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Conflict of Caste and Culture in the Writings of Chinua Achebe

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Abstract

This research paper emphasizes the study of Chinua Achebe's writings in point of view of the conflict of caste and culture. This research paper is a sincere attempt to examine Achebe's inspiration for crafting stories that talks about the prominent changes took place in African societies persuaded by colonization. At the same time this paper explores the major conflicts viz. caste and culture in his major novels and stories. Through the writings of Achebe, we can have the exploration of African culture and its people. Probably it is Chinua Achebe is the first African writers who brought the lives of the African people on the panorama of the world through his writings. Key words: conflict, caste, culture, prominent, colonization

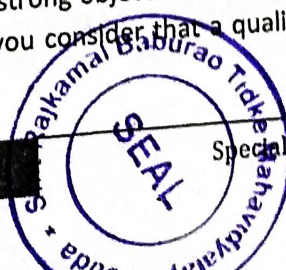
Chinua Achebe globally acclaimed writer of African colonial, pre-colonial and post-colonial history and realities. He has given a better and realistic and understanding of Africa's rich and dynamic Igbo ancestry, in south eastern Nigeria. He presents before the readers a complex and sympathetic portrait of traditional village culture in Africa. He is not only trying to inform the outside world about the rich Igbo culture but also to remind his own people of their past and to admit that it contains a lot of value and importance. In 'Marriage is a Private Affair' we find the tussle between a father and a son. In this heart touching story there are three characters; Okeke the father Nnaemeka the son and Nene Nnaemeka's wife.

The reason of the tussle or quarrel between son and father is Nene who belonged to a different culture, caste and religion. Nnaemeka belonged to Igbo tribe while Nene was a Christian and she had a different culture. Moreover, she was a teacher. Therefore, Okeke Nnaemeka's father takes a strong objection. He said, "teacher did you say? If you consider that a qualification for a good

wife, I should like to point out to you, Nnaemeka, that no Christian woman should teach. St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians says that women should keep silence."

Chinua Achebe (of Nigeria) is represented by his early three novels only, *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. In these three books, the conflicts are basically cultural. In addition, Achebe has dealt with other minor conflicts, such as religion, politics, education, individual and collective conflicts, war, and tribal conflicts. All these elements are carefully handled through characterizations, themes and language. We also find the conflict of caste in the writings of Chinua Achebe.

If we read the story 'Marriage is a Private Affair' we find that Okeke the father of Nnaemeka does not accept Nene as his daughter-in-law because she did not belong to his caste. Okeke wanted his daughter-in-law of his tribe or caste. He had already selected Ugoye Nweke as his daughter-in-law. But his son Nnaemeka had already been married with Nene Atang without informing his father. Nnaemeka knew very well that his father



would not permit him to marry a girl who did not belong to his caste, culture and religion. Okeke was a purely traditional and orthodox person. He never expected that his son, Nnaemeka would marry secretly with a girl who was not of his tribe and caste. On these issues both the father and the son quarreled. From that day the father decided never to see the faces of his son and daughter-in-law.

No Longer at Ease is, to some degree, sequel to *Things Fall Apart* for it deals with Obi, the grandson of Okonkwo. However, this time the setting is wider than that of 'Things Fall Apart' since the story oscillates between the contrasting modes of village and urban life. *Arrow of God* is set in Iboland during the period of colonial entrenchment in Eastern Nigeria. The novel is concerned mainly with the deadly struggle of Ezeulu, who strives to preserve his authority as spiritual leader against rival elements within his tribe and against the impending influence of colonial intrusion, both missionaries and political officers. Ezeulu, man of ripe maturity and experience, dignity, command and pride, and above all, a man of intelligence, accepts and believes strongly in the inevitability of change.

Thus, as matter of strategy, he sends one of his sons, Oduche, to the mission school "to be his eyes and ears," and in particular to learn the secret of the white man's power. Nonetheless, the strategy fails. Oduche becomes zealous Christian who even goes so far as to defy the village customs by attempting to kill the sacred Royal Python, sacrilege which endangers the safety of the six villages. Through basically intra-cultural conflict, Ezeulu's pride, stubbornness and hostility towards the white administration combined with his refusal to eat the 'sacred yam' end up by loss of his religious status as Chief Priest of Umuaro. Like many African writers Achebe did not escape at all the sweeping impact of colonization upon his psychology and the formation of his personality. He himself confessed that: "Today things have changed a lot, but it would be foolish to pretend that we have fully recovered from the traumatic effects of our first confrontation with Europe."

Achebe's commitment included the need to prove to the West that Africa was never devoid of

culture or cultural values. Moreover, he pointed out that the African writer should be a "cultural nationalist," aware of his social responsibility to explain the traditions and African history and values of his people to that hostile alien world. He should instill in his people new energy, new dynamism and new consciousness. 'Things Fall Apart', 'No Longer at Ease' and 'Arrow of God' are primarily based upon the conflicts of cultures which have directly or indirectly shaped their themes, plot, characterization, language and structure. Some of these conflicts of cultures are embodied in the novels' moral, social, religious, tribal, problems, whether collective or personal.

Through the writings of Achebe we can have the exploration of African culture and its people. Probably it is Chinua Achebe is the first African writer who brought the lives of the African people on the panorama of the world through his writings. He is also considered as one of the remarkable and high-ranking African authors due to revolutionary work in post-colonial literature and his politically conscious writings that offered the world with the view of colonial understanding from the perception of the colonized. He presents before the readers a complex and sympathetic portrait of traditional village culture in Africa. He is not only trying to inform the outside world about the rich Igbo culture but also to remind his own people of their past and to admit that it contains a lot of value and importance. Chinua Achebe influenced the whole world by his writings. It is said that literature never grows old. Some things remain immortal. So, his novels like *Things Fall Apart* never becomes old. It is still read with the same fervor and taste.

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