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## The Dynamics of Change in African Sensibility: *Anthills of the Savannah*

**Dr. Pallavi Bhardwaj**

Assistant Professor, Baddi University of Emerging Sciences and Technology, Baddi, Solan, HP, India

### **Abstract:**

*Anthills of the Savannah delineates the problems inflicting newly independent African states. The prevailing theme and the major problem in this novel is the corrupt dictatorial set up of Kangan. The theme in the work is 'overcoming the history of suffering' through the inculcation of a strong sense of community among the people. The people want change and peace, but they are unsure how to attain a suitable system of government. Thus, the first step towards national salvation is to throw out the colonizers. Being a witness to the failure of social justice and democracy to take root in postcolonial Nigeria, Achebe dramatizes the impasse in *Anthills of the Savannah*. The two major characters alongwith their girlfriends were obviously chosen by the writer to reflect his own frustrations with Nigeria and mixed feelings about Africa's tomorrow.*

Novel as a literary form is a convenient medium in the hands of an author to project his ideas in an effective way. As a form of literature, it has twofold purposes: Highlighting the major issues, conflicts and problems that beset a society, and suggesting the effective means and measures required to cure the society from these serious diseases. It also facilitates the readers to understand and recognize the social forces that shape and influence their lives.

Chinua Achebe is honoured as one of the founders of modern Nigerian literature for his historically receptive and discerning writings on contemporary Africa. He is one of those thinking young, educated Africans who have the realization that the colonial rulers and western cultural influences have penetrated almost every sphere of life that has affected African heritage and identity in a grave manner. With the annihilation of the traditional ways of life, people live a rootless existence in a cultural and moral vacuum. This erosion of human and social values have resulted in the spread of social evils like rampant corruption, palm greasing, bootlicking, etcetera that have become the order of the day resulting in the loss of worth preserving ethics of the African cultural heritage. At this juncture, Achebe adopts literature, particularly the novel form, to disseminate his ideas among his people in order to make them aware of their responsibilities towards themselves as well as the African society in general. According to Achebe, in African society the novel form should be used by the novelists to highlight the need to transform the harsh social reality and replace it with a new and better social system which would give deeper meaning and purpose to the life of an individual, that is to say, to educate and guide the masses. Thus, the novelists should use literature and education as a tool to inculcate a sense of dignified identity in a society torn between the dichotomy of the "colonizer and the colonized" (Memmi 55). The ideas of Achebe about the nature and function of fiction in particular, and literature in general, have led to the marvellous flowering of literature in Africa.

*Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) marks an idiosyncratic moment in Achebe's reflections on the writer's role. He has his own method of educating his people, that is, by exposing the chicaneries of administrators, functionaries and the ruling elite in the Sovereign State. Like most postcolonial novels, *Anthills of the Savannah* aims at social change instituted within the Nigerian "core of reality" (100). Here Achebe fictionalizes the condition of the activist, artist in Nigeria under a repressive regime and tries to re-establish a connection between the traditional artist and the contemporary writer challenging the tyrannical regime of the native political leaders. The writer hopes to reform the society "around what it is, its core of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction" (100). In the novel he does not merely indulge in realistic reporting, which has never been his chief interest, but seems more anxious to transform it into a fable. Thus he makes the people's struggle a reincarnation like the scorched anthills of the Savannah, both as a warning and as a promise for the common masses.

Achebe in the novel does not merely expose the sad state of affairs of Nigeria but points towards a solution, identifying people with a higher responsibility to remould the society. He projects the picture of the archetypal African in his native surroundings before his encounter with the whiteman's culture and the effects of cultural interaction without much exaggeration and excitement. He examines in his novels the nature of the traditionalists' moorings without idealizing them. Unlike negritude writers, Achebe is not sentimental about the traditional past. As a detached observer of African society, he highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the Igbo traditional society. His remarks in this context are noteworthy:

We cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolour idyll. We have to admit that like other people's pasts ours had its good as well as its bad sides. (Qtd. in Prasad, "Colonial Consciousness in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" 82).

The novel is hailed in the *Financial Times* as "a powerful fusion of myth, legend and modern style ... Achebe has written a book which is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from 'overseas' who see nothing new out of Africa" ("Anthills and Paralysis," [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua\\_Achebe#anthills\\_paralysis](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe#anthills_paralysis)). *Anthills of the Savannah* dramatizes political struggles of Africans and exhibits continuing British and Western economic and cultural influences; and ends with the overthrow of the government. This text seeks to sum up the major thematic concerns of Achebe's earlier novels and present a real picture of the socio-political condition of the postcolonial post-independent African countries. The roots of this novel go back to its predecessor *A Man of the People*, wherein, a small group of intellectuals, however, with little success, try to offer resistance to the corrupt anti people regime in an African state. The theme of resistance to an unpopular government gains a new impetus and sense of credibility in *Anthills of the Savannah* because herein the intellectuals take up the responsibility of checking the oppressive and dictatorial rule of an army government. The novel depicts life in Kangan, an imaginary African state, in the nineteen eighties and attempts to re-establish proper relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The title of the novel is quite apt and symbolic which surfaces from Ikem's "Hymn to the Sun":

The trees had become hydra-headed bronze statues so ancient that only blunt residual features remained on their faces, like anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year's bush fires. (31)

Here the anthills symbolize the elders from Abazon, the repositories of ancestral wisdom and communal experience. The failure of poor leadership, neocolonization, economic downturn, schism of coldwar-isms, ravaged the savannah. The jagged anthills jutting out of the barren savannah are a reminder of the dreams lost and hopes yearned. In spite of the adverse sociopolitical conditions, these people have survived to tell the coming generation - 'the new grass' - the stories of struggle and of coups and counter coups - 'last year's bush fire' - and thus infusing inspiration in the youth to fight and strive for social reformation.

*Anthills of the Savannah* is set in the fictional West African state of Kangan. Unlike the earlier novels, Achebe here chooses a fictional setting which gives him the advantage of distinction from history. The absence of any particular real historical streak gives the work an air of freedom, and it refers not to concrete situation but to an ideological formation which concrete situations have actually produced. The textual space practically includes the whole society, from the massive and magnificent presidential place with its marble corridors and mahogany furniture to the squalor of the one room shack of the urban poor. The novelist here no longer remains a historian, but is transformed into an ideologue. He is not merely evaluating but clearly censuring certain developments in Africa in the last two decades. He is even suggesting positive values to replace the old ones and offers an updated comprehensive critical statement on the contemporary political situation explicitly showing that any form of government, which is insensitive to the needs of the suffering masses is doomed to fail.

The huge canvas of the work is crowded with the characters drawn from various social circles ranging from the Head of the State and his cabinet colleagues to students, taxi-drivers and slum dwellers. The focus, however, is on a trio of friends - Sam Okoli, Christopher Oriko and Ikem Osodi - adventitiously at the apex of power after a military coup in Kangan. This enables the writer to portray an inner view of the political maneuverings. The Sandhurst trained army officer, Sam, finds himself transformed into his Excellency overnight in the zeal of guarding the supreme political power, more by the quirk of the nation's destiny than anything else. The portraiture of Sam depicts him as a military dictator and inept leader, who relies on brute force and violence to consolidate his leadership and power base. Also he considers the state machinery as a private estate that ought to be used for the institutionalization of mediocrity, private interest and above all materialistic pursuits. The metamorphosis of Sam into a dictator is normal and natural, given the political atmosphere in this ex-colonial state with corrupt politicians, indifferent intellectuals, and apathetic masses.

The narrative of the novel includes two main interwoven threads: One providing current information on the final days of his Excellency's government and the deaths of his Excellency and his two bosom friends, Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi; and the second thread, gives background information on the personal and national events that culminate in the unhappy fate of these three men. The populace welcomes his Excellency as the President of Kangan in a military coup d'etat. The elected officials are toppled by the coup who seem to have "finally got what they had coming to them and landed unloved and unmourned on the rubbish heap" (12). The junior officers invite his Excellency to assume the reins of Presidency. The newly elected President is easy going and quite amiable person. He has 'few ideas about what to do' when he first assumes power and to carry out a political program, he enlists his two high school friends, Chris Oriko, who edits the *National Gazette* (11) and Ikem Osodi, a well respected column writer in a newspaper. The President, still referred to as Sam, appoints Chris, his minister of Information and promotes Ikem as an editor of the *National Gazette*.

His Excellency after attending the Summit of African Heads of Government adopts a new goal and resolves to become Kangan's President-for-life, exactly like the despots at the conference he attended. The text minutely observes the paradoxes of the military power. The armed forces terrorize both the general population and the officials into a wretched state of powerlessness. The slavish subservience of the cabinet comprising lawyers, professors, university graduates, in brief "the hope of the black race" is disheartening (2). They are like rats crawling in and out of holes sniffing their master's moods, a bunch of "court jesters" (46) acting out the ritual of sycophancy and 'half witted idiots' readily hailing their tyrant as Jesus: The "Man of Destiny" (23). Fear appears to be the inseparable twin of power, the powerless fear power while those in power fear of losing it. More than any other government department, His Excellency pays special attention to security services such as the police, the army, and the secret police named 'The State Research Council.' These agencies work as if they have the mandate to track down and eliminate all perceived enemies of the state, the usual suspects being labour unions, students' associations, critical editors and news reporters.

Chris, the Commissioner for Information, is in the world of politics but not a part of it. As a minister of information, Chris is in an enviable position. Charged with the responsibility of defending the policies of a military dictator, who happens to be one of his oldest friends, he treads a fine line between loyalty, toadyism and subversion. He is intelligent enough to know how rotten the government is, but fails to commit himself for the cause. When confronted by his old friend Ikem Osodi, a fire brand oppositionist who has succeeded him as editor of the state-owned newspaper, Chris justifies his inaction through a kind of Hegelian aloofness:

Nations ... were fostered as much by structures as by laws and revolutions. These structures where they exist now are the pride of their nations. But everyone forgets that they were not erected by democratically-elected Prime Ministers but ... by rather unattractive, bloodthirsty medieval tyrants.

The cathedrals of Europe, the Taj Mahal of India, the pyramids of Egypt and the stone towers of Zimbabwe were all raised on the backs of serfs, starving peasants and slaves. Our present rulers in Africa are in every sense late-flowering medieval monarchs, even the Marxists among them. Do you remember Mazrui calling Nkrumah a Stalinist czar? Perhaps our leaders have to be that way. Perhaps they may even need to be that way. (74)

Kenyan Ali Mazrui along with Achebe and Wole Soyinka is one of the prominent intellectuals of Africa. While hosting the PBS series on Africa in the 1980s, Mazrui's Afrocentricism heightens the wrath of white critics, with comments like:

Black will inherit the most advanced nuclear infrastructure on the continent. Out of the ashes of apartheid will emerge a black-ruled republic with convincing nuclear credentials. (www.igcs.binghamton.edu/igcs\_site/dirton1.htm)

A decade later Henry Gates, a Harvard scholar came forward with his own African series, which was highly critical of notions such as female circumcision and black-on-black slavery. He was accused by Mazrui for "black orientalism" (www.africana.com/articles/daily/index\_1999/1117.asp/). Africa's precolonial past was considered as a kind of 'fall from glory' by Mazrui. The position seems not satisfying to Achebe, despite his own hatred for colonialism and its impacts on the continent. In the work Ikem Osodi exemplifies his own dissatisfaction with postcolonial society.

Chris supports the grandiose projects of His Excellency initially, but when he metamorphoses into 'a baby monster' later, Chris turns into a cynical observer of the ridiculous developments. He represents a class of well-meaning intellectuals who slip into inertia out of disgust with the goings on in the world of politics. As the political crisis deepens, he wakes up to the need for active intervention but by then dictatorship has had its toll. On the other hand, Ikem, the editor of the "National Gazette" (11), poet, novelist and a revolutionary is a "man of action" (4). He boils with rage at the abuses of the military government and launches editorial crusades against the policies of the government.

The novel is cast against the background of a small delegation of Abazonians wanting to meet His Excellency to make amends for their hostile stand against him when he sought to install himself as the President-for-life. The other three provinces voted in his favour, Abazon was the only province to have opposed His Excellency. Sam was infuriated and in turn ordered to shut down the water bore-holes in the province resulting in draught at Abazon. The delegation comes to see the President to rectify their mistake so that the work on the bore-holes could be started again, but Sam refuses to meet the group. Gazing upon the masses, standing in blistering noontime heat awaiting the public executions, Ikem wonders how the common man can bear to see shaded seats reserved for the VIP's. The situation evokes the imperialist rhetoric for the oppression of the poor, a rhetoric adapted by the new native government. Ikem states:

He [the poor man] had learnt to squeeze every drop of enjoyment he can out of his story luck. And the fool who oppresses him will make a particular point of that enjoyment: *You see, they are not in the least like ourselves. They don't need and can't use the luxuries that you and I must have. They have the animal capacity to endure the pain of, shall we say, domestication* [Italics Original]. The very words the white master had said in his time about the black race as a whole. Now we say them about the poor. (40)

Consequently Ikem goes to meet the delegation for he is in a way one of them, born and raised in Abazon, and has come to be greatly respected by the Abazonians as their representative, and their 'eye and ear' in Bassa, the capital of Kangan. When he leaves the Abazonian delegation that day, he is stopped by the traffic police and is accused of breaking some minor traffic rule. It is later revealed that he was followed by the 'State Research Council Agents' who needed proof that Ikem had actually visited the delegation so as to implicate him for treason, for siding with the rebellious Abazonians.

The leader of the delegation, an unlettered old man, ridicules the idea of any permanent arrangement or alliance in one's lifetime. According to him even the marital alliance between a man and his wife becomes null and void the moment one of the partners dies, let alone divorce and other factors. The President is piqued and panicky about the delegation despite its goodwill mission. The old man narrates the parable of the "Tortoise and the Leopard" which serves as a metaphor for the need for struggle even in the face of a formidable opposition of a checkmate power. The leopard is always in search of a tortoise intending to kill him, when the tortoise is about to be killed the latter pleads the killer to spare his life for a minute or two to be mentally prepared for death. The last wish is granted quite generously. The little creature begins to rove and kick and throw dust in different directions. At this crazy behaviour of the tortoise the latter asks about his doings. The tiny animal swiftly answers:

*Even after I am dead I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here* [Italics Original]. (128)

For speaking out against the military dictators, the old man is arrested and held in solitary confinement in Bassa Maximum Security Prison and is consequently killed. Soon after meeting the delegation, Ikem is also fired from the *National Gazette* by the President, who thinks Ikem's writing in *Gazette* is too critical of his admiration. The parable by the oldman impresses Ikem, an Abazonian himself, so much that he uses it as the title, for his lecture at the University of Bassa, "The Tortoise and the Leopard - a political mediation on the imperative of struggle," (153) clearly pinpointing to continue the struggle against exploitation and oppression till the very last, that is, one ought to resist anarchy however hopeless the situation may be. He condemns social inertia, acknowledges the sorry state of Kangan society, and reminds his receptive audience that cynicism is ruining the country. He chastises the students for their exclusion of truly downtrodden group - peasants, the self-employed poor, and women - from their attempts to mobilize society. In this regard, they are no better than other progressive social movements staged by leftist intellectual and labour unions. The exclusion, asserts Ikem, amounts to elitism. He blames elite pressure groups for "spouting cliches from other people's histories and struggles," while they conveniently forget that "in the real context of Africa today they [the elite] are not the party of the oppressed but of the oppressor" (159). Ikem warns the students against facile solutions that leave backward social structures intact. Revolutions, he tells them, can be betrayed just as much by stupidity, incompetence, impatience and precipitate action as by doing nothing at all. To blame capitalism and imperialism for the entire problems of Kangan as "our modish radicals ... do" (159) is "sheer cant and humbug" (159). It is like arresting the village blacksmith everytime a man hacks his fellow to death.

Ikem talks about the risk involved for the storyteller in challenging the power groups - political, religious as well academic. "Storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit - in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever" (153). Ikem's words about the perils for a storyteller prove true when both oldman and Ikem were brutally killed by the native officials. Ikem urges students to develop the habit of skepticism, and not to "swallow every piece of [ideological] superstition you are told by witch doctors and professors"; then "your potentiality of assisting and directing this nation will be quadrupled" (161). During the discussion, the idea of putting the President's picture on the currency comes up, Ikem says:

Yes I heard of it like everybody else. Whether there is such a plan or not I don't know. All I can say is I hope the rumour is unfounded. My position is quite straightforward, especially now that I don't have to worry about being Editor of the [*National*] *Gazette*. My view is that any serving President foolish enough to lay his head on a coin should know he is inciting people to take it off; the head I mean. (162)

In contrast to Chris Oriko's cynicism, Ikem Osodi is driven by compassion for Kangan's underclass. He crusades against public executions immediately after attending one as a representative of the state owned newspaper. Appalled by the cruel taunts of the crowd and inspired by the dignity of a doomed man, a common criminal, he writes an editorial that ended with a hymn sung to the tune of "Lord Thy Word Abideth": The worst threat from men of hell, may not be their actions cruel, Far worse that we learn their way, And behave more fierce than they (43).

Chris warns Ikem against writing such editorials which might prove perilous for his career as well as life. Ikem is always acting impetuously; he has certainly no choice, given the urgency of his continent's problems. Within the perplexed dictatorship of Kangan Ikem's play of words is an invitation to trouble. *National Gazette's* interim editor twists Ikem's words into "EX-EDITOR ADVOCATES REGICIDE!" (162), a misquoted version of the speech delivered at the University of Bassa, giving the impression that Ikem wants ill of the President. Soon after, Ikem too like the oldman is arrested with the charges of treason and conspiracy against the government and is eventually killed in a fake encounter with the security men, claiming it to be an unfortunate accident. Ikem writes crusading articles critical of Sam's tyrannical rule, but he is not altogether against Sam. He believes that the sycophant cabinet ministers have made Sam blind to distinguish between right and wrong, which is creating problems not only for the nation but for Sam himself.

Chris Oriko's refusal to accept the official lies that Ikem fought his arrest makes Chris "fatally wounded by gunshot"(169). He abandons his post and hides himself after contacting alternative news outlets for broadcasting the exact story of Ikem's murder. All over the city, the students protest against the lies published in the *National Gazette* about Ikem's lecture and his subsequent assassination. The schools are promptly shut down by the government and president of the student union is declared a wanted man. Chris escapes the capital with the help of a sympathetic security officer and poor taxi drivers, who house Chris and help him leave the town in disguise. Emmanuel, the wanted student's union president, joins Chris on the fateful journey.

The news of the fall of his Excellency's government reaches the fugitives on their way to Abazon. His Excellency has been killed. The new administration, headed by the army's Chief-of-Staff broadcasts the false news that the President has been abducted from the palace by some unknown persons. A drunken police sergeant serving at the Abazon regional boundary shows disbelief in the official set up of the nation: "This our country na waa! I never hear the likeness before. A whole President de miss... This Africa na waa [is incredible]" (213). Even in the remote areas of the nation, citizens celebrate the fall of the tyrannical regime of His Excellency, as they did for his predecessor's years earlier. Making inquiries about the coup, Chris spies on a policeman trying to rape a nursing student and attempts to save her. The policeman threatens to shoot him if he is not left alone. When Chris persists, the policeman executes him in front of everyone and runs off into the savannah. The country has now a new leader, but things as Chris's killing shows, have not changed for the better.

The political theme in *Anthills of the Savannah* is rooted in postcolonial compulsions. The storyteller, an old Abazonian talks about the invincible power of politics. He at one level takes his audience to the contemporary world of power politics, both as a victim and a victimizer, through Sam, Chris, Ikem and Beatrice.

The novel brings out Achebe's continued and deep concern about the contemporary politics, especially the exercise of power by 'new rulers.' The beginning of the text portrays the military ruler Sam contemptuously treading his civilian cabinet like children portraying the political realities of Nigeria during the last two decades, the civil wars, the corruption of power and the toppling of governments in Kangan, in the nineteen-eighties. The episodes in the text record the harsh realities of the military rule - the police searches, the sycophantic cabinet meetings, the traffic jams in the capital Bassa, reflecting the breakdown of law and order in everyday city life, and the coups and counter coups. These constitute the texture of life as experienced by and recorded from the points of view of the protagonists. However, after presenting the complex nature of oppression, Achebe's realistic mode turns to the myth of Idemili. It is significant to note that the text which begins with the voice of a powerful dictator Sam, concludes with the voice of Elewa, a common woman suggesting the need to reconsider values to recognize the supremacy of woman to administer peace, modesty and moral law. By this narrative shift to a female voice of Beatrice in her autobiographical account, Achebe seems to have acknowledged the need for women empowerment in modern Nigerian context.

*Anthills of the Savannah* depicts the political crisis under the military rule, choosing few significant events of time and encompassing them with the perspective of myth and traditional legend of Idemili. He endeavours to infuse a new kind of confidence among Africans in general facing the crisis of civil war and puts them on the path of brighter future. Bertrand Russell rightly observes: "The fundamental concept in Social Science is power in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in Physics" (*Power* 9). Power in the post-war period has become the source and goal of all human enterprise, epicenter of all experience and the monitor of the destiny of millions. Literature as a reading of life gets invariably implicated in issues concerning power. Sartre was only looking at this from a different angle when he said: "The writer as freeman addressing freeman has only one subject - Freedom" (*What is Literature?* 58). Freedom from what, and freedom to do what - is the issue in question, one cannot perhaps write about 'people' today, without talking of 'power.'

'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely' is an adage which holds good to any system or arrangement. Achebe's major preoccupation in *Anthills of the Savannah* appears to be the issue of power and the problems arising out of it. He deals with the phenomenon of power by taking recourse to the myth of Idemili to project the traditional tribal attitude towards power: In the beginning Power rampaged

through our world, naked. So the Almighty, looking at his creation through the round undying eye of the Sun, saw and pondered and finally decided to send his daughter, Idemili, to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty (102).

Achebe uses the myth of Idemili and incarnates woman as the daughter of Idemili, to uphold dignity and significance and assigns them a greater role in keeping peace and social morality. The two primary myths of creation and destruction, the pillar of water and the burning sun, take on a variety of forms to compose two separate worlds, one of unilateral power to make power crazy and thus, invite their destruction, and another the world of dialectic and mediation operating on the vital play of contraries.

Idemili comes down as a "Pillar of Water" (102), linking the earth and heaven. People in various parts of Africa worshipped her in the form of 'a dry stick'. To this emblem of the daughter of Almighty, any rich and powerful has to come to offer sacrifices and seek blessings in order to gain "admission into the powerful hierarchy of ozo" (103). He must be accompanied, as mediator, by his daughter or the daughter of some kinsman. If Idemili finds the aspirant unfit, she sends death to smile on him. If she approves of the plea, he will be alive in three years time. The myth of Idemili is an expression of the Divine disapproval of man's "unquenchable thirst to sit in authority on his fellows" (104). Eventually, Sam, the President suffers in the end for his unrestrained thirst for power and for defying Idemili.

This shift from the realistic to the mythic mode dismantles the world of unilateral power - colonial/ paternal/military - and suggests possibility and urgency for retrieving the models from the past. Remedy for the malady of contemporary polity is, thus, sought in myth and legend, Beatrice represents Idemili to warn the future generations about the abuse of power. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the predominant theme is power versus powerlessness, one representing rulers and men and the other, the people in Nigeria and women. Though, Achebe advocates women's liberation, he is neither for Elewa's way (passive and traditional), nor for Beatrice's (active and western), but assigns a new role for women free from patriarchal values and psychological subordination to men, without affecting Nigerian traditional values.

Beatrice Okoh, a minor official in the Ministry of Finance, an old friend of two major male characters, Ikem and Sam and a former lover of Chris, comprehends the complexity of contemporary situation more fully than anybody else. She is clear sighted, unbiased and objective in her assignments. Despite her determination to make a career for herself above all else, she rejects the idea that this has anything to do with a "Women's Lib" (88) that she might have picked up in England. There was enough male chauvinism in her father's house to last her a lifetime. She is Achebe's image of the new woman of modern Africa. Beatrice is not created in the mould of an imported western model of 'a feminist' but portrayed as a reincarnation of 'the village priestess who professes when her divinity rides her.' She is the first to foresee the power of the political tornado building up in Kangan, professes: I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first. No joking, Chris. He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you. We are all in it. Ikem, you me and even Him (114-115). Beatrice can be seen as forging a path for women out of her own traditions, for she is associated with the age old cult of Idemili. "The situations can arise in which women are not the underdogs but can take over the affairs of society" (Lindfors, *Palaver* 150).

This intractable tension in the polity occasioned by bungling military junta and socioeconomic dissonance that *Anthills of the Savannah* prefigures. The novel seeks to sum up the major thematic concerns of the earlier novels of Achebe in addition to projecting fresh insights into the perspective framework of the novelist in context of the neocolonial African realities. The most striking aspect of the text is its experimentation in multiple protagonistism and assignment of a larger than life role of Beatrice, a highly individualistic and strongly determined woman. This process was initiated in *A Man of the People* in which a small group of intellectuals, without much success, try to offer resistance to the corrupt and anti-people regime. The theme of resistance of an unpopular government gains a new impetus and a sense of credibility in the novel in terms of its intellectual backing and down-to-earth realistic orientation.

The political crises in the work escalate to counter coup d'etats, power game, political assassination, feminist agitation and other integers of an unwholesome state of affairs. However, in conspectus, the political turmoil in the novel basically stems from the class struggle and power play, which are fuelled by cultural materialist imperatives. The exchange between Sam, His Excellency and Chris Oriko is a presage of power play and class war, which was fully developed as the novel progresses. Sadly, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely making the problem of Africa to rely on leaders obsessed with power. The defect is profoundly felt in Nigeria, where ethnic loyalties are exploited by leaders making political debates to be acrimonious. Within a year after the first coup, there were three counter coups which culminated in the North and Eastern Igbo Nationals in the 'Biafra War' that lasted for two and a half years. The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely failure of leadership. Achebe quotes

The Nigerian [African] problem is the unwillingness or the inability of its leaders to raise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.' (*The Trouble with Nigeria* 1)

Despite the changes in the government, the essence of British attitude persists in the country, because the nation's new leaders are the products of the British-European culture. Ikem, Chris, Sam and Beatrice - all London University products, equally indicted, symbolize a section of the society as intellectuals who have modelled their lives and beliefs after the British lifestyle and through their flawless English, Achebe subtly underscores their British backgrounds further widening the gap between government and the common masses. The new black leaders yearn to mimic the British life style as well.

Sam, however, continues his worship of the British, their intolerant, despotic rule, thereby assuming the role of colonial masters. The new ruling class, thus, identifies itself with the colonial masters than with the native people. This so-called elite class is following the western culture and feels more comfortable to assume the role of colonizers instead of appreciating their own rich traditional value system. For instance, Beatrice portrayed as a young urban professional, more concerned about her career than marriage, acts as a foil to Elewa, Ikem's fiancée, a half literate poor salesgirl. Elewa, a symbol of conventional value system on hearing the suspension of Ikem as editor bursts into tears and cries violently to the embarrassment of Beatrice. She displays 'undignified' emotions and 'backward' culture in the eyes of these so-called elites. By contrast Beatrice representing British tradition, suppresses her grief after Chris's death, goes into her room to weep instead of lamenting publicly.

Beatrice's initial distancing from common masses is reflected in her arrogant relationship with Agatha, her housemaid. At many points Beatrice shows rudeness towards her maid who in turn reacts by displaying a "slave's sullen disobedience - defiance, sulking or tears. Their relationship is a replay of the master slave relationship of colonial times" (Kirpal, "*Anthills of the Savannah*: Postmodern or Postcolonial

Novel?" 132). But after Ikem's death, Beatrice is transformed completely. She with a touch of sympathy places her hand on Agatha's shoulders and apologizes: "The unbelief [of Agatha] turned first to shock and then, through the mist to her tears, a sunrise of smiles" (185) surged up. Beatrice represents a modern African woman, a marvelous blend of conventional and modern values, not a mere photocopy of a British lady.

However, despite Ikem's sympathy for the poor, he is out of touch with them. He being 'a man of the people' regards them sympathetically from a distance but is not organically linked to their struggles. This goes to the heart of Achebe's novel: The inability of the nation's elite to connect with the masses. His alienation from the common people becomes obvious from the incidence of the traffic jam, wherein he does not let the two taxi drivers overtake him; and secondly, his insensitive sending Elewa off to home at midnight because he could not bear to spend the whole night with a lower-class woman. Though, his claim of this to be in Elewa's interest is quite questionable, yet he proclaims proudly, "I never pass up a chance of just sitting in my car, reading or pretending to read, surrounded by the vitality and thrill of these dramatic people" (47).

The episode reveals Ikem's intentional alienation from the people in market by car and books, the symbol of wealth and education unavailable to them. This shows that on one hand, Ikem is ideologically involved in the lives of the common people through his crusading articles but on the other hand, ironically he prefers to stay away from them. Being a 'brilliant son of Abazon' by the leader of Abazonian delegation, turns to be a satire on the character of Ikem, the fact that he has never visited his village since his departure in youth.

Conversely, Ikem undergoes a sea change after meeting the oldman from Abazon and the two taxi drivers who visit his house. The story of Abazonian's struggle against the powerful ruler of Kangan influences Ikem very much and alongwith the tale, he is also deeply touched by the pleasant visit of the drivers who come to thank and appreciate him for his commitment towards the upliftment of the poor and ordinary masses as the editor of the *National Gazette*. Ikem now becomes more determined to wage a battle against the brutal and disinterested native rulers for the wellbeing of the "small people" (136). "Like those complex, multivalent atoms in Biochemistry books I have arms that reach out in all directions - a helping hand, a hand signalling for help. With one I shall touch the earth and leave another free to wave to the skies" (142). For Ikem the night of the taxi drivers' visit becomes a night of fulfillment, transformation and his ultimate union with Elewa, symbolizing the fusion of the intellectual and earth's people.

Chris too like other elites is alienated from the common people. He lives in the world of ruling class but does not breathe there. His first actual contact with the ordinary mass takes place when he is forced to flee Bassa in the company of Emmanuel, the student leader, and Braimoh, the taxi driver who shelters him in his house for some days. Disguised as a common man, wearing common worker's clothes, symbolizes his identification with the poor. This episode enlightens him and he becomes aware that it is not only the elite class that can run the nation but, on the other hand, the bright and talented people are there in the lower classes too who can uplift this nation to new heights. By making the nation aware of this realization, the dictatorship can easily be replaced with democracy. Though, Chris has not been able to reduce this distance of power versus powerless, yet he himself gets close to the concerns of the common man. Towards the end of the novel Achebe states, "Chris, in spite of his brilliance, was just beginning to be vaguely aware of people like that old man [leader of Abazonian delegation]" (232), and eventually Chris sacrifices his life by protecting the honour of a common girl - 'Adamma' - and proves himself a gentleman.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, dealing with the 'issues of leadership,' the reader expects the small Abazonian delegation entrusted with the responsibility of getting the Nigerians out of the bad patch of utter chaos exposes the crisis in the government and initiates the transformation of the society. The events of the text trace the necessary re-education that the intellectuals should go through before they can assume their role as the builders of modern Africa. They need to be reinitiated into "the world of people", "the ways of their culture," in brief "the real Kangan." The intellectuals and artists are still at the centre as keepers and decoders of ideology. The responsibility of the intellectuals is to replace the old hegemonic forms with the new alternatives, more appropriate to liberation and equality, by firmly holding their rich traditional cultural heritage.

The work underscores the need for the identification of these elites with the suffering masses - Ikem, throwing open the realms of his revolution to women; Chris, growing aware of the power of the poor; Beatrice, breaking the barriers of bureaucracy to accept Agatha, her servant on equal footing - are all going through this process of 're-education'. The different ideological paths undertaken by Ikem, Beatrice and Chris merge at one point when each one of them realizes the utter need to get themselves closer to the common people, since "this world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented" (232).

Achebe's innovative experiment in multiple protagonistism is at once striking and impressive wherein a group of committed intellectuals led by Ikem, Chris and Beatrice, struggle and strive hard in collaboration with the university students, the faculty, the taxi drivers and the people from all walks of life in their endeavour to check and counter the ruthless nature of power in the neocolonial African context. The first two, Ikem and Chris, sacrifice their lives in pursuit of the cherished objectives. The lone survivor of this elite group, Beatrice follows the path shown by Ikem and Chris in order to keep up the spirit of struggle.

Those looking for a stirring message about revolutionary struggles will not find any such thing in this work for this is imbued with a very deep mood of futility that is only broken by the personal examples of self-sacrifice. The novel is not in any way a gloomy one, though its tone is such and it shows distrust for the Marxist alternative when it portrays how ambivalent Ikem Osodi feels about Marxism and other trendy radicalisms of the students' and labour unions. Against pessimism and marxist solution *Anthills of the Savannah* evokes a measured optimism. However, the brave fighters Ikem and Chris lose their lives in their struggle against the dictatorship of Sam but their sacrifice does not go in vain. Long after their deaths the germs of social transformation continue to be "alive and kicking" (223) like Elewa's newborn. Emmanuel, the student leader admits: "It wasn't Ikem the man who changed me. I hardly knew him. It was his ideas set on paper" (223), and this worthy idea laid forward by Ikem becomes the source of inspiration for ages:

... his [Ikem's] death and Chris's death serve as the catalyst that brings 'a group' 'a small company around Beatrice' together, which, thereafter, presages 'the possibility of a new beginning. A new dispensation.' (Needham, "Articulating the Postcolonial Writer's Social Responsibilities" 27)

Thus, the optimism that the text evokes comes from the mixing of the intellectuals and the workers at the naming ceremony of Ikem-Elewa's girl child. The ceremony signifies a gathering together of stakeholders - highly educated citizens, urban working classes, and government

officials - to herald the possibility of a better African future. The traditional naming ceremony by Beatrice underscores the strong yearnings for a kind of reconnection with Africa's lost traditions that are trampled underfoot by colonialism. The infant is named Amaechina - a boy's name - "We shall call this child AMAECHINA: *May-the path-never-close*. Ama for short.... But that's a boy name. No matter.... It's a beautiful name. The Path of Ikem.... May it always shine! The Shining Path of Ikem" (222). The name is given in the honour of child's dead father Ikem, which portends high expectations for recovery and renewal. Amaechina is thus, the new generation of young Africans growing in the global village with more opportunities to move on the path of progress.

Even Nwanyibuife - "A female is also something" (87) - Beatrice's middle name is full of connotations, as is the newborn's ceremony at the close of the text. At her naming ceremony, the baby receives the name Amaechina, which is normally reserved for boys in Igbo society which testifies that the role envisioned for women in the future is debatable. At the very least, it points to a leadership role at par with that of men. The two names 'Nwanyibuife' and 'Amaechina' - both point to the importance of including a formerly neglected group, 'Women' - who like the poor can prove invaluable for the cause, beyond participation on an equal footing. The novel can also be seen as envisioning women as leading men in times to come. In Achebe's own words:

I think we must ... find a way in which the modern woman in Africa ... bring her ... special gifts to the running of affair. This is one of the things that I was tentatively exploring in *Anthills*.... It's not enough for men to work out what women should do.... Women should ... not just from a copying of European fashions ... but out of our own tradition ... work out a new role for themselves. (Qtd. in Lindfors, *Palaver* 150)

Elewa's uncle appreciates the spirit with which Beatrice organizes the naming ceremony and comments, "... in you young people our world has met its match" (227). Thus, Beatrice is one among those people who love to live life in their own way with a sense of freedom just like the mother-bug who stresses on the need of struggle for survival. She exhorts her newly-hatched offsprings not to be bothered by hot water poured on them and avers: "Don't give up, whatever is hot will become cold ... And so they survived" (199).

A close look at the various forms of governance at home and abroad in the distant past or in immediate present probably, convinces Achebe that any type of authority or establishment tends to be authoritarian and anti people in the ultimate analysis. This could be the reason why the novelist does not recommend or favour any other form of government as an alternative to the existing ones. Instead, he pleads for the imperative need of struggle as the only means to checkmate the authoritarian nature of power. Hence Achebe advocates the necessity of vigil and struggle against the myriad forms of neocolonialism in different forms and situations.

*Anthills of the Savannah* takes from where *A Man of the People* ends. "While the latter concludes with the fall of the first civilian regime, the former heralds the era of coups in the country, marking transition from the civilian rule to the regimes of the shaky, fear-stricken and nervous army boys. Over twenty five years of indigenous rule by the civilians and the army have left behind a sad spectacle of rampant corruption, degeneration of values and a sense of disgust. The natural corollary of all this is that Achebe tends to look at the obnoxious breed of rulers with the mistrust and scepticism" (Ready, "The Leopard and Tortoise" 10). However, the despair at the end of *A Man of the People* is replaced by a belief in a kind of renewal, a regeneration, and re-appropriation of African identity. Some of the major issues raised by Achebe in this novel are: How the dictatorship and insensitivity of the rulers can be checked? What can be the possible alternatives? Who will shoulder the responsibility of leading the suffering masses from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge? Who are the ones capable of steering the country and its people out of this mess and morass? How the deteriorating moral and social values can be revived and sustained? The military coups that would figure largely in Nigerian politics in the coming years foreshadowed in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, in a way is the logical extension of *A Man of the People* as it depicts the inner workings and consequences of such a coup. Achebe reiterates the idea that power needs to be checked, restrained and resisted, lest it tramples and crushes the very principles of liberty, freedom and human dignity. Another significant Igbo belief that influences Achebe's sensibility is the concept of "the duality of things", he asserts: "Where something stands, there also something else will stand" ("Chi in Igbo Cosmology" 93).

Achebe, as a committed and dedicated artist to his culture portrays as well as answers the situation that colonialism has wrought on his society. He protests against it and stresses the need to regain belief in the rich African past:

I believe it's impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, some kind of protest.... In fact ... all our writers whether they are aware of it or not, are committed writers. The whole pattern of life demanded ... protest ... put in a word for your history, your tradition, your religion, and so on. (Qtd. in Lindfors, "Achebe on Commitment and African Writers," *Africa Report* 18)

Achebe has taken up the task of registering the protest of natives in *Anthills of the Savannah*. He claims that in addition to recording the past and the current revolutionary changes in progress, the African writer exercises a great influence in determining Africa's future by recording what has gone before, he is in a way helping to set the tone of what is going to happen in future. "This is important because at this stage it seems to me [Achebe] that the writer's role is to act rather than to react" (qtd. in Lindfors, "Achebe on Commitment and African Writers," *Africa Report* 18). Achebe strongly believes that the writer has a responsibility towards his society and he could and should influence his society in charting out a future course of action.

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