

## The Kaleidoscopic Study of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*.

**A. Suresh, Assistant Professor of English, Vivekananda College, (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli), Agasteeswaram, Kanyakumari.**

**M. Sivakami, Research Scholar, Pioneer Kumaraswamy College, (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli), Nagercoil.**

### Abstract

Chinua Achebe is a reputed African novelist who has facilitated the world to understand the colonial and the post colonial condition of Africa especially Nigeria by focusing his attention on the African customs, traditions, rituals and practices. His works mainly focus on the socio-political conditions, exposing the corrupt practices and the African's desire for western lifestyle. The novel *No Longer at Ease* is a powerful novel that truthfully depicts the impact of colonialism on the African society which has caused both positive and negative effects. The degradation of cultural and ethical values has ruined the African social system. The indigenous people are attracted by the fashionable and comfortable life of the colonizers. Earlier, African tribes had no proper educational system and structure and hence, they were not exposed to the scientific advancements and the benefits of science and education but later the colonizers provided them with education and in the present day the African community has occupied respectable position in the world arena.

**Key words:** colonial encounter, cultural degradation, education, slavery, clan differences, alcoholism, violence, conversion of religion.

Colonial encounter is a wide spread cross cultural process having far-reaching effects on the economy and political organization of pre-historic and historically documented societies in both old and new worlds. It has also created a profound impact on the cultural identities of all the

ethnic groups involved. In addition, it forms the part of the broader phenomenon of culture contact or inter-regional interaction. Generally, it pictures the plight of the colonized of the world whose sufferance is due to slavery, suppression and colour prejudice. Ravichandra states, “Colonialism as a mass experience of history, engages the creative attention of Achebe. He explores the political, social, cultural and human dimensions of the colonial phenomenon and portrays the transformation of popular life in the wake of those rapid and radical changes”( 68 ).

Achebe’s second novel *No Longer at Ease* (1960) is a sequel of *Things Fall Apart* (1958). *No Longer at Ease* is set in Nigeria on the verge of political independence. Westernization imposed by the colonial rulers has spread far and wide and the African society in brief is shown to be at the cross roads of culture. Achebe depicts the ambiguity, indecisiveness, dichotomy of values and moral chaos that characterize the colonial African society and focuses on the plight of an educated youth caught in the whirlpool of contradictions and complexities. Devi assumes, “Achebe thus presents the conflict between the individual and the society and its consequences in a pre-colonial society in a neutral fashion without taking sides either with the individual or with the society”(38). Achebe has accused the western imperial power for disfiguring the African culture and at the same time, he praises the colonizers for providing education that has helped the natives to overthrow the supernatural beliefs. The Africans have led the traditional life being governed by the elders. The foreign power in order to loot the wealth of Africa, has exploited the culture and tradition of the native tribes and ultimately it has brought them under its rule.

The power of the West exercised on the Africans is quite evident in Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*. The indigenous has blindly followed the foot prints of the colonizers. Colonialism has sowed the seed of dominance by capturing European posts in Africa so that they may help the particular ethnic community to hold supremacy over other tribal groups. The president of the Umuofia Progressive Union in a public meeting says, “Many towns have four or five or even ten of their sons in European in this city. Umuofia has only one. And now our enemies say that even that one is too many for us”(NLE 5). As the Africans have imbibed the qualities of the colonizers, they have started discriminating away themselves to overpower one another.

The colonizers who were able to land on the shores of Africa, they have were able to rule the Africans by means of their knowledge acquired through learning. The natives strongly believed that mastering the foreign language above could bring them all the comforts life. Obi Okankwo, a Christian convert has gone after western education and promise for he is determined to join the Senior Civil Service. Achebe exposes the colonial mentality of native Africans through Obi.

King's perception and personal understanding of the African society finds an echo in the character of Obi. He opines, "A noticeable feature of African Literature just before and after independence is the clash of generations. The old are usually corrupt, traditionalists, poorly educated and pawns of the colonizers. The young, more western in education and style of living are progressive and sympathetic to the poor"(62). The moral values in colonial Africa have declined mainly due to the arrival of the West. Obi indulges in premarital sex relationship with Clara which is considered as a sin by the African tribal communities. Obi forgets his responsibilities to serve his African society but concentrates only on his love affair with Clara. His relationship with Clara has ended in her pregnancy but she aborts it. The moral values have degraded rapidly for the natives have got accustomed to the order and fashion of the European society.

The British colonization has forced the conversion of the natives to Christianity brushing aside the value of their religion, household Gods and rituals. The Umuofian tribes have largely converted themselves into staunch Christians. Christianity, the prime product of colonialism has brought in tremendous changes in the thought and attitude of the Umuofians. The positive change is that they have ceased to kill and take revenge on other clans. Mr. Ikedi, a man from the township, advises the young Obi, "Umuofia would have required of you to fight in her wars and bring home human heads. But those were days of darkness from which we have been delivered by the blood of the Lamb of God. Today we send you to bring knowledge. Remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"(NLE 8). It cannot be completely assured that colonialism alone has led to turbulence and other forms of violence. It has also in some way helped the native people to get relieved from supernatural beliefs and violence. Achebe though a

converted Christian points out that Christianity failed in Africa as it could not drive away the rituals and marriage practices followed as social order of the Africans who considered the Osus as low. The English education and Christianity have created a positive impression in Obi for it facilitates him to fall in love with a girl of lower status. The narrator with social concern says, “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”(NLE 57). Repercussion of inter-clan marriage in the tribal society is depicted with realism. Obi’s wish to marry Clara who belongs to the low clan is not accepted by his parents. Colonialism has failed to reform such social evil despite converting the people to their religion.

The impact of colonialism has gradually made a drastic change in the lifestyle of the native Africans who have played their own vital role destroying African culture. The influence of colonialism has not only affected the men but also the women. The native have got addicted to alcoholism considering it to be a symbol of status and fashion of the high class society. Achebe brings out Obi’s observation of a woman in a ball who has not danced the last number. She has said to the man who asks her, “No petrol, no fire, which clearly meant no beer, no dance”(NLE 90). Dancing breast to breast is a pastime for the Europeans who consider it to be a dance performed by the elite society. This has wrongly motivated the educated Nigerians to opt for western dance which is not a part of African culture. The young Nigerians differ in taste and manner from the old orthodox natives. They leave behind the traditional customs and they are interested in imitating the West by performing western dance which has an ultimate motif of inciting sexual urge in the opposite gender. Achebe regrets, “They held their woman close, breast to breast and groin to groin, so that the dance could flow uninterrupted from one to the other and back again”(NLE 89-90). Cultural anarchy is a serious issue caused by colonialism. The Africans have lost their food-style, traditional arts and social system through which the European countries are highly benefitted till date.

Achebe though being an African statesman, he stands neutral in discussing the merits and demerits of colonialism. Though he is intolerant of his motherland being enslaved by the

imperial powers, he candidly admits the benefits received by the Africans due to colonialism. As he has highlighted colonialism leads to exploitation in various ways causing terrible damage to the society. Though Africa is enjoying liberty, the continent still is unable to evade the lifestyle and practices imposed on them by the colonizers. Achebe advocates that education is the only weapon that could root out the social evils from the society and make them raise as empowered individuals and their country as the elite society.

### Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *No Longer at Ease*. London: Penguin, 1960. Print.

Devi, Rama N. "Pre- and Post-Colonial Society in Achebe's Novels". *African Literature Today*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige, 1994, 36-42. Print.

King, Bruce. "Nigeria I: The Beginnings and Achebe". *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World*. London: Macmillan, 1980. 58-77. Print.

Ravichandra, C. Vijayasree. "A Journey Through History: A Study of Chinua Achebe's Fiction". *Commonwealth Fiction*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Classical. 1998. 226-37. Print.

