

Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart: A Case Study of Relation the Between Nationalism and Literature

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Abstract

The paper tries to analyse Chinua Achebe's writing skills which he uses to evoke nationalism and open the eyes of the people of his land whom the coming of the foreigners has maligned. It is a journey to the past, a reinterpretation to know the true self. The unknown world is created through the magic spell of literature. Chinua Achebe took upon himself the task to fight against the misinterpretation of the Europeans about Africa through his writings.

Keywords: Drain of wealth theory, culture, self respect. purpose, values, degeneration, wholistic to individualistic, concept of civilization also change

To understand the relation between nationalism and literature, we need to understand the terms nationalism and literature separately.

What is nationalism?

To understand nationalism, we should first be able to understand what a nation is. A nation is a stable community of people, formed based on a common language, territory, history, ethnicity, or psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.

A nation is more overtly political than an ethnic group. It has been described as "a fully mobilized or institutionalized ethnic group".

Benedict Anderson calls a nation as an imagined community as the material conditions exist in the imagination of the imagining extended and shared connections. (*Cinema and Nation*) It is an abstract community, according to Paul James as even an individual of a nation experiences him or herself as subjectively part of an embodied unity with others. Vance Packard calls them as "a nation of Strangers"

Nationalism is the desire of a group of people who share the same race, culture, language, etc. to form an independent country. Nationalism is an ideology and movement characterized by the promotion of the interests of a particular nation, especially intending to gain and maintain the nation's sovereignty over its homeland. It is an identification with one's nation and support for its interests especially,, the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations. Nationalism is a big umbrella which gives shelter and

protection to many things that can be seen and felt. It is more an ideology, something that is framed in the mind and created. This nationalism includes the protection of the integrity, uniqueness, tradition, values, cultures, languages, demographic boundaries, its trade links, commerce, way of life and so on. Nationalism thus might mean the protection of the sovereignty to preserve everything that it says is its own.

Literature

The simple meaning of literature is all known written and oral group of works of art. The word literature originates from Latin word *Litaritura/litteratura* which means "writing formed with letters". Walter Pater defines "the matter of imaginative or artistic literature as a "transcript, not of mere fact, but the fact in its infinitely varied forms". (Sociological criticism in the movie of "I feel pretty".) Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "written artistic works, especially those with high and artistic value". It can take different forms, like novels, dramas, poetry...etc. Literature is not a mere written fact but artistically designed to have a high and artistic value. Thus it will have a lasting impact on the people. It is regarded highly by the people. It is not simply something that is written but dear to the heart or influences the people. Literature cannot be viewed away from society. That is the reason it is often said that literature is a mirror of society. When we look into literature, it has been changing according to the historical background and developments that have been taking place in society. It tries to be true towards society. The events that have happened in history have also influenced literature. The individual cannot be seen away from literature. It is not a chronological description of facts but an elucidation of the experiences he has had in his life and his values. Valmiki composed his first poetry only when he saw something happening which ought not to happen. It is said that he, while taking a bath and performing his religious rituals on the bank of the river Tamsa, saw a female Krounch lamenting about the killing of her male partner. His heart was so much deeply overwhelmed with grief that he could not bear it and spontaneously uttered a few lines in the form of poetry: 'maa nishhaada pratishthaamtva | magamah shaashvatiih samaah | yat krauncha mithunaat eka | mavadhiih kaama mohitam ||' "Oh! Ill-fated Hunter, by which reason you have killed one male bird of the couple, when it is in its lustful passion, thereby you will get an everlasting reputation for ages to come ("Literature and society.", 85.). Poetry, as is explained by Wordsworth in The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, says poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity." ("The Craving for Incidents: Wordsworth." 74.) Literature or poetry being the overflow of powerful feelings can easily influence the people and their behaviour. It is well meditated and thoughtfully crafted, an art.

D.H.Lawrence while writing *WOMEN IN LOVE* he wrote a letter to his friend saying " At present my real world is the world of my inner soul, which reflects on the novel I write. The outer world is there to be endured, it is not real – neither the outer life ("Blake and Lawrence between the Relative and the Absolute." 51). For an author or a writer, the present world is the inner soul and this takes hold of the imagination of the author who presents it.

The Relation between Nationalism and Literature

On the one hand, nationalism is an abstract idea which brings together people to protect the sovereignty and integrity of a nation, whereas literature springs out of the experience of an individual and leaves a lasting impression on the hearts of the people.

Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Samuel . T. Coleridge speaks of the poet as a person who, in his trance, will influence all people who see him, for he is like a person who drinks the milk of paradise. The influence and power of the poet are being shown. As the poet is a person who writes out of his inner soul or his experience that is internalized which is actualized in his writings. The experience of a person is influenced by culture, tradition, language, nation etc., which he gains as a part of society. The author writes as part of a nation.

According to John Milton: "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured on purpose to a life beyond life." (*History and Theory*, 212) If this is the case, a good book of literature can carry the master spirit of nationalism and instill in them the spirit of imbibing true tradition and the regaining the lost tradition, as did the Irish Renaissance through authors like James Joyce, W. B. Yeats and so on and at the same time the Modern African Literature which traced back the lost history and tried to regain the past culture and tradition forgotten by the Africans under the European regime.

Creation of the unknown world and the magic spell of literature

The power of literature is so powerful that it can lead a person to a different world. Novels like the Harry Potter Series have led people to another world of magic and it created a universe of its own. The magical spell of J.K Rowling's has made the Harry Potter characters household names. Pearl S Buck found refuge in Charles Dickens and found companionship in the characters of Charles Dickens' novels. She also loved England through his novels. Malgudi Days and other novels and stories of R.K. Narayan created a village called Malgudi that never existed. An imaginary map of the village is also created. The English author set all his major novels in the area called Wessex which existed before the unification of England. He defines Wessex as a "merely realistic dream country."(Kramer, Dale, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, 32.) Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll leads us to a peculiar world filled with anthropomorphic characters.

Chinua Achebe and Literature

The influence of his literature and retrieving back of the lost culture. The culture and history of the Igbo people were defined and written by the Europeans. The Europeans looked down on the culture of this land. Europeans were people with a lot of brains but less knowledge of the culture. So they were not the true interpreters. They took upon themselves the task of making them cultured and refined. Chinua Achebe the Father of Modern African literature took on himself the charge to present his version of Africa especially the Igbo culture. Chinua Achebe wrote the novel *Things Fall Apart* for a distinct purpose: to tell a side of history that tends to get ignored. He realized there was an abundance of books written by white people about Africa, but not written by Africans. Centuries of having the African tale told by foreigners have affected just how much control modern Nigerians have on their own lives. Based on how Achebe portrays the white men stripping the Igbo people of their agency, he would think the

cultural agency in modern-day Nigeria is constricted by subliminal messages created by Igbo land's colonialism.

According to Christina Dunn, Chinua Achebe wrote the novel *Things Fall Apart* for a distinct purpose of projecting the lives of the Nigerians through the eyes of the Nigerian people than of the colonialized or the constricted subliminal messages created by Igbo land's colonialism. Realizing the abundance of books written by white people about Africans rather than Africa by Africans.

A Response to "Heart of Darkness"

Heart of Darkness depicts white men as saviours of the savage Africans. He tries to portray the traditional Igbo culture and the changes that took place after the coming of the Europeans. The outlook of Joseph Conrad is explicit when he quotes that “We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on the earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance” (Joseph Conrad , Heart of Darkness, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton,1972, P. 37). the words like “prehistoric earth”, “unknown planet” and “accursed inheritance” to describe the geography and the words like “ a burst of yell, a whirl of black limbs, of hands clapping, feet stamping, body swaying, eyes rolling, black incomprehensible frenzy, the pre-historic man himself;, ‘the night of first ages’.

“The vast arsenal of derogatory images of Africa amassed to defend the slave trade and later colonization gave the world a literary tradition that is now happily defunct but also a particular way of looking... at Africa and Africans that endures, alas, into our own day.”(Multiculturalism & Hybridity in African Literatures, 14.)

“Conrad’s dangerously highfalutin delirium by his genius as well as simple reason and sanity, but almost immediately crowded out, alas, by the long- established and well- heeled tradition of writing about Africa.” (Africa’s Tarnished Name, 23.)

Manipulation from the white man

Egwugwu was unmasked, considered as a spirit of an ancestor that the Igbo saw as a god and killed him as a great offence and to incur punishment on the crime doer. They went to the commissioner to complain, but in turn, they were arrested and made to pay two hundred bags of Cowrie and more than that, the agency that went to collect it gathered two hundred and fifty bags instead of two hundred bags. These incidents showed the exploitation by the white people who were colonizing Africa.

Analysis

Achebe uses Igbo characters to depict the plight of the Igbo community. The destruction and degradation of the Igbo community and culture is well depicted in this novel. The planning and slow study imposition of the Europeans, snatch away the real essence and culture of the real Africans. They are alienated and the culture itself comes to an end. Even death is written not by the one who experienced or knows, but by the one who sees it.

Chinua Achebe is a writer who not only rewrites the story of the Igbo community but also reinterprets and points to the failure of the community. He is very objective. He writes his novels so that the future generation may be aware of the culture and the consequences of history upon them. The story of the Unoka who was allowed to die in the forest for possessing bad chi or a personal god.

Chinua Achebe says if you are not happy with the story to write your own. This is precisely what he did.

Reinterpretation

He felt the story depicted was not true. It was throwing mud into the eyes, depicting the wrong plight and making people believe false stories. The minds of the natives had also been corrupted. Like the drain of wealth theory, it was the drain of roots theory. The drain of Wealth Theory was proposed by Shri.Dadhabhai Naoroji, the Father of Indian Nationalism. He mentioned it in his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* and later propagated by R.C. Dutt in his book *Economic History of India*. The drain of wealth was the portion of India's wealth and economy that was not available to Indians for consumption. In the same *drain of roots* are the drain of a country or a nation's culture, tradition and its entire whole which, has been alienated and wiped out of the mind of the natives. This has spread wide. As the trade and labour of India were undervalued, so the culture and tradition of the natives were also undervalued. They felt the sand on which they were standing was being eroded. We need to use new spectacles. This has also happened in India, consciously or unconsciously, white skin colour is considered beautiful.

To bring back the lost culture

He tried to reinterpret the history and the facts, the events that happened and the culture through the eye of a native than a European. The concept that Africa is just the opposite of Europe and America had to be tackled. The language used was the popular language as this misconception was framed in the mind of not only the Africans but also the Europeans. So history had to be retold. This decay of culture is not only seen in Africa but also in India and other third world countries which have forgotten to see itself and imbibed foreign culture. Now it has become difficult to differentiate between the foreign and the native culture. The feeling of supremacy of the native culture and acceptance of it as not a subaltern but a dominant culture should be taken as a challenge.

Highlight the situations and the problems

Literature should help understand the true picture through which society is going through. They should depict the truth.

Change in society

Literature should become the catalyst of change. The stereotypes of women, beauty and the real meaning of the culture and tradition should be brought back. The present government is trying to emphasize by bringing in yoga, but more writings should emerge and be popularized through literature. The song *Jana gana mana* could spur the spirit of oneness and unity among Indians who got down to the streets and sang it in unison during the Bengal partition, it could happen even now. Literature has to become a companion, a true friend and strength. Literature should come to the forefront. Gandhian ideals were uplifted and popularized by literature. This is the precise reason why nationalism got strong first in the

hearts of the youth who studied in universities. Nationalism means not only appreciating but critically viewing and bringing back the real consciousness and culture which has set the nation apart from others.

As Wordsworth, wrote in his poem London 1802,
*Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:*

The war cry of Okudu also ignites the Igbo tribe. "In those days, Okudu was still alive. He was not a fighter but his voice turned every man could. He was not a fighter, but his voice turned every man into a lion.(140) This is precisely what literature can do. It can ignite the minds of the people and make them aware of the circumstances and make them realize their past, their history and their glory. At the same time, point out the problems and insecurities the people of the nation face.

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