CHAPTER – IV

RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Of Achebe’s novels, the main body of his work rests in four namely *Things Fall Apart*, (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966). *Things Fall apart* the first of Achebe’s novels recounts events that took place during the time when Achebe’s father converted himself to Christianity with the name Isaiah. He was brought up by his mother’s father. What Achebe has done is to describe his stories with what in his childhood he was told of the events, circumstances and way of life of the past and with the legends of his people that he heard from the lips of his mother and elder sister.

Achebe’s racial consciousness is quite evident in all his novels, and short stories. “African novelists in their novels try to make the past present and bring the distant near. They made ‘history’ as the hero of their novels”¹. One such novelist who has been capable of performing is Chinua Achebe. He has made day-today Igbo life a vivid experience to readers who have never visited Africa.

Achebe had said that he had considered writing three novels with the recent history of his people and his country. The first one which illustrates the
conflicts arising with the arrival of the British is *Things Fall Apart*. The second is to exhibit the problems facing the generation of Okonkwo’s son Nowye. His second published novel, *No Longer at Ease* describes the Nigeria of the late 1950s and of Okonkwos’ grandson, Obi. *Arrow of God*, Achebe’s third novel is quite different from the two earlier works, both in scale and in treatment and in it he confirms that he is a true novelist.

It is true that a man can find it difficult to write a novel about his own father, a man whom he has actually known and in Achebe’s case at least loved. The person he had been writing about, with whose times he had been involved was in reality his father’s grand father, a member of a still older generation. That is why the events of *Things Fall Apart* seem to be coming from much further back than the mere turn of the century, since although Achebe had plenty of experience of the traditional non-Christian way of life in his own childhood, he was really recreating the world and times of his great grand father, Udo Osinyi.

*No Longer At Ease* tells us the story of young Obi Okonkwo who having been educated at the UK, returns to Nigeria to take up a post in the civil service in Lagos. It is a cosmopolitan city in a flux and ferment in which the traditional values of caring and kinship exemplified by the old Umnoafia are at odds with the values of acquisitive contemporary society largely materialistic and selfish. In such a life, young Obi’s high ideals do not stand much chance of surviving. His determination to stamp out corruption cannot withstand the Umnoafia view that
the home community that paid to educate one of its sons to place him in
government service might thereby to benefit. His own impatience with traditional
order in wishing to marry a member of the prohibited Osu caste brings him
inevitably into conflict with his family and people. Thus he cannot fit either world
but succumbs to bribery and ends in landing in the prison.

As a novel it has nothing of the scale and stature of Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo is the hero one admires: Obi is merely a young man with whom one
sympathises. The events display the muddled dilemmas in which such a man is
placed largely through his own folly. The dilemmas are real enough, but most of
them could have been solved by a sympathetic Bank Manager and could have
been avoided by a man of more moral fibre. Solutions are not offered.

The Europeans are, one must suppose, intended to be satirical
presentation but are mere paste – board characters, and one is forced to
wonder whether an African novelist is so bad in presenting Europeans. It is
perhaps likely that Europeans are just as unsuccessful when they try to depict
Africans. The fact remains that this novel is quite popular with young west
Africans who are best fitted to understand Obi’s problems. Since Achebe
considers his African readers as his main market, it is accounted a success
only.
The novel AOG goes back almost to the period of Things Fall Apart to deal more specifically with the struggle between Christianity and old religion, which is symbolized as the python. It is the creative force of Ibo faith and in it he displays both maturity and experience with a work of high artistry and intelligent self consciousness. It concerns Ezeulu, priest of God Ulu and his struggle to assert the primacy of the cult of his God over other gods. David Carroll says,

“For most part he seems to translate his own wishes and those of his god into each other effortlessly, but his motives remain ambiguous. As he seeks to extend his influence into the adjacent worlds of the whiteman and the missionaries Ezeulu becomes more isolated and disgraceful of the tripe”\(^2\).

The situation is complicated not only by the new Christian faith but also it depends upon the ambiguous complexity of the principal character. Ezeulu’s unbending nature brings about his own ruin, disaster to his followers and a strengthening of his enemies – in particular the Christians. It is Achebe’s most difficult book and a master piece quite different in kind from Things Fall Apart.

In the two novels of the past Achebe seems perfectly at home in his task of reconciling himself to his ancestors and of presenting to his fellow – Africans
pre-colonial past.

“In the two novels dealing with the present he is not so successful as if his involvement with and nearness to the events of today had clouded the clarity and objectivity of his vision”³.

When it was published in 1966, A Man of the People was seen as prophetic of the political disasters in Nigeria that so soon followed and indeed a political disaster was an inevitable outcome of the situation, Achebe so bitterly describes. The novel is a satirical farce about the way in which politicians so corruptly manipulate the power that has been entrusted with them.

Another novel of Achebe is Anthills of the Savannah where Achebe puts the primary focus on the story articulated through myth, legend, parable and folk tale by the old man Abazon. It is reaffirmation of the intricate Igbo philosophy about rulers that in a pluralistic traditional system if one over-reaches his authority, he is liable to severe punishment.

“In all the novels described above, we see a shift in the communal life of the individual consciousness and back to the ethnic group. Achebe tries to describe the symbolic order of African society from a culturalistic point of view and as a detached observer he attempts to highlight the set backs of traditional culture responsible for the social and political maladies of the
modern Nigerian society with a sense of irony and satire. We also see him trying to define African myths in terms of relevance and meaning to contemporary living.”

An attempt is made to find how Achebe’s traditional novels namely *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are not anthropological but historical novels and in them how Achebe traces the decline and fall of the Igbo utopia towards the political nightmare of a corrupt society; and also how in these novels, he renders meaningfully the Igbo encounter with historical change and crises. In an interview at the University of Texas in Austin in November 1969, Achebe called himself and his fellow African writers ‘Committed Writers’:

“I believe” impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of message… In fact I should say all our writers, whether they are aware of it or not, are committed writers. The whole pattern of life demanded that you should protest, that you should put in a word for your history, your traditions, your religions and so on.”

In 1965, he had described an African novelist as a teacher who should be concerned first to teach the African past to the whole world and lead his own African people to recover their dignity from “the wound in our soul” inflicted by their colonial experience.
Presumably it is Achebe’s reiteration of his belief in the role of an African writer as a ‘teacher’ in his own special sense that makes most critics always claim that the primary subject of novels is the tragic consequence of the African colonial experience and that his fictions are too didactic. More so, Achebe’s pronouncements lead generally to the facile conclusion that his novels are in essence fictionalized anthropology: a sheer historical document. Achebe renders the African colonial experience subtly within the large, basic human life.

And in truth, Achebe never denies the place of art even in a novel whose subject is avowedly historical past. The observation from his article ‘The Novelist as a Teacher’ ends on the needlessness of the mutual exclusion of art and education:

“If pure art can be regarded as art for art’s sake, applied art may not necessarily be sheer ‘journalism’ or ‘purple literature’. Applied art probably arrows its subject mater as its primary concerns while the novel becomes the sheer medium, say in the Lawrentian manner.”

But Joseph Conrad and Henry James talk about their subject matters and still their craftsmanship is no less consummate. In short all serious art, whether pure or applied, tries to evenly combine form and matter, instructing entertainingly. Basically, all arts draw on this. Whatever makes the art
imaginative derives fundamentally from the ‘poetic’ perception and artistic transmutation of the earthly material and whether the art appears pure or applied, good art depends on the degree of the skillful and imaginative plotting.

Achebe’s trilogy - Things Fall apart (1958), No Longer at Ease (1960) and Arrow of God (1964), has an order of structure, instead of a sheer order of events whose narrative syntax achieves a conscious interplay of plural significance in contradiction to the ‘full close’ with the permanent fixed reality of an anthropological account. The historical time Achebe reconstructs in imaginative terms can be said to be roughly between 1850 and 1957. The historical documentation can be best regarded an “myth”, while the representational aspect is the plot.

Achebe can in a sense be regarded as “history”, a narrator who inquires into the evidence he has gathered, as he seeks the truth while reconstructing events to produce a narrative that has a dynamic and sequential action. In the interview with Donatus Nwoga quoted above, he demonstrates a sense of objectivity that demands a sense of artistic integrity when he admits that opposing colonialism does not mean that one does not appreciate the values of the western technological civilization. His art transmutes the history into an imaginative recreation of the past in every one of the novels.
When one considers the racial consciousness of Achebe in all his novels, one aspect is very clear. That is he actually gives the real picture of his community, its living style, African environment and the customs and rituals. An analysis is made in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* for the explanation of his racial consciousness. The Ibo people are a large nation of related tribes, now numbering around eleven million people sharing a common language, common beliefs and traditions and a common social structure. In English, both they and their language are known as Ibo.

But they prefer themselves to use the form ‘Igbo’. They inhabit a very large forest area of inland south-eastern Nigeria, between the Niger and the cross Rivers and in past history, they were a peaceful, agricultural people. The intelligence and capacity for hard work and their high regard for education caused them to spread out over Nigeria as traders, teachers and professionals with the economic development that followed the settlement of the country in the first half of the twentieth century.

Africans were never organized as a ‘nation’ in the modern political sense. But based on the extended family and elaborate kinship and clan relationships, they were organized in small villages or group of villages, getting along with neighbouring villages through a system of agreements, petty squabbles and settlements that had evolved through the centuries. *Things Fall Apart* shows
how these arrangements worked as well as the various social rituals engaged in by the Ibos that were appropriate to their way of life.

It should be made clear however, that they were organized on democratic and republican lines that a man was esteemed for himself, his achievements and his value to the community and for what his father was. They settled everything political by argument or discussion, dearly loved the rituals of speeches, for or against any side, liberally larded with proverbs, and thus were regarded as highly argumentative individualists. They were honest but always drove a hard bargain. Unlike the African peoples further west along the Guinea Coast, they inherited from the father’s side. The creative force of their religion was the Sun (male) rather than the moon (female).

Though most of them now are either Christians or agnostics the traditional religion of the Ibo people was one in which there were many gods under one great god, Chukwu, in which ancestor worship and reincarnation featured and in which the other world inhabited by the gods and the dead ran parallel to and interpreted the everyday world of present reality. The priests and priestesses interpreted the other world to mortals, after becoming ‘possessed’ by the spirit of their god or Oracles, and the gods themselves could visit this world in the guise of masked dancers called ‘Egwuwu, who wore elaborate disguise or raffia, straw and carved wooden heads.
Simple people might believe that these were real gods, but those in the know were aware that they were really humans in disguise. Nevertheless, the tribesman himself knew that his ordinary everyday self was one thing and that when he was ‘Egwuwu’ he was another. In a sense, as with the priests and priestesses, he was a vehicle for the god. In addition, each man had a personal god or ‘Chi’ that is his spiritual other self, part soul, part personal god and part fate. However, all the complexities of Ibo faith are clearly explained by Achebe in the novel or can easily be deduced from what he says about them.

**Things Fall Apart** is of course about the Ibos and their position towards the end of the nineteenth century when faced with the first European penetration of their country, bringing in a new religion, new ideas and money-based economy. But the dilemmas faced by the Ibos were those that confronted many people all over Africa and indeed, in other parts of the world. For the political structure of modern Africa was created by act of the super powers who divided it into units that often paid little regard to the natural, social and language groupings of the people who were colonized.

Their motives were nominally those of evangelism and of ‘bringing light’ to the ‘dark’ places of the world, but were in reality motives of trade. The results of this action are still being lived with today. The tact remains that the individual who were engaged in this enterprise – administrators, teachers, doctors,
missionaries and traders – often worked for the highest motives and were men of the highest caliber.

One interesting aspect of Achebe is that he does not condemn these men, as he could so easily have done, any more than he presents pre-colonial Africa as a Garden of Eden. In this novel, he presents things as they were without condemnation and only occasionally with the wryest of ironic comments, so that we can see for ourselves the tragedy of a human being caught up in the circumstances of history over which he has no control.

**Things Fall Apart** is set in Ibo land towards the end of the nineteenth century, when Europeans were just beginning to penetrate inland in West Africa. Ibo land is now a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and lies on the other side of the Inger river in the east of that great country. In the late 1960s the Ibo speaking people attempted to go away from the Federation under the name of Biafra and the tragic Civil War that followed cost many lives. Now the country is peaceful and the Ibo people are assimilated with the Eastern Nigerian states.

At the time of the writing of the novel, however, there was no idea of nationhood or the modern state in West Africa, and ‘Ibo-land’ is merely the convenient name one gives to that large area settled by people who spoke the language, Ibno who shared the same social structure and cultural-religious
ideas. They were organized into groups of related villages in a basically democratic system, engaged in simple subsistence farming, and their lives were within a highly formalized framework of social relationship and of primitive, animistic religion in which respect for ancestors and magic played a very dominant role: “The sort of tribal society he is creating is one which will be foreign and strange to most of his readers. It will be even strange to most of his African readers, since what he is showing is a way of life that has passed from living memory”7.

The readers learn the life of Umuofia at this period through the life of Okonkwo, one of its prominent citizens. One may learn of their crops and how they are planted, of their disputes and how they are settled, of their elaborate social rituals and the ceremonies with which the high spots of their lives – harvests, marriages and the like are celebrated and also of their highly formalized modes of address and discussions. The readers are explained of the way in which the everyday lives of the Africans are interpenetrated with the other world of magic and mystery and of the part played in their lives by superstition and the witch doctors.

Yet the picture given is not of an unhappy society. It is stable governed by tradition and custom, and if some of their practices may seem ignorant or barbaric to us today, these people lived a life that was strong and firmly knit and that had its own considerable virtues and values; everyman knew his place and
what was expected of him and subscribed to a generally accepted system of beliefs.

When one reads the novel Things Fall Apart one can acquire a knowledge of all the customs of the tribe – its festivals and celebrations, tied to the seasons and to sowing and harvest time, its religious rituals, its way of administering justice. The readers are given appropriate points and in order, the various stages of the celebrations of marriage with the arranging of bride price in chapter Eight – the feast at the brides’ household in chapter 12 and (though this is another marriage), the final ceremony in the husband’s household in chapter 14. Similarly the social customs and of how life is actually lived in Okonkwo’s compound, can be understood.

If the tale is what happens in the novel, the theme is what it is about. While there is usually one main theme, there are often minor themes or lesser threads going to make up the whole.

“Undoubtedly, the main theme of Things Fall Apart is that of change”.

The change is considered as it affects one society when it comes under pressure from dramatically new ideas in religion, law, political, economic and social structure. These pressures have occurred often in history, not only when a relatively primitive society has been invaded by forces of ‘Civilization’ but also
when, for example, a country has changed its political system (as in revolution) or when, say an agriculture based economy has changed to one based on industrialization. When these big changes come about, stresses are set up in the society which affect every individual living in that society:

“Achebe has chosen to consider such changes as they affect the society he knows best, that of his Ibo grand parents, and in so doing he has created a picture that, with minor changes has seen in dozens of parts of the world (but perhaps, particularly in Africa) over the past century. Thus the interest of his novel for the reader is widened out beyond a consideration of a small corner of West Africa”.

When such changes take place, one of the almost inevitable results in violence, to a lesser or greater degree. The tragedy of Okonkwo is one expression of that violence. Though his tragedy will purely by chance be recorded as a minor foot-note in a history book one knows that there must be many similar tragedies that have gone unrecorded when similar intransigent characters have tried to oppose change. Achebe merely records impartially what happened without assigning blame.

Ibo traditional society contained a great deal of violence, senseless except in terms of Ibo beliefs, as is amply recorded in the novel, and it is the
hope for an end to this violence that sends Nwoye to seek better things in the new order.

“Achebe does not suggest that this new violence is any better than the old: it is merely based on a different view of the world… The manifestations of each type and what happens when they come into collision are presented as facts, recreated and brought alive in fiction”\(^\text{10}\).

Achebe knows that his readers will not have any idea of what an Ibo society is like. Therefore everything that such readers learn about it must be contained within the novel itself and must not depend upon knowledge of history and the like from outside. This is why it is hardly necessary to give elaborate notes on Ibo customs and beliefs: everything is explained to the reader in the simplest way, as one reads:

“In essays and lectures he (Achebe) has shown that he has plenty of views on the matter of colonialism. In Things Fall Apart, however, he is silent, preferring to present the facts as they happened without taking sides, and leaving his readers to make their own deduction”\(^\text{11}\).

Coming to Achebe’s use of language, the words he uses are of the simplest and are such as would be used in the Ibo world of which he is writing.
West African English is not a uniform variety of English. The different countries of the region often have different varieties of the same language. The problem of language in African literature has been there from the beginning when the native writers used the language of their colonial rulers to convey their message. In the article, “African Literature III: The Modern Writer” Donald Stuart writes that “English has a long record of being accommodative to various dialects”¹². There are no long and complicated words, no difficult and abstract words and not a single word that has the taste of the twentieth century. The images used are also entirely of the Ibo world as are the comparisons and similes.

The simplicity of the words used when combined with imagery and references that are strictly limited to the world and concerns of the forest tribesman at the end of the last century reinforces strongly the simplicity of the sentences and creates an impression that one is totally immersed in the life and affairs of Umnofia. It is as if one is listening to the story being told by an anonymous tribesman of the period. This impression is heightened by Achebe’s use of proverbs.

Proverbs which are pithy, wise sayings which embody some supposed truth or moral lesson are found in all languages and their wisdom is unusually a simple and practical folk wisdom which, one feels, has been handed down from generation to generation by a word of mouth. In the Ibo land of Things Fall
Apart, they have been developed into a highly approved adornment and embellishment of formal speech.

As one notices, the ornamental languages, the many elaborate figures of speech and the tricks of rhetoric common in languages that have been written down for a long time are all absent from Ibo speech. The use of proverbs and folk tales is yet another way in which Achebe adds truth to the Ibo atmosphere of the novel. They have omitted them, or to have used extensively the tricks and flourishes of more advanced written languages would have created a very different situation in which both the author and readers would be looking at Ibo society from outside.

In all his novels, Achebe makes prolific use of proverbs and popular adages. They reflect the good and the lean times through which their societies pass. The society of Umuofia holds achievement and success in high regard. This is well expressed in sayings like,

“You can tell a ripe corn by its look” (TFA, p.16).

“If a child washed his hands, he could eat with beings” (TFA, p.6). A number of proverbs are based on spiritual wisdom of the Ibo culture also. For example,

“When a man says yes, his ‘Chi’ says yes also”. (TFA, p.19).
The proverb, “If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others” (TFA, p.89), shows that effortless spreading of anarchy among the natives after the advent of the white man. The resentment of the people towards Ezeulu’s positive attitude to the whites finds expression in some proverbs as:

“If a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut, the matter lies between him and his God’. (TFA, p.113).

Also, “When a handshake goes beyond the elbow, we know it has turned to another thing (AOG, p.13).

When Ezeulu goes to the white man’s prison, people’s indifference to his predicament is expressed thus:

“The lizard who threw confusion into his mother’s funeral rite, did he expect outsider to carry the burden of honouring his dead”. (AOG, p.125).

The importance and the foolishness of the Obi Okonkwo’s are compared to that of “the young antelope who danced herself lame when the main dance was yet to come” (NLAE, p.10). In A Man of the People. Achebe uses a number of proverbs that clearly trace the decline and decay of the cultural values of the Nigerian society. Selfishness and greed for power and money are the characteristics of political leaders like Nanga.
**Things Fall Apart** is the novel which is the demonstration of Achebe’s view that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans: that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth, value and beauty. Achebe is not sentimental about the traditional past but has tried to project an exact picture of the archetypal African in his native surroundings before the encounter with the whiteman’s culture. Commenting on the superior regulated life of the Africans, Neil McEwan comments thus:

“The Ibos of **Things Fall Apart** whose Nineteenth century level of civilization was untouched by either high technology or Christianity might have been envied by many Europeans of the 1890’s”\(^{13}\). In **Things Fall Apart**, a depiction of pre-colonial situation in Africa can be noted in which Achebe has examined the nature of the tradition without idealizing.

In **Arrow of God** Achebe goes back to Igbo village life in the 1920s before it has experienced any sustained contact with the Europeans. This is after the arrival of the whiteman and is now administering the country, but remotely from this hill station is a neighbouring district. The significant change from **Things Fall Apart**, the events of which occurred a few years previously, is that the villagers realise that they must come to terms with this alien rule which is both powerful and permanent. The author has chosen as his central
character the aged Ezeulu who as his name indicates, is the chief priests of Ulu, the most powerful of all the deities of the six villages of Umuaro. Ezeulu’s role is to interpret to Umuaro the will of the god and to perform the two most important rituals in the life of the villages – the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves and the Feast of the New Yams.

The reader gets a glimpse of the African customs and rituals when the feasts and ceremonies are described vividly. The first of these ceremonies cleanses the villages of their sins before the planting season. Beginning casually as a thought in the mind of Ezeulu, the chief actor in the drama, it is eventually made public in an announcement which breaks in upon the domestic reality of Umuaro. Then people, the friendly gather towards the meeting place. Next the great decorated Ikolo drum, made from a giant Iroko tree as old as Ulu himself greets the six villages in their ancient order, salutes Ulu and finally summons Ezeulu from the shrine of the god.

Achebe uses all his skills in capturing the tension of communal Igbo rituals, with their strange mingling of fear and delight:

“He wore smoked raffia which descended from his waist to the knee…. He took a few long strides, pausing on each foot. Then he ran forward again as though he had seen a comrade in the vacant air; he stretched his arm and waved his staff to the right and to the
left. And those who were near enough heard the knocking
together of Ezeulu's staff and another which no one saw. At this
many fled in terror before the priest and the unseen presences
around him". (AOG, p.71).

Half black, half white, Ezeulu is the intermediary between the human
world and the spiritual world. As the narrator's impersonal description changes
to the frightened view of a villager, the man in raffia is transformed into the
divine intermediary inhabiting his mysterious world.

Ezeulu then re-enacts the first coming of Ulu in the distant past when the
six villagers sought help against the soldiers of Abam who came to burn their
houses and carry their people into slavery. Powerful medicine men created a
common deity named Ulu, whose priest became the chief priest of Umuaro.
From that day they were never defeated by an enemy in battle. Ezeulu
celebrates this event—the crucial ritual within the ritual—and then performs the
ceremony of purification.

As he runs round the market place the women throw their bunches of
pumpkin leaves, and implore him to exorcise the sins of their households. The
priest runs into his shrine, and the tension is released. The crowd seems to
rouse itself quickly to the knowledge that their chief priest is safe in his shrine,
triumphant over the sins of Umuaro which is now burying deep into the earth
with the six bunches of leaves. Finally, the women dance, each village in turn, and a vast cloud of dust rises from their feet as they stamp in unison, pounding and smashing the pumpkin thickly about the market place.

The novel moves from a clear beginning to the climax of the central purification and then to the release of the community’s tensions. The stages of this drama are punctuated by the sounds of the gong and the drum – “gome, gome gome, gome” (AOG, p.65). And it is a private as well as a public drama. The power of the scene comes from the effortless interaction of individual and community, which of the climax merges in the ritual gestures.

Another major ceremony, the Feast of the New Yam sanctifies the harvest and marks the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. On this occasion – every grown man in Umaro takes a seed yam to the shrine of Ulu and from these the elders can reckon the number of men in each village. Ezeulu also selects twelve seeds to calculate the new year. He starts peering up into the sky looking for the new moon. Despite his age, he refuses to believe that his sight is deteriorating or that he is in anyway inferior to the youngmen of the villages.

There is one game which Ezeulu is never tired of playing with young men. When they shake hands with him, he tenses his arm and puts all his power into the grip, and being unprepared for it they wince and recoil with pain.
He then selects one of the sacred yams from his barn and eats it, as a ritual. Finally he thanks Ulu for allowing him to see another new moon and begs good fortune for the six villages.

By means of these festivals, Ezeulu controls both planting and harvesting, and the village year which is dependent upon them. And yet, as he carries out his yam ritual, the chief priest is perplexed and uncertain. He has begun to question the crucial role he plays in the life of the six villages. The kind of power he wields is something to be understood and taken note of. It is true that he named the day for the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam Feast; but he had not chosen it. He acts merely as a watchman.

Perhaps Ezeulu’s power is illusory, and he is simply the passive intermediary between the god and villages. His pride will not allow self-doubt of this kind. It is felt that the chief priest must be more than this. If he should refuse to name the day, there would be no festival, no planting or no reaping. But he never refuses. He gets some questions to himself. The inner debate has not removed his misgivings. His mind is never content with shallow satisfaction and creeps again to the brinks of knowing. As his ceremonial appearance indicates, Ezeulu is half man, half spirit. In the world of man he is very powerful and in the world of spirits he is a servant.
Unwillingly, both Winterbottom and Ezeulu are becoming involved in the
dialectic of power which prevents authority being located in one agent as it was
in the days of Ulu’s glory and the British pacification. Hence the vivid
particularity of the two desperate worlds of the novel Arrow of God, pushed
them apart while this common preoccupation of the main characters
significantly draws them together again. This is a major step in the logic of
Achebe’s development. Having effortlessly destroyed the myth of African
primitivism in Things Fall Apart and established Igbo life as a valid norm, he
then traced the effect of two powerful but contradictory cultures upon his hero In
No Longer at Ease.

The world of the Europeans has its rituals too. Although there are only
five men at Government Hill in Okperi, Winterbottom insists on the rigid
hierarchy of power. There are the administrators, other officials and the
Engineer Wright, the weak link who Winterbottom feels is letting the side down
by his misbehaviours with the native women. He had had occasion to reprimand
him.

As the Europeans employ their defensive strategies against the
unknown, their simplifications and exaggerations are pushed into parody by our
inside view of the African society which has elicited them. The rich texture of
Igbo traditional life is reduced before our eyes to the simple out line of the
stereotype. From Government Hill, Ezeulu’s familiar rituals become the
unspeakable rites of the heart of darkness. This does not mean that Achebe depicts the Europeans as a beleaguered minority of extreme reactionaries.

Winterbottom, Clarke and Wright represent different colonial points of view. Winterbottom himself is not simply an embittered Old coaster; he knows the country well, understands the Igbo language and acts according to the values he believes in. And parody works in the opposite directions too.

The villagers assume similarly defensive and exaggerated postures later in the novel *Arrow of God* when they seek to contain the encroachment of the Europeans. So long as the two worlds of the novel remain unintelligible to each other they act in a similar way in face of the unknown. The Europeans seek refuge behind their myths and rituals as they strive to administer this corner of empire. They are looking for a power structure they can understand and promote: if they cannot find one, they will have to create it. The role of the whiteman here as agents of change is different from *TFA*. In an article, “The Human Dimension of History in *Arrow of God*, Obiechina observes thus:

“The local school and mission station, irreverent strangers like the catechist Good country and the inarticulate though palpable reality of the whiteman’s administrative presence, all these have undermined traditional confidence and
shakes the sense of common purpose and solidarity which in the past constitutes the spirit of traditionalism” 14.

There is another group of characters on Government Hill besides the Europeans. They are the Africans employed by the colonial administration – the court messengers, the police and the stewards who make up a class which had not come into existence in the Umuofia of Things Fall Apart. They act as intermediaries between the Europeans and Umuaro and are frequently presented as comic hybrid figures. In the novel Arrow of God they usually appear absurd. They have lost the traditional dignity of the clan and become bad imitations of the Whiteman as can be seen most clearly in their language. They use pidgin English to impress the locals but their speech appears comic and naïve when compared either with the English of the Whiteman or with the simple dignified English of the sent Igbo.

One character in this group presented differently is John Nwodika, Winterbottom’s steward. He is another hybrid, uneasily placed between two cultures, believing firmly in the whiteman’s power but warning Winterbottom about Ezeulu’s strong magic; but Nwodika seeks to bring together the two ways of life and reconcile them. The readers see a member of the clan using the traditional Igbo flexibility and adaptability to cope with a new situations and turn it to the advantage of his own business as he had planned. In his career
sketched briefly but memorably are embodied some of the essential ambiguities and problems of the historical situation that is exploring in *Arrow of God*.

Although they are both involved in the problems of power, the African and European worlds of the novel misunderstand each other’s motives because in the last resort, they employ different frames of references. The values of Umuaro are finally religious, those of the colonial administration secular. This is the reason why they do not see each other as rivals. No such neutrality is observed by the third group of characters, the missionaries. Mainly Igbos, but accepting the god brought by the Europeans, they form and intermediate society between the African and the administrators. They are in direct competitions with the priests and tribal deities for the loyalty of the people. At first they seem peripheral to the main events of the novel, impinging only slightly on the major characters. Ezeulu might hear the sounds of their ritual as he meditates on his priestly role but he is not unduly perturbed:

“If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring have my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the
whiteman today will be saying had we known tomorrow”

(AOG, p.46).

He is seeking to insure himself against any possible rivals in Umuaro and his fears prove well founded. The Christian bell rings in an increasingly peremptory fashion as the division between the six villages deepens.

Again there are two alternatives. There is the direct imposition of alien values which ignore the beliefs of the community; or there is persuasion through negotiation with existing values. The first is based on a belief in the absoluteness of power, truth and civilization: the second on a belief in the relativity of these abstractions which are only realised through particular relationships. One is unilateral in its mode, the other dialectical. This opposition was first examined in Okonkwo’s career in Things Fall Apart where it arose from the clash between hero’s character and Igbo society.

Such a clash also occurs in Arrow of God between Ezeulu and the people of Umuaro. But now Achebe is prepared to generalize more freely outside the confines of tribal life: colonial rule and Christian proselytizing are shown to display the same tension between alternative modes of action.

The Arrow of God elaborates the theme of Things Fall Apart, the traumatic experiences of African confrontation with Europe by caricaturing the
more absorbingly sustained character of Ezeulu. As Achebe says in the preface to the revised edition of the novel:

“For had he been spared, Ezeulu might have come to see his fate as perfectly consistent with his high historic destiny as victim, consecrating his agony – thus raising to the statue of ritual passage – the defection of his people”\(^15\).

Such a sacrifice was made at the creation of Ulu; it is now made, as Ulu proves, ineffective and the next god, the whiteman’s god emerges the new protector of Umuaro, with all that it entails. In this larger perspective, one may notice that Ezeulu’s early version of the end of all things was a true one, and as a priest of a god whose life was coming to an end, he is trying to resist historical forces. His efforts are in vain and misled by what he thinks are Ulu’s best interests, his actions precipitate the death of his god and he himself becomes the sacrifice which prepares the way for the next stage of Umuaro’s history.

Achebe’s view of the movement of history is dynamic. It is an interplay of forces domestic and remote. The simple tale of a priest at odds with his people shadows a pageant of the transformation of West Africa. \textbf{Arrow of God} is also viewed as an ironic study of the struggle for power and religious authority and of cultural chasm. It becomes a study of betrayal, disillusionment and alienation of the high priest that makes the novel in essence an examination of the ironies of
parochial malice and cross cultural understandings and the readers know that the social fabric of *Arrow of God* is denser than that of any other novel of Achebe.

Another fact that is likely to catch a readers’ attention is that most of these Igbo writers in English use the word ‘Chi’ or its English interpretation several times in their novels. In these situations where the word ‘Chi’ is used, it is given meanings that could equate to fate, luck god, guardian, creator and companion. The suggestion is unmistakable in all these situations that one’s fortunes are dependent on ‘Chi’. Very often it is material fortune or prosperity, that is involved.

As these characters struggle to make a decent living in life, to be successful by the standards of their people – good farm yields, possession of children, good health, happiness and material contentment – their graph of life reveals an irregular fluctuation. It appears as if life is a continued attempt to pull one self out of one kind of misfortune or another. There is an impression of a tetheredness to some strangling hold from which man struggles vainly to free himself. In this struggle through life, Igbo value system is used as the store house of what one might describe as “the tragic activities” in which man finds himself enmeshed.
These ‘tragic activities’ are the results of human factors – economic, religious, sociological and political which man grapples within his march through history. Ultimately tragedy becomes easily recognizable when these ‘tragic activities’ relate to the values of the Igbo world. In Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo devotes his whole life to trying to carve an indelible name for himself and his family in Umuofia. He has had an upbringing of shame and poverty which he is determined to erase from history and possible memory. The year he enthusiastically plunges into farming with borrowed yams Umuofia experiences the worst harvest ever.

The disaster is enough to break any man’s heart. But Okonkwo possess an “inflexible will” which he puts to good effect with the result that he becomes one of the greatest men of Umuofia with three wives, many children, the Ozo title, and a member of ‘egwugwu’, the highest court in the community. Then misfortune strikes with his banishment from his community. He has to start life anew.

Even when the resilient spirit refuses to concede defeat, his chi cannot be bad. But somewhere along his path of heroism, he suddenly realises that his ‘chi’ is determined to lead him into disaster and shame. So he takes his own life in order to end it all. The same ‘inflexible will” which has propelled him through life enables him to commit suicide. Okonkwo spends his whole life wrestling with his ‘chi’ and he concedes defeat to this enigmatic entity. The word
‘wrestling’ actually used in the text is significant for Okonkwo himself is a wrestler of great repute.

In Igbo folktale, Ojaadili, the master wrestler, dares wrestle with his ‘chi’ and the result is catastrophic. Okonkwo attempts the same in life out of the folktale, and the end is equally catastrophic. His tragedy has communal significance for he embodies many of the vices, and some of the aspirations that characterize the Igbo society of Umuofia.

Achebe has been criticized several times for his style of writing where the non-Nigerian readers may often have to guess what words and phrases really mean, and the incorporation of description of Beatrice as Goddess Idoto or the hymn to Idemili which are unintelligible to the non-Nigerian reader while going through Anthills of the Savannah.

The culture and social change provide the novelists with their themes and subject matter. Different stages of cultural and social changes are represented in the novels, from the early contact between the classical traditional culture and modern industrial culture to the present time of considerable adjustments and synthesis. Achebe sees the situation in terms of traditional – modern or rural – urban differentiation and consequent clash of values. He shows that the behaviour of the character has been largely
conditioned by the social, economic and political environment which in turn has been very much affected by social and cultural change.

The main purpose of Achebe has been to write about his people and for his people. His novels make a counter over some ten years of Igbo (and later Nigerian) civilization. In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Europe has not yet penetrated the village of Umofia. When the novel ends colonial rule has been substantially altered. Achebe is also clear about the medium he chooses, to convey the African experience. He comments:

“We chose English not because the English desired it, but because having tacitly accepted the new nationalities into which colonialism has grouped us, we needed its language to transact our business,… overthrowing colonialism itself in the fullness of time”\(^ {16}\).

Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is full of semantic characteristics from the mundaneness of the breaking of Kola nuts to the dance of ancestral spirits. Basically these symbols serve as cultural symbols rather than just provide local colour. It is one of the ways in which Achebe reveals the value system of his society. He, in presenting the traditional African society has sufficient integrity to resist the temptation to overlook inconvenient facts. He does not hesitate in showing the harshness and cruelty of his society. He is aware of its strength
and beauty and does not deny the reader a peep into the horrors of the African clan.

Achebe himself admits that “We have to admit that like other people’s past ours had its good as well as its bad sides”. The traditional society has its grim aspect. Achebe balances the positive values against them and he stresses that traditional life must be taken as a whole so that it is seen to have a pattern and logic.

Sociologists underline the fact that one of the main aspects about culture and society is collective responsibility. To ensure that individual responsibility to the group is accepted, it is built into the network of customary beliefs and social attitudes. The first impact of change undermined collective solidarity and tradition. The introduction of Christianity, for instance, alienated the converts from their traditional loyalty to the ancestors. The collective conscience was split and the community could no longer speak with one voice.

**No Longer at Ease** presents a society which is radically changed from Achebe’s previous novel. It portrays the corruption prevalent everywhere and that moral anarchy the precipitates in an urban city such as Lagos. As David Carrol comments: “Tribal solidarity when transferred from the country to the town becomes nepotism and self interest”\(^\text{17}\). The city in its complexity is symbolic of the aspiration and corruption of the new society. In **A Man of the**
**People,** Achebe has moulded English to suit all occasions in the post-colonial society: code switching, back and forth translating the African proverbs and transliterating as well as using pidgin with the standard English.

**Anthills of the Savannah** is centrally concerned with the role of the writer than with the role of the speaker. There is a recurring meditation on the writer’s aims, consciousness and semi-consciousness, on the interrelation of self and effectiveness. Whereas the earlier novels explored the dichotomy between oral and European literary cultures, **Anthills of the Savannah** is more concerned with the African literary culture that has been developed since Achebe’s first novel was published in 1958.

**Anthills of the Savannah** ends on a note of optimism, despite the death of all the major characters. The surviving characters try to transcend present restriction by imagining and attempting to create a better future and a better Nigerian society. Achebe’s novels demonstrate that it is possible for a writer with his roots firmly planted in the local African soil and writing in a foreign language to produce work that is authentic as regards local colour and universal in terms of humanity and the empathy that is shown explicitly. His fiction is both a rejection of some traditions of fiction which preceded it and a fulfillment or others.
Achebe dramatizes the tensions and conflicts which result in the social relationships. He portrays characters, their personal behaviour and idiosyncrasies and predicaments as a reflection of the conflict and the lack of full integration in the changing social scene. His novels question and dismantle the European view of African history and culture; they challenge and provide alternative to many of the assumption 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 these in accordance with his own Igbo world view.

Achebe places the words in context in which the meaning are relatively clear. "I salute you! said Ezeulu and I welcome you again. Non!" (Arrow of AOG, 446). The immediate explanation of a formal greeting is the only occasion in the book when an African word used among Africans is handled that way. It shows clearly that the messenger like his European superior is an outsider. When Achebe uses Igbo words a note of authenticity is added which cannot be conveyed in English translation. Every meeting of the council of the elders of the village of Umuaro is preceded and followed by a series of ritual greetings in Igbo.

"Umuaro Kwenu! Nwaka roared
Hem! replied the men of Umuaro
"Kwenu!"
‘Hem!’

‘Kwezuene!’

‘Hem!’ (AOG, 334).

It is obvious that it is a greeting always used by the natives before addressing anybody. Similarly, Achebe does not translate the fragments of a children’s song which is indicative of Ezeulu’s mood. Ezeulu felt like a kind of elation as he walked causally in the rain after his freedom from the District Officer’s prison. He expresses, “Milizobe ezobe, Ka Mgbado Og-Wogwo! (AOG, 507). The literal meaning of the word is not necessary but the important thing is that the meaning presented is of good mood.

Achebe’s handling of these unexplained Igbo words and phrases can be contrasted with instances of direct translation by the author. For example, two of Ezeulu’s sons repeatedly chant words in Igbo as an incantation. The old man is inside his hut and hears them. “Eke nekwo onye Uka!”. They chant these words repeatedly. Ezeulu listens even more carefully and asks them what they had been saying. Called by the father, the young boys are forced to repeat the words, but this time they are given in English.

“We were saying. Python run! There is a Christian here!”

‘And what does that mean?’
‘Akwuba told us that a python runs away as soon as it hears that’ (AOG, 530).

The incident needs explanation because it is important to the story. The python is sacred to the Igbo whereas the Christians consider it evil. Achebe provides the translation to show the conflict of two cultures. He further sketches the difference between the whiteman’s way of doing things and of the blackman’s. The chief priest of Ulu whose existence is mainly for the protection of the tribe strangely has a cosy relationship with captain Winterbottom.

“Ezeulu is prepared to exploit his friendship with Winterbottom because he sees not only that to resist would be pointless but that change is inevitable and gains can be made”\textsuperscript{18}.

The change from describing the traditional Africa in Achebe’s earlier three novels to political novels like A Man of the People and The Anthills of the Savannah marks a shift in his narrative technique too.

With A Man of the People the African novel has taken up the political theme. There is greater discussion of the conduct of the governments and their failings and the consequences of their failure, for the people for whom the government legislates. This development has necessitated the projection of intellectual, political activist characters who conceive their role as pertinent to help and determine the future direction of their societies.
Some of the African writers fighting for independence from colonial imperialism, desired to fulfill their own selfish interests in the hope of occupying the social position vacated by the colonial rulers. The English and the English way of life became the status symbol for the characters Chief Nanga and Odili, the protagonist as depicted by Achebe in *A Man of the People*. The décor in the house of Nanga was done in western style with ‘princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming silent action water closets, while the rest of the country men settle for unhygienic buckets and pit latrines. “The surprises and contrasts in the country were simply inexhaustible” (*A Man*, p.46). And though Nanga dons the mantle of nationalism and adopts its rhetoric to acquire power and his position as Minister of Culture, his real power and wealth are underwritten by the British.

There is a hint of English snobbery when the traditional African mode of welcome is meted out to chief Nanga. To him the music was nothing but a din and he feels contempt rising in his throat when he watches his village women do their traditional dances of welcome. He mocks at his people for mispronouncing English words, ‘Grammar Phone’ for ‘gramophone’.

This point is well illustrated in the novel. Mrs. Nanga says that Mr. Nanga insisted that his children must be taken home to their village at least once a year, otherwise they would become English. “Don’t you see they hardly speak
our tongue?… they reply in English. The little one, Micah, called my mother a dirty bush woman”. (A Man, p44)

Thus Chinua Achebe has carved a niche for himself among the reading public. He is greatly instrumental in drawing the attention of the people to the variety of life in Africa. His novels give an African view of the country, which is in a phase of intense transition now. Achebe has chosen to be didactic. As he wrote in an essay, “The Novelist as teacher”, about a boy who put ‘writer’ instead of ‘harmattan’ into a school paper on Nigeria, “I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach that boy that there is disgraceful about the African”19.

But this experience of modernization and westernization is psychologically a traumatic experience of the continent. The well-entrenched racial system is on its way out and yet the legacy of tribal segregation aggravated by the system of apartheid does not allow the vast continent to secure peace and stability with reasonable ease. Regional and other divisions are still bleeding the African nation to continued debility. The old order does not change yielding place gracefully to the new order. And religions have to co-exist in the continent in peculiar situation, exerting different levels and degrees of influence on all people.
African artists are trying to give expression to all their bewildering experiences. The most important thing to note in the process is that their writings are mainly a way or means of clarifying to themselves their relation to their age old tradition in their contemporary situation. This impulse dominates the work of most of these writers, even when their work is inaccessible to non-African readers. Chinua Achebe tries to get and give a perspective on the relationship between the past and present doing this kind of work with equal sincerity and honesty.

Achebe presents the Igbo calendar of events before the advent of the Britishers in these tribal lands. C.L. Innes comments:

"At the beginning of Things Fall Apart, the whiteman has not even been heard of, let alone seen. But its end, he has already destroyed the delicate equilibrium of the traditional world"²⁰.

In the works of African artists of today, there is a vibrant note of nostalgia for the way of life that has passed away. This note is all the more vibrant because these artists are able to feel its presence in the contemporary scene.

Achebe gives an exciting view of an age of his country passing through a change. As he faces the political realities of his society he interprets them not only for himself or his fellow African but for the world. Readers, specially in India, can imaginatively feel through some of the characters particularly with
Obi in *No Longer at Ease* the intellectual and emotional impact of these situation. As a man educated in the west, he is the meeting ground of both the cultures, western and non-western. Though he was educated at a great cost by this clan, what he seems to have learned is "inviolable independence of the individual"\(^{21}\). Many Indian readers can recognize the features they share with this African counterparts.

Though it is easy to identity ourselves with these characters there are vast differences among the characters that are described by the African writers. One common unifying factor among them is the concept of group solidarity. These writers differ from one another as their characters are moulded by the traditions of the particular region of Africa to which they belong. A western reader may comparatively find it difficult to group the multiplicity of characterization whereas an Indian reader can more easily identity himself with the character as India is a Kaleidoscope of tradition.

There are many features of culture in Africa. The continent is too large and vast. Different cultural needs have imposed different influences though there seems to be some tendencies which are common. Many writers have made ample use of oral traditions and hence a researcher finds the use of proverbs by these writers. Achebe excels in their use.
Numerous examples are given to illustrate the people’s customs, traditional ceremonies, festivals, beliefs and rituals to demonstrate their importance to the community. This community is at the early stage of economic development. They live a simple rural agrarian life. They have some sort of a political organization, moral conscience and code of conduct guided by the elders and their tradition and custom. Everyone has to fit himself or herself within this pattern of life.

The traditional chief possesses enormous powers. All the people are protected by supreme deity who is helped by a pantheon of lesser gods. These lesser gods have been assigned an individual work. Generally traditional chiefs with the help of the gods maintain law and order in the society. But there are cases where such an equanimity is violated by the leaders themselves denying justice to the people purely for selfish reasons.

Achebe stands out distinctly from other writers by his pungent criticism of the past and present life of his own people. His characters are those who hold on to the traditional customs and practices so tenaciously that it would seem to the readers that the destruction is inherent in themselves. Also Achebe makes the two religions Ibo and Christian, confront each other.

In one of the most wry and pointed passages in the novel, TFA, Akunna with his sound commonsense and Ibo theology is more than a match for the
Christian evangelist with all his book learning. He makes it clear that there is no remarkable difference between the two faiths:

“This treatment of the two religions is typical of Achebe’s impartial treatment of the two different cultures throughout the novel”\textsuperscript{22}.

A Nigerian novelist is greatly influenced by the social setup to which he belongs and tries to trace the circumstances in his society which have paved the way to present day life. He is in a dilemma whether to associate himself with the modern life or to glorify the traditional culture which might have survived more fully without the colonizers. The colonizers disturbed the life of Nigerians.

With the colonizers came the new trading system, administrative machinery and inevitably the missionaries. The latter had taken the initiative in education with an ulterior motive; and it was the missionaries who were monopolizing the field till recently. They had only one aim that is to convert the people to Christianity.

Achebe’s \textit{Things Fall Apart} gives ample examples which the researcher had quoted already to throw light on such developments. The education provided by the missionaries changed the life style of the people. And colonization supplied the means of destruction of the traditional life. When the colonizers assumed power and control of Nigeria, they assumed conveniently that they brought ‘history’, enlightenment and progress to a population which
had no social, political and religious tradition of its own. All that differed from their religions or politics they termed as pantheism or fetishism or superstition and chaos.

Achebe exposes the more recent Nigerian life that has been dominated by uncontrollable corruption. He states thus:

“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”\textsuperscript{23}.

Achebe grew up at a time when Africans were not only opposing the European rule through political action but also beginning to question with increasing vigour and clarity the cultural assumption used to justify that rule. Achebe’s aim in his novels is to redefine the African past and the present in the light of both “official history” and oral tradition. He recreates old Africa and dispels the notion within the modern African that his country was evil and primitive and shows him that it has endured the evils of slavery, compounded by the wrong-headed western forms of education and religion. His racial consciousness is evident in all his novels and he tries to convey to the readers that he is a lover of his country Nigeria eventhough he has stayed in other places especially in the United State of America.
Achebe wishes to emphasize the strength of his tribal past and to show that his people were not living in darkness and primitiveness when the colonizers over-powered them. If it is so, that the Nigerians had their own tradition, a question will arise in the minds of the readers as to what made them succumb to modernity.

Achebe is largely pre-occupied with the traditional life of the Igbos as it comes into conflict and contact with modern Western civilization. He gives a complete and beautiful picture of the cycle of life in the traditional Igbo society, and goes on to show the way in which the new way emerges into existence. The Igbo people have all kinds of varied life. At the same time one reads about a tribe that is chiefly directed toward personal achievements.

Thus to conclude, Achebe is a writer who has been greatly influenced by his circumstances. His life has been, in that way, representative of many of his country men of the present time. His father became a Christian and worked as a religious worker of sorts, being a catechist. So at home Achebe’s life was the life of a Christian, which meant a life style more westernized than native African.

But when he went to his grand parents in the country for his vacation, he landed on traditional African communal life which dominated over his western life style. He was quite conscious of his own tribe’s life style, its customs and traditions which he could throw more light when he wrote his novels. With his
increasing sophistication as a modern African came his realization that this Christian modernity of his was not an unmixed hiatus.

In his African Trilogy he tries to understand his and his community’s past and its relevance to the present. He tries to achieve this without sentimentality, and without resort to a pseudo – intellectual – sociological approach. All his novels graphically reflect the times they deal with in every way. The life and thought of the early community is reflected truthfully even in the rhythm and idiom of the first book TFA. The other novels come further into modern times and their style reflects the change in the author’s writings. The political chaos of Modern Nigeria is admirably captured in the later novel, Anthills of the Savannah and the short stories.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Ibid., p.190.


9. Ibid., p.42.


