

LOSS OF ROOTS AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *NO LONGER AT EASE*

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Abstract:

This paper aspires to evince the cultural consciousness of the African writer Chinua Achebe by depicting the dilemmatic outlook of Igbo young man in dual cultures in his second novel 'No Longer at Ease' (1960). Most of the postcolonial writers serve as a spokesperson of their culture to protect their roots and preserve the magnificent traditional past of their country. Likewise Achebe, a Nigerian novelist, being a pioneer in African writings in English, focuses on submitting the values of African culture differently. He felt that the western world literature misrepresents with depth and intensity that Africans are barbarous and uncivilized. Most of the European writings portray African culture as a mysterious symbol of primitivism, cannibalism, savagery and tribalism, to the extent of being inhuman. He thus, wanted to talk about African culture as a benign and noble culture through his writings. Achebe aims to furnish a new insight of African culture. Achebe's No Longer at Ease reveals the enormity of African culture by demystifying the different cultural manifestations. The integrated patterns of African culture represent the total way of Africans' life. The modern African life which reflects the conflicts of Igbo reveals the religious bigotry and colonized sufferings of the Igbo people. In this novel, Achebe reveals the traditions, customs, language complexities, beliefs, taboos, codes, rituals and religious conflict of the African people.

Keywords: Culture, Myth, Tradition, Identity, Primitivism, imperialism, Historicism.

Human beings are social animals and they have constructed laws, customs and unique cultural systems in their everyday life, which is intended to get them enriched. Every individual is important for the making of society. Without individuals, growth in a society is impossible. However, the societal values differ from one place to another due to their cultural phenomena. Human beings behave according to their culture. Culture creates men and men create culture. The society gives importance to the values found in the people and it reflects the individuals' social awareness and affinity. Individuals learn from their culture and manifest it in the form of values and social behaviour.

The cultural construction of Africa depends on the values of its inmates. It is by this intrinsic dependence on culture, human beings protect themselves and their customs and laws. A country like Africa has its own unique culture that varies within a country. It has vast cultural diversities and classes that depend on different values among the different groups of people. It shows its social structure with a deep insight of their life. The integrated patterns of African culture reveal the life of Africans. The treasured traditional customs of Africans are deeply connected to their communal values. The African tradition which reflects the faithfulness of the past controls the religious beliefs of Igbo people. African culture evinces the traditions, customs, languages, beliefs, taboos, codes and rituals of the African people.

African writers are trying to explore their cultural dignity to the outer worlds. Protection of cultural identity through tradition and myth is one's own responsibility and they believe in literature which will justify their cultural activities by depicting the socio cultural practices of natives. Under the domination of

colonisers, some African writers are forced to lose their roots of culture by adopting the west culture. Also, it allows other European writers to create a fake picture of Africa.

In their writings, they reflect the false representation of their nation because of the domination of western culture and political policies. According to Waller Rodney, “the colonies could not rely on the writers from the European empires to represent a true picture about the events of colonization” (20). It depends on the commonwealth writers to write how the colonizers have exploited the natives and have shown their imperialist power.

Fanon says, “the feeling of the inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority . . . It is the racist who creates his inferiors. And, the myth of the bad nigger is a part of collective unconscious” (92). The imperialist's superiority portrays the native as an inferior person in all the ways that makes them to surrender under the white meddlers in their colonized country. Meanwhile the black writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have started to write with a black consciousness about their own culture and community. Ashcroft defines this:

Black writers have been critical of what have appeared to be new hegemonic categories like 'Commonwealth literature', and this has forced critics and writers from colonized white countries to consider their own attitudes to race and to their often ambiguous position as both colonized and colonizers. (21)

The literature of postcolonialism traces certain problems of the native writers about the identification of their individuality after the rule of the colonisers, the way of observing and formulating their national identity, the justification to colonisers who consider the natives as inferior, and the misrepresentation of being the inferior culture in society. As noted by Khairnar, “The spread of imperialism in Africa has produced a far-reaching influence in the growth of African literature” (28).

In his second novel *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe projects the bad dilapidation of Nigeria under the influence of the British meddlers. This novel narrates the story after his third novel *Arrow of God*. Achebe depicts the character, Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist of this story who stands in between both the western and native cultures and he loses his roots from the native land. He is a Nigerian young man who has studied English in England. He can neither adopt the western life style, nor can he lose his natal identity. One can see this type of mental dilemma throughout this novel.

Achebe limns how an individual of Igbo spoils his identity which leads to destroy his communal life. Achebe proves that the European meddlers and their imperialist power negate one's own culture. He deals with the influence of Western education, the corruptibility of the civil servants in Afro-European offices and the conflict between the traditional culture and the western lifestyle. Achebe submits the dilapidation of Igbo land during the period of colonial rule. From his first novel to this novel, one can see the eradication of Igbo culture among the people. This novel reveals the struggles of people in adopting a new culture after deserting their native culture.

Obi is a brilliant young man, who unlike his father Okonkwo, has no interest in Christianity. But Obi himself shows as a Christian for satisfying his father's expectation. He only speaks the values of Christianity while he attempts to claim his love for his outcast lover Clara. But he fails to compromise his Christian father. In this critical situation, he loses his identity as an Igbo man as well as a modern man who follows the western life style. The imperialist power of the British forces him to lose his root and identity. He wants to learn western education and wants to become an Afro-European officer. But he stands in between the two big cultures and fails to belong to a particular culture, as his fore fathers belong to the traditional past of African culture.

Achebe presents how Igbo's mind seeks to survive under the colonial power. It is not possible to find their identity in an alien culture and they can't trace out their own culture. When Obi studies in England he thinks about his country. “During his first winter in England he had written a callow, nostalgic poem about Nigeria.” (13). He lives in Nigeria mentally, but learns English and lives literally in England. He is a

good example of a person who withstands and belongs to a different culture for survival in the modern society.

Igbo people have lost their roots and they expect Obi to act like a white man when he returns to Nigeria. So, they notice that he wears short-sleeves and speaks informal English in front of the people. Now, he looks like a stranger in his own country. Colonial power affects every native man's mentality. Finally this tedious situation leads him to lose his mother as well as his girlfriend Clara and finds him stuck up with bribes.

Obi loves his country too much. He loves the folk tales of Nigeria. Telling folk tales takes a main role in every family that belongs to Nigerian tradition. It expresses how this Igbo young man longs for his country and its glorious past. But his Christian family situation makes him a stranger for both cultures. "During this period the teacher called on any pupil to tell the class a folk-story. Obi loved these stories but he knew none which he could tell. One day the teacher called on him to face the class and tell them a story. As he came out and stood before them he trembled" (47). He has interest to hear folk stories, but his family prohibits it. It crystal clearly expresses the background of a Christian family and the critical situation of the Igbo young Christian boy, who still loves his tradition.

Achebe talks about the opinion of the Igbo people and about the young man. "But when he got to England he reads English; his self-will was not new. The union was angry but in the end they let him alone" (06). But indirectly his Christian principles kindle him to learn English. So he switches to English from law. Even though, many of them are Christians, they do not forget the cultural values of Igbo. They show their bond of being a kinsman, when their bonded fellowman is in trouble.

While he is presenting in front of UPU, the president of UPU in Lagos branch asks about Obi's love for an outcast girl. "I have heard that you are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry, and even thinking of marrying her" (65). Many of them bear a Christian name, but they still support and hold on to the values of their traditional Africa and its cultural beliefs. In this way they argue with Obi to give up his relationship with an *Osu* girl, Clara. They are very conscious about an outcast girl as per their traditional customs and cultural values. In this community, Christianity replaces the traditional gods. Throughout this novel no one prays their ancestral shrines and traditional gods. In a few places, one or two old Nigerians sacrifice some food to traditional gods. Some of them follow their customs and traditions.

Not only Obi, many in numbers stand in the mid-way between the two great cultures and they act like strangers to both of them. He can't assimilate and make a successful life with western education. He belongs to traditional Africa and lives in the modern one with a western lifestyle.

Achebe indicates the corruptive mind of the individual and the society by pointing out the socio political system. He connects the characters of Obi Okonkwo with Ogbuefi Okonkwo. This present situation clears the mind of the old and the modern Nigerians. Achebe initiates the story with the trial of Obi for accepting a bribe. In the courtroom, everyone is eager to know the judgment of this case. It envisions the status of individuals in Nigeria and the imperialist power on them. The judge says him: "I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this that a sudden and marked change occurred" (02). Obi is an honest man and wants to make some changes in his country. He gets European education and gets jobs in the European civil service. He forcefully acts against bribes and shows himself as a very honest man to everyone.

He thinks for his country and its development. So he puts his efforts to make changes in his country as per his tradition. But, as a Nigeria-educated man, he can't make any changes in the society. When he works in civil services Mr. Mark, an Ibo, comes and asks to give scholarship to his sisters. He is ready to bribe him. But Obi ignores him and behaves like an honest officer. But Mark's sister offers her body for sexual pleasure. The Igbo girl doesn't want to lose her purity and honesty. But her economic status induces her to act immorally. The Africans starve and struggle for everything. They lose their identity in modern Nigeria and seek for them in a corruptive society. Later this same financial problem forces Obi to get a

bribe. Jai Ram Jha says, "So the same Obi who had earlier raised so many overwhelming questions regarding the prevailing corruption in Nigeria, becomes corrupt himself" (42).

Every educated and uneducated man in Nigeria lives in this dilemmatic condition. This type of critical situation makes him to react like a corrupted person in his native land as well as in Europe. Finally, Obi loses his mother and his lover Clara by standing in between two cultures. After a lot of losses, he feels like a new man to start a new life and begins to get bribes. At this stage he is arrested by the police. His education and his promising future get wasted by him. Had Obi practiced his native religion and native practices, he would have survived. Or if he had remained as a complete Christian, he would have survived with a new identity. But with a failure to adopt both identities, Obi fails miserably. This is the plight of every African who struggles in the aftermath of colonization.

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