

PRIDE IS A DISEASE: A SCRUTINY OF EZEULU IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD*

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Abstract:

The present paper discusses the growing, historical body of African Literature. So far, the Africa was given birth many established writers like Buchi Emecheta, Nuruddin Farah, Nadine Gordimer, Nelson Mandela, and Chinua Achebe and so on. The writers who have been chiefly penning Africa real life well. Chinua Achebe was one of the most prolific writer has written many novels of modern African literature which one of those is *Arrow of God* in which he deals with tradition and customs of Modern African literature. Furthermore, he then insists that the traditions are subverted by the arriving of Christianity, the power of the British colony, and, most grandly, by Ezeulu's unadaptability and insisting on clinging to tradition. Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* is highly proud and inflexible. He is known for his hunger for power. His major failing is his arrogant pride. He wants to be the priest king. He earned the displeasure of Nwaka. With regard to the death of Akukalia, Ezeulu committed the sin of pride. His egoistic behaviour brought him bitterness and hardness of heart. He rejected the ideas and advice of the elders. He was proud that he could see tomorrow. Ezeulu's aggressive self-will and pride is beautifully portrayed by Chinua Achebe. Ezeulu finally plans to bring famine and suffering to his own people. Though he succeeds in doing so, sense of alienation and isolation brought him devastation that he became mad at the end.

Key words: Rituals, failing, pride, Umuaro, enmity, ego, arrogance, judgement.

Introduction:

Chinua Achebe is acclaimed as the inventor of African fiction who is widely appreciated and accepted for expressing his view that his country also has its own social arrangements, beautiful traditions, abundance of valuable culture which is no less valuable than those of the Western and European Countries. As a matter of fact, his novels are truly a symbolic assertion of how Africa exhibits the identity of its people and uniqueness. Ideally speaking, Achebe's African fiction "emerges as a kind of reaction to Eurocentric Version of the African Portrayal in terms of 'a Savage' inhabiting 'a dark Continent' (Indrasena Reddy 9). S.A. Kayyaoon also tries to bring out of how the nature of Africa has got its own authenticity and how it has echoed its cultural uniqueness." Africa is no longer an imaginary continent, a 'trackless Wilderness' devoid of meaning. It is rich in culture and mythology and its inhabitants are endowed with unique and novel potentialities'. African culture is a donor culture, not a client culture". ("Myth and Symbolism" 71).

It should be accepted that Achebe through the tragic story of Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*, sets about textualizing Igbo cultural identity. The Novel *Arrow of God*, is adorned with beautiful examples of ritual and strong tradition in which one can read about engagement rites, death rituals, festivals like the weak of the Peace and the Feast of the New Yam. The Igbo people are seen to be worshipping their ancestral spirits, sometimes personified by tribal Elders and so on. In fact, *Arrow of God* focuses on how a proper governing authority is constituted. It also explores the limited powers of ruler. *Arrow of God* Calls forth the exploration of the nature of power and its limits which produce refractory conflicts.

This article would focus on not only the characteristic features of Ezeulu but give a special spot

light on the fractious failing in his character that is 'pride'. One can always find that in Ezeulu resides an innate desire to control. Ezeulu is a priest of the god, Ulu, the central deity of Umuaro. He has a job that compels him to watch for the appearance of the new moon and only after his announcement; any commencement of planting is possible.

Ezeulu is understood to be a man who is hungry for power. But at the same time he is also doubtful and not certain of the power which he already has. Achebe says that

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the years and the crops and, therefore, over the people, he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast. He did not choose it. He was merely a watchman...No, the Chief priest of Ulu was more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival-no planting, no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare (AG 3)

He strongly believes that power enhances one's reputation and honours upon one's social status. Often the power of Ezeulu is questioned by Nwaka and his supporters. Nwaka is an arch enemy of Ezeulu who always attacks authority and traditional, exclusive enjoyment of power. His failings are overvaulting ambition, arrogant pride; lack of insight and foresight, his anti people command in the name of god Ulu and his thoughts of spiteful revenge against his own people. Though there are a lot of intimidating failings of Ezeulu, the pride of him can't be accepted by anybody. There is a proverb in English that goes like this. 'Pride is a disease which would rob you of even common sense. This proverb is absolutely matched with the character of Ezeulu.

S.A. Khayyom pinpoints his pride as the cause of his downfall: "Ezeulu's inordinate desire to demonstrate his power as the traditional head of the society against the will of his society and communal harmony and his overweening and over hearing nature are prophetic of his fall" (Chinua Achebe 105). It may be worth nothing that Ezeulu somehow earned the displeasure and enmity of Nwaka and others who personally attacked and abused Ezeulu for his denominational attitude and betrayal of his Clan's Clause. Because Ezeulu was sharply blunt and daringly outspoken in his views on Akukalia's death. The conflict between Ezeulu and Nwaka was mounting up. Nwaka also reminded the assembly that Ezeulu's duty was exclusively limited to performing rituals and offering sacrifices. Mezu comments, "...to prideful, uncompromising Ezeulu, Nwaks's challenge to limit his power is galling". (58) With regard to the death of Akukalaia, Ezeulu tried to assess the merits and advantages of Okperi independently without consulting the clan's elders. In this process he took his clan's elders for granted. So it is understood that Ezeulu committed the sin of pride. Yousaf remarks; "Like Okonkwo, Ezeulu has forsaken his individual responsibility to the group and the group's beliefs. He breaks tradition partly in the sin of pride in his own ability to judge a case, as when he counsels Umuaro against ear with Okperi and supports Captain Winterbottom". (48)

It is worth saying that Achebe has tried to picture in Ezeulu such an ambitious person who wants everyone to accept his argument and people should never question his actions. Throughout the novel **Arrow of God**, Achebe portrays Ezeulu as a man of self-conceit, selfishness and as a man of building himself into towering personality and a power centre. The mission of Ezeulu was to maintain and continue his egoistic behaviour and image as the most powerful Chief priest of Ulu who couldn't and should not be passed or taken for granted at any cost by anybody including his enemies like Nwaka. When his son Oduche who was the church-going son brought in a bag a serpent which was considered to be a sacred one worshipped by the priest of Idemili, Ezeulu openly refused to convince or pacify through some prescribed sacrifices instead which in his blistering pride and in a state of blasé Ezeulu planned to cleanse the six villages of their sins.

The character of Ezeulu has got an immense significance in his poignantly tragic drama of political and religious intrigues. He fails to relate himself with his own people. "Even his sons do not know him" (AG 131). Ezeulu's pride can be well read when he insists:

I have my own way and I shall follow it. I can see things where other men are blind. That is why I am known and at the same time unknowable. You are my friend and you know whether I am a thief or a murderer or an honest man. But you cannot know the thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances. I can see tomorrow...(AG 132).

The meeting between Ezeulu and his friend Akuebue is quite significant in this novel as it depicts a clear message that Ezeulu has a highly provocative 'far sighted' move of white appeasement. The meeting demonstrates Ezeulu's aggressive self-will and pride which trigger the tribal act against him and undermining his influence and popularity. Akuebue, as a close friend tries to advise Ezeulu but the proud Chief priest of Ulu wouldn't accept it. He is impelled by his arrogance and immeasurable conceitedness carve his own destruction and tragic end when he chooses to turn a deaf ear to his friend's forewarnings and attract devastating consequences. Ezeulu's rejection of his friend Akuebue's message, advice and argument shows his imprudence, arrogance and falsely cultivated belief in the strength of his intellectual power and in the invincibility of his so-called foresight to see what others can't see. It is a dangerous barrier or failing in Ezeulu and in contaminated attitude on his part. It is evident to say that Ezeulu lived in a self-woven web of unfathomable and impenetrable ignorance futilely bolstered by his pride-pride of holding a powerful priesthood of a mighty god Ulu in which he firmly believed that it only gave the power and the capacity to foresee future happenings, but did not mind or realize that the villagers were slowly moving away from him.

His foolish act makes one think that he can only make good decisions and he wants to prove it with a touch of pride that he alone is capable of doing great things and that he does not need the advice of others. He never cared for the importance of others and their co-operation. He says that "He declared that he was going to meet the white man without any fear because 'had not stolen the white man's goat or killed his brother or fucked his wife' and 'he had not offended him in any way'" (AG 45). Immensely proud, Ezeulu's image of himself is enshrined almost in hubris. It is this kind of image that makes him blind to reality in Umuaro and makes him ignore both elders and common people in Umuaro.

There are four important concepts of psychoanalysis which are to be studied simultaneously in Ezeulu: They are repression of huge emotions of anger and bitterness, isolation as he rejects his friend's advice, intellectualization as he tries to rationalize all the problems and conflicts with Nwaka and his family and there is also neurosis for the negative issues which are not well repressed.

Ezeulu is always comparatively weak in judgement. This is occasioned by the not restrained and unchecked and ungoverned bitterness and obstinate pride and impatience that make treat friends and enemies alike. When Nwokeke Nnabenyi, Akuebue and his brother Okeke Onenyi wish to travel to Okperi along with him, Ezeulu arrogantly and stupidly refused.

Achebe gives a beautiful and a graphic account of the contention between Ezeulu and Clarke. It is indeed a significant moment in the life of the proud Chief priest of Ulu. Even though he had already faced many tussles with his clansmen who actually questioned his credibility and credentials towards his priesthood, he could somehow manage it. But this time the fight is against the powerful and authoritative white administration. Both Ezeulu and Clarke are equally proud and inflexible. When Ezeulu was given an opportunity to be the paramount chief he said "Tell the Whiteman that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief except Ulu" (AG 174). Since Ezeulu rejected Clarke's offer of the paramount Chief, he earned a jail punishment. But when he was freed from the jail, Ezeulu bloated with pride and swaggering vanity. In his foolishness he thought that the white man was inferior and runty. The last fight he had was with his own people. It was definitely a serious wrangle. While Ezeulu was languishing in the jail no one cared to visit him with words of comfort and solace. This caused in him an emotional spate and an explosion of rage and spawned a fierce revengeful fire of strong negative emotion and wrath against Umuaroans.

The motives of Ezeulu are not totally honest. He is not happy about his people who did not visit him during his predicament in the jail and so he inwardly intends to hurt his own people as hard as he can. So he beautifully designs the scenes in which he refuses to eat the scared you and denies the people to have their

harvest on time. He never shows respect and genuine concern to his own personal grievance to bear on a precarious communal situation. The chance or possibility of a no harvest of all with attendant possibility of famine in Umurao. Ezeulu is seen to be directing his attention to his intransigence and thoughtlessness after having sent the visitors away, says the author, "The old Priest's face glowed with happiness and some of his youth and handsomeness returned temporarily from across the years" (AG 24).

Ezeulu who was patriotic and progressive statesman is now turned to a rapid egoist bent upon hurting Umurao in a bit to crush his enemies. The reader maybe shocked to find that Ezeulu with all his heart willingly takes revenge against him with people. All his revenge designs transform himself into a seven-headed serpent, into another Satan, into a venomous and vengeful grandeur could not be convinced by the elders of him clan. All their plaques and pleadings to which Ezeulu turned a deaf ear. He even said that what he told them was Ulu's will and not his. He told this with a concealed glee and deceitful preference. He renounced and abrogated all his responsibilities.

Achebe presents a grim picture of the wretched state of the Umuroans. There was a severe famine and people were starving for food. There was no place for rituals, funeral feasts and rites. Ideally speaking not conducting the mandatory rites and ceremonies was a serious, sinful violation of convention. The people of Umurao were forced to buy yams from neighbouring clans when "their own crop lay locking in soli" (AG 218).

But of the end one can see that Ezeulu being egoist transformed and mellowed into a sorrowful man. He could not find place of mind. He had only conflicting thoughts and emotions which constantly killing him. Finally the scorching sense of alienation and isolation was psychologically unbearable devastating and maddening. He could not come out of a strange kind of silence and solitude. Ezeulu dreaded this horrific silence eloquently expressed thus [optically] with a native smile. "so with every passing day Umuro became more and more an alien silence-the kind of silence which burnt a man's inside like blue quiet, razor-edge flame of burning palm nut shells. Ezeulu writhed in pain which grew and grew..." (AG 219). Surely he became a victim of his own pride and thus proving the above said proverb to be true and worth saying.

Conclusion

Achebe had created in the ever proved Ezeulu, a different person who is known for his conflicting qualities of deep enmity, unyielding stubbornness, and ability of heart ungrudging, gorgeous generosity in allowing his son Obika to run the spirit runner. It is quiet an undeniable fact that pride of Ezeulu was the biggest reason for his fall. Ezeulu was a proud man- but never used his pride to derive personal power, profit or pleasure. But the authoritarian strain in his personality had dangerous potentialities. He could not suffer or endure for long the public humiliation of being branched as the white man's ally and a betrayer of his people. His ego self-righteousness warps his social conscience and he was not able to respond to the demands of the physical and social reality. Ezeulu supreme deeds, enmity are some of his failings and failures. He was finally defeated by his own pride. The fire-tested wisdom and truth of his forefathers, "no man, However great, was greater than his people: that no one ever won judgment against his clan" (AG 330). Pride is indeed a disease which robbed the common sense in Ezeulu and crippled him inside his hut for the rest of his life.

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