

**POST COLONIAL STUDIES IN THE FACET OF NIGERIAN CULTURE FROM
THE VIEW OF CHINUA ACHEBE**

Bhanu s.
Assistant Professor
Siddharth Institute of Engineering&Technology
Puttur
&
Padmaja D.
Associate Professor
Siddharth Institute of Engineering&Technology
Puttur

Postcolonial studies analyse the politics of knowledge of creation, control, and distribution by analyzing the functional relations of social and political power that sustain colonialism and neocolonialism. The Nigerian culture is shaped by Nigeria's multiple ethnic groups. The country has over 521 languages and over 250 dialects and ethnic groups. The four largest ethnic groups are the Hausa and Fulani who are predominant in the north, the Igbo who are predominant in the southeast, and the Yoruba who are predominant in the southwest. The Edo people are predominant in the region between Yorubaland and Igboland. Nigeria is famous for its English language literature, apart from the 'pure' English speaking population; Nigerian pidgin is also a common lingua franca. Chinua Achebe was a Nigerian novelist, poet, professor, and critic. Achebe wrote his novels in English and defended the use of English; a "language of colonisers". A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African tradition particularly Igbo varieties and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often affected by individuals from Europe, but institutions and urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African tradition particularly Igbo varieties and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. This paper explores a thorough study of African tradition, Igbo society, colonialism and the struggles of the African people to free themselves from European political influences. It also focuses the women's role in Nigerian society. On the whole it depicts the Nigerian socio cultural and political influences of the society.

INTRODUCTION: The Nigeria's ethnic groups sometimes called 'minorities' are found all over the country but especially in the middle belt and north. The Hausa tend to be Muslim and the Igbo are predominantly Christian. The Efik, Ibibio, Annang people are mainly

Christian. The Yoruba have a balance of members that are adherent to both Islam and Christianity. Indigenous religious practices remain important in all of Nigeria's ethnic groups; these beliefs are often blended with Christian beliefs.

Nigeria is famous for its English language literature, apart from English language being its international language, pidgin is also a lingua franca that was common among illiterates and the street touts who cannot speak the formal English but nowadays everybody including the rich and the poor, the literates and the illiterates all speak Pidgin English which is a picture of English and other slang like 'How you dey' instead of 'How are you' and its popular music. Since the 1990s the Nigerian movie industry, sometimes called "Nollywood" has emerged as a fast-growing cultural force all over the continent. The spread of English in Nigeria and the English speaking West African region (ESWA), which consists of Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, is said to have occurred in three distinct phases: (1) the development of English-based pidgins, which occurring during the pre-colonial period; (2) the introduction of Western education by English missionaries in the 1880's; and (3) the post independence adoption of English as an official language. Primarily as a result of its historical implementation, West African (Vernacular) English (WAVE), described below, is the form of English linked to formal education, and it currently forms the larger part of a continuum of English in West Africa.

While English became an official language during the era of nineteenth century colonialism in Nigeria and the ESWA, the British had been trading in the region as early as the fifteenth century, during the pre-colonial period, primarily for slaves, ivory, and gold. In fact, by the eighteenth century, British contact had been so firmly established within the Nigerian region that an Efik chief in Calabar (a city in north-eastern Nigeria) kept a diary in a form of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE): "... I walk up to see Esim and Egbo Young so I see Jimmy Henshaw come to see wee and we tell him to go to on board". Both oral and written forms of English thus have a fairly long historical presence within Nigeria and the surrounding ESWA region, which, one might argue, gives weight to the assertion that English ought to be considered as an historical language, both orally and literarily, within Nigeria.

All over the country, and even increasingly in the conservative north, western music, dresses and movies are ever popular. When the region of Biafra broke away from Nigeria in 1967, Achebe became a supporter of Biafran independence and acted as ambassador for the people of the new nation. The war ravaged the populace, and as starvation and violence took its toll, he appealed to the people of Europe and the Americas for aid. When the Nigerian government retook the region in 1970, he involved himself in political parties but soon resigned due to frustration over the corruption and elitism he witnessed and titled Igbo chieftain himself. Achebe's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influences, and the clash of Western and traditional African values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on the Igbo oral tradition, and combines

straightforward narration with representations of folk stories, proverbs, and oratory. He also published a number of short stories, children's books, and essay collections. Achebe's novels approach a variety of themes. In his early writing, a depiction of the Igbo culture itself is paramount. Critic Nahem Yousaf highlights the importance of these depictions: "Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity". The portrayal of indigenous life is not simply a matter of literary background, he adds: "Achebe seeks to produce the effect of a pre-colonial reality as an Igbo-centric response to a Euro centrically constructed imperial 'reality' Achebe wrote in 1975: "Equiano was an Igbo, I believe, from the village of Iseke in the Orlu division of Nigeria" in *Culture and colonialism*. Traditional aspects from Chinua Achebe's works: A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African tradition particularly Igbo varieties and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often affected by individuals from Europe, but institutions and urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. African colonization by European settlers and the aftermath has wide, descriptive and analytical coverage in Chinua Achebe's novels. Particularly there is an avid examination on the Nigerian sociopolitical and cultural aspects. More specifically, Achebe's novels depict Igbo tribes either in south-East Nigeria or elsewhere in the world dating from pre-colonial era to the present. His novels cover the timeline of Nigerian history and like a prophet his writings are visionary of long desired Nigerian peace and prosperity. Achebe's novels can be read through different perspectives to explain these inequalities and it can also be advocated through different ways of redressing inequalities, and there are marked historical variations in the nature of feminine identity from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial time frame. Again, Achebe is often praised for his skillful blending of folklore, myth, proverbs, and customs with modern western political ideologies and Christian belief systems. By presenting these two approaches, Achebe asserts his belief in the power of the past to ease the excesses and confusion of the present. In a similar vein, Achebe was the first Nigerian writer to apply the conventions of the novel to African storytelling. Achebe saw for himself how disruptive social upheaval and political instability are and how they affect every facet of a society. He was born during Nigeria's colonial years, a period of tremendous conflict and sociopolitical change. Achebe grew up during the ensuing period of nationalist protest. Once Nigeria gained independence in 1960, vestiges of the colonial years remained including borders and new political ideas and structures. When Achebe left his position with the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in 1966, he accepted the position of Biafran Minister of Information. After colonization, African children were taught European history and literature so that they might compete in the modern world, while their own heritage was ignored. Rereading of Achebe's novels revive the knowledge of the old heritage and give an ample opportunity to determine the roles of women in the changing tribal society. Critics appreciate Achebe's development of the conflict that arises when tradition clashes with change. He uses

his characters and their unique language to portray the double tragedies that occur in the story- the tragedy of an individual and tragedy of a community.

An Overview of Chinua Achebe's Novels Defining Women's Roles in Nigerian Society: Achebe's women as seen in his novels in the historical perspectives, it is better to cover the journey of Nigerian literature particularly novel up to Achebe. In Achebe here is a glimpse of present Nigeria which was once a home to ethnically based kingdoms and tribal communities before it became a European colony. It can also be traced the facts in Achebe's novels how in spite of European contact these kingdoms and communities maintained their autonomy and how the colonial era began, and how Nigeria became independent of British rule in 1960 and how After independence Nigeria experienced frequent coups and long periods of autocratic military and how finally a democratic civilian government was established. It will also examine how in this long run of Nigerian history, Achebe as a Nigerian writer flourished and how Achebe has drawn women as a cultural agent in these social evolution. A literature review of Achebe's text, *Things Fall Apart* aims to explain the benefits of defining women's roles in traditional Igbo society in pre-colonial era of Nigeria. It presents the conflicts inherent in masculine and feminine aspects of the novel. *Things Fall Apart* teaches tribal women's role in social changes from my proposed experiments. In exploring the development of Okonkwo's relationship with his sons and daughters and wives, *Things Fall Apart* is an interesting study if the novel develops themes of the awakening of self-awareness, and of the need to accept persons with very different perceptions and opinions about life. Again, it can be studied if the events in the book are realistic and believable, and the characters' actions and thoughts draw the reader directly into the plot, making the conflict come alive as a universal issue facing all tribal women.

"I would be quite satisfied if my novels especially the ones I set in the past did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (from *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 1975)

An example of his skills as a storyteller is 'The Madman,' a richly layered narrative, in which the social customs of the Ibo-speaking people are strongly present. Nwibe, an honored member of a distant town Ogbu, plans to go to the market, where he has once chased a madman out of his hut and sent his children to throw stones at him. As he washes by the river, the madman snatches his cloth. Nwibe runs naked after him, shouting stop the madman. The thief with the cloth disappears in the crowd, and Nwibe is taken to a medicine-man, but he has lost his social position.

"For how could a man be the same again of whom witnesses from all the lands of Olu and Igbo have once reported that they saw today a fine, hefty man in his prime, stark naked,

tearing through the crowds to answer the call of the market-place. Such a man is marked forever."

Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* juxtaposes a mother's oral storytelling with a son reading the first page in his Igbo primer, the first book ever to enter the family compound. The novel narrates the coming of literacy to Igboland by focusing on three quite different images: the python in a box as an image for the book and the Domestication of the Savage Mind; the road through the forest as a symbol of writing and its power; and the solitary man, shut up in a closet, who attends to a disembodied voice but is distracted by noises from outside as a metonym for the experience of reading. Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is aimed in explaining the results of independence of a new nation, Nigeria. The character of Clara will allow each critical argument's unique response to determine, to assess the value of womanhood and how social taboo is still bifurcating relations.

Feminine perspective in the works of Chinua Achebe: The women in Achebe's novels can be read according to their self-perceptions, as well as societal awareness of them as women, wives, mothers and daughters. For example, Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is a presentation of cultural dislocation in a largely male-dominated setting. This novel is a manifestation of women's multiple marginalities, and the dynamics of otherness, inclusion and exclusion.

As JanMohammed (1986) states, "colonial literature is an exploration of a world at the boundaries of civilization; a world that has not yet been domesticated by European signification." It is a world perceived as "uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil."

Against this context, Achebe's novel allowed European readers to perceive Africans through an alternate lens. The Igbo society described by Achebe has definitive and complex social systems, values and traditions. Achebe presents customs such as the abandonment of multiple birth babies, and the sacrifice of human beings as conventions and not barbaric, inhumane rituals. He brilliantly places his characters within an ancient civilization with a labyrinthine system of governance and laws. Igbo women control certain spheres of community life, just as men control other spheres. Women are perceived to possess superior spiritual well-being and head many of the traditional cults and shrines. The limited space created for women at the family level is reversed by important spiritual roles played by women as priestesses. For example, Chielo the priestess of Agbala serves the oracle in *Things Fall Apart*. Even none of the clan challenges her authority. The priestess of Agbala mediates between the world of spirituality and the world of reality. Whatever is denied in reality is given in spirituality to Women. They are also empowered within the world of women, as we see in the status of Okonkwo's first wife, Anasi. Again, we also find Ekwefi, Okonkwo's second wife, 'the crystal of beauty', is overcoming disappointment and bitterness in her life. Ezinma, the daughter of Ekwefi who survives the early diseases earns her father's love and respect like a

male child. Okonkwo favours his daughter, who is not only as beautiful as her mother once was, but who grows to understand her father and his moods as no one else does. Father and daughter form a special bond. Okonkwo and Ekwefi treat Ezinma like she is their equal rather than their child. They permit her privileges that other family and tribal children are not granted. There is one woman, or young girl who elicits pure love from all the lives she touches, even her father, Okonkwo. However, he cannot fully appreciate Ezinma as a person. Instead of admiring her for her strength and disposition as a burgeoning woman, Okonkwo is saddened by the fact that she is not male.

Ezinma is Ekwefi's only living child and it is demonstrated that her father does in fact respect her character. When Okonkwo acknowledges these affections, a male reading may solicit a sense of alliance with him and wish, for his sake, that Ezinma were male: "She should have been a boy, he thought as he looked at his ten-year-old daughter. If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit.

Reading the text from the male purview, one may empathize with Okonkwo who, because of the fates, has no child, except a daughter, worthy of conveying familial legacies. But because Ezinma is female, she cannot function in this capacity. Moreover, even a woman, in a traditional reading of the text would support this notion. Culler (1982) articulates that "what feminists ignore or deny at their peril . . . is that women share men's anti-female feelings--usually in a mitigated form, but deeply nevertheless." According to Culler this stems partly from the fact that women "have been steeped in self-derogatory societal stereotypes," while being constantly "pitted against each other for the favors of the reigning sex." While reading as a woman, one must acknowledge that women are also indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective, and that, in Ezinma's case; one must revise these biases to appreciate her strength, singularity and vivacity. Achebe's female characters are generally stunted individuals as above, or they are idealized as mothers in the manner of such Negritude writings as Camara Laye's *Dark Child* (date). The latter, maternal valorization is indicated by the meaning of Nneka "mother is supreme" -- as provided by Okonkwo's uncle Uchendu:

It is true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you.

CONCLUSION: Finally, we must not forget that Achebe as a writer founded the Association of Nigerian Authors. Who else but Achebe founded the publication *Okike* an international journal which, thanks to the editor, Ossie Enekwe (d. 2010), has endured and where many a nascent Nigerian artist, poet, or short story writer has cut his creative teeth. This exploration honestly reveals the culture of Igbo society as a very rich culture whereas the colonial novels

would look at it as a primitive culture. Through this novel the writer put forth his penetration into the African culture.

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Egudu, R. N. "Achebe and the Igbo Narrative Tradition." *Research in African Literatures* 12.1 (1981): 43-54. Again, Achebe is often praised for his skillful blending of folklore, myth, proverbs, and customs.