

Post-colonial Elements in Chinua Achebe's Novel *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

Without any shadow of doubt, Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* is a powerful exploration of post-colonial society in Nigeria. It presents beautifully clash between two cultures: the culture of colonizers and the culture of those who were colonized. The natives are suppressed and repressed by the whites who try to impose their cultural values on the natives. Discrimination on the basis of cultural values forms the central part of the novel.

Paper

Although *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958, two years before Nigeria's independence in 1960 and six years after that country being granted self-rule in 1952, it is a complex heterogeneous, multi-layered, hybrid and significant novel that, among its other feats, also ushers in post-colonial Anglophone African writing, as opposed, for instance, to colonial texts on Africa, eg Joseph

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as well as his *A Personal Record*, and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*.

Things Fall Apart is one of the powerful masterpieces written by Chinua Achebe, one of the most prominent writers of postcolonial era. The present novel deals with the problem of generic classification, its status as an African text, its representation of the colonial encounter as it happened in 19th century. The novel deals with the exploration of cultural differences between the colonized and the colonizers. The novel also explores their contrary notions of knowledge and of power. The narrative strategies employed by the author to delineate these themes are excellent.

The immediate subject of Chinua Achebe's novels is the tragic consequences of the African encounter with Europe- this is the theme he has made immutably his own. His novels deal with the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white men. It also reflects the disarray in the African consciousness that has followed, but the novelist deals not only with situations but also, and above all, with individuals. The importance of Chinua Achebe's novels derives not simply from his themes, but also from

his complete presentation of men in action, in living reaction to their fate.

Achebe has chosen the tragic medium in handling his themes- as opposed to the comic treatment of the same theme in Oyono and Beti's, these two authors are in many ways no less serious than he is. As the title of the novel suggests, the present novel is concerned with the African society caused by impact with another way of life. The reconstruction of Ibo Village life is directed at revealing the forces at work both inside and outside the traditional society that paid the way for its disintegration.

The double level of action is realized through the relationship that exists between Okonkwo, the principal character, and his society. In many ways, he represents his society in so far as the society has made a man by proposing to him certain values and lines of conduct.

In case of Okonkwo, he is a man who has grown up in a community which places its faith above all in the individual quality of manliness. It is an irony of fate that makes him start off with a

disadvantage on this score- the failure of his father to satisfy this social norm. It is the need for him to live down the shame of his father that compels him to an excessive adherence to the social code which transforms a value into a weakness.

As a result of that Okonkwo's relationship with other people is thrown off balance. His own rigidity towards himself is reflected in his impatience with others, and in particular with his son Nwoye. On a greater scale than his passion is the struggle of a man with his fate. His ambition and impatience drive him on to calculate on a larger scale than others, to demand more of his fate and to force the pace. Ironically, the reversals begins with his own son, who is very antithesis to his father, and stands as a symbolic negation for his father, the living denial of all that Okonkwo accepts.

The present novel is the tragedy of one man, worked out of his personal conflicts- his neurosis as well as out of the contrariness of his destiny, yet the title is not without relevance, for the novel does have another dimension, that of social comment .Okonkwo's suicide is a gesture that symbolizes at the same time his personal refusal of a new order, as well as the collapse of the old order which he

represents. It is true, of course, that Achebe presents the society as that has positive qualities of its own. The coherence and order that make social life one long ceremonial, reveals the other side of the coin. A correlative theme is here attached to the whole portrayal of Umuofia- that of the liberating influence of the new religion.

The present novel turns out to present the whole tragic drama of society, vividly and concretely enacted in the tragic destiny of a representative individual. This case of an individual character as a symbol of a social dilemma is what gives Achebe's novels their real measure of strength- it explains what is the weakness of his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*.

The present novel is also the story of an individual who is caught up in this situation which demands from the individual that he creates a formal moral code out of the flux of value in the world in which he lives. The whole novel is built up out of the profound gulf that exists between Obi's Western education and its practical relevance.

Though the theme is potentially a tragic one, it is not given an adequately tragic treatment. The main shortcoming of the novel is the inadequate stature of the hero who is a pathetic figure without any grain of nobility. He is the man of superior intelligence, whose understanding of things surpasses that of his followers. He alone understands the nature of the dilemma posed by the presence of the white man in their midst.

In other words, the colonial situation is essentially a tragicomic one. Achebe presents degraded human behavior in a tragic cast, but what we get rather is a picture of human misery. In the present novel, the new order is represented by the white man, who has brought his administration, his civilization and his God. On the purely secular level, the novel represents a critique of colonialization, the overbearing attitude of weight.

To conclude, the author has justly been called a chronicler for in the last resort he is not dealing simply with the collapse of African society, but with its transformation. He examines from inside the historical evolution of African society at its moments of crisis, and the inevitable tensions attendant upon this process. In the final

analysis the present novel reveals the intimate circumstances of the African Becoming.

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