of the People is the infectious nature of corruption in Nigeria - in politics, in the army, in civilian life, in rural as well as urban environments. There is a general breakdown of morality, and an over-indulgence in greed, delusion and
superficiality having tasted the fruits of so called European civilization and 'order' of life. Achebe cynical about his new Nigerian society, does not seem to favour any of the characters he has portrayed in the novel and not even the narrator Odili Samalu, the elite full of vigour and emotion and idealism, 'whose hypocrisy is also exposed to the disliking of the readers and African masses.

The novel presents a conflict between different values represented mainly by the two central characters through their dramatic relationship. The two characters personalise social contradictions taking divergent stand, one totally succumbing to corruption willingly, the other trying to resist the temptation. The novel even presents the impact of 'cultural imperialism' affecting the style of living and in the use of pidgin by Mrs. Nanga and Nanga himself with a feeling of cultural superiority over the villagers of Ananta village. They are half traditional and half modern in their thinking and outlook of life.

Achebe's novel Anthills of the Savannah published in 1987 is his most explicit comment on the place and function of literature in the modern Nigerian context,
represented by Kangan, a fictional military state in Africa. The novel like most post-colonial novels, aims at social change instituted within the Nigerian "Core of reality". As an optimistic work, though the three major characters, (Sam, Chris, Iken) face their sticky end, lose their lives, the novel presents the surviving characters trying to transcend the present restrictions by imagining and attempting to create a better future of modern Nigeria. Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah* tries to fictionalize the condition of the activist artist in Nigeria under a repressive regime. The novel presents the role of contemporary writer in challenging his own leader in power.

In *Anthills* the controlling motif is struggle against authoritarian regimes, the selfishness of the educated elite and its compliance with those in power is its ancillary theme. Sam, the young army commander, with virtually no experience of political leadership, becomes head of the state, and subsequently the dictator, Chris, the Minister of Information, Iken, the editor of the National Gazette, and Beatrice, the Secretary in the Ministry of Finance are London University products who are equally indicted. The so called intellectuals and 'Pride of the
society' brought in his or her own way, very well placed, are completely alienated from the people and insular in their privillages. With the exception of Ikem (to some extent), they love and succumb to the trappings of power and become weak bourgeois in their mentality (though they change in the end out of experience). His excellency Sam, at the begining of the novel is seen chairing a cabinet meeting, transacting like dictator bullying eleven inteligent men (including 'Chris who willingly play the button and face his villanity. The terrible insecurity is felt by the authoritarian leaders when they hear chants of the peaceful six member delegation from Abazon, mistaken for the storm of revolution of 'multitudes'. And the alienation of the rulers from the ruled is suggested emphatically by Achebe in the use of the phrases "alien climate of the colonial chamber" and "violent wave of heat" that contrasts the conditions of drought in the country with the luxury of air-conditioner inside the council chamber. Ikem is no different though he has expressed his concern for the poor. Though he is called a brilliant son of Abazon, by the old man, he has never visited his village for several years. But in course of time, he realises his own self, his commitment and potential in changing the society. His attitude towards
Elewa, a traditional girl, is changed leading to their union which symbolizes the total and true fusion of the intellectual with the earth and earth's people. Their postumously born child is called Amaechina, means "May-the-path-never-close", suggesting the utopian vision of oneness between Nigeria's elite and her people. Chris, as a member of the cabinet too is possibly alienated from the people as any other member, a neo-colonialistic attitude. But a change comes into his life when he is in the company of Emmanuel, the student - leader and Braimoh, the taxi driver who saves him from the police Chris realizer in his journey to Abazon that there are bright and talented people among the lower classes capable of running the country. He, as products of neo-colonialism in modern Nigerian Society, calls Sam, Iken and himself the "three green bottle that hang precariously than the wall looking down purposefully upon the world unaware of that they can fall down any time.

In the novel pidgin has become the legitimate language of the common people while standard English represents the language of the elite of Nigeria. Anthills is used by some critics as power (of rulers, men) versus powerlessness (of the people, women). Achebe is critical of
westernization (a form of colonization) also in this novel and seems to believe that if a society is to be changed, it must not be disturbed at its core because that would invite disaster and that a society must therefore only be re-formed "around what it is, its core of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction". He seems to have been critical of alienation from indigenous traditions and acculturation of the Whitemans' ways by the so called elite youth in modern Nigeria. Achebe who believes in "Society is but an extension of the individual", blames the individual for creating a new social and political order disrupting harmony and happiness because of inept and failure of leadership. Sam his excellency's Kow-towing to American Journalist, is just a personal weakness, almost a foible, an outcome of his early education and training and his extended stay in western countries. Achebe seems to state that "if the nation had a new leader who more deeply rooted in Nigerian culture- Mallam Aminu Kano, for instance, all these problems would not arise". Acebe's politics of vision is idealistic and utopian, authentically African in warmth and humanity.

Ikem's refusal to be silent after his suspension as editor is an effective political strategy. Similarly,
Christopher's reaction after Ikem's death at the hands of the state security forces is to immediately publicise the true account that has been distorted by the state version. This indicates that the authenticity of the peoples story is a threat to the power structure which places itself above the people and the act of telling a story is a sign of resistance, a determined attempt to counter official myths of stability and justice. This alienation between the people and leaders traps both in an endless circle of violence and repression.

*Anthills of the Savannah* is a novel about power versus powerlessness and is a move from corrupt, inefficient neocolonial multi-party system to a rigid, authoritarian military state. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has been under almost unbroken military rule. In the January 1966 coup the armed forces had taken control in Nigeria ostensibly to control ethnic tensions and 'elash conflicts. The coup attempt in Nigeria in April 1990 shows that religious tensions and clashes between the centre and the periphery have hardly been resolved.

*Anthills of the Savannah* is a fictional version of Achebe's concerns in the *Trouble with Nigeria*. Nigeria's
leaders have placed their own interest before those of the Nation. Achebe’s commitment to the powerless groups reveals his dissatisfaction with the ineffective Nigerian middle class and his opposition to the military leadership. The circle of communication between the leaders and the led is closed in the tribal society that predated colonization.

African nationalism means not the process of nation formation in African states, but the assertion of a black African identity as a means of resisting imperialist European notions of the Universal. Achebe’s conflation of race, nation-state and ethnic grouping has validity and a grain of hope for the future of Africa is held out by *Anthills* and it is based on the redemption of an African nation-State.13

Achebe’s writings call for the continuation of struggle as new forms of oppression arise after each revolutionary movement. The trouble with Nigeria is quite bluntly the indiscipline of its leaders, a national condition of lawlessness and rampant selfishness. The malaise is social, but its root cause and primary cure are to be found not in society at large, but in the nation’s
leadership. African's national leaders have become nation's curse, but they might also be its salvation. Note worthy in this diagnosis is Achebe's focus on character and role models in favour of class or neo-colonial factors.
REFERENCES


8. Ibid., p. 84.


