

Social realism as reflected in select novels of Chinua Achebe

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Abstract

A study has been made into the social realism aspects in select novels of Chinua Achebe. The word 'realism' meant the presentation of the ordinary, the contemporary and the everyday reality of life. As opposed to idealism, realism presents things as they appeared in the natural without any colour or façade. The study of Chinua Achebe's novels through the theory of social realism shows us the history of Nigeria from Pre-colonialism to the days of Neo-colonialism. Studying the novels in order of appearance takes one on a journey of how things happened from the past to the present. It has always been said that Literature rightly hold a mirror to society and Chinua Achebe's novels traces the history of the land step by step. Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart* speaks of the closely knit society held close by religion, family, social and community ties. However through the novels, *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *Man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah* the author showcases the changes that have taken place within the society and the reasons for the cause of change. One also sees how people began adopting to change and how the land gradually came into the possession of two or more culture-their own native culture and the culture and language of the powers of colonization

Keywords: Colonization, change, society, culture, religion, beliefs

Introduction

The title of Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart* is taken from W.B.Yeats' *The Second Coming*

'Round and round in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer

The centre cannot hold, Things fall apart' (p.158)

The poem speaks of the change that place in society as it moves from everything it once held

close. The initial ties to God, religion and moral are broken as man gets caught up in materialism and his own ways of life. The falconer in other words man is no longer able to hear the voice of the falconer or in other words God. The centre comprising of firm ties of kinship, family and community no longer holds society together but gradually things fall apart. These lines reflect the theme of the novel-*Things Fall Apart*. The novel showcases a society that was tightly bound by beliefs, religion and practices develop cracks with the arrival of the colonizer.

Emelia Oko writes

‘Achebe is ...recreating a world he says still existed as he grew up.’(p.204)

Despite the natives attempts at preserving their culture of the land from outside intrusion cracks gradually appear leading to the fall and collapse of entire society

S.C. Dubey and M.k Gaurav states

‘The African Novel is a response to and a record of the traumatic consequences of the impact of Western capitalist colonialism on the colonial values and institutions of the African People.’ (Dubey & Gaurav, 2011 p.71)

The first mention of the arrival of the white man in the Chinua Achebe’s first novel *Things Fall Apart* is when Oberika gives the news to Okonkwo saying that the people of Abame have been wiped out and some have tried to seek shelter in other neighboring villages.

"Three moons ago," said Obierika, "on an Eke market day a little band of fugitives came into our town.

During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan."

"An albino," suggested Okonkwo.

"He was not an albino. He was quite different."(p. 138)

The first understanding of a white man was that he was an albino, a person who suffered from leprosy. His bike was called an iron horse by the people and they were afraid to go close to him. While the white man called out to a few of them, a few brave men went forward and touched him. They even consulted their oracle and it was prophesied that there would be destruction of the land and the people.

‘The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them.'(p.138).

On the proclamation of the prophesy and out of fear, members of the clan kill the white man and tied up the iron horse fearing that it would run away and call the white man’s friends. Moreover, the prophesy of the oracle had said that other white men would follow soon. The man who was killed was considered to be a harbinger, sent to survey the land. As per the prophesy, there was the destruction of the native land by the white man which was total and complete except for the sick and the elderly who stayed back at home.

"Their clan is now completely empty. Even the sacred fish in their mysterious lake have fled and the lake has turned the color of blood. A great evil has come upon their land as the Oracle had warned."(p.140).

The destruction began in one neighboring town but word and fear spread to all the nine neighboring villages.

Russel McDougall writes

‘Chinua Achebe’s novel, *Things Fall Apart* tells a story that visualizes a pre-colonial society poised on the knife-edge of change...’(McDougall 1986 p.92)

The social realistic fact of what happened to the people of Africa can be brought to mind by the conversation between Oberika and Okonkwo.

"But I am greatly afraid. We have heard stories about white men who made the powerful guns and the strong drinks and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true."(p.140-141).

Mala Pandurang in her essay states

‘Achebe presents the colonial encounter as a catalyst which speedily brings about a new, complex and morally problematic social order.’ (Pandurang 2015 p.29)

The next group of white men who set foot onto the land of Umoufia was the missionaries coming on mission of peace. They gradually worked their way into the hearts of people and settled upon the land. Although they were not given a grand welcome by the native community, they managed to begin their life on native soil on what was offered to them. When the missionaries requested for a place to stay, the natives gave them the Evil Forest- A forest that was inhabited by the dead, the unwanted, and the sick, those not given a burial. None of the natives ever ventured into the Evil forest at night. They thought that the missionaries would not be able to spend even a day in the Evil forest. The Evil Forest was the home of those suffering from abominations such as inflammation of the stomach, leprosy and small-pox or those possessed with an evil spirit. So when the missionaries were made to stay in the Evil Forest, the community believed that the missionaries would be dead by the next day or they would flee for their lives. They knew for sure that they would not be able to last even a night in the forest. But what happened was something the natives least expected. The missionaries not only outlasted the night successfully but they also built a temporary structure to represent the church.

‘It was well known among the people of Mbanta that their gods and ancestors were sometimes long-suffering and would deliberately allow a man to go on defying them. But even in such cases they set their limit at seven market weeks or twenty-eight days.’ (p.137)

It seemed a miracle to the native community but they thought that their own native Gods were being patient with the missionaries. However the last day came by which all the missionaries should have died but the

missionaries were still alive building a new red earth and thatch house for their teacher. They then began accepting those unwanted by the community- those who were considered untouchables and women who gave birth to twins and not were unwanted by the community. The first few converts were *efulefu* otherwise known as worthless empty men. They were considered to be the excrement of the clan. Although the natives did not understand the language of the colonizer the first thing that drew the native into the religion of the missionaries were their songs and music. The protagonist’s son Nwoye was one of the first few members to join the missionaries.

‘It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul-the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth.’ (p.134)

Nwoye, the son of Okownko was easily drawn into the religion of the missionaries as he found himself to be a black sheep in the family. In comparison to his father Okonkwo who was a brave man, he was seen as someone timid, quiet with no sign of greatness upon him. His father Okonkwo was always yelling at him that he was not going to be man enough. He was drawn towards music and with the loss of his friend Ikemufuna, he had no one to turn to except his mother. He was becoming more withdrawn. So when the new religion came in with its song of comfort and acceptance, he was drawn to it very easily. Nwoye speaks for himself about his adoption of the new religion in Achebe’s second novel *No Longer at Ease*

“I went through fire to become a Christian. Because I suffered I understand Christianity--- more than you will ever do.” (p.105)

Education was the next big element that drew the natives away from the sense of clan-the ability to read and write.

Leelamma Mathew writes

‘Achebe in his novel beautifully depicts the socio-cultural ethos of pre-colonial Africa endowed with a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty.’(p.112)

The natives never thought that education would draw them away from their clan, their own people. They only wanted their children to learn and come back and teach the others. In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, the beginning of formal education is seen.

‘The missionaries built a school and went from family to family begging people to send their children to his school. At the beginning they only sent their slaves or sometimes their lazy children. Mr. Brown begged and argued and prophesied. He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umoufia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them.’(p.164)

The community saw that the change was already taking place. They saw strangers speaking the whiteman’s tongue. They came from distant places where the white man had first set foot. Gradually more people came to the school and they were encouraged to be regular with gifts such as singlets and towels. People were of different age groups who came. Some were as old as thirty years. They worked on their farm in the morning and went to school in the afternoon.

‘Religion and education went hand in hand.’(p.164)

Syam Agarwal writes

‘The religious tradition of the Igbo culture falls neatly into three clearly defined areas. Firstly, worship and rituals of transitional deities, including the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, secondly the worship of the ancestors and finally the concept of ‘chi’ that occupies a place of great importance in the Igbo cosmology’(p.162)

However gradually a number of changes began to take place. Many of the natives were willing sent their children to the white man’s school to be educated for fear of being left out

‘One of the great men in that village was called- Akunna and he had given one of his sons to be taught the white man's knowledge in Mr. Brown's school.’ (p.179)

Neeta Pandey states

‘The novel shows the helplessness of the indigenous people in the hands of the missionaries and the white man’ (Pandey 2011 p.46)

Families were being separated. A lady Nneke, the wife of Amadi was heavy with child. She had had four prior pregnancies and childbirths. But each time she had given birth to twins but the children were thrown away soon by the family considering the birth of twins to be inauspicious. She was one among the few to join the church and her family only considered it good riddance. Gradually when more people joined the missionaries, The elders of the clan such as Okonkwo feared for the entire clan. This fear was actually a glimpse into the reality of the future.

“Okonkwo felt a cold shudder, run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his fathers

crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god.”(p.153)

Things falling apart were first noticed by the elders they tried to hold things back together but the new religion and their practices were far stronger that huge cracks began to form which could not be held together by any means.

‘....One of the oldest members of the umunna rose to thank Okonkwo: "As for me, I have only a short while to live, and so have Uchendu and Unachukwu and Emefo. But I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong the bond of kinship is. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan."(p.167)

Eustace Palmer writes

‘...with the arrival of the whiteman and his new religion and administration; traditional and society's cracks and weakness, hitherto concealed by the common fear of the ancestors and the god, break open and the once stable community collapses.’(p.61)

A New Government was next brought in by the Whiteman. He didn't just come with his religion and education but also came with his new norms of governance. It was a place of judgment. A new court was set up and the District Commissioner judged the cases in ignorance. To protect those who believed in the white man's religion as well as punish those who dared cause harm to a missionary. Although the natives did not want the white man to stay, they did not want to kill any of the worthless men who joined the missionaries

because they knew that if they killed someone from their own clan they could be exiled. Court messengers brought people to the trial; and the cases were handled by total strangers unlike the respected elders or *egwugwus* of the clan. Court messengers were posted guard outside prisons where men were placed who went against the white man's laws. Prisoners were made to do menial jobs like clean the compound in the mornings or fetch firewood for both the commissioner as well as the court messengers. Many titled men were also sentenced to such punishment which seemed very unfair to the clans and community.

Indrasena K. Reddy states

‘Achebe underlines the indestructible elements of the Igbo culture while sensitively depicting its process of disintegration under the impact of the whiteman's arrival’(Reddy 1994 p.23)

On the other hand, the number of people joining the missionaries and the church were increasing. Apart from accepting worthless men, women and twins, the church also welcomed the osus.

“He was a person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart-a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest.” (p.156)

Seeds of corruption are being sown and it seems to be growly slowly and steadily in Umoufia. The court-messengers were seen are people who sought bribe and in the bargain justice was lost. People lose their piece of land because the messengers and interpreters have been bribed so unfair verdicts were being passed.

‘What has happened to that piece of land in dispute? asked Okonkwo

The white man's court has decided that it should belong to Nnama's family who had given much money to the white man's messengers and interpreter.'(p.159)

Trade stores were being set up in Umoufia for the first time. No one had seen anything like a store earlier. Palm-oil and kernel became things of great price and money began to flow into Umoufia. Hospitals and Schools were also set up gradually in the land of Umoufia. Those who fared well at school were promoted to the position of teachers, court messengers and court clerks. Gradually, the clan which was once known for its brave warriors was appearing weak and soft like women. Things were actually falling Apart.

David Carroll states

The author attempts the more difficult task of creating in details the values, the attitudes and the atmosphere of the colonial society...'(Carroll 1980 p.94)

Although the elders felt they could fight against the white man, their biggest loss was the loss of their own kinsmen who joined hands with the white man, adding his voice to those of the white man and calling their very own customs bad.

"How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."(p.160)

Corruption

In Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the seed of bribe is just sown and the court messengers are easily bought with money.

However in Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* bribery has become a way of life.

"He has worked steadily to the top through bribery--- an ordeal by bribery. To him the bribe is natural. He gave it and he expects it." (p.17)

There are instances of bribery taking place in the open and no one seems to be doing anything to correct the situation but they seem to be flowing with the tide. When Obi took a ride to Umoufia from Logos he took the mammy wagon and travelled first class which meant he was given a seat beside the driver. However the vehicle was stopped by police men to collect their dues. However when Obi looked in their direction, they mistook him for a C.I.D man and shooed the driver's mate away. After going some distance, the vehicle stopped and the driver's mate ran back to the policeman and the matter which could be settled with two shillings was no settled for ten. Both the driver and everyone looked at Obi with dislike because their lost out on their money for just one look by Obi.

'Why you look the man for face when we want give um him two shillings?' he asked Obi.....Now that policeman go charge me like ten shillings. You see now,' he said to Obi, who was already beginning to feel a little guilty, especially as all the traders behind, having learnt what was happening, had switched their attacks from career girls to 'too know' young men. For the rest of the journey the driver said not a word more to him.(p .34-35)

Obi wondered what had gone wrong? Why was society so caught up with the idea of bribe? How could he help change society.

"Where does one begin? With the masses? Educate the masses?' He shook his head. 'Not a chance there. It would take centuries.'"(p.35)

The younger generation in Lagos believed that there could be a change in society, they could get rid of the evil called bribery

“Obi's theory that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities” (p.31).

However in the novel it is seen that the evil of bribe is so wide spread that like a swamp, even the young man Obi falls prey to this evil.

“Then one day someone brought twenty pounds. As the man left, Obi realized that he could stand it no more. People say that one gets used to these things, but he had not found it like that at all. Every incident had been a hundred times worse than the one before it. The money lay on the table. He would have preferred not to look in its direction, but he seemed to have no choice. He just sat looking at it, paralyzed by his thoughts.” (p.128)

Whiteman's Education and Opportunities for Employment

Chinua Achebe's second novel *No Longer at Ease* depicts the time prior to independence. People hoped that only with education can they make a good living for themselves.

'...Education for service, not for white collar jobs and comfortable salaries. With our great country on the threshold of independence, we need men who are prepared to serve her well and truly.'(p.27)

The Education and language which was just picked up by the natives became an object of admiration gradually in the second novel. Natives are seen well read and holding prominent position of power in society.

“A university degree was the philosopher's stone. It transmuted a third-class clerk on one hundred and fifty a year into a senior Civil Servant on five

hundred and seventy, with car and luxuriously furnished quarters at nominal rent. And the disparity in salary and amenities did not tell even half the story. To occupy a 'European post' was second only to actually being a European. It raised a man from the masses to the élite whose small talk at cocktail parties was: 'How's the car behaving?'" (p.70)

People went far and wide in search of jobs leaving members of their family behind, especially old people.

“That was what the world had come to. Children left their old parents at home and scattered in all directions in search of money. It was hard on an old woman with eight children. It was like having a river and yet washing one's hands with spittle.”(p.102)

The novel talks about a new category of people called 'sojourners' (p.6) who having benefited from the English education, now sought opportunities outside Umoufia,.

“Those Umuofians (that is the name they call themselves) who leave their home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria regard themselves as sojourners. They return to Umuofia every two years or so to spend their leave. When they have saved up enough money they ask their relations at home to find them a wife, or they build a 'zinc' house on their family land.” (p.6)

The superior position held by the colonizer and his condescending attitude continues in the second novel *No Longer at Ease*. The second novel presents the reality of how the white man treated the African. The treatment and the thoughts of the white man towards the African is inter-twined into the novel holding a picture to reality. There are no more shocked expressions of ill treatment or strangeness at the treatment. The treatment of the colonizer, the Whitman towards the colonized, the natives are accepted as the

norm. Africans were given lower positions as waiters or cooks

“On this particular occasion there was none, except of course the stewards who served unobtrusively. It was quite possible to go in, drink, sign a cheque, talk to friends and leave again without noticing these stewards in their white uniforms. If everything went right you did not see them” (p.5)

Derogatory statements regarding the native were believed and spoken about the African.

‘The African is corrupt through and through.’ (p.5)

Sonia Soni states

Achebe explores the truth about colonialism, decolonization as well as neo-colonialism’ (Soni 2014 p.85)

Change in Currency

When there was the presence of cowries to represent currency for bride price or buying and selling of yams, with the white man came the introduction of shillings. The soil also seemed to have given everything of itself to the people of the land, like the people themselves.

“They shook hands with him and as they did so they pressed their presents into his palm, to buy a pencil with, or an exercise book or a loaf of bread for the journey, a shilling there and a penny there --- substantial presents in a village where money was so rare, where men and women toiled from year to year to wrest a meagre living from an unwilling and exhausted soil.” (p.11)

Physical change of surroundings

Typical of social realism that reflects the changes in society that takes place, characters in the novel also talk about changes that took place in such a

short span of time that they are unable to recognize that it’s the same people or land.

“Umuofia had indeed changed during the seven years Okonkwo had been in exile.” (p.174)

“But the Nigeria he returned to was in many ways different from the picture he had carried in his mind during those four years. There were many things he could no longer recognise,.....”(p.12)

Change in the notion of greatness

Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo writes

‘In Things Fall Apart, Achebe combines the form of the realist novel with the depiction of an Igbo culture of folk tales and proverbs’ (p.66)

The people of Umoufia looked up to men of title, brave warriors who drank palm wine from human head, men who were unafraid of war. These men like Okonkwo were sent as emissaries to neighboring villages but gradually a whole new set of men are looked up to as reflected in Chinua Achebe’s second novel No Longer at Ease. They were the soldiers who visited far and wide places and came back home to tell stories of foreign lands.

“Some of them had been village ne’er-do-wells, but now they were heroes. They had bags and bags of money, and the villagers sat at their feet to listen to their stories.....He went in full uniform, breaking the earth with his boots, and no one dared touch him. It was said that if you touched a soldier, Government would deal with you. Besides, soldiers were as strong as lions because of the injections they were given in the army.” (p.12)

The idea of greatness changed from the days of Okonkwo to the times of Obi Okonkwo.

“Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or large

numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we too have changed our tune. We are the first in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man's land" (p.42)

From Medicine men to Whiteman's medicine

In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, it is seen that if any child fell sick with fever or any illness, people of the household uses their own native knowledge in regard to medicines to cure the child and if they were not able to, their called upon medicine men. However when the white man set foot upon the land of Africa, he called it an impenetrable land and he feared diseases such as yellow fever or rheumatism. They were looking for vaccines to fight the disease with the hope that if they found a medicine, they stay of the colonizer could be longer and more successful in the land. This search for medicine is reflected in the novel *No Longer at Ease*.

'One of the men held up a bottle for all to see. It contained Long Life Mixture, he said, and began to tell the crowd all about it..... The other man brought out a sheaf of handbills and distributed them to the crowd, most of whom appeared to be illiterate. 'This paper will speak to you about Long Life Mixture,' he announced..... The first three were: 'Rheumatism, Yellow fever, dogbight.'(p.37)

Change in the notion of Conversation

Africans had a great art of conversation and they had great pride in it. They loved speaking in one's own language man's language especially in his presence as it would suggest they did not have a language of their own. even in a foreign land and they looked for opportunities to do so. However they were ashamed to speak in the English

"He spoke Ibo whenever he had the least opportunity of doing so. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to find another Ibo-speaking

student in a London bus. But when he had to speak in English with a Nigerian student from another tribe he lowered his voice. It was humiliating to have to speak to one's countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own." (p.39)

The Dream of Independence

The desire for Nigeria's independence is seen in the novel *No Longer at Ease*.

"In the case of Green it was difficult to see what his deadline was, unless it was Nigeria's independence. They said he had put in his resignation when it was thought that Nigeria might become independent in 1956. In the event it did not happen and Mr. Green was persuaded to withdraw his resignation" (p.81)

The Colonizer's perspective of Africa

The readers are also given a whole new picture about Africa from the colonizer's perspective. Although it is Obi, a native of the land, his view of the English man Mr. Green's thoughts, it still presents a very different picture from that of Joseph Conrad who had such a negative picture of Africa.

"It was clear he(Mr. Green) loved Africa, but only Africa of a kind: the Africa of Charles, the messenger, the Africa of his garden- boy and steward-boy. He must have come originally with an ideal--to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal head-hunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice?With a flash of insight Obi remembered his Conrad which he had read for his degree. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.' That was Mr Kurtz before the heart of darkness got him. Afterwards

he had written: 'Exterminate all the brutes.' It was not a close analogy, of course. Kurtz had succumbed to the darkness, Green to the incipient dawn. But their beginning and their end were alike. 'I must write a novel on the tragedy of the Greens of this century,' he thought, pleased with his analysis" (p.81)

Another important aspect of social realism which is reflected in the novel is the colonizer's mindset that the colonized would be unable to manage their countries affairs well even if they are given the freedom. This attitude is reflected in the words of Mr. Green in the novel *No Longer at Ease*.

"That is what I have always said. There is no single Nigerian who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interests of his country. From your ministers down to your most junior clerk. And you tell me you want to govern yourselves." (p.116)

A new relationship between the Colonizer and the Colonized: Friends

In Chinua Achebe's third novel *Arrow of God*, the relationship between the native and the white man seems to have blossomed where they seem to have become friends. The chief priest tells his son that though he is friends with the English man Wintabotta, still there are certain things that could not be overlooked.

"It was I who sent you to join those people because of my friendship to the white man Wintabotta. He asked me to send one of my children to learn the ways of his people and I agreed and sent you." (p.16)

Colonizer as a Settler in Africa

The colonizer found living in Africa a difficult place. The weather-the dry harmattan, the

mosquitoes made it difficult for the white-man to make it his home.

"Fifteen years ago Winterbottom might have been so depressed by the climate and the food as to have doubts about service in Nigeria. But now he was a hardened coaster and although the climate still made him irritable and limp he would not now exchange the hard life for the comfort of Europe."(p.36)

The presence of the union Jack flag indicated the establishment of the European colony in Nigeria.

"The Union Jack flying in front of his bungalow declared he was the King's representative in the district."(p.38)

Moreover the control of Umoufia and the death of Okonkwo which was intended to be written in the form of a book entitled *The Pacification of the lower tribes of the Niger* has been published by George Allen and is now circulated among the other colonizers as they try to gain control over other parts of Nigeria.

"He was now reading the final chapter of *Pacification of the Primitive tribes of Lower Niger* by George Allen which Captain Winterbottom had lent him."(p.39)

The colonizer constantly believed that it was his duty to bring colonization to the rest of the world.

"...send us fearless and erect, to lead the backward races into the line. Surely we are the people" (p.40)

Native leaders themselves agents of corruption

In Achebe's next novel *A Man of the People*, the native leaders themselves are seen as corrupt responsible for the country sloping down towards inflation, yet villagers were so blinded that they had gathered in large groups for the minister's welcome.

“Here were silly ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation.”(p.2)

Satyanarain Singh states

‘If the turning point in the life of Africa was its historic encounter with the imperialist West and the resultant agony of subjugation and slavery, the post-independence experience has also been none too edifying with poverty and corruption plaguing them...’(Singh 1985 p.49)

The villagers had accepted the fact that politicians were bound to be corrupt and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

“Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you...if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth.” (p.2)

Moreover in the novel *Man of the People*, the aspect of corruption again highlighted.

“A common saying in the country after independence was that it didn’t matter what you knew but who you knew.”(p.16)

Yet there were people like the protagonist who chose to be honest and prosper in life by overcoming obstacles.

“For a like me who simply couldn’t stoop to lick any man’s boots it created a big problem. In fact one reason why I took this teaching job in a bush, private school instead of a smart civil servant job in the city with car, free housing etc was to give myself a certain amount of autonomy.”(p.16)

Change in Customs

Ayesha Irfan writes

‘The first part of the novel *Things Fall Apart* can be said to be a pastoral recollection of life. The latter part of the novel highlights the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white man and his culture into the hitherto self-contained world of African society’ (p. 153)

While the first generation of people –like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* are proud of their culture and tradition, the second generation-Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son seems disillusioned about the beliefs and practices of life. He sees that some practices like the killing of twins, or the killing of Ikemufuna is unjust and he finds comfort in the new religion-the religion of the white man. However in the third generation- Obi Okonkwo, Okonkwo’s grandson’s peer group seems to follow the norms and customs of their native land when things seemed comfortable for them. Yet they seem confident of themselves unconcerned of what the white man may think of him which is empowerment and self- assurance as reflected in the novel *No Longer at Ease*

”The second generation of educated Nigerians had gone back to eating pounded yams or garri with their fingers for the good reason that it tasted better that way. Also for the even better reason that they were not as scared as the first generation of being called uncivilized.” (p.17)

When people assembled together for an occasion –be it celebration or discussion they brought their own goat skins and sat upon it.

“There were not enough chairs for all of them to sit on, so that many sat on their goat-skins spread on the floor. It did not make much difference whether one sat on a chair or on the floor because even those who sat on chairs spread their goat-skins on them first.” (p.39)

It was also believed that a man could not marry an Osu. An osu was considered to be an outcaste as the clan was dedicated to the gods. So when

Obi decided to marry Clara who was an osu ,he knew that his family would not agree.

“It was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great- great-grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god, thereby setting himself apart and turning his descendants into a forbidden caste to the end of Time. Quite unbelievable.” (p.55)

When Obi brought up the matter with his father, his father out rightly rejected the idea of him marrying Clara.

“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 on 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.” (p.101)

With the coming of the white man, there was a change in wedding celebrations. It is said that with the white man came the wedding cake. Both the groom and bride joined hand in cutting the cake and whoever cut the cake first was considered the one to be the senior partner.

“When the missionaries brought their own kind of marriage, they also brought the wedding cake. But it was soon adapted to suit the people's sense of drama. The bride and the groom were given a knife each. The master of ceremonies counted 'One, two, three, go!' And the first to cut through the cake was the senior partner. On Isaac's wedding day his wife had cut the cake first” (p.125)

Change in roles of people

Moreover, as a number of things were changing in Africa, so were people and their roles. In Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart*, the role played by the crier was considered supreme. As he sounded his gong, the entire village went silent and their ears were tuned keenly to the crier's announcement. Through the announcer people were made aware of something important. In the novel, *Man of the People*, there is the mention of the crier's gong, but he also has undergone a change like the world around him.

“Two nights later we heard the sound of the crier's gong. His message was unusual. In the past, the crier had summoned the village to a meeting to deliberate over a weighty question or else to some accustomed communal labour. His business was to serve notice of something that was to happen. But this night he did something new: he announced a decision already taken.”(p.126)

Conclusion

Through the theory of social realism one is able to understand the process of change in every area of the land. A land that was once bound tightly together slowly fell apart. Through the journey of the novels of Chinua Achebe one understands how things began to change and how one was unable to stop that change that was taking place. So reading the novels on the lines of social realism gives one a better understanding of the history of the land and the unavoidable circumstances under which the society was forced to change. Although people seldom wanted a change, with the passage of time and with the influence of the colonizer upon the colonized innumerable changes took place that was irrevocable.

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