CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I dreamt a bad dream, a very bad dream one night. I was lying on a bed spread with white cloth and I felt something creepy against my skin. I looked down on the bed and found a swarm of termites had eaten it up, and the mat and the white cloth. Yes termites had eaten it up right under me.”

(Chinua Achebe, No longer at Ease, 154)

The term post colonial has been subjected to many interpretations. The simplest form of understanding may be that of breaking up the term and attempting to bring about a comprehensible meaning to it. The term ‘post’ would imply the after math of the colonialism and the imperialistic overtones in the experience thereof. The complexity of the concept of colonialism which also gives way to imperialism makes the entire theory of the postcolonial very vast and complex. Ania Loomba in her seminal work Colonialism / Post Colonialism (2005) has been able to articulate the intertwining complexity by segregating the case of a country’s post colonial traits. She states that a country can be both post colonial and neo colonial depending on whether it is totally independent of any colonial constraints or it may also be neo-colonial in that, the country may continue to be economically and culturally dependant on the colonial influences. (Loomba, 12)
The importance of the impact of colonization and decolonization cannot be underestimated because the unequal relationship between the colonizers and the colonized has its effects till today. Anne McClintock has cited the fact that because of the unequal political relations there is still in some sense indirect influences in the relationships between powers in the world today. This makes it difficult to actually consider the so called post colonial nations as truly post colonial (McClintock, 87). She pointed out that imperial power “took haphazard shape from myriad encounters with alternative forms of authority, knowledge and power.”(Ibid, Imperial 10-19) There is more to Post colonialism which cannot be theorized as a mere psychological explanation of colonial denigration. Social and historical changes have been prevalent whose immediate cannot be overruled. There is always a location of certain social system of values and it becomes pertinent for theories to accommodate multiple the understandings of these values as a necessary reality.

Human actions are often guided by them and diversity is created out of it. It is not possible for any nation to be re-written because it becomes a reason for emergence of discord and separation between discursive construct and historical practice. This calls for careful consideration of any kind of unabashed intellectual appropriation of the culture of a people within a representation discourse.

It is but inevitable that in writing, differences and disjunction in meanings can emerge which may deviate from the acceptable order of priorities. In the process, the hierarchical dialogue is broken up. As such, colonialism and imperialism are terms which are used interchangeably. While colonialism can be defined as the direct conquest on the lands and goods of other nations and its people, the term imperialism has other implication as well. Marxist theory as encapsulated, looks at it in the form of a phenomenon
in Lenins *The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1947) which gave the colonialists direct control over the finances or economic control over a nation.

While this may be the border line between the concept of colonialism and its product as imperialism, the presence of the ruthless logic of oppositionality cannot be denied. This inevitably leads to the ‘others’ suppression as different and inferior. The prevailing condition, as the aftermath of the ‘colonial’ intercourse of the culture, is therefore seen as Post-colonialism. There is a difference in the term as it does not directly imply anti-colonialism as against the notions of atavistic nature which is essentialist and nativist.

Anti-colonial attitudes have mobilized the population against their rulers; ethnic identity arises in this context. Those cultures which were despised and denigrated by the colonialists have been taken as authentic and pristine tradition. Yet hardly any attempts have been made as has been extensively discussed in canonical critical texts to retrieve past glory or discover ethnic purity and origins. Parry opines that, it is now an accepted fact that no dominant centre can reinstall or replicate linguistic polarities and claim to liberate the ‘other’ from the bondage of ‘colonialism’ (Parry,14). Heterogeneity therefore lies in the traditional representation of the stereotypes of colonialists. There is a world beyond ethnicity which calls for an assessment of the various assignments of the consciousness that demarcates the oppressed from the confines of the white man’s grasp over all that is intelligible.

Bhabha on such grounds rejects the notion that colonialism must/should be viewed from the Hegelian theory of hierarchy or the master/slave dialect or even the projection of “otherness”. Spivak on the other
hand is, “...critical of the binary opposition of the colonizer/colonized... rather disciplinary enclave of the critique of imperialism” (qtd. in McRobbie, 9)

But there is a definite presence of dualism in colonialism where the colonized are undermined and repositioned, brute institutional representation is given in the form of obligation and persuasion which the position of the ‘other’ colludes but at same time resists. Fanon in the Black Skin, White Masks (1952) addresses the problem of native identity in his theory. He opines that it validates him to rebel which is why he distances himself from the rediscovery of tradition, where there could perhaps be space for a reconception of the “autochthonous” culture from within; but rather there is a reaffirmation and powerful reconstruction of customs, traditions and beliefs.

Fanon’s argument is that these steps towards resurgence of these traits are a break from the colonized tradition. It is these allowances of “passionate espousals” that actually position the native to fight against all kinds of exploitative and alienating suppressions of man (Fanon, Racism 43). All colonized people with a feeling of inferiority on account of a compromise which buried the cultural originalities, find it inevitable to face and encounter the language of civilizing nation. In this sense the culture of the mother country becomes their new found apparel. The language itself is their new identity, which they grapple to hold on to, Fanon’s argument leads to the fact that somehow a political consciousness is promoted. They become ‘the wretched of the earth’ who are actually mobilized to create an armed struggle against colonial power.
When the history of colonization ends, the history of the nation emerges. Fanon is read as an anti-colonialist critic whom Bhabha calls a premature post structuralist. The aspect of the ‘black skin/white masks’ is seen in Fanon’s theories and body of writings. The obscurity in Fanon’s writing is gleaned from the fact that his works have become a paradigm of colonial condition, an implacable enmity between the native and the invader. His texts are read as theories of resistance and liberation.

‘Post colonialism’ can be a chronological, political, cultural, social question as against decolonization. It is even quite relevant in undoing neat chronologies. That is the reason why ‘post’ in colonialism need not imply an end but rather be viewed as a gradual progress moving towards a non-negotiable realization. The phenomenon cannot be periodised and it is limited to territories within the claims for recognition of ‘culture’ only. The term ‘post colonial’ is therefore determined, “…to cover all the culture affected by imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffins, 2)

A domesticated acceptance of anti-colonialism and the racism are cultural questions. They come under the preview of questioning the difference between orature and literature. It also addresses the questions about the subjects of colonialism as to who the subjects may be and the manner in which they are put addressed. The involvement of either the ‘colonizer’ or the colonized or otherwise is also brought into question. De-centering or re-centering are also highlighted.

Inevitably post-colonialism also impinges upon the question of nationalism which is undoubtedly a political feature but becomes indispensable as is seen in Fanon’s Algerian experience and Said’s Palestinian struggle. To some
critics it implies political progress; and the issue of location becomes vital in understanding the bigger picture. The question of belonging and the insider/outsider difference and relationship is dislocated. It must therefore be realized that the complexity present in the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized cannot be adequately explained by merely posing an oppositional model. As a consequence of the many existing schools of thought existing in parallel, binary representation is no longer easily accepted and the figure of the subaltern is considered intrinsic to the theory. The specific space attained by English literature within the sphere of post-modernism is therefore highly questioned.

It is important to understand that the rearticulating of ‘power’ as given to understanding the colonized is not to possess ‘colonial power’ but rather to resist within the discipline of civility. There are opinions that this stance of entering into an unchartered territory of Europe by means of discourse is leading to hybridity. Yet it can be argued that what is articulated in colonial discourses is not that of the powerful nation writing out the ‘other’ but rather an ambivalent reinscription of the colonial and the other. There is a marked difference in the critical practices. The materialistic critique views it as, historical events which arise out of conflicting economic and therefore social conditions.

Spivak believes in the theory of “…exorbitation of discourse and related curiosity enabling socio-economic political institutions and other form of social praxis,” (qtd. in Parry 21) which is shared by Bhabha as well despite their differences in the theoretical concept. Spivak looks at the imperialistic bellicosity signifying superior knowledge as an act of complete destruction of the old culture. She leaves no space for the colonized to speak in confrontation. Moving to another extreme, Bhabha argues that the colonized
nation’s maneuvers and stratagems of confrontation provide no alternative
text as the affectivity of the English book was established (Bhabha, 
_Difference_ 198). Anti-colonialist discourse required a different set of
questions, techniques and strategies in order to reconstruct it.

The other is the theory of power and contest. The notion of
hegemony is inseparable from that of counter hegemony. According to this
notion resistance is created leading the marginalized towards the belief of the
existing structure of relationships through ideological inducement. Therefore
it cannot be denied that in this case the dominant discourse is perceived as
throttling whereas the alternative is projected on the basis of the never
colonized territory as a utopian alternative. It replaces the reflection of
disobedience and combats the emergence of other relationships where values
and aspirations are articulated.

Fanon questions European discourse for its presumptuous
arrogance and through a native insurrection reconstructs a legitimate process
of cultural resistance as well as encouraging disruption by writing a text that
can anticipate a condition beyond colonialism and imperialism.

“Face to face with the white man, the negro has a past to
legitimate, a vengeance to extract... In no way should I dedicate
myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro
Civilization. I will not make myself a man of the past.... I’m not
a prisoner of history.....it is only by going beyond the historical,
instrumental hypothesis, that I will initiate the cycle of my
freedom. (Fanon, _Black Skin_ 231)

Fanon talks about the birth of an oppositional discourse raised out
of a political struggle which in turn creates conditions to invoke the past.
Once this happens due importance is given to archaic native tradition which
far supersedes the epitome of coloniality and its epistemic bellicosity almost
to the point of rejection. To the colonized intellectual, the essential qualities of the west (colonizers) seem to remain eternal. The native intellectual also seem to have accepted the cogency of these ideas so much so that they would be vigilant about these passed-on beliefs. However, it is during the struggle for cultural and historical liberation that this artificial conditioning gets dislocated. Western values appear worthless compared to the timeless value systems handed down which has been passed as the indestructible tradition.

While asserting the necessity to defend the past, Fanon does not overlook the limitation of the writers and intellectuals who depend on the techniques as well as language that have been borrowed from the ‘stranger’. To him it is more of a transitional writing where legends were reinterpreted in the light of borrowed aestheticism. This for Fanon is a prelude to a literature which will fight not only to disrupt literary styles and themes. He also perceived that it would arouse national consciousness and give it form and contour and fling open countless new horizons.

He opens up a whole new aspect of queries without bringing in any resolutions to the discussions on the cultural nationalism. (Fanon, Wretched 170) It projects a development which becomes inseparable from the community’s engagement in a combative social action; the final culmination resulting in the rejection of the colonialists signifying system. Clearly this is an aspect which colonial discourse has not considered and as such has give rise to the concept of the native taken as a historical subject, where the agent of the oppositional discourse is highlighted.

Abdul Jan Mohammad takes up and opposes Bhabha’s theory in The Economy of Manichean Allegory: the Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literatures. This particular work has been considered as one of
the major critical canons set as a paradigm for African literature. In this essay he recognizes the presence of an ideological problem in the colonial/anti-colonial writing. He clarifies that the indigenous people had been subjugated by military coercion and bureaucratic control and therefore the colonial discourse must be understood in terms of the presence of the,

“...exigencies of the domestic that is European and the colonialist politics and culture”. (Ibid 62-63)

His discourse is based on the concept of the existence of a Manichean duality in the conflictual structure of colonialism as purported by Fanon. He rejects the presence of the correspondence between the English and the African literature and insists that each fulfills its own given ideological function. While one solves the conflict of contradictions securing its own established world, the other projects a realistic representation of what is essentially African and achieves in portrays a contrasting picture to that which had been created by the colonizers.

But again if colonialism and its discourse is to be understood in terms of condemnation for its imperial conquest and consolidation of a condition of passive conquest, then it also to be seen that colonialism was a variable phenomena and its discursive violence in separable from material and institutional force. Mohammad further analyses the internal overtones in colonial discourse in Manichean Aesthetic: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa. Here the Anglophone fiction of colonial Africa in its Hegemonic phase is examined for failing to specify imperialism as a moment of colonialism has been critiqued upon. He has made it the central trope within which he has studied the embedded structure of colonial discourse. It has also become the challenging concept from which African fiction placates its antagonistic dialogue.
Spivak and Bhabha have refused to accept colonialist misconstruction with highlighting of native traditions and their valorization. Spivak distinctively believes in the natives’ arduous attempt to rise against the colonizers by a sentimental drive and nostalgia for the lost roots. It cannot however restore the sovereign self of the colonies and therefore cannot become a ground for countering those ideologies. It can thus not be taken as a representation for a contesting practice. She has taken this stand even in her essay, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ Bhabhas’ argument is related to Spivaks assertion but differs in that he maintains that in nationalist criticism, the view of the text’s transparent relationship to a preconstituted reality, represses ideological and discursive construction of difference.

This in turn reduces the problem of representing difference to the demand for difference and more favorable representations. Spivak and Bhabha deny the radical forces of creating transgressive appropriations in a reverse discourse which will try to contest the so called ‘master text’ on its own terrain. Jan Mohammad argues for the power of positive representations subverting through inversion the received colonialist version.

Jan Mohammad’s believes that there is an ideological mission in African writing which attempts to retrieve the value and dignity of a past that has been insulted by European representation. At the same time they are to counter the almost eternal verities and universalities of a liberal criticism which either deforms colonial difference to make it conform to western notions of intelligibility or reproves it as deviant. To him this mode of fulfilling this emancipatory role is realism. This particularly seems to be true of the African writings in general and Achebe’s in particular.
To a great extent the politics of colonial discourse and its counter hegemonic alternative has since been locked in a constant struggle for ascendancy. Therefore, the search for a fiction that can recover Africa’s autonomous resources was required. Such a discourse also needed to reconstitute a fragmented colonial subject and contribute to the collective objective to regain a sense of direction and identity form the midst of chaos and the debasement.

It is to be noted that such reminiscences are not merely to encourage a passive yearning of retrieving a past which is, to a large extent, irretrievable but rather a kind of an intercession to win back a territory from the colonialist representation. In the African context this distinction can be made between the nostalgia for a lost past as set against the romantic notion of the Negritude movement, which attempted a portrayal of an idealized, monolithic and homogenized African past. Again there is the other dimension where attempts are made by writers like Leopold Senghor to valorize the indigenous cultures and almost completely reverse the old colonial Manichean.

The conflict emerges clearly between the European fabrication of Africa, the ‘Dark continent’ and the culture and people existing in anonymity and the realistic representation of Africa by the African writers. It is in a sense a reaction or even a counter action with depictions of representations of African existence, thinking, perception and values. The hegemonic fiction strove to offer apologies for the colonial rule while the colonized writers reacted with the stories of social havoc and psychic and cultural damage inflicted by the white invasion. Jan Mohammad argues for the potential of a historical memory to an anti-colonialist struggle.
He implies that in order to recover from the ‘assaults’ and ‘belligerent bourgeois occupation’, the colonial and post-colonial cultures must aspire to possess an understanding of the bourgeois ideals of humanism (qtd. in Parry, 29) But interestingly, Mohammad’s exposition is different from Fanon’s perception that the paradoxes as well as the pitfalls of rediscovering tradition and representing it are present and prevalent within the Western system of meanings.

Fanon felt, it is a transitional process where the progress of liberating the consciousness of the oppressed into a new level of reality. Jan Mohammad on the other hand views the advent of the post-colonial as the arrival of a completely definitive oppositional discourse. To elucidate further we may also recall Walter Benjamin’s recollection of the oppressed past in which the image of the enslaved ancestors are re-inscribed in the present (Benjamin 262-263). This aids in the completion of the task of liberation keeping in mind of generations of the downtrodden. Julian Roberts describes this trend of creating a vision of societal transition as,

“...absolute discontinuity between the conditions of our present historical existence and those that will follow after the messianic transformation”. (Roberts, 206).

Mohammad’s theory of authenticating the past by producing a counter discourse is often rebuked for lacking what Roberts would call a visionary gaze in anticipating displaces received in displaced construction. In arguing his case on African writing Mohammad, discusses English Language, social/psychological realist novels where the politics is embedded in the subject matter, by treating both realist and modernist fictions as modes of his study which is inclusive of both African and European worlds. It lies within a
referential mode of criticism both as portrayals and interpretations of the existing worlds. Manichean aesthetics give rise to such readings which have often been neglected and contradictory meanings have been enunciated.

Jan Mohammad seems to consider the fact that literature can be viewed as a cultural text and rhetorical practice which produced and performed within determinate historical, social and political conditions would enable and constrain the construction of meaning. Stories dealing with colonial military conquest, coercive institutions and conflictual relationships, marginalized by the modes of colonial discourse are re-read. In some cases an analyses of these meanings restores to these writings a particular sense of identity, historical density and sensitivity.

But he maintains that there is not a trace of the presence of prevailing discontinuities, defensive rhetorical strategies, unorthodox language challenging official thought as the source of the texts’ politics. In order to understand colonial discourse, we need to map its ideological function in relation to actual imperialist practices. Any ambivalence produced, he reiterates is the product of a deliberated or even a subconscious duplicity of imperialism.

In paradigm of text and context, it is to be understood that writing is controlled and is to a great extent determined by political and social imperatives. Therefore the changes which are external to the field become imperative. But again the accepting discourse implies articulating and justifying the aims of the colonialist. But ‘bracketing’ the political context of culture and history in the text becomes highly disputable. The very notion of a counter discourse is bound by its role as a defensive and a reactive reply to
the hegemonic construction. Consequently the so called third world literary
dialogue with western cultures is marked by the certain broad characteristics:

“...its attempts to negate the prior European negation of the
colonized cultures and the other is its adoption and creative
modification of western languages to be specific the English
language as well as artistic forms in conjugation with indigenous
languages and forms.”(Mohammad, Economy 84)

He asserts that the analysis of this dialogue will bring to the front
the fact that the domain of literary and cultural syncretism is increasingly
being seen as belonging to the third world artists instead of colonialist and
non-colonialist writers on them.

In an important essay, ‘Humanism and Minority Literature:
Toward the Definition of Counter Hegemonic Discourse’, Mohammad
maintains that the outcome of the post-colonial tradition can be placed as an
outcome of a dialectic between the hegemonic culture and the third world
writers. It is interesting that the argument here is the argument which holds
that the responsibility rests upon the ‘minority criticism’ to resist the western
hegemonic idea of ascendency in ideology of western liberal humanism by
cultivating and celebrating ‘marginality!’ He asserts that the minority
criticism,

“...must articulate and help to bring about consciousness to those
elements of minority literature that oppose, subvert or even
negate the power of hegemonic culture.”( Mohammad, Humanism
299)

Fanon has elaborated on the perspective of colonial culture as a
western representation of civilization and culture which has been devised
through the imperial power. Yet this seems to be present in most anti-colonial
writings. Consequently, it points to the failure of colonial discourse analysis
to hold on to the range and effectivity of the triumphalist address highlighted by the imperialist attitude in discourse as well (Jameson, 81).

Edward Said also observes this omission and declared that the onset of such literary and cultural establishments has led to an awareness of the seriousness in imperialist studies and what would be fall under the preview of cultural off limits. These studies which have actually led to the recognition of a suitable case for theoretical enquiry. Some of the perspective of colonialism is the presence of subjugation and liberation, dislocation and relocation which rest on its trajectory clearly defined by western definitions of meanings and value. Spivak refers to it as the “…willed autobiography of the West masquerading as a disinterested history.”(Spivak, Rani 131)

This is the reality present where alternative constructive analysis is made; there no longer exists the colonial area where it was accepted as a historical catalyst. Radical criticism often overlooked and treated the subject as the narrative wherein reality the history they created was imperialistic. Frederic Jameson’s call to restore uninterrupted narrative and the fundamental history in an attempt to create an originary text is criticized for repudiating the contextual implications. It was again the emergence of a theory which refused to accept exocentric world, history has redrawn the global map marked by the text of colonialism. Though the results have been varied, these studies have stimulated analysis where colonization seems to be the explanatory notion that is applicable to all situations of structural domination (Jameson, 19).

They are supposed to be valid for formulating a single grand theory to study discursive systems of oppression and discrimination which had been initiated at the 1984 Essex Sociology of Literature conference, ‘Europe
and its others’. The conference was held in order to bring about identification of certain strategies of discrimination and control and later link it to the subject. This is where Spivak also brought about the critique on the discourse. Edward Said has pointed towards the study of a knowledge of the underlying surface of ‘texture and textuality’ of disciplines of literature, history and philosophy. Said cites the example from Gauri Vishwanathan’s, researches which has managed to unearth the underlying politics of modern English studies which has been used as a mode of ideological pacification by the British administration in order to reform the Indian Society (Said, Intellectuals 63-64).

A critical reading of the late Nineteenth century writings will give enough evidence of the ingenious and permutations of gender, race, class and nationalist discourses in order in order to establish moral and knowledgeable authorities used to exercise global power. Virility, mastery, exploitation, performance, action leadership, technology, progress are some of the taxonomy of values that are expressed clearly by imperialist discourses.

Then again as far as the Theory of Resistance is concerned, it stands for perusal that the intermittent process of decolonization and the study of Post-colonialism itself affirm that the colonized were never successfully pacified. But articulating the theory of resistance brings up several questions of the topics of subjectivity, identity, agency and the status if the reverse discourses as oppositional practices which pose problems about the appropriate models for counter-hegemonic discourse.

It is inevitable that a Post-colonial critique is designated as a discourse of deconstructing. It displaces the exocentric premises of discursive apparatus which constructed the third world both for the West and the culture
so represented. Yet again there are those critics who maintain that a discourse can never be considered as a monologue. Its constitution moves into a horizon of competing contrary voices against which it asserts its dialogues. Therefore theoretical paradigms which project colonialism as instrument of social control are most likely to be read as producing the colonized as a stable position of subjugation. Hence the possibility of theorizing resistance is foreclosed. Based on this evaluation the other side of Post-colonial critiques stand for the assertion that the colonized refusal of their positions as subjected and subjugated cannot be accorded centre stage. It goes on to assert that mythological beginnings can actually create a loss of commitment to ones’ own contemporary plural/secular identity.

This stand seems to answer the recurring question of whether revisiting the repositories of memory and cultural survivals in the cause of Post-colonial refashioning can have a nostalgic value. Again there is another group of critical discourse which moves towards a consideration of a notion of an ahistorical essential and unified self. Stuart Hall has stood for defending the reprobation of the search for ethnic identity. He believes in the creation of a space for revising an understanding of ethnicity from its, “…equivalent with nationalism, imperialism, racism and its function in the dominant discourse and accommodating it for a different usage in the Post-colonial content” (Hall, 31). Subjectivity to Hall is a narrative, a story and a history that which is told and not simply found. Identity on the other hand is an invention “…which is never complete, always changing...can be constituted within representation, while still being aware of colonial subject as a product of multiple constitution…” (Hall, Cultural 222)

Despite a contradiction and over determination of post-colonial ideological position, he writes of a negotiable call for the ethnic and cultural
differences as sites of articulation. He also denied the role played by the cultural identity in all colonial struggles. This continues to be a very powerful and emergent form of representation amongst the marginalized people. Narratives of decolonisation almost always include rhetoric of ‘nativism’ in one form or the other. It is necessary to view these phenomena mainly from its claims to ancestral purity.

“Decolonisation is the meeting of the two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature...veritable creation of new men...the settler never ceases to be the enemy, the opponent, the foe that must be overthrown...the immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called to question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonisation-the history of pillage-and to bring into existence the history of the nation-the history of decolonization” (Fanon, Concerning 30-41).

The theory of nativism itself is strongly debated upon. There are critics who censure the cultural nationalism for its complicity with the terms of ‘colonial discourse’. The ‘nativist’ topology itself discusses the argument of the inside/outside, the indigenous/alien, Western/traditional and in raising these questions; the topology of the nativist is finally launched. The colonizer becomes the forceful benefactor and the colonized the submissive recipient.

The reciprocity of the colonial relationship, even when stressed, continues to give all power to the Western discourse. Arguments come up even in the case of the phenomenon of cultural nationalism as far as Africa is concerned. African identity is seen a consequence of answering back the Europeans for what they had snatched from them; vocabularies, metaphors and their dignity. This is what brings Achebe and his works to the forefront of argument and discourse more intricately in this thesis.
The thesis focuses upon the three principal books of Achebe; *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*, which are taken together as the *African Trilogy*. The other works produced the latter part of his career including essays and poems have also been included as sources for the research. It is of great importance that we understand the initial periods in Achebe’s life as he is one author whose works have been shaped by the events in his life. Even in the works we will find that he keeps pace with the events in the socio-political arena of his country and its impact on his people. Being born and brought up by the environment created by the colonization, Achebe was inevitably greatly impacted.

Achebe was born in the Igbo village of Ogidi on November 16, 1930 to Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet AnaenechiIloegbunam who were converts to the Protestant Church Mission Society (CMS) in Nigeria. He was named Albert Chinualumogu Achebe. Mr. Isaiah stopped practicing the indigenous religion but nevertheless respected its traditions. The manner in which the entire siblings of five have been named is an evidence of his respect for his tradition and customs. Achebe's unabbreviated name, Chinualumogu was a prayer for divine protection and stability meaning "May God fight on my behalf". The Achebe family had five other children; Frank Okwuofu, John Chukwuemekalfeanyichukwu, ZinobiaUzoma, Augustine Nduka and Grace Nwanneka who were similarly named fusing their traditional faith and the ‘new’ religion.

As a child Achebe was exposed to extensive story-telling, which was a part of the Igbo tradition and an integral part of the community life. Chinua's mother and sister ZinobiaUzoma filled his childhood with many stories which he obviously treasured till his adult days. His respect for the
traditions of his people was further conditioned by his father, who taught him to take pride in one’s own culture and customs. Their house was a storehouse of traditional artifacts, almanacs and numerous books pertaining to the tradition they had left behind to adapt to a new religion.

The Achebes had not forgotten their origins and roots though. The numerous collection of the senior Achebe also included a prose adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and an Igbo version of *The Pilgrims’ Progress*. Chinua was therefore witness to the various traditional village events, like the frequent masquerade ceremonies, which later got recreated and woven into his novels and stories.

Achebe was educated in the St Philips’ Central School initially. He received religious education when in school but was moved to a higher class when the chaplain took notice of his intelligence. He was known to have good reading skills and the best handwriting in his class. He attended Sunday school and evangelistic classes and learnt in depth of the Christian faith as well. It was in one such session that he had witnessed a controversial issue take place between the church apostates and the catechist. This did not miss Achebe’s keen observation and it was reflected in the novel *Things Fall Apart*.

Achebe enrolled as a student at the Central School in the village of Nekede, four kilometres from Owerri, where his older brother John taught. It was here that Achebe gained an appreciation for Mbari, a traditional art form which seeks to invoke the gods' protection through symbolic sacrifices in the form of sculpture and collage. Achebe joined the Government College in Umuahia in 1944. It was modeled on the British public school, and funded
by the colonial administration. The Government College had been established in 1929 specifically with a view to prepare the future elite of Nigeria to help continue the colonial legacy.

The academic standards were rigorous and they accepted boys solely on the basis of ability. The medium of education was in the English language and language of the school was English, not only to develop proficiency but also to provide a common tongue for pupils from different Nigerian language groups. Achebe described this later as an imposition of the language of the colonizers being forced into their faces.

Achebe discovered his world of books in his school library like Booker T Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901) which is an autobiography of a former American slave. Achebe "found it sad, but it showed him another dimension of reality". He also added other classical work such as Gulliver’s Travels (1726), David Copperfield (1850), and Treasure Island (1883) together with tales of colonial derring-do such as H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887) and John Buchan's *Prester John* (1910). Achebe informs that the books had a lot of effect on him as it would on any other reader and he "took sides with the white characters against the savages". He says that unconsciously he developed a dislike for Africans. In all the pages he saw that, they were ordered to put away their language and communicate in the language of the colonisers. The effect was so deep that he as an individual Igbo, began to react as an outsider and began to take sides with the Europeans and hate his own people.

In 1948, in preparation for independence, Nigeria's first university opened which was known as University College and later came to be known as
the University of Ibadan, it was an associate college of the University of London. Achebe was admitted as a Major Scholar in the University's first intake and given a bursary to study medicine but after a year of grueling work, he changed to English, History, and Theology. He lost his scholarship and had to pay tuition fees. He was however helped out by his family. He had so much support from his family that his older brother Augustine gave up money for a trip home from his job as a civil servant so his studies would not be hampered. The University had a strong faculty and includes many famous writers amongst its alumni. These include Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, novelist Elechi Amadi, poet and playwright John Pepper Clark, and poet and friend Christopher Okigbo.

Achebe started his debut as an author from the university itself. In 1950 Achebe wrote a piece for the University Herald entitled "Polar Undergraduate", his debut as an author of which he went on to become the editor. He also contributed essays and letters about philosophy and freedom in academia, some of which were published in another campus magazine, The Bug. Achebe wrote his first short story, In a Village Church, when he was in the University. It combined details of life in rural Nigeria with Christian institutions and icons, this feature carried on to the other stories for which he became known for. He began to experiment with other themes in his works like the conflict between tradition and modernity and wrote stories like the "The Old Order in Conflict with the New" and "Dead Men's Path". He tried to come to a consensus and bring about an understanding and dialogue of both sides. It was at the university that he was introduced to the study in comparative religion that he began to explore the Christianity and the African traditional religion. It was perhaps with the exposure to the gamut of
literature that Achebe began to have a critical view of the European literature about Africa.

He read Irish novelist Joyce Cary's book *Mister Johnson* 1939, about a cheerful Nigerian man who (among other things) works for an abusive British storeowner. Achebe observed the authors’ cultural ignorance in the way the protagonist was portrayed and disliked the unmistakable way that the European authors misunderstood Africa and her people. After getting a second class degree and being unsure about his career prospects he returned to his village Ogidi. It was during this period that he applied for an English teaching position at the Merchants of Light School at Oba.

It is interesting to note that this school was built in the area demarcated for the unfriendly spirits and the abominable. This came to be reflected in the novel *Things Fall Apart* in a major way and called the ‘evil forest’ where the Christian missionaries built the church and their schools. He taught in Oba for four months, but when an opportunity arose in 1954 to work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), he left the school and moved to Lagos the "evil forest", where the Christian missionaries are given a place to build their church. Achebe later worked in the NBS, a radio network started in 1933 by the colonial government in the Talks Department, preparing scripts for oral delivery. It must have been this experience that helped him master the subtle nuances between written and spoken language.

This trait later became his tool for creating an original work in answer to the people he wished to address the African and the Westerners. Achebe seems to have been greatly influenced by the life and the environment around him and in this way the city of Lagos also made a significant
impression on him. The city teemed with recent migrants from the rural villages. Achebe drew upon his experiences when describing the city in his 1960 novel *No Longer at Ease*.

While in Lagos, Achebe began his work on novels. It was a very challenging, since there was very little African fiction written in English, although Amos Tutuola’s *Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Cyprian Ekwensi’s *People of the City* (1954) were notable exceptions. While appreciating these former works, Achebe made tremendous effort to cultivate his own style. In the process he pioneered the creation of the Nigerian novel. Another event that had a big effect on Achebe was Queen Elizabeths’ visit to Nigeria in 1956. It brought about many issues to the surface which concerned colonialism and politics, and Achebe gleaned a lot from it to broaden his perspectives on his role as a citizen. It was during this time that he was selected into the Staff School run by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). He used his trip outside Nigeria as an opportunity to advance his technical production skills. In London, he met a novelist named Gilbert Phelps, to whom he offered the manuscript who showed great enthusiasm. Achebe declined any further help in publishing insisting that it needed more work.

Achebe set to work revising and editing his novel in Nigeria; revolving around the story of a hardworking farmer Okonkwo who lived around the colonization of Nigeria, which we now know as *Things Fall Apart*, after a line in the poem "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats. By 1957, he had formed the novel to his liking and sent it to a typing service offered in a London company. He did not receive any communication from
them and it was with the intervention of his boss from the NBS, Angela Beattie that he received the typed copy of his manuscript. This was a crucial turn of event for him as he puts that he might have given up altogether out of discouragement.

After many rejections from the publishers, the Heinemann publishers finally in 1958 under the influence of their educational advisor Donald Macraein, published 2000 copies of the hardcovers. It was Macraein who reported that the book was the best novel ever written since the war. It was ironic that while the book was received well by the press in Britain with positive reviews from critic Walter Allen and novelist Angus Wilson and other raving reviews from the Times Literary Supplement who wrote that the book "genuinely succeeds in presenting tribal life from the inside".

Others like The Observer called it "an excellent novel", and the literary magazine Time and Tide said that "Mr. Achebe's style is a model for aspirants." In Nigeria itself, the work took time to be received well. One review in the magazine Black Orpheus said: "The book as a whole creates for the reader such a vivid picture of Ibo life that the plot and characters are little more than symbols representing a way of life lost irrevocably within living memory." Things Fall Apart went on to become one of the most important books in African literature. Selling over 8 million copies around the world, it was translated into 30 languages, making Achebe the most translated African writer of all time.

It was during this year that Achebe met Christie Okoli who worked in the NBS and later married on 10 September 1961 in the Chapel of Resurrection on the campus of the University of Ibadan. Their first child, a
daughter named Chinelo, was born on 11 July 1962. Their son, Ikechukwu was born on 3 December 1964, and another boy named Chidi, on 24 May 1967. Achebe began to be worried about the way in which Africa and the Africans were being portrayed in the schools that their children were attending since most of the teachers were white. In order to address these issues in 1966, Achebe published his first children's book, *Chike and the River*. The Achebes had another daughter in March 1970, after the Biafran War, named Nwando. They have six grandchildren, Chochi, Chino, Chidera, C.J. (Chinua Jr.), Nnamdi and Zeal.

*No Longer at Ease* was written in 1960, while he still dating Christie Okoli and dedicated this novel to her. Having shown his skills for portraying the distinctive traits of Igbo life, Achebe successfully showed his ability to depict modern Nigerian life. He drew from his experiences in Lagos and the life of the people there and interpreted it into his work. He continues the trend in showing the protagonist as the grandson of the hero of his previous novel, *Things Fall Apart*, a story of a young Nigerian facing the conflict between tradition and modernity in the awake of the new generation, on the threshold of the Nigerian Independence.

Later that year, Achebe was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship for six months of travel, which he called "the first important perk of my writing career"; Achebe set out for a tour of East Africa. During his visit he encountered several incidences pertaining to the ignorant and racist attitudes of the people. Ethnicity questions were raised even in offices. An instant is cited where he travelled to Kenya, and was required to complete an
immigration form by checking a box indicating his ethnicity: European, Asiatic, Arab or other.

He was shocked and saddened at being forced into an "Other" identity. He took an extra form as a souvenir in order to be able to remind himself of the need to fight in his own way for his people. He further noticed the paternalistic attitude of the non-African clerks and the social elites in the course of his journey. Achebe also found in his travels that Swahili was gaining prominence as a major African language. Radio programs were broadcast in Swahili, and its use was widespread in the countries he visited. But there was indifference in the attitudes of the people towards literature written in Swahili. He met the poet Sheikh Shaaban Robert, who complained of the difficulty he had faced in trying to publish his Swahili-language work.

He further experienced the disease of segregation in a bus in Rhodesia now called Zambia where he sat in the section meant for the whites only on the way to Victoria Falls. He was questioned by ticket collector; to whom he replied “If you must know I come from Nigeria, and there we sit where we like in the bus.” He was cheered by the black travelers from the bus on reaching, but he did not overlook the fact that those very same people were not able to resist the policy of segregation at the time. Achebe again left Nigeria, this time as part of a Fellowship for Creative Artists awarded by UNESCO two years later. He travelled to the United States and Brazil where he met with a number of writers from the US, including novelists Ralph Ellison and Arthur Miller.

In Brazil, he met with several other authors, and expressed his concern over the Portugese literature that it would be lost if left untranslated.
into a more widely spoken language. He showed unbiased concern for the literature of the other colonies as well. Achebe was promoted at the NBS to the position of Director of External Broadcasting on his return. His main duty was to help create the Voice of Nigeria network. The network was to be able to maintain an objective perspective during the turbulent era immediately following independence. The station broadcast its first transmission on New Years’ Day 1962. A series of conflicts between officials of varying parties caused the then Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to declare a state of emergency in the Western region; the network was put to test during this particular period. Achebe was distressed at witnessing the evidence of corruption and forceful domination of political opposition. These events did not go unnoticed and was inscribed within the annals not only of history but his writings of those accounts as well.

Achebe became the initiating figure for the growth of the African Literature. In 1962 he attended an executive conference of African writers in English at the Makere University in Kampala, Uganda and met with important literary figures from around the continent and the world, including Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor, Nigerian playwright and poet Wole Soyinka, and US poet-author Langston Hughes. He highlighted the importance of community among the isolated voices of the continent and beyond.

Achebe was chosen to be General Editor of the African Writers’ Series, which became a significant force in bringing Postcolonial Literature from Africa to the rest of the world. It was Achebe who sent the novel by Thiong’o who was then known as James Ngugi called *Weep Not Child* to the Heinemann publishers. It was published to coincide with its
paperback line of books from African writers. Hill, the publisher indicated this was one earth-moving way to change the misconception where British publishers, "regarded West Africa only as a place where you sold books."

As these works became more widely available, reviews and essays about African literature, specifically from Europe, began to flourish. He rose against the flooding responses into his home country through the means of an essay titled "Where Angels Fear to Tread" in the December 1962 issue of Nigeria Magazine. He sternly criticized the critics, who looked at African writers from the outside, saying: "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak (and 'language' here does not mean simply words, but a man's entire world view)."

Achebe's third book, Arrow of God, was published in 1964. The theme of the continuing conflict is explored in this book as well. The intersections of Igbo tradition and European Christianity are extensively dealt with in this novel. The novel tells the story of Ezeulu, a Chief Priest of Ulu, it is set in the village of Umuaro at the start of the twentieth century. Shocked by the power of British intervention in the area, he orders his son to learn the foreigners' secret. As with Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart and Obi in No Longer at Ease, Ezeulu is erased by the resulting tragedy.

The idea for the novel came in 1959, when Achebe heard the story of a Chief Priest being imprisoned by a District Officer. He also drew further inspiration a year later when a collection of Igbo objects were excavated from the area by archaeologist Charles Thurston Shaw. Achebe was struck by the cultural sophistication of the artifacts. In addition to these instances he was privy to a series of papers from colonial officers much like the
Achebe successfully combined these strands of history and the powerful novel was born. A revised edition was published in 1974 to correct what Achebe called "certain structural weaknesses". Many writers had expressed their appreciation and surprise for the way that the protagonist experienced downfall. Writers like John Updike praised the author's courage to write "an ending few Western novelists would have contrived". (Updike, 16) Achebe gave a befitting response by suggesting that the individualistic hero was rare in African literature, given its roots in communal living and the degree to which characters are "subject to non-human forces in the universe".

*A Man of the People* was published in 1966. This is a political satire set in an unnamed African state which has just attained independence. The novel follows a teacher named Odili Samalu from the village of Anata who opposes a corrupt Minister of Culture named Nanga for his Parliament seat. This novel has drawn acclaims from people as a prophet as it was not long after this novel that a major military coup took place in Nigeria. Nigeria seemed to have lost its way between the losing their pre-colonial roots and their new found independence. They seemed to have embraced the negative portions of the legacy and corruption began to be rampant in the country. That was how they seemed to have understood independence when left to deal on their own. Nigerian Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu seized control of the northern region of the country as part of a larger coup attempt. There was a military crackdown as commanders in other areas failed. Three thousand people from the eastern region living in the north were massacred soon
afterwards, and there were other random attacks on Igbo Nigerians which began to be talked about in Lagos.

Achebe had to pay for his foresight and vision in his novel. The military personnel began to suspect him of having foreknowledge of the coup and a part of what they called a conspiracy to overthrow the rule. He had to become a fugitive with his family as he was hunted down. The Achebe family had to go into hiding. He sent his pregnant wife and children on a squalid boat through a series of unseen creeks to the Igbo stronghold of Port Harcourt. They arrived safely, but Christie suffered a miscarriage at the journey's end. Chinua rejoined them soon afterwards in Ogidi. These cities were safe from military incursion because they were in the southeast, part of the region which would later secede. In that sense he played an important role in the intellectual forefront without having actually been directly involved in the coup.

The family had to resettle in Enugu, it was here that Achebe and his friend Christopher Okigbo started a publishing house called Citadel Press. The aim and objective of this press was to improve the quality and increase the quantity of literature available to younger readers. Having suffered the coup Achebe wrote a complex allegory for the country's political tumult and turned the *How the Dog was Domesticated*, into *How the Leopard Got His Claws* after revision. It was considered as the most important book during the period of tumult in the Biafra.

Achebe faced many disasters during the war that followed. In May 1967, the southeastern region of Nigeria broke away to form the Republic of Biafra. The rebellion was considered unlawful and the Nigerian military
attacked all possible sources of the rebellion. It was during this time that Achebe's partner, Christopher Okigbo, who had become a close friend of the family (especially of Achebe's son, young Ikechukwu), volunteered to join the secessionist army while simultaneously working at the press. As a result, Achebe's house was bombed one afternoon, but the family escaped unhurt as Christie had taken the children to visit her sick mother. The Achebe family narrowly escaped disaster several times during the war. Christopher Okigbo was killed on the war's front line. Achebe was affected by the loss; in 1971 he wrote "Dirge for Okigbo", originally in the Igbo language but later translated to English.

As the war intensified, the Achebe family was forced to leave Enugu for the Biafran capital of Aba. During this period of turmoil he mostly wrote poetry perhaps as an inevitable consequence of having to live in the in a war zone. "I can write poetry," he said, "something short, intense more in keeping with my mood ... All this is creating in the context of our struggle." Many of these poems were collected in his 1971 book Beware, Soul Brother; one of his most famous, "Refugee Mother and Child", spoke to the suffering and loss that surrounded him. He saw a future for the emergence of Biafra and was dedicated to its cause. This was the reason why he accepted a request to serve as foreign ambassador and refused an invitation from the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University in the US. Consequently, he traveled to many cities in Europe, including London, where he continued his work with the African Writers Series project at Heinemann.

The war strained the relations even between writers in Nigeria and Biafra. The issue was carried even beyond the war zone and Achebe and John
Pepper Clark had a tense confrontation in London over their respective support for opposing sides of the conflict. Achebe demanded that the publisher withdraw the dedication of *A Man of the People* he had given to Clark. But the dedication was restored along with their friendship. Meanwhile, their contemporary Wole Soyinka was imprisoned for meeting with Biafran officials, and spent many years in jail. Speaking in 1968, Achebe said: "I find the Nigerian situation untenable. If I had been a Nigerian, I think I would have been in the same situation as Wole Soyinka is – in prison". The war saw the ugly side of the independence that Nigeria boasted of earlier.

The British government backed the Nigerian government, under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon for the mere reason that there existed a vigorous trade partnership between the two nations. Achebe was very vocal about the causes of the war and weighed them in terms of the country's colonial past. He blamed the Nigerian political and military forces for the secession of Biafra and the deaths of so many innocent citizens. To him there was hardly any difference in the turbulent present and the colonized past his country had to go through. He stated that the writer in Nigeria, "found that the independence his country was supposed to have won was totally without content ... The old white master was still in power. He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his dirty work for a commission."

Conditions in Biafra worsened as the war continued but they continued to put up a brave fight against the Nigerian government. But in September 1968, the city of Aba fell to the Nigerian military and Achebe once again moved his family. This time they moved to Umuahia, where the Biafran government had also relocated. Here he was chosen to chair the newly formed
National Guidance Committee, and given the task of drafting principles and ideas for the post-war era. In 1969, the group completed a document entitled The Principles of the Biafran Revolution and was later released as The Ahiara Declaration.

In the later part of the year, Achebe took another major step to address the dire situation in the Biafra. He joined writers like Cyprian Ekwensi and Gabriel Okara for a tour of the United States to raise awareness about the dire situation in Biafra. The visit was quite fruitful for Achebe as he got to not only raise an awareness of the situation in his land but was also came upon some gory truths about the bleak history of his people in the America. They visited thirty college campuses and conducted countless interviews. It was in the Southern US that, Achebe learned for the first time of the Igbo Landing, a true story of a group of Igbo captives who drowned themselves in 1803 –rather than endure the brutality of slavery–after surviving through the Middle Passage. The group was well received by the students and faculty, but Achebe was taken aback on witnessing the harsh racism he saw in the US against Africa. Therefore his verdict at the end of the tour was that "world policy is absolutely ruthless and unfeeling".

Despite efforts from the intellectual front, the beginning of 1970 saw the end of the state of Biafra. On 12 January, the military surrendered to Nigeria, and Achebe returned with his family to Ogidi, where their home had been destroyed. He joined the University of Nigeria in Nsukka and immersed himself once again in academia. His chances for going abroad and working under the different invitations were cut because his passport had been revoked
by the Nigerian government on account of his support for Biafra. It was his prominence perhaps that saved his life and his family’s.

Achebe had to relent to the governmental provisions but he did not allow that to interfere with his creativity and continued to write and bring out important literary works. Achebe helped start two magazines: the literary journal *Okike*, a forum for African art, fiction, and poetry; and *Nsukkascope*, an internal publication of the University (motto: "Devastating, Fearless, Brutal and True"). In the University Achebe and the *Okike* committee later established another cultural magazine, *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, to showcase the indigenous stories and oral traditions of the Igbo community. *Girls at War* was released in February 1972 which is a collection of short stories ranging in time from his undergraduate days to the recent bloodshed. It was the 100th book in Heinemann's African Writers Series.

It was in the year 1972 that Achebe was offered professorship in the University of Amherst and the family moved to the United States. In their initial years the family and the younger children especially, had to face the alien experience in an alien country. Even in the midst of these familial experiences Achebe did not forget his role as the mediator for the misconceived ideas of Africa by the Westerners. Through the experiences of his daughter he understood that even his children were facing the dilemma of the language barrier. He solved this problem by telling them stories from their homeland at every given opportunity so as to help them blend into the alien society and not leave their roots altogether.

He used the opportunity in the University to study he began to study the perceptions of Africa in Western scholarship. He got to understand
the magnanimity of the misconception that is associated with Africa given the names and the terminology given by the explorers and the other respected litterateurs before Achebe. He made a very powerful statement:

“The Igbo culture was not destroyed by Europe. it was disturbed...cultures are constantly influenced , challenged , pushed about by other cultures that may have some kind of advantage at a particular time...a culture which is healthy will often survive” (Ogbaa, Interview 3.)

Perhaps the most important argument that came up after this statement was the brave lecture he gave on Conrad’s view of the Heart of Darkness”. Achebe expanded this criticism when he presented a Chancellor's Lecture at Amherst on 18 February 1975, An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. He decries Joseph Conrad as "a bloody racist", (Achebe, Image 788) Achebe asserted that Conrad's famous novel dehumanizes Africans and projects Africa as "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril.”

Another pointer Achebe discussed that caused the audience to stir is his critical elucidation of a quotation from Albert Schweitzer, a 1952 Nobel Peace Prize laureate: "That extraordinary missionary, Albert Schweitzer, who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epitomizes the ambivalence. In a comment which has often been quoted Schweitzer says: 'The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother.' And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being.” (Achebe, Image 6) Some were appalled at the
challenge made against a man honored in the West for his "reverence for life", and recognized as a model of Western liberalism.

The lecture caused a storm of controversy as many people found it difficult to accept this other concept of texts they had already understood for years. He brought a sudden sweep of change in the literary canon as understood by the West. His remarks upset many of the English professors in attendance and not many responded positively. But Achebe had turned the world of English Literature upside down as he brought to the forefront some of the most important discussions that had long been swept aside with indifference for want of a voice and accommodation. It took someone of his caliber to stand up for the cause he believed in and fought for. Despite taking time to accept the harsh truths put forward, he was nevertheless presented later in 1975 with an honorary doctorate from the University of Stirling and the Lotus Prize for Afro-Asian Writers.

It caused scholars to respond and the first comprehensive rebuttal of Achebe's critique was published in 1983 by British critic Cedric Watts with his essay "A Bloody Racist: About Achebe's View of Conrad". He defends Conrad’s Heart of Darkness as an anti-imperialist novel, suggesting that "part of its greatness lies in the power of its criticisms of racial prejudice.” Palestinian–American theorist Edward Said also agreed in his book Culture and Imperialism that Conrad criticised imperialism, but he was also observant in saying that Conrad made a safe movement between his pages and never really came forward to give force to his stance. He added: "As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them."
Today, Achebe's criticism has become a mainstream perspective on Conrad's work. The world now had two points of view of looking at Conrad’s works; as critic Nicolas Tredell aptly placed the Conrad criticism “into two epochal phases: before and after Achebe.” The essay has been included as a serious perspective on Conrad’s’ novel and is included in the 1988 Norton critical edition of Conrad’s novel. Several major critics have acclaimed his views. Editor Robert Kimbrough called it one of "the three most important events in Heart of Darkness criticism since the second edition of his book...."

But Achebe defends his stand on the underlying currents of racism he traced by asserting that he was never promoting any kind of propaganda against the book or the author but that one needed to read the text with the understanding of the views that he had put forward too. He asserted: "It's not in my nature to talk about banning books. I am saying, read it – with the kind of understanding and with the knowledge I talk about. And read it beside African works.” Interviewed on National Public Radio with Robert Siegel, in October 2009, Achebe remains consistent in his opinion about the book. He held an intensive discussion titled 'Heart of Darkness is inappropriate', but tempered down his criticism and stated that: "Conrad was a seductive writer. He could pull his reader into the fray. And if it were not for what he said about me and my people, I would probably be thinking only of that seduction."

Achebe had three goals in mind when he returned to the University of Kenya in 1976, he wanted to finish the novel he had been writing, renew the native publication of Okike, and further his study of Igbo culture. He was
also determined to include and expand his criticism to his fellow Nigerian writers other than the Europeans as they needed to also take one particular stand for their literature. He strongly believed that literature had to serve a purpose and a reason and had immense faith in the liberating potential of literature. Having been true to his beliefs and ideals as well as his works, he was very critical of the archetypal Nigerian intellectual who he believed that he is divorced from actual intellect. He vehemently lashed out that they were unfit to fall into the caliber and that they seemed to exist; "but for two things: status and stomach. And if there's any danger that he might suffer official displeasure or lose his job, he would prefer to turn a blind eye to what is happening around him." In October 1979, Achebe was awarded the first-ever Nigerian National Merit Award.

Achebe also became a prominent figure in politics besides academia. On retirement from the University of Nigeria in 1982, he entered the People's Redemption Party (PRP) which had the left-leaning. He also devoted more time to editing Okike. In 1983, he became the party's deputy national vice-president. He became the forceful intellectual in the party and published a book called The Trouble with Nigeria to coincide with the upcoming elections. On the first page, Achebe voiced his political opinions bluntly. He started the opening of the book with the blunt statement: "the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."(Achebe, Trouble 1)

The elections that followed were marked by violence and charges of fraud. Achebe was asked if he thought the politics had changed in Nigeria
since *A Man of the People*, to which he replied: "I think, if anything, the Nigerian politician has deteriorated.” His stint with the politics in his country did not last long enough to bring any change as there was a lot of differences in the ideological stands with the people of his party as well as the elected representatives. He left the PRP and afterwards kept his distance from political parties, expressing his sadness at the dishonesty and weakness of the people involved.

Instead he fruitfully spent most of the 1980s delivering speeches, attending conferences, and working on his sixth novel. He also continued winning awards and collecting honorary degrees. In 1986 he was elected president-general of the Ogidi Town Union; he reluctantly accepted and began a three-year term. In the same year, he stepped down as editor of *Okike*.

It was during this time that Achebe released his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* in 1987. It reflected the political upheaval in his nation and talks about a military coup in the fictional West African nation of Kangan. This became another celebrated novel of Achebe and was a finalist for the Booker Prize. The novel was widely acclaimed and received raving reviews from respected papers like the Financial Times. They stated that the new work was bound together: "in a powerful fusion of myth, legend and modern styles, Achebe has written a book which is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from 'overseas' who see nothing ever new out of Africa."(Ubani,2) But he did not receive the prize and instead went instead to Penelope Lively's novel *Moon Tiger*.

Achebe suffered major spinal injuries when the car he was traveling flipped over and he was badly injured on 22 March 1990, in Lagos.
He became paralysed waist down for life. Soon afterwards, Achebe was called to take a position in Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York and became the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature. He held the position for more than fifteen years till the autumn of 2009 where he joined the Brown University faculty as the David and Marianna Fisher University Professor of Africana Studies. In June 2007, Achebe was awarded the Man Booker International Prize. In 2010, Achebe was awarded The Dorothy and Lilian Gish Prize for $300,000, one of the richest prizes for the arts.

In October 2005, the London Financial Times reported that Achebe was planning to write a novella for the Canongate Myth Series, a series of short novels in which ancient myths from myriad cultures are re-imagined and rewritten by contemporary authors. Achebe’s novella has not yet been scheduled for publication. In October 2012, Achebe's publishers, Penguin Books, released There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra. The book immediately caused a stir and re-opened the discussion about the Nigerian Civil War. It became the last publication during his lifetime. He died shortly after on the 21st of March, 2013 in Boston, United states. His works are still relevant through all continents and cultures that have been a part of the colonial story.

The thesis reads as therefore an over view of the intricacies in the manner of portrayal of the Africa that people have hardly seen in general and the depiction of his Ibo community in particular. The core texts are the Trilogy which he had initially started as the story of the hardworking Igbo farmer Okonkwo who stands as the resplendent figure of the traditions and customs of his people. The
success of his first story gave birth to the other successive two stories about the successors of the protagonist of the first novel. In other words it turns out to be the unfolding of the subsequent stories of the conflict between tradition and modernity, the old and the new, pre-colonial and the post-colonial.

The entire trilogy therefore becomes a story of three generations: a man in pre-colonial Igboland who struggles against the changes brought by the first European missionaries and administrators; his son who converts to Christianity and receives some Western education; and his grandson who is educated in England and is living the life of the new elite on the cusp of independence. Achebe focussed only on the first generation in the first novel to produce a carefully observed story of the African-European colonial encounter set among the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria in the 1890s, the tragic hero Okonkwo being the center.

The second novel, *No Longer At Ease*, skipped a generation and tells the story of Okonkwo’s grandson, Obi, a civil servant in 1950s Lagos. *Arrow of God*, his third novel is about an Igbo priest and a British district officer in 1920s Igboland. It can be read as representative of the times of Okonkwo’s son or in other words, it runs simultaneously during the same time that the story of *No Longer at Ease* is taking place. All three novels is taken together as Achebe’s “African Trilogy,” and creates a complete form of a human chronicle of the cultural and political changes that brought about what is now seen as the modern African state.

*Things Fall Apart* became a critical success after William Heinemann overcame their reservations and published it in June 1958. In more ways than one, the pioneering novel genuinely succeeded in presenting tribal life from the inside.
It was not so much the subject, which was a discussion of the complexity of the human predicament in relation to the community and the personal dilemma that each has to go through; as it was the close observation of the tribal life in conflict and its African point of view. There were already numerous literatures from the colonial times written on Africans by non-Africans. Interestingly, the African life was hardly, if ever, portrayed by an African on his own people.

Achebe was successful at it, having read a gamut of the available literature and sampled the better-known examples of these “colonialism classics”. He has written about his unconscious response to the African characters that; “I took sides with the white men against the savages…” Achebe then understood the enormous power that stories had to cause change and bring about a desired turn of trends.

He also understood how much of this power depended on who told the stories and how these stories were told. Time magazine had named Joyce Carey’s *Mister Johnson*, the “best book ever written about Africa.” Achebe disagreed when he read this novel set in Nigeria, in which the Nigerian character in the novel was unrecognizable to him; he also detected, in the description of Nigerians, “an undertow of uncharitableness … a contagion of distaste, hatred, and mockery.”

While a lot has been written about Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as a response to *Mister Johnson*, one cannot ignore the fact that he was an artist first who used literature as a means of finding the answers to the looming questions about his country and his people. We can also believe that Achebe would have written his novel even if he had not read Cary’s. Yet it must also not be overlooked that Achebe was greatly affected by the prejudiced representation
of African characters in literature which had a great influence on Achebe’s development as a writer. This feature echoes in the stand that he takes years later in speaking on Conrad’s classic novel *Heart of Darkness*, creating an earth shaking argument and a parallel approach to an already established literary canon.

It was a strange duality for the African to see himself misconceived and warped, many times removed from reality; and to surrender to that portrayal by the coloniser who proclaimed himself lord over their way of life. It was the same dilemma that haunted all, Africans studying in the colonial schools and educational institutions as they had to conform to the British mode of learning and imbibing books and literature. Their understandings of the stories were all British and the settings were England. Achebe posed many queries to his fellow Africans first and foremost and then took it to the outsiders to rethink on their preconceived notions. Achebe made the Africans exist in life from in the literature he brought out. He created a brutal and forceful African literature replete with exotic African sensibilities; a hundred years before and the aftermath of it all.

Regrettably, the educational system in Nigeria did not teach the students of their pre-colonial past because there was hardly any that could be taken as one created out of an objective intention and aim. Over and above the story of one single individual who fights for up keeping the values and the traditions of the culture and the society and also a battle of the pride and individuality he possesses; his writings expand beyond the realms of a limited understanding of African texts of the past.

In the same way the subsequent novels that followed gained personal significance for the African reading them. They almost became re-enactment of
the occurrences within the various communities and the tribes of Africa. *Arrow of
God* was more than just the story about the British administration’s creation of
warring chiefs, and interwoven destinies of two men – one an Igbo priest the
other a British administrator. *No Longer at Ease* transcends the story of an
educated young Nigerian struggling with the conflict arising out of the new found
identity which is both Igbo and Western.

The portrayals of Africa as a place without history, without humanity,
without hope usher in a sense of defensiveness for a humanity that is seen as
negotiable. The relevance is extended beyond the boundaries as is seen in the
number of languages it has been translated into. Within the pages of his works we
therefore find sheer poetry, humour and complexity laced with the answers for the
years of denigration and abasement.

Achebe’s works became both literature and history for the Africans of
a certain generation, perhaps even now. He has been vocal about the fact that he
has wanted his works to make his fellow Africans understand the fact that their
past was more than what the Europeans made it out to be and that it was
erroneous to believe that they were delivered, as it were, from savagery with the
arrival of the whites.

In *Things Fall Apart* he narrates the dilemma that Okonkwo faces with
regards to his father Unoka, “Fortunately among these people, a man was judged
according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.”(Achebe,
*Things 9*) Achebe never allows the writer to abdicate responsibility in favour of
the artistic touch; in equal measure Achebe has been able to tread that fine line.
His dual, yet at times antithetical embrace of honesty and ambiguity further
complicates the situation and thickens the plot- there are hardly simple answers
within the pages of Achebe’s works. He effectively criticises the effects of colonialism but also interrogates the internal structure of the Igbo society.

This explains why Nwoye is a misfit in the society and his extraordinarily masculine and fearless father joins Christianity; it is an appropriate outlet for him as well as for the plot where the colonisers have a victory in getting one more convert. The quite son has also found peace in getting away from the deep disillusionment he had been holding against the inexplicable customs of his people. The vulnerabilities, the internal complexities, the cracks that already existed even in the social system of the community are extensively discussed in his works. He weighs it both ways and examines the various angles and the phases of the system, its victories and its failures. The observation is aptly made by one of the characters;

“The White man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together (and we have fallen apart”. (Things 176)

Achebe achieves in creating an Igbo English in all the three novels with direct translations from the Igbo language and the result is a unique yet powerful form of adaptable English. It does not fail to amuse and endear the readers. It has become one that even the colonisers were not able to deny and to date exists as a successful mode of written language form Africa. The resulting phrases like “still carrying breakfast” and “what is called ‘the box is moving?’” give an entirely unique feel about the nation as a whole and the Igbo community in particular.

For instance even the laugh-out-loud lines are comical, especially for an Igbo-speaking reader, like “the white man whose father or mother nobody
knows.” The reader outside of the community knows that the phrase might have had a very comical connotation to the Igbo reader and thus it lends a very neighbourly yet distinctive touch to the entire plot and the motif of the novel. However it is the rendition of proverbs, of speech, of manners of speaking, that elevate Achebe’s novels into a celebration of language. Achebe captures eloquently the taste of the Africans in the solemn speeches rendered by the character for instance in Arrow of God, Ezeulu is able to place his cautiousness as beautifully expressed when he explains to his son as he decides to send him to the missionary school:

“I am like the bird eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching...the world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place”. (Achebe, Arrow46)

Achebe’s characters are well moulded and he gives them an identity that is distinctively their own, organic, as it were with their environs. There are times when he expresses a certain condescending humour at their expense. He finds subtly subversive ways to question them and even laugh at them, he does not rescue them from their dilemmas and allows them to grow on their own and face whatever they have to.

Perhaps the best-known character in modern African writing in English is Okonkwo, the hero of Things Fall Apart who has been represented as the archetypal Strong Igbo Man, and is dictated by his own fears of having to fight the danger of becoming like his father who was a disgrace to him. He is ruled by that fear and it blinds him to the point of being ruthless and devoid of emotions. His insecurities give him the garb of an extremist point of masculinity.
The portrayal of gender in the novel Things Fall Apart is impossible to overlook. Achebe has been criticised for the brutal approach to the woman in his works where anything weak and incapable has been equated with the female. Yet it interesting that Achebe interrogates this patriarchy in subtle ways as is seen in the way that Okonkwo denigrates women and yet the child he most respects is his daughter Ezinma, his daughter. In the entire novel she is the only character who dares to answer back and who happens to be confident and forthright in a way that his male children are not. Okonkwo is quite confused about his stand on women because he is not able to understand the existence of love between the old couple Ozoemena and Ndulue. When Ndulue dies, his wife Ozoemena goes to his hut to see his body and then goes into her own hut and is later found dead there. Okonkwo’s friend Obierika recalls,

“It was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind. I remember when I was a young boy and there was a song about them. He could not do anything without telling her”. (Achebe, *Things* 68)

This puzzles Okonkwo because Ndulue’s authentic masculinity is doubted here. He says, “I thought he was a strong man in his youth,” (Ibid) and finds it contradicting that the old man’s greatness which lies in his masculinity should be dependant entirely on his wife. The others apprise him that Ndulue was a strong man and had led the clan to war in those days. They are just amazed that the stories which should have surrounded the couple should have actually turned out to be true; that of the two having one mind.

Okonkwo’s rigidity and uncompromising nature is contrasted against the many humiliations and the inhuman actions of the colonial encounter. When
the power structures of his society have been so easily overturned, Okonkwo struggles to understand why it should be that the world he has lived in with so much dignity and respect, have disappeared. His world in which the elders are greatly respected, chiefs are worshipped and the pride of the land is the pride of the individual, has just been turned upside down by people they do not even know. For trying to keep up the dignity of his land, he is flogged by agents of the District commissioner. The hapless rage he feels is shown realistically and the final violent actions are Okonkwo’s response to the enormous, and perhaps baffling, political and economic power that came with Christianity and Colonialism. He is a man seriously flawed who has also been gravely wronged.

Similarly, Ezeulu, the character at the center of Arrow of God, is both flawed and wronged like Okonkwo, but he is also portrayed as captive to what he imagines are society’s expectations of him. He is a more complex character, unlike Okonkwo, lending Arrow of God its enduring power. “Arrow of God” is told from the points of view of both Ezeulu and the British district commissioner Winterbottom; when the novel begins, the central event has already occurred, and what Achebe explores is the aftermath. Ezeulu has testified against his own people in a land case with the neighbouring town, because he is determined to speak the truth, and this action has earned him the respect of the district officer as well as the rage of his local opponents.

Ingeniously woven, this action precipitates him to his eventual downfall and his tragic end. Achebe explores the pride, idealism and obstinacy of Ezeulu and their contribution to his inevitable end. It shows the helplessness of the people against a power they cannot comprehend. Their powerful men are treated with scorn by the government agents, their greatest of men are flogged,
their justice system is replaced by one they do not understand and in this way the entire construct of the society is turned topsy-turvy.

The same theme is carried forward in the next novel *No Longer at Ease*, however; it is shown in a different light as the terms have changed during the short lived optimism of independence. Their helplessness is replaced by something embryonic, something which gave them temporary respite. Obi, struggles with the pressures of the new Nigerian society. He unconsciously embraces this change and he thinks of his boss the Englishman Mr. Green, who he believes,

“...loved Africa but only Africa of a certain kind: the Africa of Charles the messenger, the Africa of his garden boy and steward boy. In 1900 Mr Green might have ranked among the greatest missionaries, in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils, but in 1957 he could only curse and swear”. (Achebe, *No Longer* 121)

Achebe writes in the realist tradition and there are often traces of the autobiographical in his work. Another noted feature of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is the plainness of the style where we often find the novel is seen stripped of any symbol. Despite the fact that the Igbo words/phrases and idioms lend a distinctive flavor and colour to the novel, it is the ordinaries of the Igloo world and lifestyle which is highlighted here. The innocence yet purity and strength of their belief is seen even in the oracle and their sacred python. Their sincere efforts in maintaining the sanctity of their religion is nothing short of amazement. Achebe places a convincing contrast between the brutality yet binding nature of their social structure and the aftermath of the incursion of the western world and Christian religion.
Achebe emphasises through his works how linguistic dysfunction causes change in the connectivity of thoughts between two different languages. Mr. Brown the missionary and Akuna one of the great men of Umuofia discuss God. They misunderstand each other but somehow they are able to bring some kind of understanding amongst themselves. We also see a lot of strong communitarian values which he binds together through the use of language as collective art, the central place of storytelling and the importance of symbolic acts and objects in keeping a community together. Achebe showed as much concern about a person as he did about a people; it is well captured in the proverb that a character in *Things Fall Apart* states:

“We do not ask for wealth because he who has health and children will also have wealth. We do not have to pray for more money but to have more kinsmen… An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, but a man asks his kinsman to scratch him.”(Achebe, *Things* 165)

Achebe followed the “rhythms of decolonization” in both his fictional and non-fictional works. (Brennan, 80) While Achebe was writing his novels, Africa was being politically transformed. And as a writer, Achebe participated in this transformation by intervening and fighting the hegemonic misrepresentation of Africa in colonial/imperial discourses and resultantly creating alternate images of Africa. He makes a very powerful statement in an interview that, it is clearly seen that in the span of three decades, Achebe focuses on specific instances of the impact–psychic costs of colonial values as well as language and rhetoric on the ex-colonized people and cultures of Africa. Fanon put it that,

“…to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture, to refuse to speak a language is to deny and denigrate the culture and language points to…”. (Fanon, *Black* 38)
Achebe argues that this emerges from the persistence of colonial values and discourse in addition to alienation from a people’s own values and culture. Achebe sees and executes his tasks as a writer mapped out. He strongly feels that his society’s denigration and self abasement emerge from the impact of Africa’s confrontation with Europe. They are a product of the colonialist misrepresentations of Africa. The two texts he picks up for scrutiny and contesting are *Mister Johnson* by Joyce Cary and towards *Heart of Darkness* the comment about Cary’s book as a superficial representation of Africa; which is why he took up the task of looking at it from the inside. He says that he takes on *Mister Johnson* because it is one of the most read books in Nigerian and the Africa image in these novels might have influenced the Nigerian writer’s consciousness to a great extent.

It is often seen that the success of this text has been attributed to the fact that he claims to write as one who knows Africa well and is deeply concerned for the welfare of its people and the nation. But Achebe feels that the impact is just the reverse because Cary seems to rely on the familiar analytic categories imposed by colonial discourses where Nigerians are characterized as ‘bush pagans’, ‘savages’ unaffected by the ‘battles of civilizations’. Cary seems to have either ignored or overlooked the fact that there was a gradual movement of the rise of African National consciousness. He is more worried about Cary’s sympathetic representations of Africa because he feels they are dangerous and preempts a serious critique of an author’s reliance on colonial discourse on Africa to be able. As far as *Heart of Darkness* is concerned, as Achebe said, it was built on Manichean dualism, and that it...