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# List of Abbreviations Used

1. **TFA** - Things Fall Apart
2. **AOG** - Arrow of God
3. **NLAE** - No Longer at Ease
4. **AOS** - Anthills of the Savannah
5. **AMOP** - A Man of the People
6. **TN** - The Trouble with Nigeria
APPENDIX

1930 - Achebe born at Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria.

1953 - Graduated from University College, Ibadan.

1954 – Talks Producer with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation.

1956 - Studied at the BBC in London.

1958 - Things Fall Apart – published

1959 – Awarded the Margaret Wong Memorial prize for his constitution to African Literature.

1960 – No Longer at Ease published, Achebe awarded the Nigerian National Trophy for Literature.

1960-61 – Travelled in East Africa on a Rockefeller Fellowship.

1961 - Director of External Broadcasting, Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation.

1963 - Travelled in the United States, Brazil and Britain on a UNESCO fellowship

1964 - Arrow of God published. Received the Jock Campbell New Statesman Award for Literature.

1966 - A Man of the People published. First Military coup in Nigeria in January; second in July.

1967 - Biafra declared its secession from the Federation of Nigeria in May. Fighting begin in July. Achebe sent on political missions to Europe and North America in Biafran cause.


1973 - Took up residence in the United States.
1975 - Morning yet on Creation Day published.

1976 - Professor of Literature, University of Nsukka.

1979 - Awarded the First – ever Nigerian National Merit Award.

1982 - Retired from the University of Nigeria.

1986 - Elected President-general of the Ogidi Town Union.

1990 - Met with an accident; paralyzed

1990 - Became the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Language and Literature at Board College, New York, Held the position for over 15 years.

2007 - Awarded the Man Booker International prize.
RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS:  
A STUDY OF CHINUA ACHEBHE’S NOVELS

SYNOPSIS

African literature has developed after the Colonial countries got freedom from the British. It has the heritage of a rich oral tradition and history. The African novels started to dominate the scene as interest was shown in the area by the writers. The novel is paradoxically young and old; maturity was forced upon it just as African societies were going through the birth pangs of old age history within a few years after they gained independence. The works of African intellectuals like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, James Ngugi, Camare Laye and Lenrie Peters are among those well known inside as well as outside Africa. Their writings have cultural, social and racial ideas and a reader can see a conscious blending of the old and new history.

The African novel is very keen on showing the various cultural tensions and conflicts arising out of the fight between tradition and modernity, the real and the occult. It is different from the European novel in the sense that it has a typical African flavour. In the novel, it is the conflict between the individual and the society and the way it is resolved makes the reading interesting. In an African novel, society, the larger entity comes out victorious against the individual who disassociates himself from the society to prove his pride and individuality.
The literature of West Africa describes the colonial encounter with intensity unique in aesthetic formation of form and feeling, demanding commitment from Chinua Achebe, the writer. He does not approve of the way in which Africa was described as a metaphysical retreat for all kinds of prejudices. He rejects the European literature to a considerable extent as it is irrelevant and suffering from despair.

The growth of African literature was greatly influenced by many foreign languages. But the native sensibility retained its identity. The fight against the British gave rise to the social commitment and protest movement in African literature. The political disturbances and the upheavals of the African feelings are profoundly presented in African fiction. The writers were keen on giving a historical background in their creations.

A notable aspect in the African novelistic writing is that the writers have the rediscovery of the past and a breakthrough in historical studies. The Colonial situation strongly influenced their writings. Simplicity has become the hallmark of the African fiction. It is coupled with vivid imagination illuminating every page that is written and read. In the African writing, the medium of expression is generally English as most writers feel that English can reach a wider audience.

An African writer is conscious that his choice of English deprives him of the linguistic resource of his mother – tongue for creative use. He tries to Africanize the medium. If a flavour of life is to be captured in novels written in
English, the use of language has to be flexed and bent to allow the idiomatic and rhetorical usages to be presented. In the formation of a new diction, Achebe is quite successful. He concentrates with professional competence upon solving the question of how to indicate the style of speech of the African characters; he goes from the extremely formal English which is appropriate to the most educated, to the rather dislocated English of the less educated.

Achebe is not guilty of choosing to write in English for he says — “for those who have opted for writing in English there is much work ahead and much excitement”. He himself says that he feels that the English language will be able to carry the weight of his African experience. But it has to be a new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding. He interprets his world making it neither idyllic nor barbaric but as an authentic picture of his country and his country men. One can note the assault of colonialism on the psyche and the culture of the Africans. He also opines that English language will be able to carry the weight of African experience and adds that the language has to be altered in full communion with its ancestral home but modified to suit its new African environment.

Chinua Achebe describes vividly the Igbo way of life with its traditions that stay in the reader’s memory with complete conviction. The traditional life is skillfully combined in Achebe’s novels with his role of novelist and anthropologist synthesized in a new kind of fiction. Achebe’s essential genius lies only here. The reader absorbs the information effortlessly, never as detachable
generalization but always as something relevant to the emotional and moral life of the individual and the community. It is a fact that Achebe introduces many of the conventional resources of the English novel, but he is constantly transforming these in accordance with his Igbo world views. He tries to convey the idiom-tone of Igbo and their rhetoric in all his novels from Things Fall Apart to Ant Hills of the Savannah.

This research thesis entitled “Racial Consciousness: A Study of Chinua Achebe’s Novels” examines the topic analytically and methodically. Chinua Achebe’s racial consciousness is given a sharp focus and relevant details are described vividly. His novels Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People, Arrow of God and Anthills of the Savannah encompass the entire social, historical and political experiences of Nigeria from pre-colonial times to the present. The novels especially Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease and Arrow of God give the readers ample evidences of Chinua’s racial consciousness and any reader will feel that the African writer has successfully conveyed his native spirit and attachment to his African soil with his Igbo tradition and glory.

The first chapter is the “Introduction” where an elaborate study of the evolution of novels in African literature is made. A brief sketch of the life of Chinua Achebe is discussed highlighting his intention in writing novels in Africanised English. He recreates the simplicity, charm and significance of the traditional life of Ibgo, the devastating effect of colonialism on this rich culture
and the cultural neurosis that set in as a consequence. He is both explicit in his writing and implicit in his asides and his humour.

Chapter II entitled “African Culture” discusses in detail the social aspects, Igbo clan and its history. The people of Africa have rich and varied culture and ancestry. In traditional African society an individual is a part of the corporate life of the community. The Igbo community live particularly in compounds or homestead as they call. Their main food crops are yams, taro and cassava which men and women combined to cultivate. They have a complex organization of markets and of internal and external trade. In economic activity barter system is followed. Pottery and jewellery making are also in vogue. The Igbo people are a large nation of related tribes, sharing a common language, a common belief, traditions and social structure. They are peaceful agriculturalists and hard working people. Mothers in the African tribes are duly respected. Igbo give considerable weightage to glories and honours.

There are many instances quoted to make the reader understand the African culture in Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God and No Longer at Ease. In Things Fall Apart, the reader is able to understand the culture and status of the people Achebe writes about. Hence there are ample number of quotations taken from these novels to show the nuances of African culture. The personal God called ‘Chi’ is referred to many places. The folk think that one’s ‘Chi’ is always inclined to consent one’s wishes. There are also many references on the African
music, songs and the musical instruments like drums and flutes. The Igbo people are also fond of folk tales.

In Chapter III “Cross Roads of Culture”, transformation of Africa from the old to the new order is traced. The impact of colonization on the African society is described in detail with reference to the novels of Chinua Achebe. He accepts that he lived at the cross roads of cultures in a way which gave a peculiar quality and atmosphere to life. On one side there was the hymn singing and Bible reading. On the other side his close relatives were offering food to idols. But the reader finds that even at the age of ten, Achebe participated in both worlds without being torn by spiritual agonies. He was fascinated by the traditional ritual Igbo life but in a detached and perceptive way. One can enjoy Achebe’s novels with the assistance of sociology and anthropology. The novelist creates his own world according to his own criteria and it is understood in terms of its own inner consistency.

The expansion of Christian missionaries who did not care to understand the religions of the people whom they considered uncivilized and savage, who proceeded to convert them to Christianity resulted in religious encounter. In the death of Okokwo in Things Fall Apart, Achebe symbolizes the death of what is traditional in Africa and the collapse of the entire society. In the second novel No Longer at Ease, Achebe dramatizes the perplexity of the two cultures of which Obi is the hybrid product. To the Europeans, it is inconceivable that someone who has had the privilege of a western education, should not stick to the rules of
conduct it explains. To the Africans of Umuofia it is disturbing that their most learned offspring should be so incompetent in the elementary convention of bribe taking. One can observe that when Christianity with its strange customs and practices invaded the traditional society there was bound to be friction in many ways.

In the Fourth Chapter, ‘Racial Consciousness’, a reader may be able to realize Chinua’s ‘African feeling’ in all his novels, short stories and from the works of his contemporaries. Achebe is at home in his task of reconciling himself to his ancestors and of presenting to his fellow-Africans pre-colonial past in which they could take pride producing works that are ‘tragic in intensity and epic in scale’. In ‘Anthills of the Savannah’, Achebe puts the primary focus on the story articulated through myth, legend, parable and folktale by the old man of Abazon.

The reader is able to understand that the novels Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are not anthropological but historical novels; and in them Achebe traces the decline and fall of the Igbo Utopia towards the political nightmare of a corrupt society. Achebe also renders meaningfully the Igbo encounter with the historical change and crisis. He says that he is trying to lead his people to recover their dignity from the “wound in their soul” inflicted by their colonial experience.

When the reader considers the racial consciousness of Achebe after reading all his novels, from Things Fall Apart’ to ‘The Anthills of the Savannah’, one observation is very clear. He is actually giving the real picture of his community,
its living style, African environment and the customs and rituals. In all the novels proverbs are sprinkled at frequent intervals to show Achebe’s racial consciousness.

The stylistic hallmark of Igbo speech is the use of proverbs. All the heroes especially Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* make use of proverbs often. They use them particularly in formal speech and generally a speaker who can use them well and appropriate gains most approval from his audience. Among the Ibgo, the art of conversation is regarded high and proverbs are the ‘palm oil with which words are eaten’. The reader also gets a glimpse of the African customs and rituals when feasts and ceremonies are described. Achebe’s love of his traditional values and his respect for his Igbo clan are evident in all his novels. Eventhough he was brought up in the Christian way of life, a reader after his study of Achebe’s novels, understands that basically he is still the son of the soil with his African identity.

Chapter V entitled, “The Summation”, makes the reader understand Achebe’s main aims of writing his novels. He has stated unequivocally that he tries to restore ‘the African dignity and self respect of his clan’. His novels dismantle the European view of African history and culture. They challenge and provide alternative to many of the assumptions upon which European fiction is based. It is true, of course, that Achebe employs many of the conventional resources of the English novel. But he is constantly transforming them in
accordance with his own Igbo world view and he does not want to compromise his race’s dignity with the European’s on any account.

The reader, after his reading of Achebe’s novels, infers that the terms which Achebe uses put the emphasis firmly on the historical dimension. The function of the African novelist is to explain ‘what happened’ and to show his people what they had lost because of the entry of the British into their soil. Being a creative writer, Achebe insists that a novelist must do this function by showing in human terms what had happened to his people. Without changing the novel patterns of the English language, Achebe creates the awareness that the language is merely the telegraphic line across which the vernacular speech is being simultaneously committed and translated to the reader. Thus Achebe in every aspect succeeds in conveying the message to the readers that is he is faithful to his clan in word, thought and deed.