

A psychological analysis of Novels and Short Stories written by Chinua Achebe

Dr. Rajive Kumar Ranjan

Assistant Teacher

Gov. of Bihar

Abstract: *Chinua Achebe is known for his novels but he has also written some short stories. He has influenced many young authors of Africa and like his novels his short stories are also a mirror of society. Stories like Dead men's path asserts the questions related with individuality and traditional beliefs. The cultural insights of Africa can be seen in most of his short stories. He writes about traditional beliefs of people and we can also see that in most of his writings there is some kind of optimism. Such optimism reflects a general theme that the colonizers have successfully changed the thought process of the natives. In Civil Peace we can see the results of the Nigerian Civil War. Jonathan Iwegbu is one of the most important character in this story. There are some historical references in the short stories written by Achebe. Vengeful Creditor is the kind of short story which is very interesting. It talks about free education and its effects. Here a wealthy woman finds herself in problem because of free education. Her servants leave her because they want to be educated. It also talks about the social gap which is widespread in Nigeria. We can see that most of the times Achebe writes about African tradition. Themes of colonialism, racial segregation are common in his novels but even in his short stories we can find traces of such themes. He experiments with the traditional values of his society and there is an insight of development in his writings. There is an assertion that black men are not weak but they also have their own history and individuality. There are varieties of characters in his short stories and almost all of them are interesting. Achebe has successfully presented the psychological advancements of black natives.*

Keywords- *psychology, individuality, sins, follies, racism, colony*

Chinua Achebe is a Nigerian writer who is known best for his novels. In modern African literature his books are widely read and circulated. The present article intends to project a psychological analysis of his short stories. One of the chief features of his writings is that his short stories and novels are connected through the thread of a common culture. He has written mostly about African culture and tried to show the world that in terms of culture Africa equally stands with other countries on the world platform. In *Dead Men's Path* the author has presented a beautiful story where a young man is appointed as a headmaster of a school. In the village of Ndume the protagonist Michael Obi takes the charge of headmaster of a secondary school. He is young and dynamic and he plans to reform the education system of his school by his new ideas. He makes new and advanced methods of teaching. By doing so he intends to change the superstitious beliefs of the villagers. There he also tries to strengthen the new religious missions so that the whole area can develop. His methods and standards of teaching are high enough to attract the students and the villagers but he fails at last. His experiment with the traditional form of teaching goes unsupported and unnoticed. One evening he finds a woman from the village cutting across the garden of the school. Her trespassing makes him furious and he orders the footpath closed with wires. That footpath was considered sacred and ancestral as it connected the cemetery with the village shrine. This decision of Obi is considered as offensive by the villagers as they think that the dead ancestors of the villagers have been insulted by the action of the headmaster. Finally Obi is fired from his job. This story clearly projects the superstitious beliefs of African people. They have accepted such beliefs which are illogical. Obi wants to change their belief system but he himself loses his job and is dismissed from his position. The hopes and dreams which Obi has seen for the villagers are shattered and he himself feels helpless. Obi is a born hero as he is dynamic and he has new ideas in his mind to develop his school but he is considered as an anti-hero by the villagers. It is very interesting to find an organic structure in the writings of Chinua Achebe. He has also written novels like Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease, Arrow Of God and A Man Of The People. We have already seen that there is a connection between his short stories and novels. They are written to show the African identity. Achebe has beautifully written about the culture of Africa in both his novels and short stories. In *civil peace* the author writes about the Nigerian Civil war and its effects. In this story Jonathan Iwegbu is a character who considers himself lucky because he has survived in the civil war. He is a hard working man and as the war is over he uses his bicycle as a mode of earning. He starts taxi service and supplies food to the soldiers. His family also supports him by picking fruits or cooking food. Jonathan worked earlier in a coal mine but because of war it was closed and yet not reopened. So he chooses to support his family by an alternate business of supplying food to the soldiers. One day he turns over the rebel currency and as a result he is given a reward of twenty pounds. He feels scared that he might be robbed. He remembers a theft which has occurred earlier where a man broke into the public. He feels insecure because of the prevailing conditions in the society. His fears came true when a group of robbers knocked at his door in that night. They demanded money from Jonathan so that they could be left harmless. Jonathan was compelled to give the rewarded money to them and thus he succeeded in securing his own and the other family member's life. It reflects the civil unrest of Africa during that time. Africa has been often pictured as the land of barbarians who are black. They do not know mercy and they are uncivilized. This account of Africa has been given by several white authors who believed in the ideas like racism or segregation. In the novel Heart of Darkness Joseph Conrad has given an account of Africa as-

"[Marlow]: "Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with

violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it's the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea".¹

Marlowe says that Africans are brutal and they need to be tamed by the same force of brutality. No doubt Africa is considered as a dark continent but one should also notice the stark reality behind it. In response to this charge of Conrad the author Chinua Achebe has said in “**An image of Africa: racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness**”² that Conrad has a racist view for Africa. The continent has not been presented by Conrad in a true form. Whereas Conrad fears from the barbarians and emphasizes over the white man’s burden to civilize the uncivilized. A quotation from the novel Heart of Darkness is worth mentioning here. He says-

“It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams...No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence--that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream-alone..”³

In the story *Civil Peace* Jonathan keeps on saying that there is nothing in the world which can puzzle God. He seems to be more calm and optimistic in life. Achebe has tried to show us that we should always look forward in life. Jonathan was robbed but it is also a fact that there was a civil unrest in that society. During the conditions of war rampant corruption and illegal activities becomes a prominent feature in any society. The author Achebe has tried to show us a kind of psychological insight of the characters as well as the society. Jonathan fears that he might be robbed as he recalls an earlier incident of a man broking into a house. It clearly reflects that it was a general sense of insecurity which comes into the mind of Jonathan. In reality he is robbed and it seems that he was mentally prepared for such incident. *Vengeful Creditor* is a kind of story which talks about the effects of education. This story has some comic elements and it is very interesting to find the decree associated with misconceived government. This story also talks about class struggle. The upper class society of Nigeria has been presented through Mr. and Mrs. Emenike. Their servants are uneducated and they also belong to the downtrodden society. The government decision and a bill which is about free education is a burning issue in the society. The uneducated people want to be educated by this scheme of the government. It leads to the mass dissatisfaction of the working class people who are poor. Mr. Emenike and other higher class people face a lot of problem by this decision of the government. They are shown in a cabinet meeting and finally it is decided that everybody will have to pay. This servant problem becomes a very crucial problem for the Emenikes. To solve this problem they ask a village woman namely Martha if she can send her daughter Vero to them as they require a baby nurse. A handsome sum of five pounds per year is offered to her. Now the readers come across the life of Martha who has led an unhappy life. She was not illiterate but she was also educated under a program of education for the girls of Africa. However Martha was persuaded by the woman in charge of her school to marry a carpenter. Martha suffered a lot because it was an unhealthy marriage. She was left as a widow who was overburdened with several children. However the free education decree was withdrawn and it left children like Vero back to their sad lives. Mr. Emenike makes a statement in front of Martha that education was not important to become great in life. Martha understands the future of an uneducated individual. She also knows that he wants to patronize her. Mr Emenike says that Vero is only ten years of age and she will get ample time later in life to be educated and in response to this Martha says him that she will hardly get any chance in life to be educated. This story is humorous but ironical. In *The Voter* we can find various themes like guilt, loyalty, greed, corruption and power. This story has a third person narrative technique and its narrator is unnamed. Marcus is a politician in this story and he compares his life with the residents of Umofia. He is happy in his new home as it has the facility of running water. It seems that he has made his fortune out of corruption. Some of the local elders are bribed by Roof to vote for Marcus. The people are unaware that why they should give their valuable votes to Marcus. The local elders are unaware of the power of voting. They are not able enough to decide that they should vote for the development of their community. They are concerned only to receive payments from Marcus for their votes. This story also has a theme of loyalty and it has been already mentioned above. The local elders are loyal enough to vote for Marcus as he is going to pay them for their loyalty. It is very interesting to see that Roof also accepts a bribe for his voting rights from Maduka. At the end we can see that Roof shows his loyalty to Maduka who has offered him a bribe. It is very ironical that Roof has bribed the local elders to vote for Marcus whereas he himself is not loyal to Marcus. Roof is working on behalf of Marcus but he himself is not trustworthy. It is not simply about loyalty but disloyalty also. It seems that he has a false persona of loyalty. Although Roof feels guilty over his decision to vote for Maduka but now he cannot change his mind. At the climax of the story we can find that Roof finds an alternative to satisfy his loyalty for Maduka as well as Marcus. He tears his ballot paper in two parts and places each half in separate ballot boxes. He has shown loyalty to both of his masters by spoiling his vote. Achebe here tries to show us the psychological state of human mind which always searches alternatives in life. In other short story *The Madman* we can again find out several themes like identity, determination, perception, appearance, conflict and struggle. This story also has a third person narrative technique and in this story we again have an unnamed narrator. Here Nwibe has been shown as a character who wants to visit a market of Eke. Although there is a local market but still he prefers to visit Eke. For this purpose he goes through the struggle of two days journey. The market of Eke is bigger than the local market and this is one of the reasons that it attracts the protagonist. In this short story Chinua Achebe has also tried to focus on the role of hierarchy which is very crucial for any individual. The protagonist of the story Nwibe wants to be respected in the society as he is wealthy and rich. For this reason he wants to join the membership of the hierarchy in the village. It is very important to see here that he wants to satisfy his own proud and this is because he values hierarchy. To the characters like Nwibe appearance plays a very important role in life. He is successful and wealthy that is why he thinks that he is also a prominent member of the society. He is careful to know that what others think about him. He is bothered about himself. He loves his own praises and thus judges things on their face value. There is always a conflict between his two wives. As the plot of the story advances it becomes more ironical. It becomes crystal clear that although Nwibe is rich and successful but he is not seen with higher esteem by the people. He is ignored by the society so the reality is exact opposite of what he thinks. When Nwibe comes from the market then he faces a lot of problem as his two wives are not in good terms with each other. There is some internal conflict between them. It is also very hard to believe by the people that Nwibe was robbed by a lunatic man in the journey. People think that Nwibe is himself a mad man. The views of people changes and he is considered no more as a successful businessman but he is looked as a mad man. It is very

noteworthy to see that the behavior of Nwibe also changes. He feels alienated, repressed and lonely. His plan to join the village hierarchy fails. He is considered unfit by the villagers and this is very ironical. The climax of the story is very interesting. It is declared that Nwibe is not a mad man but because of misunderstanding he is compelled to suffer. His aspirations and future prospects of advancements are ruined. Thus we can see that Chinua Achebe is a kind of writer who writes on several themes. He understands the true human psychology and he values tradition and culture. In his novels we can feel the different horizons of identity, tradition and culture. His short stories are embedded with several images of society. Thus we can also say that he is preoccupied by the human affairs which govern a society. We can also see that he is conscious about human follies and sins. His fictions have some sense of realism in it. He views society with different angles and this is one of the reasons that he has a critical insight. He cannot see things as it is. We have seen earlier that he has accused writers like Joseph Conrad as a bloody racist. For writers like Achebe it has been said by different critics that he always looked for perfection. This perfection can be seen in both his short stories as well as novels. He brings his characters from his rich sources of experience. In the novel **Things Fall Apart** Achebe talks about the Igbo society of Nigeria that because of the internal weakness and colony rule of British Empire the Umofian community is not able to resist the transformation and change which will ultimately lead to destruction and complete anarchy. The African culture and traditional values was going to fall apart. The African society which has been often considered as primitive, old is viewed by the author as vibrant and composite. European writers have presented Africa as a dark continent. In **Things Fall Apart** the author has tried to show us the clash on different Issue between new and old order. This clash can also be seen in terms of cultural differences. We can see in the novel that after the arrival of white men things start falling apart. These things are nothing but the traditional values of the society. The attitude of white men towards the society clearly reflects that the culture of the African society was unsatisfactory and ugly. This novel is a witness of the reality of people which brings change. This change is an end for the Ibo people. The native villagers cannot accept this change so easily and thus they are in a state of dilemma. This was one of the ill effects of colonialism. It clearly shows that Christianity was intriguing with the lives of native people.

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