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Literature and social change in Chinua Achebe's Novels

Literature is a kind of tool to transform the society. Most of the Literature and Literary writers expound their ideas regarding the changes of society through Literature. Without these ideas any Literature and Literary writers could not cross over the roads. Some Literature bring the changes in a positive way, some bring the bitterness of the society. Especially Achebe is an African writer, brings the social change in Ibo Land by the missionaries and their culture. Behind these social changes could not understand the motives. Most of the Literature based on colonialism and this colonialism bring which kind of changes in society. Being an African writer and a representative of Ibo culture expound the violent and cruelty of colonization. The colonizers not only bring the changes in society but also the life, culture, custom, political system and society. Thus the paper examines this kind of perspective with the novels of Achebe. Achebe explores the social changes in native clan of Nigerian along with the struggles faced by the people in Africa because of the Colonizers.

Throughout the novels of Achebe reveals both critically and systematically bring the various components of social change and the aspirations too.

Literature is a kind of art it reflects the life. Literary writers like Achebe uses the tool of art to express the greatest things such as life of Ibo people, the social and cultural change happen in the society. Hence with, which Achebe tries to reshape the society in the form of Literature. From the novels of Achebe captures the social change from the beginning of the African era to the present time. Colonization is the greatest issue in the human life of Ibo people.

Achebe is the first and foremost African writer to bring the eyes of the readers about the changes because of the white missionaries in Africa. Bruce king declares that Achebe and the characters of the novels are,

“European character study is subordinated to the portrayal of communal life. European economy of form is replaced by an aesthetic appropriate to the rhythms of traditional tribal life. Nigeria since 1950 has witnessed the flourishing of a new Literature which has drawn sustenance from both traditional, oral Literature and from the present and rapidly changing society”.

The very name of Chinua Achebe known by everyone throughout the world because of his first novel *Things Fall Apart*. From the first novel to the end of the writing career itself Achebe raises voice about the social change because of the missionaries. Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart* is the starting point to insist about the social change and the missionaries take a step into the cultural world of Africa. The white man entered into Africa and introduces themselves as a brother along with the white man brings their culture too.

The missionaries behave as humble personalities from the beginning and they start to build the church in the evil forest. In *Things Fall Apart*, evil forest is filled with the unburied dead bodies and the evil souls. Actually, the missionaries built the church in the evil forest to

show themselves and their culture as a superior one and try to prove that, their culture is the greatest one than their God among the native Ibo people. The cause for the missionaries involve in this action prove to be asuperior personalities than the Ibo people. However, the native Africans have strong belief in African Ibo culture and customs. So, it is difficult for the missionaries to change the mind of the people.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the first step of the missionaries to get the belief of them and their culture. Then it is easy for the missionaries to bring both social and political changes in Nigeria. *Things Fall Apart* attempts to examine the point of view in crisis of change in African society that affects the cultural patterns of life in Ibo clan during and after the colonial era. Achebe illustrates both present and past to maintain the balance and to render the reality of the African life and culture. While, Achebe starts with the way the African people live along with present the culture of the people and also how the culture bring the people in moral way.

The Ibo culture has many gods and goddess among the Chukwu is the supreme god and Chi is the personal god. These are most important gods to keep the people and society in order. In addition to this, Achebe insists the proverbs and Folk tales in Ibo language. Because Achebe tries to capture the structure and beauty of the language and also the common unique code to insist the valour of the principal characters along with symbolically mention the future events.

The Folk tales play a vital role in Ibo cultural society. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe uses variety of stories such as Earth and Sky, Vulture and Rain and the Tortoise stories. Among these the Tortoise story gives meaning to the novel. The Tortoise reaches sky with the help of birds likewise Okonkwo becomes famous personalities among the tribal people and be a leader of the people. After words the Tortoise get down from the sky the shell breaks into many pieces. This symbolizes that, Okonkwo the clan and the people separate

themselves and be fall apart because of the colonizers. The colonizers are the main cause for the people and the society bring the change. The Ibo culture and the people are very close to each other but now the people their culture and the teachings.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the older generation represents the embodiment of culture. But the younger generation represents a taboo. Because the white missionaries change the psyche of the younger ones. Desperately, Oduche the son of the protagonist change himself into white culture. Herewith, this is the starting place the younger generations are played vital role to bring changes in Ibo society. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe not only illustrates the culture, people and society to get involve into changes. And the changes poisoned the land, people and the society. Eventually the title *Things Fall Apart* suggests that, the things in Ibo community could fall apart because of change.

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe represents in the form of power and authority into African missionaries. As Franz Fanon declares that:

“The colonial world is Manichean world... the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quite essence of evil colonized society is not merely portrayed as a society without values... the native is declared insensible to ethics, he represents not only the absence of the values but also the negation of values” (Franz Fanon: 6).

The mode of Ibo culture changes into an appealing mode because, of Christian culture.

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe illustrates the changes in native culture make them, blindly follow the alien rules in the native society. From the beginning of the novel itself the missionaries take a step into the native land. While, the missionaries enters Umuaro and Okperi quarrel with each other for land dispute. This incident is the most advantageous one for the missionaries to implement their culture and judicial system into Africa and to bring change in Africa. Hence with, clearly picturise the social and political changes in Africa. Simon Gikandi declares that: “ The conflicts in Umuaro are not a rivalry between two gods

Ulu and Idemili but actually a struggle between two conflicting ideological interests and authorities represented by Nwaka and Ezeulu” (Gikandi : 153). The cause of social change brings the conflict and also changes the patterns of society, life and the people. But, by the social change the Ibo people follow the various layers of customs and culture has practiced in Africa.

The Umuaro decides Akukalia as an emissary to settle the matter. Instead of that, there arises a problem because of miscommunication between the two. Mean while, Akukalia breaks the Ikenga of the town – crier. All of a sudden Ebo’s gun explodes and it pierces the heart of Akukalia. Actually the Ibo culture teaches each and every one could maintain peace with each other. But after the arrival of the colonizers the morality and cultural values of the people and the society changed. From this understand that, the Ibo clan slowly undergoes the changes because of the missionaries. Achebe declares that:

“The war was wayed from one Afo to the next on the day it began Umuaro killed two men of Okperi. The next day was Nkwo, and so there was no fighting on the two following days, Eke and Oye, the fighting grew fierce. Umuaro killed four men and Okperi replied with three, one of the three being Akukalia’s brother, Okoye” (AOG : 27).

The white on the side of Okperi because the white man decides to put the colony there off. Most probably the missionaries take advantage to win over the land of Africa.

Ezeulu, the protagonist sends his son Oduche to the white man. Behind the reason is to know root cause for the white man to be in Africa. Along with Oduche some of others follow the alien culture. From this identify that slowly native culture along with the people and the society has changed and be trapped into the hands of the white. In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu is the arrow of god and a representative of the clan. Ezeulu has all the responsibility to take care of the wealth of the clan. The missionaries decide to ask Ezeulu to act as a

representative by the side of white. But, Ezeulu rejects the white orders him to arrest. Latter Ezeulu has released from jail the rain starts to beat him on the way the road full of mud. This symbolizes the change of society. Especially, in *Arrow of God* initiates the cross roads of culture.

The culture is the way to regulate the society and people in order. Moreover, the rituals and ceremonies are renovate the relations between the people and society. During the occasion New Yam Festival the people ready to harvest the crops. Ezeulu is the person to announce the harvest but Ezeulu rejects. So, the people harvest the corps in the name of Christian culture at the end. Achebe conveys the message that the Ibo people and the society could be changed.

No Longer at Ease is set in modern Nigeria in the days immediately before independence from British colonial rule. *No Longer at Ease* reveals the changes to Nigerian Society that result from foreign intervention and the extent to which things have fallen apart. The nature of these changes is revealed through the experiences, actions and beliefs of Obi. The protagonist and the grandson of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. The tragedy of the modern state reveals through Obi's experiences. Achebe provides a record of modernity in terms of its social, political and economic implications derived through colonial rule, as Nigerians have accommodated themselves to it and of the price Nigerians have paid for this kind of modernity.

In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe has tried to be a torch bearer to invoke the cultural past to the new generation. The process of Achebe is to re-educate the cultural past on the way to renovate the society in order to safe from the changes because of the colonizers. Thus the cultural past is not an easy task. As Achebe point outs in an interview with Jim Davidson as:

“...within one generation people lose even the memory of what used to be. The writer has a responsibility to remember what it was like before, and to keep talking about it” (Achebe:11).

Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, is about the plight of new generation of Nigerian society who has exposed themselves through education in alien land of Lagos and to be placed in civil service. Thus the first step of Obi to cut off the roots of the native land and culture and to discover the western culture. Along with this Obi caught between clash of old and new and be indulged in corruption, bribery and immorality. Meanwhile Obi develops in his mind to renovate the society and the people with the values of education eventually the society has the same thought. For time being Obi learns that, in Lagos corruption is the great issue while Obi, return to his native land the police man accepts the bribery from the lorry driver. This incident makes great effect within himself and Obi understands that the cultural values and morality could be changed because of western education and culture.

Obi in *No Longer at Ease* develops the thought of marriage with Clara, an Osu. According to Ibo culture no one could married an Osu, yet Obi has. Thus indicate that the society has changed for the cause of western culture and values. In another incident Obi bargaining and asked the person to issue the radio gram without bill. This incident clearly shows how Obi changed by the knowledge of western education and culture. And at the end Obi accepts the bribe for the personal needs. This makes Obi to face the struggle and challenges.

After a while Obi realizes that, the change in himself and the society is struggle to survive in host land besides Obi understands that the reality and the reality of the African people. Gradually, on seeing the old generation fight with the battle of western culture and to clutch with old belief. The social change in Ibo land is represented through the man Obi

Okokwo. Obi felt to be alienated and dislocated from the roots of native culture because of western education and the changes has to come across within himself.

A Man of the People is a bleak satire set in an unnamed African state which has just attained independence; the novel follows a Minister of Culture named Nanga. The reason behind write the novel *A Man of the People* is that in the mid 1960 the exhilaration of independence has died out in Nigeria due to terrific political problems. The Ibo, who has played a crucial role in Nigerian politics now, become oppressed by the man Nanga. *A Man of the People*, is the bitter portrayal of a corrupt Nigerian politician Nanga, before that he is a formal school teacher of the protagonist Odili.

Achebe brings together the two contrasting personalities Chief Nanga and Odili. Nanga represents himself as a man of the people and be a politician in modern Africa. But Odili represents the modern society. Meanwhile, there is a shift in the system of values because of corruption. Achebe's *A Man of the People* advocates the legacy of the whites and the reflection of the Ibo people. Along with Achebe handles the problems of both public and the private life along with expoused the changeable society. Achebe as a novelist foreshadows the intricacies of changes continued even after the colonial era.

Achebe's *Anthills of Savannah* is about a military coup in the fictional West African nation of Kangan. It is a polyvocal story with multiple narrators. Here, Achebe aims at giving the story back to the people, at reclaiming the art of storytelling in a society in which oral wisdom is in danger of dying out because of the increasing development of the modern technocratic society and where the communal and public act of storytelling is yielding to the private form of the printed word.

Achebe is a kind of man to educate the people and the society and to insist that the society has changed. In *Anthills of Savannah*, Achebe conveys the message that the people have changed according to their needs. As it is Sam the President of the Republic society has

to take vengeance against his childhood friends Chris and Ikem and to take an attempt to murder them to take over the position. Sam not ready to realize the mistake of himself and to treat the people in a crucial manner. At the end Beatrice the fiancée of Chris arranged for the naming ceremony of Ikem and Elewa's daughter. Beatrice gives the name as Amaechina means may the path never close. This indicates that the society could not be recovered from the changes at any cost.

Achebe's purposes as an artist the duty to the art and the social purposes. Achebe's art reflects in all its variety the endless permutations of essential duality of Ibo life. The connection between the world view and artistic irony is apparent. The British policies of education of the natives and the promotion of learning the English language focus on oriental studies and the subsequent renewal of interest in literature. The historical context that shapes Achebe's writings incorporates the essential moments of African History. The early face of colonial encounter critically embodies the loss of the pristine glory of a civilization that had flourished on the strength of the Africans. The painful experience of colonization recaptures the process of destabilization both internal as well as external and finally the struggle against foreign domination, the establishment of indigenous rule and the emerging contestation of various conflicting tendencies arising out of intense poverty, corruption and progressive pauperization of the people.

In the novels of Achebe able to see the entire spectrum of the nature of conjunctions and disjunctions in the process of nation – building that the Nigerians underwent or are still undergoing and it is in this historical context that the reader can understand the politics formation that Achebe attempts to delineate. Achebe believes in the emergence of a transformed society based on moral principles which can be brought into being if the masses fight their corrupt leaders and engage in acts of resistance and subversion. The tenor of anti-colonial resistance movements questions this very process, and the secular, social vision that

emerges challenges the hegemonization of the dominant structures that threatens to erase the values, the civilization so far has to be cherished.

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