CHAPTER II
T.M. ALUKO AND HIS WORKS

Timothy Mofolorunso Aluko of older generation of Nigerian writers was born at Ilesha, a Yoruba Town in 1918 and educated at schools in Western Nigeria. He received professional training in Civil Engineering and town planning at Yaba Higher College in Lagos and at the University of London. He returned to Nigeria in 1950, and was appointed as an Engineer in the Public Works Department. In 1956, he was appointed Town Engineer to the Lagos council and subsequently in 1960, he became Director of Public Works for Western Nigeria. Again he joined college to obtain M.Sc., Degree in Public Health Engineering from the University of New Castle on Tyne in 1969 and the degree of Doctor of philosophy in the same subject from the University of Lagos in 1976. He retired as an Associate Professor at the University of Lagos in 1979. As has been acknowledged by Aluko himself, he was first encouraged to write fiction by F.W. Williams, one of the first representatives of the British council in Nigeria. He had won several prizes in short story writing competitions organised by the British Council in Nigeria in 1944 and in 1945, while studying at school had made writing his hobby during his student days in Britain (1946-1950). Beginning from late 1940's till early 1950's he wrote a number of short stories and published articles also in the Western African Review and some were broadcast by the BBC African service. Though Aluko started writing even before Cyprian Ekwensi, Ekwensi over took him as a reputed writer producing Onitsha pamphlets. Aluko's first novel One Man, One Wife supposed to have been written years ago, appeared in print only in 1959.
after the publication of Ekwensi's first novel *People of the City* in 1954. Unlike most other Nigerian novels published first in London, this novel of Aluko appeared in print first in Lagos which is an indication that it was not acceptable to the British publishers.

T.M. Aluko's first novel *One Man, One Wife*, published in 1959, which brought fame to him as a reputed novelist, was followed by his other five novels viz. *One Man, One Matchet* (1964); *Kinsman and Foreman* (1966); *Chief, the Honourable Minister* (1970); *His Worshipful Majesty* (1973) and *Wrong Ones in the Dock* (1982). *One Man, One Wife* is Aluko's brilliant satire presenting its themes of cultural conflict and impact of westernization, in comic mode. While Christianity has stipulated monogamy, the traditional society encourages polygamy. The society rejects the Christian concept of One man, One wife imposed on them by the Christian missionary. The villagers disillusioned by the new faith, return to worshipping their native gods.

On a Sunday evening, Elder Joshua, a member of the Isolo Church and Bible Jeremiah, head of the church congregation, accompany David, the village pastor to the village square where the village Christians have gathered to hear the open air service, a campaign against the age old tribal practice of worshipping idols, streams, rivers, rocks and trees. Royasin, popularly known as a teacher, village school master, a Catechist, a public relation officer is the pride of Isolo. He alone in the entire village
could write letters and interpret telegrams, and entrusted with the task of evangelization of tribals. Even though the church has succeeded in converting some villagers to Christianity it has faced severe setbacks in certain parts of the village. Having failed in his mission, Pastor David advises Teacher Royasin to adopt all means to dissuade the tribals from worshipping trees, rivers and rocks and to encourage them to embrace the new religion which brings salvation to the mankind.

Elder Joshua, a new convert and member of the church one day visits the church along with his wife Rebecca to learn more about Christianity. He is told that to attain perfection one should practice monogamy, a chief tenet of the new faith. He was very much distressed at this news for he planned to marry Toro, the beautiful daughter of Ma Sheyi and grand daughter of Gbemi. To save himself from embarrassment and to save money, he planned to marry Toro off to his grown up son Jacob, who had set up his business establishment at Ilorin. But Jacob rejects the idea of his father, saying that she is not a grown up girl and prefers to marry Joke, a daughter of his friend. The news about the strange woman staying in the house of Joshua spreads like fire and people think that Joshua has married a second wife, against the doctrine of the church. Later, contrary to the expectation of his villagers, Joshua performs the marriage of Jacob and Joke with great enthusiasm. But the marriage proves itself unsuccessful as Joke's pregnancy is declared within four days of her marriage.
The interesting beginning of the novel falls into chaos and confusion. Joke and Joshua die and the focus of the story shifts to Royanson, an expelled member of the church, known as Teacher Royasin and now called as a 'Public letter Writer and Notary, Friend of the Illiterate and Advocate of the oppressed'. Since he is one of the few educated men in the village, Royanson earns money for his comfortable living, writing letters in English for the illiterate tribesmen and representing their legal and personal grievances to European government officials.

With the arrival of the Whiteman with his new religion, the villagers find the peace disturbed in the village with the introduction of several social and religious institutions. And God Shango and Shonponna become active again registering their protests. The disappearance of Toro from Isolo also has created a flutter in the small village. Some unexpected events took place in quick succession and the teacher Royanson goes mad for sometime unable to bear the insult of Bada, the chief priest of Shonponna. Bada, the chief priest of Shonponna also dies of small pox; chief Asolo of Isolo also commits suicide in the end when he is about to be arrested by the constables of the Oba of Idasa. The last part of the novel describes mass conversion of people to the new faith. Toro also arrives with her husband Sergeant Lawal, the young police officer who has arranged to pay the bride-price back to Jacob. Jacob himself a changed person feels happy to see a new race emerging welcoming new faith in the place of old and accommodating new values of life under the influence of the West.
He finds a new generation of children learning new education, Bernth Lindfors, an American critic has observed that,

"the last twenty five pages describe a small pox epidemic, a court case, a suicide and a sudden religious conversion, all rather clumsily contrived episodes in a wildly meandering plot'.

James Ngugi has observed that the novel deals with:

"clash between christianity - this one man, one wife religion and local polygamous culture. This collusion of values which took place all over Africa has been the subject of many African novels, the best being Achebe's Things Fall Apart."

According to Eustace Taiwo Palmer,

"Aluko's first novel One Man, One Wife is easily his worst. One of the muddled novels to have come out of Africa, it compounds all his obvious weaknesses...........".
Aluko's novel *One Man, One Matchet* is about Yorubaland - the western region of Nigeria, where coca-trees and cocoa beans are the only major crops grown, the premier industry chiefly contributing to the national income. Gregory, a young Agricultural officer, newly arrived from England, advises people to cut down every diseased cocoa tree before it would infect others. But chief Joseph Ajayi, farmers representatives, village heads and others are shocked to hear such an advice from an agriculturist, which they think is a threat not only to their prosperity but also to the economy of the nation. As they have sweated to grow cocoa trees from out of seedings, they are reluctant even to cut down the infected cocoa trees with their own hands. This becomes the issue of the entire village and the people are divided, some complying with the decision of the government officials and other rejecting the advice to protect their 'tree of wealth'. Chief Momo who opposed the decision questions the very propriety and wisdom of the authorities: Swayed by his sceptical and rhetorical questions, people reject the government proposals to cut down their own cocoa trees. Even politicians, European expatriates, village farmers and a new African District Officer interfere trying to resolve this crisis of economic concern, with slogans 'one man, one matchet'; 'one woman, one stick'; 'one child, one stone' - to echo the nationalist slogan: 'one man, one vote'. The new African District Officer, Udo Akpan, who supports the decision of the Agricultural Officer, intervenes and tackles the problem in an essentially African way, like any white expatriate, for which he is branded as 'black white man' by his opponents. He representing African elite, becomes
instrumental in spreading colonialism. Many incidents in the novel focus the activities of the rabble-rousing, ill-educated politician and journalist who creates trouble for Udo Akpan, a newly appointed African District Officer instigating people to refuse to pay taxes and to oppose the government decision to cut down the diseased cocoa trees in the district.

Also the journalist exploits the gullible illiterate masses and collects huge sums towards legal expenses for cases pending in the court of law and for the benefit of the district. Aluko has exposed the hypocrisy of people like the journalist who use rhetorical speeches to instigate people and use public platforms and public issues for personal gains and to remain close to power. Though Benjamin succeeds in thwarting some plans of the government and in making money, his leadership faces a crisis leading to bloodshed and rioting and himself gets killed by one of his own followers. Thus Benjamin plunges the whole village into a precarious situation full of violence, repression and death before calm is restored.

Udo Akpan, the African District Officer and the protagonist, checks the activities and the damage caused by the evil designs of the politician. But the villagers distrust this young man with 'new' ideas for occupying white man's position and for not accepting bribes to do undue favour. On the otherhand he is called The 'black white man' always supporting the colonial government not his own people. Udo Akpan alienates himself in his village and fails to establish rapport with the villagers.
And also he has to confront throughout the corrupt, semi-westernised African politician who wins confidence of the villagers and exploits them for his selfish ends. Akpan's efforts to create a working relationship with the tribe are also sporadically frustrated by the inefficient bureaucratic system in Nigeria. He is compelled to administer in the interest of the government, sometimes even sacrificing traditional interests. The novel does not establish the triumph of Akpan over people like Benjamin Benjamin, who have damaged the progress of the nation.

T.M. Aluko's third novel *Kinsman and Foreman* published in 1966 also depicts a colonial situation. This novel deals with another familiar theme in West African fiction - the return of the 'been-to' (native). Titus Oti returns from London as the first professionally qualified Nigerian Civil Engineer to join the Public Works Department as District Engineer of Ibala, his home town. He is greeted on his return by a chorus of wailing women. When Titus Oti had been to England to study Engineering he lost his father. It is the custom of the town that whenever a member of the family returns from a distant place, the clan gathers around to mourn the death of the dear ones, their kinsman. Pa Joel is the great uncle of Oti who is also the guardian and mentor of Titus Oti. He asks Titus Oti to follow the advice of his kinsman, Simeon who is a foreman in P.W.D. and reputed man in the society of Ibala. He also requests Simeon to provide guidance to Titus in his work as he is a fresh graduate from the University.
Titus Oti is not happy with his postings to Ibala, his home town, as his relatives take undue advantage of his position and the local church expects generous financial contributions from him. And as the chief who inaugurates the Bazaar Sales, he has to contribute generously both for the Harvest and the Bazaar festivals. He declines the invitation to be the chief opener on some pretext and as his financial position is bad. This brings disrepute to his family and he is misunderstood by the church. Titus Oti does not heed his mother Deborah and old Pa Joel's requests to be considerate to Simeon Oke. His mother has good opinion about Simeon Oke who is kind and generous and is liked by all villagers and even by the village pastor for his generous contribution to the church building fund. But Titus Oti has utter contempt for Simeon Oke who is dishonest to the core and has indulged in money making by foul means, by extorting money from his labourers for employing them to work on the roads. Out of his earnings, he used to spend on people in need of help and contribute to the church building fund, only to gain sympathy from them and the church. As a responsible District Officer, he feels it is his duty to check the evil practices of extortions from labourers and contractors of Simeon Oke. And the rumour about the transfer of Simeon Oke to a distant place is strongly opposed by the people, the pastor and his own mother. Titus Oti finds himself in a fix unable to tell his conscience and spare his kinsman for dishonesty. When Simeon Oke is arrested on charges of corruption, Pastor Morakinyo and Oti's mother prevail upon Titus Oti requesting him not to give
evidence against Simeon. Complying with the request he plans his tour and is mysteriously taken ill during the period of trial of Simeon in the Court and thus he fails to give evidence against his kinsman. He proves himself unheroic letting Simeon Oke go unpunished even on serious charges of corruption and misappropriation, claiming mileage allowance when his car was lying idle in All Races Club for months. Since the charges levelled against Simeon could not be proved for want of proper evidence, he is acquitted. As some sort of punishment Simeon is transferred to another region. Within his limitations like his predecessors in the two earlier novels, Titus is successful in his attempt to cleanse the society of social evils. He feels happy in the end that Simeon Oke has confessed all his crimes and has admitted his dishonesty.

It is beyond Titus Oti's capacity to check the rampant corruption in his society. Moreover, Simeon in the novel happens to be his kinsman, who has helped his family and is liked by his villagers and the Church. Titus could not displease his family and the people by becoming instrumental in punishing Simeon. That is why, he has kept himself away during the court trial against Simeon and does not furnish concrete evidence of his corruption and malpractices. His only consolation is that he is transferred to another region.
Bernth Lindfors has observed that,
"this novel has several good points. First unlike Aluko's other novels, it is well organised. Amusing incidents are skilfully strung together and knotted at the end into a hilarious climax. Secondly the characters are quite well-defined, with one having a special role to play in the parade of comic events. In addition, Aluko's satirical thrusts are more widely distributed than in his previous novels. If one compares *Kinsman and Foreman* with Aluko's 'formless first novel published only seven years earlier, one can see quite clearly that Aluko has come a long way in a short time". 4

Chief, the Honourable Minister, is a satirical novel, fourth of Aluko's novels published in 1970. The action takes place in an imaginary African state called Afromacoland - two years after the British colonial rule and before the formation of the first national 'democratic' government. The novel tells the story of Alade Moses, a diligent, dedicated and respectable college principal who is appointed Minister of Works. Moses luxuriates in plush offices and regal living quarters, and is married to an uneducated woman whom he considers beneath his station in life. So he takes
up with a pretty young nurse who is happy to serve him both as his mistress and as his confidant. Moses' commendable academic career and good reputation as a headmaster have earned him good name in New Town, his village, and his people pressurize him to get into politics to represent in parliament as an eminent distinguished son of the soil. Though Moses very much wishes to lead an exemplary life, leading his people out of wilderness of ignorance rather than into a promised land of milk and money, he is forced to run for office in the government. And soon he becomes the chief, the Honourable Alade Moses, M.P., B.A., (Hons) Dip.Ed., Minister of Works and the Asiwaju of New Town. The irony is that an honest man is compelled to stoop to dishonesty. He is surrounded by corrupt underlings who have a vested interest in keeping him in power only to exploit the prestige and prerogative of his office. These unscrupulous lieutenants do not hesitate to rig elections, bribe officials and extort government funds on his behalf. Two of them, an old chief and Gorgeous Gregory, a young Secretary General of the New Town Improvement Union, even go to the extent of coercing illiterate town people to swear to vote for Moses in the forthcoming election. In the turmoil following the election, Moses gets killed in the riots by the rampaging crowd, and ultimately leading to military take over of the civilian government.

Though Alade Moses is not out and out corrupt, Aluko makes him also responsible for rampant corruption and fall of the government. It is his indecision and inaction against his own colleagues and lure of his position and luxurious life that drive
him to his sticky end.

Donatus Nwoga has commented that,

"with the publication of Chief, the Honourable Minister, T.M. Aluko has an impressive record of four novels, a body of work which merits greater critical attention than it has yet received".5

His Worshipful Majesty, Aluko's fifth novel published in 1973 again deals with the theme of conflict between traditionalism and modernism. In this novel Aluko takes a plunge back into colonial times to show us a clash between the two opposing systems of government the reinless, absolute authority of feudal monarchies (tradition), and the decentralised, shared responsibility system brought about by the British. (modernity).

Like all his fore-fathers before him, Oba Olayiwola Adegoke, the Alaiye of Aiye Kingdom, wields absolute power and control over his domains. His tyranny and despotism leads to setting up of a commission of Inquiry to look into the organization of his household... As a corrective measure, the government institutes some new departments to assist the traditional rulers. The arrival of Morrison, an educated officer, in Aiyeland to take over as chairman of the new council results in a clash between the old and the new order. A practical man of action, he soon sets about his task of the eradication of corruption and dishonesty. He starts
to modernize the land and to make sure that public funds are fairly spent for the public good: education, hospitals, new roads, and town planning. Initially all goes well, the fine aims and objects are welcomed by the Oba until he realizes that the new schemes cost money and that he cannot continue to spend public money which has been his prerogative till recently. His behaviour upsets Morrison who has been considerate to Alaiye and enlighten him about the charged procedure of the government. But Alaiye, realizes that the new forces of modernization are beyond his control and when he could not resist them nor come to terms with them, he commits suicide.

Eustace Taiwo Palmer opines that,

"Aluko's latest novel His Worshipful Majesty gives the most realistic and intelligent treatment of the theme of tradition and modernism." 6

Tejumolo Olaniyan has observed that,

"this is easily the best in terms of language and narrative skill, of Aluko's novels with colonial setting............" 7
Wrong ones in the Dock, Aluko's sixth novel published in 1982, is the story of Jonathan and his son Paul who arrested for murdering Gilbert Bassey's mother. But it is Gilbert Bassey who swung the axe which accidentally killed his mother. The author uses this story of the court case to attack the debilitating inefficiency of the system involving the instinctively discourteous juniors to the cynicism and sexual indiscretions of the bosses. Witnesses are unwilling to give evidence for the defendants in the court of law. Sometimes, it is because of fear of repercussions, and indeed one of the witnesses dies suspiciously in a road accident. And it is also because of fear of scandal as in the case of Mark Abiola, Pastor's warden at St. Nicholas Church, who does not want his wife know that he was at Sissy Bintu's flat that night.

Tijumola Olaniyan has rightly observed that,

"Some of his novels that promised a seriousness of purpose like chief, the Honourable Minister and Wrong Ones in the Dock are ruined by excess of treatment, giving the picture of an ambitious amateur desperate to make a point. Perhaps, the little attention to him and his works is not without some justification. More importantly, the deep Cynicism, Pessimism and blind alleys that pervade his works reveal only a nose-length vision, perhaps a testimony to his unstated belief that

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things are as they are and can never change structurally. In terms of a positive social vision, Aluko's masterpiece is yet to come."^8
REFERENCES:


(8) Ibid, P.53