

## Introduction of Chinua Achebe: An Overview

Birth 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1930.

Death 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

(Ogidi Nigeria).

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Chinua Achebe is the best known novelist not only from Nigeria but from the entire Continent of Africa. He is the first African writer whose books have been taught throughout the world. He is now not only one of the most translated novelists in the world but also one of the most honoured and respected. His *Things Fall Apart* is a part of the heritage of world literature. Honoured with scores of awards, medals, honorary degrees, fellowships and editorship of African literature.

The novels of Chinua Achebe: *A Colonial Encounter* is about the colonized people of the world suffering due to slavery suppression and colour prejudice. As it is known, colonialism perpetuates itself through oppression and aggression. The colonized are thrown out of history of society and culture. Colonialism helps to maintain the myth of superiority of the colonizer over the colonized.

In 1964 Chinua Achebe told a conference on common wealth literature Leeds University that as a novelist his duty was to teach, to re-educate his society out of their acceptance of racial inferiority. He said:

“Where then..... is an adequate revolution for me to spouse to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the comp[lexes of the years of denigration and self denigration”. 1

Thus, Achebe has utilized the organic structure of the novel to express the true picture of his land and people. He has projected the African as an individual with infinite possibilities and has transmitted the socio-economic, political and cultural network of Igbo's from an African perspective into the artistic genre of the novel. Therefore, it is discussed to study the colonial encounter in his novel to examine the

achievement of an African who has chosen to write in the language of his colonial masters. Moreover, Achebe has challenged the image of the African as propagated by novelist by Joyce Cary. He totally rejected the European attitude towards the African.

In his *No Longer at Ease*, Green makes a sweeping generalization about African Morality: the African is corrupt- through and through.

"They are all corrupt, I'm all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa". 2

But equality will not alter facts and goes on to offer an ecological explanation for it:

"The fact that over countless centuries the African has been victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically, we have brought him Western Education. But what use is it to him?"3

Chinua Achebe is the trend setter among the African novelists who are writing in English and have challenged European approach towards the Africans.

Achebe was born at Ogidi not far from Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1930. His mother tongue was Igbo but he would have learned some English at home as his brother, Isajah Okafor Achebe, was the teacher in charge of the church missionary society's village school, which young Chinua Achebe attended. In 1944 he went to Government College, Umuahia, in Eastern Nigeria. In 1953 he was one of the first students to graduate from the university college at Ibadan, then in special relation with the University of London. His formal studies in English literature would have been similar to those of British undergraduates. In those days the New-British-Style University in Africa were intended to transplant on African soil what established academic circles in England regarded as the best features of English University, without much regard for the special needs of the countries where they were set up.

In 1954 Achebe began a career in broadcasting as Talks producer for the Nigerian Broadcasting service, and in 1961 was appointed Director of External Broadcasting for Nigeria, an appointment which frequently took him abroad, to Britain and other parts of the world. He relinquished this post after the massacre of

Igbos in Northern Nigeria in 1966 and moved back to Eastern Region, where he was preparing to go into a new publishing venture with, among others, Christopher Okigho. When the Eastern region declared itself independent under the name of Paifrs, Achebe threw his lot with his fellow Igbos. After the war ended in 1970, but from 1972 has lived and worked in the United States and Britain, until his return to Nigeria in 1977.

Achebe expressed his conviction on the role of the artist:

"The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and re-generation that must be done. Perhaps what I write is applied out as distinct from pure. But who cares. Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need to be mutually exclusive. .... An African irrelevant". 4

Achebe further strongly attacks art's sake and formalism and says "Art for art's sake is just another piece of deodorized dog shit" and pronounces "running away from myself seems to be a very inadequate way of dealing with an anxiety. And if writer should opt for escapism who is to meet the challenge?"

Achebe has written in English language. He says:

"The real question is not whether African could write in English. But whether they ought to. Is it right that mass should abandon his mother tongue for someone else. It looks like a grateful betrayal and produces a guilt feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it". 5

But the way he utilizes the Igbo proverbs and expressions clearly indicates that he is a competent bilingual with similar control over English and Igbo. He himself accepts that:

"There is certainly a great advantage to writing in a world language". 6

And further says:

"I don't know for certain but I have probably spoken more in Igbo than English. But I have definitely written more words in English than Igbo". 7

Chinua Achebe says, "At the university I read some appalling novels about African including Joyce Cary's much praised Mister Johnson and decided that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else; no matter how gifted or well-intentioned".

Chinua Achebe further says:

"I have indicated somewhat off-handedly that the National literature of Nigeria and many other countries of Africa is, or will be written in English. This may sound like a controversial statement, but it is not. All I have done has been to look at the reality of present day Africa. This reality may change as a result of deliberate, e.g. political action".<sup>8</sup>

Kenya's Ngugi and Nigeria's Note Soyinka also have thought deeply on the language problem faced by the African novelist writing in English and are now convinced that Swili should be used as the *lingua franca* of black Africa.

The four novels of Achebe-Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God, A Man of the People, constitute the promised tetralogy which records the history of his family locals and reflect the span of history, the four distinct eras of pre-colonial pre-independence and post-independence. Achebe's tetralogy surely shows that his novels expand into a fictional response to a concrete historical situation confirming to the general rule that the larger the scheme of a novel becomes, the more obviously its historical nature appears. Moreover, the impact of the colonial situation on the individual and the community is vital to Achebe and his novels he explores its consequences in its varied manifestations realistically with an astute historical fidelity.

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#### References:

1. Quoted by Ngugiwa Thion Go, Home Coming, Heinemann:  
London, 1981, p. 51.
2. Achebe, Chinua, No Longer at Ease, Heinemann: