

## 4. Multiculturalism:

### *A Critical Study of Chinua Achebe's Selected Novels*

---

**Trishna Devi**

*M.A in English Literature*

*Gauhati University, Assam, India*

ORCID iD: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1042-597X>

E-Mail: [trishnadevi517@gmail.com](mailto:trishnadevi517@gmail.com)

#### **Abstract:**

*Reclaiming for one's root doesn't state that one has no root. As long as one has roots intact, one survives; and if one is uprooted or one's roots are undiscovered, one dies. But they try their best to grow new roots amidst adverse circumstances to face reality. Cut off from cultural roots, they adopt a quest for self. In the contemporary literary criticism, roots and multiculturalism are the topics, dealt in by many novelists of repute in postcolonial literature. It can be observed that nowadays people are not only conscious of their own culture and tradition but claim superiority of their own over other's culture. The present paper thus aims to present the cultural ambivalence that Chinua Achebe recorded in his novels *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer At Ease*. When the Europeans came to colonize Africa, they bring with them their own culture. Achebe, in these two novels portrays the plight of the Nigerian people they face due to the mixing of the two different cultures. He draws both the pre colonial and colonial period with their both negative and positive sides. His *No Longer at Ease* is on corruption, which Achebe believes is brought by the Europeans to Africa. And his *Things Fall Apart* criticizes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* where Conrad documented that civilization of Africa took place during the time of colonial period. Achebe's protagonists were able to retain a sense of their pre-colonial glory, history considerably, however affected the culture and heritage in the ancient aroma. But in Africa, the 'falcon could not hear the falconer and the center could not hold' and eventually things did fall apart. Hence, the paper is also an attempt to examine the misrecognition of the Nigerian Culture by the dominating Europeans.*

#### **Keywords:**

*Cultural ambivalence; Multiculturalism; Identity; Misrecognition; Postcolonial literature*

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

**'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'**

**Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March**

**ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)**

**Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56**

**DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3**



# Multiculturalism:

## *A Critical Study of Chinua Achebe's Selected Novels*

---

### **Introduction:**

The cultural diversity that is seen in the societies of twentieth century can be said to be a result of colonization, immigration, refugees and slavery. Due to the Cultural diversity, the issues of majority and minority has raised which lead to the issues of language, rights, land claims, political representation and religion freedom. The minor groups demand for their recognition. Recognition is important for them because it is related to their identity or identification. The identity of a group is shaped by the dialogues of the people with other and not by a single individual. Therefore recognition of a group is important as it is an invigoration human need and misrecognition can lead to pain that can arouse self-hatred in the minds of the victims.

In Africa, the concept of multiculturalism is relevant, because the African continent was distributed as European nation. As they were colonized by the Europeans and a large number of European immigrate to the United States; a cultural pluralism takes place which gave rise to the concept of multiculturalism. So, it is important to understand how the Africans deal with the Europeans, their values, culture and the consequences resulted from the colonization. The British expand their commerce in the territories of Nigeria, using the local people for their

---

### *Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



own interest but the colonizers later justified their colonization by arguing that it was their responsibility towards the world to civilize the inferior and backward places. Hence, Nigerian society is restructured in all aspects. In the beginning of the colonial period the tension was occurred from the enforcement done to the Nigerian people to adopt or follow the British orders. They resisted against the Europeans and raised their voices to bring back the system that exist before colonization. The Africans tried to explain that they had their own culture, know to reconstruct their own society, but they gained independence only after the national movements and the forced resistance against British rule.

In Africa, the cultural change was mainly brought out by the spread of Christianity and new western educational system. The colonized people realized that these could be a threat to their own traditional culture and minimize the language of their country and loss their ethno cultural identities. These are the reasons that lead the African writers write about their own culture. Chinua Achebe is one of them.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a depiction of Igbo people and culture where he aims to present that the Nigerians already had a culture and tradition which is strong enough to destroy by the colonizers. Achebe wrote that Ibos "had a philosophy of great depth and value the beauty that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity"(Achebe, C., 1958, Page No. 8), which he felt was dismissed due to colonialism. So, he takes the responsibility to revive their traditional, historical and

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



the cultural identity. The major theme of the novel is the conflict between cultures which is a result of imperialism and the African's resistance towards social and historical changes imposed by the colonizers.

In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe criticizes the thought of the colonizers, and in *No Longer At Ease*, he criticizes the system of corruption, which according to Achebe was brought by the colonizers to Nigeria. The theme of *No Longer at Ease* is the clash of moral values between African culture and British culture or a conflict between the old traditional values and new Western values. Achebe shows how westernization influences the people of Nigeria to ignore their old moral values which lead to the loss of Nigerian's authentic self and society.

### **Multiculturalism in Things Fall Apart:**

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall apart* is an epitome of post colonial literature which is a critique and a collision of colonialism over the African Society. The Novel depicts the real nineteenth and twentieth century Nigeria in western language. It depicts the impact of imperialism and how the people of Nigeria where torn between themselves due to the cultural conflict and how it affect their cultural heritage.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a reaction against Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe, in his novel portrays the Igbo community which had rich cultural values and historical background of their own. Achebe believed that art has a social

---

#### *Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



purpose and can influence things. He continues to resist against the exploitation of Igbo people by the colonial powers. The novel's title comes from W.B Yeats's *The Second Coming*, a modern poem which describes the chaos caused by the collision between traditional and modern culture. The Nigerian people went through the same cultural trauma while demanding for their own culture and identity which gave rise to the concept of multiculturalism. The novel portrays the pre and postcolonial Nigeria. The novel depicts the inner anxiety about losing their dignity towards the colonizers. It also depicts their own cultural values, dignity, laws, customs and their consolidation with other cultures.

The setting of the novel takes place in Umuofia and Mbanta, which is a combination of nine villages. The novel is a construction of three parts. The first part takes place in the pre colonial Umuofia. The second part occurs in Mbanta, where Okonkwo's exile takes place. It also displays the arrival of the colonizers and how they start to rule the tribal life by establishing their government, church, trading system, gradually exploiting their traditional ways. The third phase describes the struggle of the Igbo society, which they face due to the change brought by the Europeans as they were able to influence the villagers. As a result, the tribal system comes to an end. This was symbolized by the suicide of Okonkwo. So, colonialism caused to reshape and reorganize Africa in the post independent era.

The novel focuses on the greatest warrior of Umuofia, Okonkwo, who is also the protagonist of the novel. Okonkwo was against the colonial religious and

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



political system. He is respected for his bravery and the honor that he brought to the village through the wrestling competitions. He is a man who is proud of himself and his own laws and norms of his society. He did not want to lose his social status in any way and become a person betrayed by the colonizers. Achebe, at the same time realistically portrayed the complex laws and customs of Igbo society which sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of the villagers: which religion is better to adopt, there's or the colonizers'? For example - the killing of Ikemefuna and the twin newborns convert Okonkwo's son to Christianity.

The inner conflict of the people of Umuofia can be understood when Obierika visits Okonkwo when he was in exile and tells him "the elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them and so they killed the White man and tide his iron horse to the sacred tree "(Achebe, C., 1958, Page No.138) "I forgot to tell you another thing which the oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way." (Achebe, C., 1958, Page No.138-39).

Though the villagers used locusts as their food, in Christianity, locust is the symbol of destruction. So locusts are the colonizers who will destroy the Igbo culture and their roots as the locust are too heavy that they break the branches of the trees which also mean the cultural break down of the community due to the colonizers.

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

**Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March**

**ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)**

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

**DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3**



In the novel, Achebe tried to show that Africans were not what the Europeans told about them, instead they have a tradition who obeys their oracle, for instance- the villagers know nothing about the foreigners, but they killed the white man obeying the oracle that the white men will bring destruction to them. They could not connect themselves to the western people because they are devoted to their own values and cultures. Africans did not have a government system; they depend on the elders and worthy man of the clan. The British government took full advantage of not having a government by imposing their power on the people of Nigeria. Achebe argued that just because they did not have a governmental system does not suggest that they were uncivilized. He showed how the Ibos were tolerant with each other and was happy with their democratic tribal system.

In *Things fall Apart*, Achebe presents their culture and religion better than the European's, who tried to convert the villagers to Christianity. Though the white man criticize the Igbo people for worshipping the gods of stone and wood and said that their custom is bad, the villagers believed that " it is good that a man should worship the gods and spirits of his fathers' " (Achebe, C., 1958, Page No.139). Achebe portrayed both the religions to show the difference between the diverse cultures. Again, while the Europeans do not hesitate to kill each other over the religious issues, in Igbo land it is a crime against the earth goddess and is punished.

### **Multiculturalism in No Longer at Ease:**

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



The main theme of Achebe's second novel *No Longer at Ease* is also on the clash between Nigerian culture and Western culture. While in *Things Fall Apart*, he portrayed from the pre colonial Nigeria, the pure laws and customs of Nigeria to the collision between the two cultures; his *No Longer at Ease* is actually a completion of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*. This novel shows the 20th century Africa where the colonizers were able to change and influence the Igbo society. The novel is able to show negative as well as the positive sides of colonization. In the novel the protagonist is the grandson of Okonkwo, who was the protagonist in *Things Fall Apart*. Lokangaka Iosambe, professor of English at the University of Vermont, is of the view that Igbo people always resisted against the colonizers and their culture. Though some of them have converted themselves to Christianity, they are not totally cut off from their roots. (Losambe, L., 2005, Page No.148). This is the idea that Achebe tried to present in *No longer at Ease*, for instance Obi's family is converted to Christianity when he was young. Though Obi does not care about his girlfriend's religion, his parents were bothered when they come to know that she is an Osu. Obi's father is a catechist and he has no right to judge on this matter but his father said that he is afraid of his future and reputation of new generation. Even Obi's mother said that if he wish to marry her, he have to wait till his mother dies. This shows that they are still connected to their roots and still care about the old Igbo society, their customs and traditions. When Obi tried to convince his father that there is no judgment like this, it is only the mistake of his ancestors, his father said:

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3





*"My son, I understand what you say. But this thing is deeper than you think. Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son not to bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family .If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow to your head and on the heads of your children .Who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters." (Achebe, C., 1960, Page No.106)*

Therefore, in this novel we not only see the collision between cultures but also the collision between religions. The aim of the missionaries were to convert the people to Christianity and to taught them that there is only one God and they were successful in converting some of the Nigerian people to Christianity because of their complex laws, for example: according to Christian religion no one can kill the newborn twin babies, so Achebe not only showed the negative sides but also showed some positive sides.

Another idea that is given through this novel is the power of written words of the colonizers. This idea was able to influence the old Igbo Society because they saw that the Christians have one supreme god in court with whom they can directly talk and the printed books that the clerks hold have a fixed meaning. In Igbo culture, there is no printed books and when their oracle say something, they had number of versions going on in their head. What means today may differ from the other day

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

**Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March**

**ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)**

**Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56**

**DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3**



but the written or the sacred books of the Christian's have only one meaning. In this matter Okonkwo said:

*“Our women made black patterns on their bodies with the juice of the uli tree. It was beautiful, but it soon faded. If it lasted two market weeks it lasted a long time. But sometimes our elders spoke about uli that never faded, although no one has ever seen it .We see it today in the writing of the white man. If you go to the native court and look at the books which Clerks wrote twenty years ago or more, they are still as they wrote them. They do not say one thing today and another tomorrow, or one thing this year and another next year. Okoye in the book today cannot become Okonkwo tomorrow. In the Bible Pilate said: ‘what is written is written.’ It is uli that never fades.” (Achebe, C., 1960, Page No.100)*

Achebe also showed the negative effects of colonizers on the Igbo Society. Through the protagonist, Achebe criticizes the expansion of corruption during the colonial period. Though Obi was a Christian and went to England for higher studies, Nigeria was more than a name for him which he felt during his stay in England. We see him caught between two different cultures: he learned the colonizer's literature though Umuofians wanted him to study law, so that he can help them in land cases. Though Obi learned the colonizer's literature, he was against the colonizer's system of corruption and always thought to keep his Igbo Society free from corruption. But it was his financial crises that compelled him to take bribe and was charged for accepting bribes. Here, we see him somewhere caught between the cultures of old traditional Igbo values (gifts) and western values (bribery). During the pre colonial

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

**'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'**

**Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March**

**ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)**

**Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56**

**DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3**



period, gifts, especially kola strengthens the relationships between the people of the tribal community; the same thing is called bribery in western culture and is a crime, so the roots of corruption came with the British. But in spite of Obi's European education he failed to resist himself from taking gift or bribe. That's way Mr. Green said "the African is corrupt through and through" (Achebe, C., 1960, Page No.3) The characters were also seen caught between two different languages- tentative and English, for instance, when Obi discusses his marriage with Joseph, he used English language which makes Joseph upset. He thought that education made him a stranger in his own Nigeria.

Therefore, identity crises is the another theme of the novel where the protagonist and the other characters are seen struggling for their identity. They loss their identity because there was a sudden need to reshape their identity, so that they could find their way to mingle with the new system. But, instead of preserving their ethnic identity they started to adopt the European ways as a sign of progress. Though the colonizers imposed their religion and culture over the Igbo people and throw out their old tradition it was difficult for them to suddenly cut off their relations from their roots. So they were caught between two different worlds and these identity crises caused Okonkwo to commit suicide and made Obi a criminal. Obi's identity now as a man of promise and education has been also missed as his education never taught him to accept bribes and his education was a symbol of promise.

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



## Conclusion:

In the twentieth century, most of the societies were multicultural. In Africa the seeds of multiculturalism were sowed during the colonial period and now it has become a part of contemporary literary criticism. Though multiculturalism has positive aspects, it also leads to identity crisis. The powerful group of a society dominates the minor group and the minor group starts adopting their culture and converts their religion to the religion of the powerful group. Instead of preserving their own culture, they begin to neglect their own culture, religion, language etc. As a result, the society or the people get divided into upper class, lower class or outcast. Chinua Achebe also shows the positive sides of colonization. Due to the colonizers the superstitions are minimized and along with that also the sufferings of the people. So, we can say that the cultural diversity in African society was a result of colonization as it was a major force. Though the colonizers claim that their aim was to civilized Nigeria but it was their commercial interest that forced them to dominate Nigeria. Colonization bring change to Nigerian culture, values, religion etc. for which a collision is seen between the two different cultures.

## References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Ibadan. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1, 138-148
- Achebe, C. (1960). *No Longer at Ease*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1, 3-100
- Losambe, L. (2005). *Borderline Movements in African Fiction*. Africa Research and Publications, 1, 1-106

---

### *Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



**Cite this article:**

Multiculturalism: A Critical Study of Chinua Achebe's Selected Novels

**Citation Format: APA**

Devi, T. (2018). Multiculturalism. *SOCRATES*, 6(1), 44-56. Retrieved from <https://socratesjournal.com/index.php/SOCRATES/article/view/330>

**For more citation formats, visit:**

<https://socratesjournal.com/index.php/SOCRATES/article/view/330>

**Copyright and permissions:**

Copyright (c) Trishna Devi



Multiculturalism: A Critical Study of Chinua Achebe's Selected Novels by Trishna Devi is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

---

*Special issue on Postcolonialism:*

'INVESTIGATING POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM AS THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK'

Vol. 6 No. 1 (2018) Issue- March

ISSN 2347-6869 (E) & ISSN 2347-2146 (P)

Multiculturalism....By Trishna Devi, Page No. 44-56

DOI: 10.5958/2347-6869.2018.00004.3



# Author Self Archiving Policy

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/search.php?issn=2347-2146>

## Summary:

Socrates journal does not allow authors to post items submitted to the journal on personal Not for Profit websites or institutional repositories or on any other website prior to publication and after publication. They can only share web links to their published article after publication. The journal, however, permits "author self-archiving" 24 months after the publication of the article.

**Published Authors can download and print their article in PD Format but cannot share it online on any website.**

## Preprint (Archiving and sharing online not allowed)

A preprint is a version of the article before it has been peer-reviewed for publication. The term may refer either to articles at an early stage of preparation or to articles at the last stage before submission for peer review. In the latter case the article is, of course, well-developed and ready for critical review and, if only minor revisions are needed as a result of peer review, a late-stage preprint may be very little different from the final article.

## Post print/Final post-print (Archiving and sharing online not allowed)

A post-print is the final version of the article that the author sees before it is published. A post-print has been peer reviewed and the changes and revisions required by the reviewers have been incorporated. However, the author's final post print and the published version are effectively the same.

**There would be no responsibility of the Journal Socrates or any member of the Journal on the items submitted/posted by the authors and readers on any personal Not for Profit websites or institutional repositories or website or anywhere on Internet. In the case of Breach from the side of the author, the Journal will remove the shared article from its published issue.**

**DO NOT SHARE THIS RESEARCH PAPER ONLINE  
DO NOT UPLOAD IT ONLINE ON ANY WEBSITE OR PLATFORM**