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Representation of Post Independent Africa: A Man of the People

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Abstract:

Contemporary African fiction has been able to establish a tradition and aesthetic of its own in a short span of time. The last couple of decades have witnessed a phenomenal growth and interest in African writing. The dominant theme of African literature is the political and cultural emancipation of its people aiming at a reassertion, reinforcement and reinvigoration of the African character and identity. Almost as a rule the new African literature is a literature of protest, of disillusion, of tension and agony and deferred hope, of self introspection and self-assertion.

African writers are intellectuals and social critics in real sense, representing the conscience of the society. These writers have diagnosed the ills afflicting African societies and devised formulas to restructure societies by transforming the very mindset of the society. For it is the moral duty and responsibility of a writer to inspire, educate and guide people to fight against all authoritarian and anti-human oppressive exploitative forces that plagued their existence in order to attain identity and selfhood.

Colonial and postcolonial African literature is the product of the effect of encounter with European culture in general and European literature in particular. This was especially true of the African writers who had received European education in the educational institutions established by European imperial powers. The educational institutions were set up by the European colonizers in the guise of civilizing mission but only to mute the native tongue and to curb the native resistance. The African predicament in this sense is closely related to the Indian predicament.

European invasion in Africa caused fragmentation of African society and Africans were mentally colonized to the core. They blindly imitated their European predecessors in all walks of life. The colonization of the tribal people fragmented socio-cultural, political and traditional life of the natives that resulted into polarization. In the postcolonial African fiction the plight of Africans is largely explored. Contemporary African writing thus, constitutes a significant part of the postcolonial literary discourse. It has quickly established its presence and reputation in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The socio-political change to which Africa has been subjected since colonization find expression in the contemporary African fiction. The African novel dramatizes the tensions and conflicts that result from the effect of socio-political changes on the individual as well as on the community as a whole.

The fundamental concern of African literature is the reclamation of the past and recreation of African history. The contemporary African literature has been able to capture and express African sensibility in its true colour. The African writer has been much influenced by politics, probably due to the fact that African intellectual is an integral part of the political elite. Thus, African literature intends to reflect the numerous political phases of the continent.

The novels of Achebe are critiques of colonization and constitute a chronicle of life in Eastern Nigeria. The novels depict the Nigerian situation in different phases - precolonial, colonial, preindependence and postindependence. The success of Achebe as a novelist is attributed to his ardent desire to delve deep into African tradition. He writes about Igbo life as an insider and dispassionately mirrors the strengths and weaknesses of the Igbo traditional society. Achebe's primary concern has been to educate the Africans in the real sense, helping them to shed off disabling ignorance, illusions and preconceptions perpetrated by unfortunate subjugation to alien races. He ascribes the African writer with bounden duty to teach his countrymen about the glorious African cultural heritage. The contemporary African writer has willingly embraced the revolutionary role of awakening the masses and Achebe is the foremost pioneer in this mission.

It is evident from Achebe's fiction that the encounter with the aggressive and technologically advanced west in the form of colonial authority forms the corpus of his fiction generating intense conflicts within African societies. His novels, in one sense, assist the decolonization of the people, who have suffered the trauma of foreign conquest. His works form a series of continuum, and cover a period of about one hundred years of Igbo's history, and by implication of all African countries which have passed through similar experiences. He himself states that his novels serve the purpose of consolidating whatever gains people or leaders have made or imagined they have made in their existential journey through the world and they serve to sanction the change when it can no longer be stopped. The importance of Achebe's fiction lies in the presentation of men in action, in living reaction to their fate, as well as from his own perception that underlies his imaginative world and confers upon it relevance and truth. Thus, Achebe moves far ahead from merely delineating the traumatic effects of colonialism on subject people towards offering a positive vision.

A postindependent Nigerian novel, A Man of the People by Chinua Achebe is a scathing attack on political opportunism. It depicts the extent to which the traditional values are turned upside down in the aftermath of independence resulting in gloom, uncertainty and disenchantment. Achebe leaves the novel open ended, for an impasse in the political system has reached and military intervention is plainly not a viable solution to the problems of the political governance. The coup in the novel serves as a symbol of abolition of false regimes constituted by politicians like Chief Nanga and thus, the arrival of coup ensures a way, a hope, a path for better future. At the close of the novel, Odili begins to have a sense of what is to be done and his enlightenment allows the possibility of a new political attitude with a vision. It reiterates that no political order is permanent and the old order is to be destroyed to make the way for the new.

The novel questions the dichotomy of power and leadership in the newly emergent nation state. The country is now in the hands of native people, but there is no worthy leadership so as to speak of, and the leaders are governed by the drive of unrestrained acquisitiveness, unchecked political corruption and unbridled self-interest. The quality of the leadership and the response of the people to that leadership form the crux of the novel. The African people at the helm of affairs follow the footsteps of whitemen in their attitudes, actions and mindset dismantle the hopes and aspirations in the independent Africa.

Contemporary African literature, an emphatic voice of world literature, manifests new changes, trends and dimensions in the wake of Africa's present state of achieved independence with growing awareness of contemporary reality as well as national identity. Due to colonial impact - cultural, political and missionary influences - Africa has verily undergone a sea-change positing a need to envisage and represent the crises in African society to reorient the natives to reiterate the lost Eden. The period of social transformation needs to dig in the past and the literature of the past offers a broad understanding of the eras gone by and the knowledge thus acquired is helpful in understanding the contemporary society so as to face the present and shape the future.

Modern African writing, specifically the African fiction, with its indigenous literary paradigms and aesthetics has added a new dimension to the postcolonial literary canon. The Post independent Africa in the past few decades has witnessed a series of socio-political upheavals and military coups. It has been a sad saga of inner and intra-party struggles, ethnic conflicts, religious rivalries, and corruption in the corridors of power that has been translated into the African literary canon with great vehemence and precision. African fiction emerges as a kind of reaction to the Eurocentric version of Africa as a dark continent and offers a counter-canonist Afrocentric literary discourse.

The Nigerian novel remarkably portrays the tragic predicament of the Nigerians torn by a lacerating conflict between the loss of their cultural heritage and identity in the colonial context and the resultant disillusionment and disgust in the Post independent era. It enumerates the conflicting contradictions consequent upon the socio-politico-cultural changes in the African community and aims at overall emancipation of African character and identity in the neo-urbanite Nigerian society of Lagos.

"Black is beautiful" is the defiant and self-inspiring slogan for African writers to counter the western impression of the Negro as "slave, savage and outcast" (Khayyoom, "Myth and Symbolism in the Novels of Chinua Achebe" 72). Wole Soyinka shows a deep sense of white rejection: "We object to outsiders' imposition of their European world, and their history, their social neurosis and their value system" ("From A Common Backcloth," *American Scholar* 284). African writers unite in their struggle against an alien, waging vigorous verbal war aiming at decolonizing the mind. The black writer's burden, Achebe contends is "to express our thought and feeling, even against ourselves, without anxiety that what we say will be taken in evidence against our race" ("Black Writer's Burden," *Presence Africaine* 139).

African writers have played a phenomenal role in boosting up the rebel spirit of the people. The contemporary African nation, a relatively new one, has its own tale of tears and blood that destructed social and cultural panorama of the nation; the situation has markedly deteriorated in Post independent era where the common man is feeling suffocated by the chaotic management of government in its complete misuse of the nation's wealth and resources.

In spite of the so called 'literati's' ignorance of African literature, it is one of the major currents of the world literature, stretching directly back to ancient times. Negritude movement, a premiere literary movement of 1920s and 1930s, originated in Paris, associated with an African quest for identity, made its way to the native roots in Africa. Africa was transformed into a metaphorical antipode to Europe, a golden age Utopia, represented allegorically as a lady. Aime Cesaire in an interview with the Haitian poet - Rene Desprestre - puts forth his views on this ideal metamorphosis of Africa into a dreamy world, which according to him is no less than a dreary world, he avers: "We lived in an atmosphere of rejection ... developed an inferiority complex. I ... thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And ... to establish this identity ... we [Africans] must have a concrete consciousness of what we are ... that we are black ... and have a history ... that contains certain cultural elements of great value ... [with] beautiful and important black civilizations" (*Discourse on Colonialism* 75-76). Cesaire further maintains that Africa is not a blank page in the history of humanity, its values are worthy of respect and quite sound for influencing contemporary world. Leopold Sedar Senghor, one of the chief thinkers of the movement, subsequently became the President of Senegal, thus, starting a tradition of African writers moving on to the political arena.

African novel is doubtless a "patent corollary" (Prasad, "Colonial Consciousness in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" 79) of western colonialism, characterized by conflicts, contradictions and superimposition of whiteman's character upon it. Eustace Palmer aptly maintains that it "is a response to and record of the traumatic consequences of the impact of Western capitalist colonialism on the traditional values and institutions of African people" (*The Growth of the African Novel* 63).

African literature is predominantly "a protest literature" (Sivaramakrishnan, "The African Mind" 25), voicing protest against the encroachment of the Britishers on the well-knit and cohered tribal societies "lamenting the loss of an integrated multi-racial society" (King, *Introduction to Nigerian Literature* 20). African society has not been able to fully recover from the traumatic effects of its confrontation with European imperialism. The demand for freedom, social justice and equality runs through the literature focalizing on the contemporary reality in the nation state.

Contemporary African writing, the new voice of world literature, has endeavoured to emancipate Africa from its literary stereotype by highlighting the 'unique and novel' potentialities of the Africans and African experience. The African literature speaks primarily about the people and the fictional writings try to relocate and reconstruct the literary, economic and socio-cultural positions of their societies. Their sense of commitment is manifest in their writings and they have come to identify themselves with the social and political movements of Africa in their fight for human rights. Achebe has been the first Nigerian writer to transmute successfully the conventions of the 'novel' - a European art form - into African literature to give authenticity and African flavour to his writings.

The present paper is an attempt to understand and project the contemporary socio-political reality in Chinua Achebe. Before looking into the contemporary African reality, it is essential to have a peep in her past and especially in context of her historical encounter with the European settlers and colonizers. The need is to look into the concepts, such as the spread of the British Empire and the birth of erstwhile colonies across the world. Emerging from colonialism, African countries are in direct confrontation with their own history and cultural past as has been illustrated in dozens of literary works. One of the crucial areas of conflict in contemporary African novel is indeed the questioning of one's own values and traditions against a complex set of historical experiences. Karl Marx observes:

The rise of colonialism ... was accompanied by unparalleled barbarism and desperate outrages on the subject people. The history of colonialism had been the history of relations of treachery, bribery, massacre and meanness. (*Capital* 704).

Colonialism, the bane of Africa, has given birth to a new form of slavery, the cultivation of the dependent cast of mind resulting in the loss of ethno-cultural identity and selfhood. The colonized propagated and perpetuated the myth of racial superiority, as a result, the colonized began to undervalue and question his traditions and values. He started admiring the white man for everything – his values, his acumen, his skill and even his skin. This internalized myth of inferiority started eating into the fabric of culturally unhinged African consciousness. The African writers are voicing the protest of natives against the forces of colonialism on one hand, and vindicating the African heritage and culture on the other in an attempt to show a way out from the present morass.

Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana, the vital representatives of Africa, come to represent the process of colonization which destructed socio-cultural panorama of the nation. They skillfully handle the themes of Post independent ennui, frustration, disillusionment, sense of loss and pain, which in a larger context present the microcosm of Africa in an irrepressible yearning for a complete breakaway from the present meaninglessness of neocolonial state of existence, reiterating the pained concern for Africans.

Being unable to camouflage their anguish at the Post independent scenario they painfully expose the various facets of greed, corruption and socio-political ills. They envisage a complete overhaul of the system sharing a faith in future, a better future than the present that could be ushered in only through struggle and reform. The major characters comprise of intellectuals, who by virtue of their education and broad exposure ought to set examples and lead the masses onto the paths of rectitude but the intellectuals represented in the texts are corrupt oppressors or the gagged, bewildered spectators.

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Chinua Achebe, an astute social critic and writer, is decidedly the most distinguished, powerful and committed novelist. He is a serious interpreter of the intrinsic cultural heritage of his society; his commitment to the Nigerian society is so profound that he regards the 'Novelist' as 'Teacher,' whose responsibility is not only of educating the natives about the ravages wrought by colonialism but also of administering cure and therapy to the warped psyche. He believes that fiction liberates the mind of man and it begins as an adventure in self discovery and ends in wisdom.

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Literary portrayal of colonial experience has been an offshoot of the wide-ranging colonial impact resulting in the growth of African literature. English, French and other European languages have become integral parts of African literature and the western world has provided models for the African writers. The native sensibility retains its identity, though layers of foreign influences are still there. The search for cultural identity is the fundamental concern of African fiction, occupying central place in the writer's quest for exploring the authentic personality. Firstly, there is need for historical roots and modern culture based not on foreign ideas but on native values. A second aspect of African cultural identity is to establish a sense of human dignity. Political freedom, satisfying as it may seem, needs to be followed by a worldwide acknowledgement. At the same time, the stability of the new political order would depend on guarding against self destructive policies of the leaders. The third element of cultural identity springs naturally from the search for roots and the wish for the approbation of one's fellowmen, a yearning for making some positive contribution to contemporary African world.

Postcolonialism is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being. The term 'postcolonial' first employed in the late 1960s and 1970s, designates the period following the extensive postwar decolonization, that began to accrue a wider range of meanings associated with resisting and understanding colonialism throughout the 1980s. The term 'postcolonial' does not mean 'postindependence' or 'after colonialism,' for this would falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Robert J.C. Young suggests that "Postcolonialism has come to name a certain kind of interdisciplinary political, theoretical and historical academic work that sets out to serve as a transnational forum for studies grounded in the historical problems of globalization" (qtd. in Brydon 21).

An important text in establishing the theory and practice in the postcolonial studies is *Orientalism* by Palestinian-American Scholar Edward W. Said, who applied a revised form of Michael Foucault's historicist critique of discourse to analyse what he called 'cultural imperialism.' This mode of imperialism imposed its power not by force, but by the effective means of disseminating in subjugated colonies, a Eurocentric discourse that assumed normality and preeminence of everything 'occidental' correlatively with its representations of the 'oriental' as an exotic and inferior other. The focal point of postcolonial literature is to give voice to one's first-hand-experiences. The postcolonial agenda is to deestablish Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values so as to expand the literary canon to include colonial and postcolonial writers. In the standard academic curriculums of the United States and Britain, the postcolonial writers writing in English have been included: The Africans - Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka; the Caribbean islanders - V.S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott; and the Indians - G.V. Desani and Salman Rushdie.

Postcolonialism contains within it "an unfathomable history for most societies, and every society in its turn of being washed by waves of invasion at the end of which a phoenix-like society is born from the ashes of the old" (Shenbagaram, "Post-Colonialism, Decolonization, Geography and Academic Syllabus" 232). Postcolonial theory - as epistemology, ethics and politics - addresses matters of identity, gender, race and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a postcolonial national identity, of how a colonized person's knowledge was used against him in serving colonizer's interests, and how knowledge about the world is generated under specific relations between the powerful and the powerless, circulated repetitively and finally legitimatised in view of imperial interests.

The critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilizing the western way of thinking, therefore creating space for the subaltern, or marginalized groups to speak and produce alternatives to dominant discourse. Often, the term postcolonialism is taken literally, to mean the period after colonialism. This however is problematic because the "once-colonized world" is full of "contradictions, of half-finished processes, of confusions, of hybridity, and liminalities" (*Dictionary of Human Geography* 561). In other words, it is important to accept the plural nature of the word postcolonialism, as it does not simply refer to the period after the colonial era. By some definitions, postcolonialism can also be seen as "a continuation of colonialism, albeit through different or new relationships concerning power and the control/production of knowledge" (*Dictionary of Human Geography* 561). Due to this, it is debated whether to "hyphenate postcolonialism is to symbolize that we have fully moved beyond colonialism" (*Dictionary of Human Geography* 562) or vice versa.

The African writers cum intellectuals like Chinua Achebe have diagnosed the ills afflicting African societies and devised formulas to restructure their societies by transforming the ways of thinking patterns. For it is the moral duty and responsibility of a writer to inspire, educate and guide people to fight against all authoritarian and anti-human oppressive exploitative forces that plagued their existence in order to attain identity and selfhood.

Decolonization, an important aspect of African society, "emerged as an important issue in political studies and international relations after the second world war, when European colonials were winning their independence from colonial rule. The term decolonization, has since been re-energized with an expanded, metaphorical range ... within English literary studies, first by the post-war sub-discipline of Commonwealth literary studies, which focused on the imaginative texts produced by writers outside England and the United States and then, in the 1980s and beyond, by the growth of postcolonial theory" (Brydon 83). It is actually a process, a project of postcolonial writing to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within and between two worlds.

Defining decolonization in African context means divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from the colonial past. Obviously, it would not be rational to try to reject everything of the colonial ancestry. Conceivably, a thought or a mode of inquiry spearheaded by the erstwhile colonizers may be valid or in some way beneficial to humankind. To build a foundation of understanding, the history of Africa is to be displayed in a nutshell. The Africa of the then government of the whites oppressed blacks in many ways. To them black people never existed in their class as people, black people were not humans. Given the harshness of the white government, blacks lost their personal value and integrity over the whites. They were forced to agree that they are inferior to the whites in every domain of life.

The blacks being the direct or the indirect victims of the colonialism are thus, directly or indirectly affected by it. However, many had suppressed the unpleasant thoughts leading to repression due to their emotional and psychological disturbances. The wise saying goes that 'if you want to defeat your opponent, you must defeat the mind first.' To a larger extent it is undeniable that the apartheid regime left Africans with nothing but destruction of Africa's character and more importantly economically ill-growing development programmes, be it in sports, education or any other arena so as to speak of.

The truth of the matter is that Africans have been living in the desired state of life - following a democratic lifestyle for more than a decade now - still they blame the then white government. There are few points that these people really did not put into account for the real understanding of the scenario. One of the many reasons why some people are still blaming the then government is because of the non-acceptance of what had happened and in the process they develop hatred and anxiety unthinkingly. This blame game even for the present failures points towards the physical liberation only encircled by the shackles of the painful memory of enslavement and superiority of the white skin. Until and unless the African mind will set itself free from the bounds of these kinds of illusions, it would not be possible to move an inch towards decolonization. For the original owners of Africa to live like kings

and hold heads high in every sphere, they have to accept the reality that they had been the victims and should now move on in life with an understanding that since the new Africa is born they must work in unison for the progress and upliftment of the nation.

'Literature' and 'Politics' are two aspects of human experience which on the very face of it seem irreconcilable, while 'literature' represents one of the highest forms of aesthetic sensibility of a society, 'politics' is the playfield of the shrewd people, thus, to put the words 'literature' and 'politics' in close vicinity seems problematic. Hence, the writers throughout the globe are advised by fellow scribes and other worthy beings of the society not only to shun politics in real life but to maintain political neutrality in their works. However, a writer being a social animal, a member of certain class, conditioned by the historical and politico-economic circumstances of his times is not able to keep the two worlds apart, because the events in the history of the society is a source of inspiration to him. Therefore, the position of irreconcilability of 'literature' and 'politics' is not only untenable but is extremely undesirable too. Literature being a social phenomenon that develops along with life and the writers delineate the truth about the world and voice their concern about a worthy future - a reality without which mankind cannot advance.

Achebe's mixed heritage of Igbo birth and Christian upbringing paved the way for realistic portrayal of African life, interpreting Igbo life and establishing its relevance to the contemporary world in an attempt to rehabilitate the African psyche damaged in its cultural confrontation with the West. With a clear perspective and remarkable insight he projects the authentic picture of Nigeria which at a larger context is a microcosm of Africa on the whole. The pertinent subject of Chinua Achebe's fiction is the tragic consequences of the African encounter with Europe and this is the theme he has inimitably made his own. His fiction deals with the "social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the whiteman and his culture into the hitherto self-contained world of African Society, and the subsequent disarray in the African consciousness" (Irele, "The Tragic Conflict in Achebe's Novels," 167). Exploring the human conditions, Achebe's novels attempt a spiritual search for arts and a rediscovery of Africa's past, they are but fictional chronicles of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general and aspire to counter the complexes born of the years of deprecation and self-denigration. His novels "look back and find out where we went wrong and where the rain began to beat us" (Ngugi, "The African Writer and His Past" 7), and attempt to recreate the dynamic spirit of a living community. Achebe's fictional world is a real world dealing with situations and individuals responding to them and showing their evolutions at significant levels of feelings and thoughts.

Chinua Achebe is Nigeria's one of the best known novelists, his novels with modern settings offer an analysis of the conflicting socio-political forces in contemporary Nigeria and the struggles of the Africans to free themselves from European political influences amidst the internal conflicts looming large. *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe's first novel on contemporary Nigeria presents the fragmented state of modern Nigerian society. He uses the fall of one man, Obi Okonkwo to depict the birth of a whole new age in Nigeria. His theme is 'mere anarchy' loosed upon the world when things fall apart, as in Yeats "The Second Coming", and the vehicle for conveying this anarchy is a young African mind immersed in corruption. Through the grandson of Okonkwo, the novel becomes the parable of modern Nigeria, a commentary on apparent corruption in the independent Africa. The socially destructive forces which lead to the breakdown of order in *A Man of the People* are anticipated in this novel.

A Man of the People holds mirror to the rottenness that has overtaken Nigerian socio-political scene after independence. It exposes the consequences of the African exposure to the West. Hence the novel centers on the theme of disillusionment in Post independent Nigeria wherein native African politicians resort to all kind of corrupt means for their selfish gains. Once the external enemy is driven out it becomes imperative for the newly independent nation to fight the internal foes.

A Post independent Nigerian novel, *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe is a scathing attack on political opportunism. It depicts the extent to which the traditional values are turned upside down in the aftermath of independence resulting in gloom, uncertainty and disenchantment. Achebe leaves the novel open ended, for an impasse in the political system has reached and military intervention is plainly not a viable solution to the problems of the political governance. The coup in the novel serves as a symbol of abolition of false regimes constituted by politicians like Chief Nanga and thus, the arrival of coup ensures a way, a hope, a path for better future. At the close of the novel, Odili begins to have a sense of what is to be done and his enlightenment allows the possibility of a new political attitude with a vision. It reiterates that no political order is permanent and the old order is to be destroyed to make the way for the new.

A Man of the People, "a rare bird in the corpus of African novel," (Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* 72) is different in tone, more immediate in subject and more deliberately polemical in purpose than other works of Achebe. It completes a sequence of novels depicting the changes brought about in the Nigerian life during the twentieth century, the period beginning with the pacification of the primitive tribes of the lower Niger and ending with the Post independent Nigeria. The novel depicts the extent to which the traditional values have been turned upside down at the advent of colonialism and ends in gloom, uncertainty and chaos. The situation in Nigeria is not specifically unique; in fact, almost every African country has experienced similar crises, contradictions and turmoils. Achebe has taken his example from the Nigerian society, the Igbo society which at a larger context represents the African predicament in general.

A Man of the People, a commentary on the history of Igbos roughly between 1890 and 1965, deals with a crooked politician, a familiar third world figure, Chief Nanga; Edna, a young girl, he is grooming as his "parlour-wife" (88); and a young school teacher, Odili Samalu who has his own story to tell. Odili is obliged to enter politics when his girl friend Elsie is seduced by Chief - The Honorable M.A. Nanga, an M.P. and Minister of Culture. Odili's sole motive in his formative years had been the winning of a scholarship for advanced studies abroad. Chief Nanga, his former teacher at school, pays a visit, recognizes him and offers him assistance in obtaining the coveted scholarship. Odili is swept away by Nanga's charisma and for time being he sits at the feet of his political master. Under Nanga's sway he reexamines his attitude towards political idealism and implementation of political beliefs. However Odili's amicable relationship with Nanga comes to an abrupt end when Nanga steals his girl friend Elsie, resultantly there is hostility between the two and Odili plans to seduce Edna, Nanga's parlour wife to avenge his manhood.

Odili joins a newly formed political party, "Common People's Convention Party" - CPC (79), founded by his friend Maxwell Kulamo and prepares to contest Nanga's seat in the upcoming election. Initially his primary target is Edna and politics is of secondary concern, meanwhile, he falls in love with Edna and under the changing circumstances Odili engages himself in an education struggle promoted by the politico-economic scandal that brings down the government and his motives gradually become more pronounced. Finally he loses the filthy political battle but succeeds in winning the girl. Nanga, who lives in fabulous opulence with his corrupt and self-seeking practices, loses everything because the election proves rough and dirty causing such a chaos in the country that the army stages a coup and imprisons all the members of the government. *A Man of the People* is a bitter satire on modern Nigeria prophesying the way the country would go in future and recalls the political stand-off in the mid-nineties Nigeria between the late Chief Ma'sud Abiola, who had won the general election, and the late Sani Abacha, who nullified the election results and took over power, leading to commonwealth's decision to suspend Nigeria's membership.

Achebe's *A Man of the People* foreshadows the Nigerian coups of 1966 and shows the colour and vivacity alongwith violence and corruption of a society making its own way between the two worlds, the world of common people and that of elites. *A Man of the People* is a first person retrospective narrative rendered by Odili Samalu, a school teacher in his native village. At first wholly cynical about the political leadership of the country, Odili keeps a scornful distance from any kind of political activity whatsoever. Once he had complete faith in University-trained public-minded leaders who promised an economically viable and politically stable unified nation in the Post independent period, but political opportunists, of whom Chief Nanga is an apt example, start hankering after the gleam of materialism so as to increase their personal fortunes at the expense of the nation or public purse, thereby thwarting the cherished dream. Odili intends to justify his own actions and values as he maligns the motives of Nanga. Achebe portrays on a grand scale the infectious nature of corruption in Nigeria - in politics, in army, in civilian life. *A Man of the People* is Achebe's first attempt to completely dissociate himself from the solutions and figures he created earlier, he does not take sides or exhibit his preferences in the novel, "the story is telling itself", it is a dramatic telling (Khayyoom, "Method and Technique in Achebe's Novels" 69).

The novel questions the dichotomy of power and leadership in the newly emergent nation state. The country is now in the hands of native people, but there is no worthy leadership so as to speak of, and the leaders are governed by the drive of unrestrained acquisitiveness, unchecked political corruption and unbridled self-interest. The quality of the leadership and the response of the people to that leadership form the crux of the novel. Ayi Kwei Armah's subtle observation sums up the present condition: "There is no difference ... at all between the white men and their apes ... [the] Party men" (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* 89). Herein the African people at the helm of affairs follow the footsteps of whitemen in their attitudes, actions and mindset dismantle the hopes and aspirations in the independent Africa.

A Man of the People in a way reminds of Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*, the film and the play that deals with a history that is frequently lived and told from Indonesia to Burma (Myanmar), to Latin America, to the Middle East, to Zimbabwe and other African 'republics.' In this sense *A Man of the People* is a representative text projecting the authentic account of the way the things have been in practice. Presently, no doubt, Nigeria has turned to democratic system under the leadership of President Goodluck Jonathan, but this novel gives an authentic account of the erstwhile period.

The interaction between the two major characters Chief Nanga and Odili Samalu forms the basis of the argument of *A Man of the People*. Both represent divergent ideology and typify the social group to which they belong. Nanga is the representative of a class of unscrupulous politicians, neocolonial elite, who wants to retain power, inherited from the departing colonial masters, at any cost. He is completely in the grip of materialistic values of a money-grabbing capitalist system left behind by the colonizers. Odili is a typical instance of an alienated, visionary, native youth - a product of the colonial education system. Odili tries to resist the archetypal imperialist in the person of politician Nanga, however this turns out to be an unsuccessful attempt for he himself fails to resist the internal forces of imperialism.

Odili is a curious blend of fascination and revulsion reminding the problem related to public and private morality in a society that has lost its traditional moors amidst the fascination for materialistic temptations. This materialistic orientation has given vent to rampant corruption, strife and cynicism in a society which is at the verge of breaking its ties with the past entering in an age of isolated individuals confronting the chaotic administration. It focalizes various aspects of thoroughly degenerated contemporary society and offers a critique of Nigerian societies in all spheres of life.

In the beginning Chief Nanga and Odili are diametrically opposed to each other: Nanga is on his way to make indoors to power by winning the hearts of people, and Odili is scrupulously critical of politics for the moral decline in political arena. Achebe maintains that in the prevailing corrupt scenario if anyone is thrown into politics, he will not prove any exception and Odili substantiates the idea by personifying the archetypal imperialist politician like Nanga only.

The relationship between Chief Nanga and Odili exhibits their true/real fabric: Nanga's philosophy is that of survival whereas Odili is an ambitious youth without conviction. Their cordial relationship suddenly turns bitter when Nanga sleeps with his girlfriend Elsie declaring their relationship to be a casual one. Deeply wounded, Odili resolves to avenge himself not only at the sexual front but at the political front too. The political enmity is thus the result of sexual jealousy that translates into political rivalry.

Chief Nanga epitomizes the opportunistic tendencies of new political masters. The loss of human values and dignity is mainly due to the exploitation of the natives by their own men. These politicians exploit the natives to meet their selfish motives. The novel illustrates the incompetence of the native leaders for what they make of their country when the power changes hands. The external forces were driven out and the country has native leaders and these upstarts are tempted to overreach themselves. The situation demands sagacity and political will otherwise they will have a sudden fall from the height, however they fail in realizing the hopes and aspirations vested in them and there is strong note of dissent and agonizing ennui at the mess that these political

representatives led their country into. *A Man of the People* is a "scathing denunciation of the political corruption of the new governing classes and the cynicism of the masses" (Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* 72).

The novel derives its ironic title *A Man of the People* from Chief Nanga - a seasoned corrupt politician, the Minister of Culture - a perfect embodiment of the one who believes in personal gratification of ambitions and is skillful enough to turn a deaf ear to the aspirations and hopes of the people. This individualistic streak is marring the real African personality presenting a sad spectacle of the rise and fall of the bleak politicians who in their newly achieved independent state have completely failed to realize the dreams of the natives.

A Man of the People is a powerful commentary on the corrupt government regime. Here independence has brought a new set of black masters stepping into the shoes of the colonial bosses in lieu of the old white masters. Nanga steals Elsie, Odili's girl friend and offers six girls to Odili the same evening, and ironically he is the Minister of Culture. "Just think of such a cultureless man going abroad and calling himself Minister of Culture. Ridiculous. This is why the outside world laughs at us" (23).

Claiming to be "a man of the people" - a representative of the common people - he pretends to understand and solve the problems of natives, however he is grossly corrupt politician living in the flamboyant opulence on his ill gotten gains; he has amassed huge wealth through commissions that he receives from contractors. Achebe presents Nanga not as a character but as a signifier of corruption, one of the finest rogues in Nigerian literature. The loss of the balance between the spiritual and material values, and the loss of "moral centre" results in the emergence of corrupt people like Nanga, whom Achebe qualifies as the "most monstrous off-spring produced by the tawdry union of Europe and Africa" (Innes, *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* 62).

Though the novel is chiefly about the socio-political situation in a postindependence African state, it is also about Odili's self-analysis within socio-political context. Fresh out of university, Odili aspires to become "a full member of the privileged class whose symbol was the car" (110). For instance, Odili's father, a District Interpreter, in whiteman's language the District Officer, was like the Supreme Deity; he also symbolizes meanness, materialism and corruption. He despises his son's meanly paid occupation: "He would ... tell me [Odili] for the hundredth time to leave 'this foolish teaching', and look for a decent job in the government and buy myself a car" (31). The father desperately desires car being the ultimate status symbol in the society. The skepticism and sycophancy of the people is apparent. "Every sensible supplicant knew that the lesser god must first be wooed and put in a sweet frame of mind ... [so] brought my [Odili's] father gifts of yams, pots of palm-wine or bottles of European drink" (28-29) for now people have become worldly wise. In determining people's preferences, money plays a vitally substantial role.

Odili's engagements in the political activities - being fully aware that by hiring bodyguards and using party funds to buy a car can land him in danger - compel him to compromise with his idealism; therefore he begins to sort out his real motives by winning Edna and contesting an election against Nanga so as to expose him publically. His self-analysis is complete when he faces Nanga at the rally; his stance is entirely reverse of the one he subscribed to at the beginning of the novel. After his political transformation, Odili vows never to be corrupted by bourgeois privileges of which "the car was the most visible symbol" (111). In this work Achebe holds the common people equally responsible for the social malaise in Nigeria and after some years he also sees them as vanguards of the revolution. The novel portrays the contemporary African society confronting chaos and disorder.

The portrayal of Odili is paradigmatic of the educated elite which are in confrontation with the professional politicians in Africa. The political elite consist mainly of professional politicians with little or no education. Their main requisite for acquiring a political position is only the loyalty for the party and politics provides them with social mobility, prestige, wealth and power. The educated elite, aspiring for somewhat similar goals, paradoxically is in conflict with the political elite. The conflict between Chief Nanga and Odili problematizes this struggle for power in the affairs of the nation state.

The novel depicts the corrupting influence of power on men and maneuvering of upstart politicians, the sexual political rivalries and its subsequent consequences. The work substantiates the fact that the social predicament and political malaise are not the evil effects of colonialism, but ruthless manipulation of Africans themselves. Achebe here satirizes a world where the title of Chief for the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P. is just a mockery, for being a corrupt politician he is simply interested in the greater share of 'national cake.' The concept of self-respect has undergone a change and moral scruples do not bother human conscience.

Odili epitomizes the mental colonization of literate Africans. His idealism, political ideology, affiliation with the new political party for personal benefits and finally his triumph in winning over Edna exhibits him to be a product of western mould. However, Odili fails in fully internalizing the western values for he is still clutching to his traditional roots and he himself confesses, "I had not always disliked Mr Nanga. Sixteen years or so ago he had been my teacher" (3).

Thus, the postcolonial politics as rendered in *A Man of the People* manifests the inconceivable damage done to the indigenous society. The simple agrarian society of ancient Africa has undergone a sea change only to become a society comprising of more self centered and degenerate individuals who cannot look beyond the boundary walls of their selfish dispositions. The alchemists are politicians like Nanga who recognize spirituality as an ornamentation that only a wealthy man can afford. The poor man in the country is so much encumbered by physical ailments and poverty that he loses the ability to distinguish between good and bad. Thus, the politicians woo the rich by persuasion and flattery and give the poor working class, not exactly what they deserve, but something that is enough to keep their body and soul together. The rich will never be disappointed because they get enough and the poor will never rebel as they are never given the opportunity to complain. The moment they are ready to topple the existing government, a conniving politician like Nanga would soothe them with words and money, and ironically this will keep the poor masses silent till the next election campaign. Hunger is a driving force, whose strength postcolonial politics recognizes fully: "Keep the poor masses hungry for sometime and when they complain throw at them packets of food and generous words that will take them back to their initial stupor. Pacify the rich man and deceive the poor is a principle by which the politicians of the postcolonial world functions. (Fanon, "Towards a Post-Colonial Metanarrative" 99).

The novel owes much to Achebe's first hand experiences in his own country, based on actual events that have taken place in various independent African countries. By ending the novel with a coup, an event anticipated still unknown in Nigeria but familiar

elsewhere in Africa, Achebe adds a dimension of universality to his story. It is not merely a satire on Nigeria but a satire on the independent Africa as well. If the coup had special meaning for Nigeria in the mid-sixties, it also contains a relevant moral for recent emerging African nations wrecked by internal upheavals. The coup is an African parable, not a Nigeria prophecy. The story culminating in a military coup is reminiscent of the army take-over in Nigeria in January 1966.

The novel dwells on the crisis of culture with which the African society was confounded. It presents a convincing model of "colonial hybrid" in Odili who is trapped in a situation where he finds him politically alienated, not only socially but also personally which certainly is a by-product of a colonial heritage. Thus *A Man of the People* offers a sad spectacle of deplorable political scenario, degeneration of values and moral decadence in Nigerian nation immediately after independence. It presents a picture of disenchantment, disillusionment and a sense of disgust after the attainment of nationhood. The socio-political postcolony rendered in *A Man of the People* makes it imperative for the newly independent nation not only to diagnose the malady but also to offer the restoration of nation's health and Achebe has tried to give direction to the aimlessly advancing Nigerian society in an emphatic manner. Revealing the changes wrought in Nigerian life during the twentieth century against the background of changing-evolving socio-political realities, Achebe puts both his concern for the masses, for their plight and predicament in the changing social scenario alongwith the problems in which they are enmeshed neck-deep.

The publication of *A Man of the People* within a month of a Nigerian coup d'etat made the reviewers suspect that Achebe had prophesied the military action in the offing. Perhaps within the context of the novel it itself has indicated the common resolution for such situations in Nigeria. Asked if the occurrences on the western province of Nigeria prior to 1966 had inspired and provided him the source for his novel or if the novel was prophetic of the events to come, Achebe made it clear that he simply responded to the existing political malaise.

The text poignantly delineates the harsh realities of party politics in the contemporary history of Post independent Nigeria. The logic of the work as well as the life in an African state is undoubtedly dictated by politics without the familiar polarisation found in the politically developed states of the western world where the events and movements can be placed in their ideological contexts. The ever changing political scenario in Africa is so complex that no single resolution of the phenomenon can be prescribed. The novel therefore ends in chaos, an apt description of African political scenario.

Achebe switches over to the national issues in *A Man of the People* in an unnamed African country. The country is independent with governance in the hands of the people, but the quality of leadership and response of the people to that leadership form the central core of the novel. There is neither collective will nor responsible leadership as has been perceived in the precolonial societies. A collective voice at the village level, moreover, is no longer operative in the present context. In fact, it offers a vision of degenerate society with unrestrained yearning for material acquisitiveness and unchecked political corruption. There is no conceivable difference pertaining to whitemen or native leaders in the manner of governance. The native politicians resemble the whitemen in attitude, behavioural patterns and mindset. It is an authentic picture of the socio-cultural crisis recording the corrupt society as well as the attendant issues.

The story of Josiah, the trader in *A Man of the People* who steals the blind man's stick to prepare juju medicine to sell to 'blind buyers of his wares,' is a parable anticipating the destruction of the traditional way of life which is celebrated with pride and concern in the novel. In *A Man of the People* the government falls but neither in history nor in the novel was the people inflamed. Here the fictional coup ends and the actual coup had to wait till the publication of the book in January 1966.

The work's major argument - that mere anarchy has replaced the laws of the village - stems from the growing tension in the relationship between Odili and Chief Nanga. Chief Nanga is an engaging and credible creation and this makes his apostasy so terrifying. Achebe leaves the novel open-ended, for an impasse in the political system has reached and military intervention is certainly not a viable solution for the problems of political governance. At the close of the work Odili begins to have a sense of what is to be done and his enlightenment allows the possibility of a new vision for Nigerian politics.

Therefore, it can be inferred that Achebe, Ngugi and Armah, offer a critique of the contemporary African society and the power centre that has failed to live up to the expectations of the masses and at the same time the writers have tried their best to give a positive direction to the Africans for the times to come via their fiction. The inevitable need of the hour is to reset the priorities to achieve real African nationhood. The pan African vision is for the ideal Africa of the dreams that upholds the view that the health of the black community can be restored only in the form of eventual unification of the race.

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