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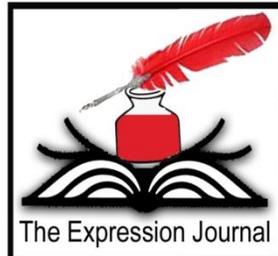
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## **DEPICTION OF AFRICANNESS IN THE SELECT WORKS OF CHINUA ACHEBE**

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### **Abstract**

Achebe presents the African society as one that has positive qualities of its own. The coherence and order that make social life one long ceremonial, the intense warmth of personal relationships and the passionate energy of the religious life, all these reveal the nativity of their Africaness. But if the social structure is carefully reconstructed with a fondness that at least reveals, if it does not betray, the author's attachment to his social background is the suddenness of the final bolt that strikes it carefully prepared for the disastrous effect it is going to have, the cracks in the edifice where the falling apart begins being carefully shown up. Achebe's literary talents are revealed in his use of English language, his skill in choosing the right words to convey his ideas. His keen sense of what is in character and what is not, his instinct for appropriate metaphor and symbol and his ability to present a thoroughly African terms. The Africaness in his writings is not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth, value, beauty along with poetry and above all, it has its own dignity.

### **Key-Words**

Chinua Achebe, Society, Africaness, Language, Culture, Racism.

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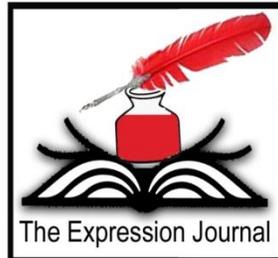
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African literature has been defined in many terms by various critics whether it means the bulk writing produced by those living in the continent irrespective of race, creed and nationality or whether it relates to the work of writers of black origin only. In the final analysis African literature represents the writings of African nationals living in African soil reflecting the African native sensibility and atmosphere. The value of African literature lies in its Africaness retained in its cosmopolitan origin. This is the characteristic feature of African literature and the lack of written medium is balanced by Africa's rich legacy of oral literature. The literature of Africa in primitive times began with Oral tradition. Telling stories and singing songs are amongst the oldest forms of literary activity and have existed in human societies. This body of literature, which was oral, had functional role to play and was used on social occasions like birth, wedding and death since most of such societies did not have a script or system of writing down their languages.

European influence was the most pronounced in southern Africa comprising of Sesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The first language which came under the European influence was Sesotho whose first Major writers are Segoete, and Mangoela both of whom drew heavily on folk literature and folk poetry. The last to be drawn to the tradition was the Zulu language.

In the western Africa, Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa language from Nigeria and Twi, Ewe and Fanti language from Ghana were considered as important languages. Hausa language

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which is spoken in the northern parts of Nigeria came under the influence of Arabic language around eighteenth century. Ibo was the last major Nigerian language to be drawn into the orbit of written creative literature and the first important Ibo writer was Pita Nwana who's short novel *Omenuko* was published in 1935.

Written literature in Eastern Africa had existed since the eighteen century when verses were composed on Swahili language, a language spoken in the coastal regions of Uganda. In the Central Africa literary attempts were made in Nyanja language only in early fifties. However with the coming of Europeans and their system of education, everything in African societies including the socio-economic as well as cultural aspects of their lives was completely disrupted. Urbanization, shift to a market oriented economy and emphasis on literacy led to the emergence of a new genre of literature which was alien to African soil. This new genre was called the novel unlike storytelling, verse – reciting or play – acting, novel reading cannot be associated with any community – oriented activity since it is not possible to narrate it, or act it or recite it. Novel as a literary form is a typical product of a society in which the emphasis is not on community oriented cultural activities but on those activities, which can be enjoyed by an individual in isolation within four walls of the room.

Major South African writers include Nobel Prize winning Nadine Gordimer and Alex La Guma Ezekiel Mphahlele, novelists who have made a deliberate effort to rise above the colour bar by adopting a political philosophy which believes in the equality of all South Africans. West African novels are centered primarily on the clan or tribe. In the cases of the East, Central or Southern Africa on the other hand since the struggle for freedom was bitter and violent. It is amply reflected in their novels.

Novel is a literary import from Europe. The Africans have adopted it to serve their artistic needs. Since the oral story is the dominant form of literary expression in Africa a number of West African novelists have very skillfully made use of that form while writing novels. Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutola, and Cyprian Ekwensi, are some of the prominent novelist. Other writer like Ben Okri has been awarded the booker Prize for his *Famished Road*. He uses the Yoruba myth of children who are willing to be born to survey and critically evaluate the whole gamut of contemporary Nigerian life and its history also Wole Soyinka who won the noble prize for literature few years ago and who is primarily a poet and a play Wright, has also written a few novels. Chinua Achebe is the best-known novelist not only from Nigeria but from the entire continent of Africa. He is perhaps the first African writer whose books have been prescribed as a part of the Curriculum in Africa, although his earlier writings were definitely aimed at foreign audiences in Europe and America. As the first black novelist from Africa not only has he got an appreciative global readership but also an acclaim which is richly deserved. He is now not only one of the most widely translated Novelists in the world but is also one of the most universally respected once too.

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Achebe was born in Ogidi Onitsha on the banks of river Niger in 1930. His father was a missionary, one of the earliest Ibos to take that profession. By the time Achebe went to school major changes due to intervention of Colonialism had already taken place and were a reality. His school education was at Umuahia Government School. After having been selected for medicine and after spending a year in that course, Achebe strayed back to University College of Ibadan to take a graduate degree in Humanities. This brought him in close contact with European culture and particularly the European literary traditions.

However when Achebe began to write in the later part of the fifties, he was quite conscious of the fact that he was writing about a part of world with which his foreign readers in European and American world be quite unfamiliar while analyzing the details of societies and assessing their cultural worth which were strange to the modern world. Achebe evokes a value, which goes beyond the narrow confines of space and time.

Like his other fellow African writers Achebe too finds himself in a unique situation as an interpreter of a society whose traditions have been disrupted by the intervention of colonialism. His novels therefore reflect on the changes in Ibo society in particular and Nigerian life in genius as a result of what he calls as change encounter between Europe and Africa during the colonial period.

Chinua Achebe's first three novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964) – which may also be read as a trilogy of related themes, as all are about societies and persons which were divided between past and present, between the old and new world and between Europe and Africa. All the three novels are about the people of the two worlds who were bewildered by both the scale and the suddenness of these change while attempting to come to terms with them they met their tragic ends.

Each of Achebe's novels shed light on a different era in the recent history of Nigeria. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is set in a traditional Ibo village community at the turn of the century when the first European missionaries and administrative officials were beginning to penetrate inland. In *Arrow of God* (1964) the action takes place in a similar environment about twenty-five years later, the major difference being that the missionaries and district officers have by this time become quite firmly entrenched. Achebe switches to an urban scene in *No Longer at Ease* (1960) in order to present a picture of the life of an educated Nigerian in the late nineteen-fifties. He brings the historical record right up to contemporary times in *A Man of the People* (1966), a devastating political satire that ends with a military coup. Achebe's novels read like chapters in a biography of his people and his nation since the coming of the white man.

*No longer at ease* (1960) Achebe turned to the last phase of the colonial regime describing with his usual poise and insight into the tragic predicament of the young African idealist. His foreign education has converted him to modern standards of normal judgment without alleviating the inner and outer pressures of traditional past. The catastrophe

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derives from the here's inability to make his choice. It is a drama of a bungled destiny in a bewildering time of rapid culture.

*Arrow of God (1964)* reverted to the past once more. As the high priest of the village deity the central character Ezeulu is the tribal intellectual who sees the weakness of the traditional outlook, and senses the need for change. His mental alertness and consequent skepticism lay him open to the charge of betraying his own people. It is essentially a novel of conflict. Ezeulu himself is at the center of all the various conflicts.

*Arrow of God* is set in rural Nigeria during the 1920s in a southern part of the country where the Igbo people reside. The novel begins with a war between two neighbouring regions of rural Igboland: Umuaro and Okperi. Umuaro is made up of six villages. These six villages are linked by their worship of a common God, Ulu.

*Things Fall Apart* is divided into three parts and twenty-five chapters. The first part of the novel describes how Okonkwo was able to go up in life through sheer hard work although his father had the reputation of being both physically weak and lazy. It also describes the circumstances under which a boy from one of the neighbouring villages comes to Umuofia and is assigned to stay in Okonkwo's house. It also describes how Ikemefuna was finally killed by the villagers of Umuofia as a revenge for one of their own women having been killed by a person from the villages to which Ikemefuna belonged. The closing chapter of part one also describes how Okonkwo had to flee from his village and clan because he had killed a boy from the village accidentally. Part two of the novel describes primarily Okonkwo's life in Mbanta during his exile for seven years. It also describes how during those years the white man – first the missionaries and later the administrators had come and entrenched themselves in Umuofia and its neighbouring village.

Great works indeed can never go in vain, thus Chinua Achebe's contribution to literary development has attracted applause from all nooks and crannies of the world. Therefore it is on the basis of hard work and determination that Achebe earned an indelible reputation, which Socrates describes as most expensive jewel one can possibly process. In appreciation of his tremendous achievements, thirty different universities across the globe conferred him with honorary doctorate degrees some of which include Harvard, Dartmouth, Southampton and university of Toronto etc.

Achebe is gifted with an extraordinary sense of history; he views the transformation of popular life. He portrays the human dimension of history by showing how important historical changes affect everyday life, the effect of socio-cultural and political changes upon the people who react immediately and violently to them, often without understanding their causes. No doubt Chinua Achebe is Africa's rare gift to the world and Nigeria should be glad that this giant emerged from its loins. His novels to date form a continuum of time over some one hundred years of Igbo civilization.

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