

Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart : A Critique of Post-Colonial Discourse

Dr. Lucky Gupta

All African writings, specially novels, are at once literary pieces, a social protest and a medium of political reassertion. The African writings portray the post-colonial African reality in all its varied colours and texture. Writers like Chinua Achebe, in their works, have delineated the characters of their fictional heroes as leaders of the struggle against colonial and neocolonial forces stubbornly obstructing the process of social regeneration and political nativization. Literature occurs under the glow of certain socio-psychological impacts upon the author. Chinua Achebe confirms the validity of this observation most forcefully in the sense that his novels faithfully mirrors the post-colonial colours that shadow the hopes and aspirations of the community that he belongs to. The present paper attempts a critique of post-colonial discourse of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart.

The cross-currents that enrich the texture of the novel consists of the emergence of neo-colonialism along with the lingering shadows of old colonialism, the resistance of the post-colonial struggle of maintaining the native originality on the one hand obsessional hand washing of the old tyranny on the other, the agony of the exile, the longings of diasporic looking back into once own native past, the emotional trauma of being a witness to the structure of one's own dream falling apart and, above all, the agony of one's being misunderstood by one's own kith and kin. The post-colonial milieu of the novel Things Fall Apart finds a poignant treatment by Booth James, in such a way that the readers feel the true spirit of the post-colonial ways of life. It is relevant to reproduce the observation of Booth James regarding the post-colonial shadows that cover the efficacy of the Nigerian progress and development ;

With the six years of independence Nigeria was a cesspool of corruption. Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation's wealth ... Elections were blatantly rigged... The national census was outrageously stage-managed; Judges and magistrates themselves were manipulated and corrupted by foreign business interest.¹

The literary construction of post-colonialism within the force of a novelistic discourse produces the necessity of fore grounding of the quests for identities, the voices of resistance and the conditioned mind of the subjugated swinging between it's innocent individual learning and the compulsive obligations of the social expectations. To set the thesis initially, it would be proper to quote the following conceptualizations of post colonial conditions by Homi Bhabha ;

... a range of contemporary critical theories suggests that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history, subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement - that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality... transforms our critical strategies.²

Achebe views the novel as an exercise in self discovery. It is through writing, he believes, that an African can determine and establish his identity by exploring and re-discovering his roots. This reflexing and self defining nature of the novel is singularly important to post-colonial writers who have been confronting an erosion of their traditional values owing to the overpowering exposure to European culture which has already made insidious advances upon the native way of life and local customs, modes and habits in many countries.

Things Fall Apart is a typical Igloo novel which describes Okonkwo's rise and fall. He was well known throughout the 'nine villages and even beyond.'³ (p.3) His greatest achievement at the age of eighteen was 'throwing Amalinze the Cat.' Amalinze, the great Wrestler was called the cat because his back would never touch the earth. But Okonkwo threw the cat at last. It was said that Okonkwo never used his words, when he was angry he used his fists instead. His father Unoka owed every neighbor some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts.

In the first part of the novel various ceremonies of the triables are narrated. From the very beginning of the first part, Okonkwo's place in the Igloo society is highlighted. It is Okonkwo's will, determination and boldness which take him to the rank of one of the lords of the clan. He is a prosperous man, one who is acclaimed by the nine villages as a great warrior. In one year the harvest was unsatisfactory A farmer committed suicide in Okonkwo's village but Okonkwo tried not to lose his head. His

father advised him not to despair. His father, Unoka, who was then an ailing man, had said to him during the terrible harvest month ;

Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone.

Okonkwo had a firm belief that if he survived that year, he would survive anything.

Part two of the novel describes Okonkwo's exile. Most people in the village suspected him for his industry and success. But now he was banished for seven years from the village. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, painting. His mother's younger brother Uchendu tells Okonkwo:

'Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will die in exile.'

Uchendu's words of comfort are helpful to Okonkwo. The arrival of the missionaries in the village of Mbanta was the cause of worry and anxiety for the villagers. The villagers were told about the new Gods. He was the creator of all the world. When the villagers were told that they worshiped false Gods, Gods of wood and stone, there was a deep murmur in the crowd. The query was quickly made about the protection of the villagers ;

"If we leave our Gods and follow your God," asked another man, Who will protect us from the anger of our neglected Gods and ancestors?" "Your Gods are not alive and cannot do any harm" replied the white man, "They are pieces of wood and stone."

Okonkwo was not at all impressed by the missionaries. He thought that they were mad people. But 'the young lad' was attracted towards Christianity. Okonkwo was not very happy in Mbanta. He regretted everyday of his exile. He wanted to give a feast to his mother's kinsmen. The reason for giving the feast was explained by him : "My mother's people have been good to me and I must show my gratitude."

In the third part of the novel Okonkwo returned to his fatherland Umuofia after seven years of exile. Umuofia had changed during this time. There were churches now. Okonkwo's return to Umuofia was not as memorable as he had wished. The village was completely changed. He was deeply hurt to see the clan breaking up and falling apart. Okonkwo was very angry to see his village changing.

Okonkwo killed one of the District Commissioner's Court messengers who came to stop the meeting. Okonkwo knew that Umuofia would not go to war. Okonkwo came to know that he was alone, he committed suicide. The novel depicts the rise and fall of Okonkwo. At the beginning of the novel he rises to the great height, but at the end of the novel he prefers to die than to accept the attack on his own Igbo tradition. At the end of the novel Obierika blamed the District Commissioner :

'That man was one of the greatest man in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; And now he will be buried like a dog.'

Thus the neo-colonial forces tie up with their natural allies the social obligations and expectations and yearnings. Things indeed fall apart to Okonkwo who suffers terribly like an oak tree braving a storm and finally falls uprooted.

Literature is the result of many and varied intertwined influences and processes resulting into a product that reflect them all in one way or the other. A novelist particularly transforms his raw-material into a finished product of art with an ever-existing sense of novelty. As a result Chinua Achebe's attempt is taken as "new" kind of African fiction in English sustained with a wonderful sense of not only the past and the present but also a sense of presence of the past; as relevant are the words of S. A. Khayoon ;

Achebe lends African colour to the narrative and interweaves the Igbo rituals ... thus he uses creativity 'his sense of the pastness of the present and the presentness of the past.'⁴

Apart from its historicism the novel Things Fall Apart mirrors the attitude of the Africans who, while looking to their future, are engaged in their struggle to get rid of the alienated shadows not only by doing away with them but also by adopting and assimilating in their main stream of culture and religion as far as it is imperative for them. What matters most about the African fiction in general and Things Fall Apart in particular, is the fact that they provide a fruitful context for the creation of the post-colonial trends emerging at the centre of the twenty first century fiction.

Bilingual journal
of Humanities &
Social Sciences

Half Yearly

Vol. 1, Issue 2,
15 July, 2010

Chinua
Achebe's Things
Fall Apart : A
Critique of
Post-Colonial
Discourse

Dr. Lucky Gupta

Reader & Head, Deptt. of
English T.R. (P.G.)
College, Aligarh

www.shodh.net

WORKS CITED :

1. Booth James, Writers and Politics in Nigeria, London : Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.
2. Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, London : 1994, p. 172.
3. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, Allied Publishers Pvt. Limited, Heinemann Educational Books, 2007. (All the subsequent references are taken from the same text and the page nos. are written after it).
4. S.A. Khayoon, The Neo-Athropological Novels of Achebe, The African fiction, ed. Shyam S. Agarwalla (New Delhi, Prestige 2000), p. 135.

शोध.
संचयन
SHODH SANCHAYAN