

**EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN THE NOVELS OF  
CHINUA ACHEBE**

**S.BHARANISRI**

**11PE01**

**A thesis submitted to  
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education  
for Women - Deemed University, Coimbatore  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master's Degree in English.**

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, the literary giant from Nigeria was born in 1930 and is widely hailed as the father of African literature. He was one of the most noted novelists that Africa produced and had written some groundbreaking works. His works bring out to the world the clash between native African culture, the traditional white culture of missionaries and the colonial government in Nigeria. Chinua Achebe has won several awards over the course of his writing career; among them were the Man Booker International Prize (2007) and the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize (2010). He has also received honorary degrees from more than thirty universities around the world. His demise on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013 is an immeasurable loss to Nigeria in particular and to the world literature at large.

G. D Killam in his “Book Reviews” quotes C.L. Innes who opines that Chinua Achebe being one of the modern exponents of the African novel is considered “Africa’s most widely read novelist and the first to be taken seriously by both Americans and European readers” (155) and C.L. Innes in “Book Reviews” quotes Kate Turkington who is of the opinion that “Achebe is at once innovative and yet is firmly in the main stream of the traditional English Novel” (119).

Achebe’s novels communicate something of significance and lasting value; to tell a story, which captures the history of a whole generation, of a nation, at the same time as telling the story of a particular individual. The genuine artist causes the readers to reflect on our own lives, on the lives of our nations and the history of humankind as the novels are read about individual characters in a novel. The motif popularly felt through his works

squarely addresses the issue of traditional ways of life coming into conflict with new, often colonial points of view. His style proved to be creatively fertile and equally productive. Most novels stand tall among contemporary works and had become a seminal post-colonial African works. In recognition of his stature during his halcyon times it is no surprise that he was being called the ‘patriarch of the African novel.’ Achebe portrays the plight of the individual in a world characterized by uncertainty, pain and violence.

G. D. Killam in his book *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* states that Achebe’s novels offer “a vision of life which is essentially tragic, compounded of success and failure, informed by knowledge and understanding, relieved by humour and tempered by sympathy imbued with an awareness of human suffering and the human capacity to endure” (104). In the words of R. K. Dhawan in his work *Commonwealth Fiction* “Achebe has been the first Nigerian writer to transmute successfully the conventions of the Novel, a European art form, into African literature and to use ‘African things’ and employ certain native techniques of narration to give authenticity and African flavor to his novels in order to attract the native audience and overseas readers as well (24).

Achebe demonstrates his preoccupation with language not simply as a communicative device but as a total cultural experience in his novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Ant Hills of the Savannah* (1987). He seizes upon the perpetual values represented by an alien European culture and its language, then exploits these criteria to portray external conflicts between African and white colonialist or to project the internal crises of African society. *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* showed the clash between Igbo and the

British in Nigeria; the first from the perspective of a Nigerian father and in the second novel from the perspective of his European educated son.

Different areas of human experience and different configuration of thought and feeling have been emphasized by Chinua Achebe. He links the ethnological implications of language to perceptual conflicts between African and western cultures. The novelist analyses the role of the individuals in traditional Igbo society as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Achebe throws light on the problems faced in Nigeria where corruption and abuse of power is dominating in a way that was unheard of in the traditional societies of Umuofia and Umuaro. In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe links the past to the present and consider changes in the exercise of power by the individual, why these changes took place and what the consequences has been for the community and society as a whole. The writer narrates the role of the individuals in relation to power. The interest of Achebe lies in exploring the depths of human condition. Therefore his concern is with individuals whose fears, hopes and passions are permanent in mankind. In all his novels, he establishes not only the character but also the ethical and moral basis of the life of the clan.

There are three sections in *Things Fall Apart*. The first and most important is set in Umuofia before the coming of the white man. Achebe explains that personal achievements and piety are the basic qualifications that anyone who calls himself a man in Umuofia must possess. Piety as it is used in Umuofia does not just mean reverence for God or devout fulfillment of religious obligations; its meaning includes 'dutiful respect or regard for parents, homeland, and elders who represent the deceased ancestors. The second part dramatizes the protagonist Okonkwo's banishment to Mbanta, the village of his mother's people, for sins committed against the earth goddess, and describes mostly through reports,

the coming of the white man to the new villages and the establishment of an alien church, government and trading system and gradual encroachment of these on the traditional patterns of tribal life. The third section, which is the shortest, brings the novel swiftly to a close, dramatizing the death of the old ways and the death of Okonkwo. He is an achiever who also shows signs of piety. Therefore he deserves anything but the contemptible death by suicide which leads to his being buried like a dog. His case is a proof of the maxim that 'character is fate'.

The main action of the novel *No Longer at Ease* begins with Obi Okonkwo who returns from England where he completes his B.A. Degree. On his return to Nigeria he discovers that the present corrupt reality is marked by a variance with the idealistic picture he had harboured during his student days, and disillusionment quickly sets in. Although he initially scorns the moves of the new elite into whose ranks his new job automatically propels him, he soon discovers that it is not so easy to be different. He also has to acquire the artifacts, which are the symbols of success of modern Nigeria, but at the same time traditional society continues to make demands and exert pressures on him, which he is not able to resist. In the end, battered by financial and emotional problems, gives up his principles. He abandons his osu girlfriend, Clara descends into bribery and is imprisoned. Obi's enthusiasm becomes eroded by the temptations of privilege and the stresses of living in a decaying social system; he succumbs to a deep pessimism and acknowledges the inadequacy of his generation in providing answers to the complex dilemmas of modern Africa. Obi's professional, social and moral decline and subsequent alienation are thus recorded in the novel.

The conflicts in *Arrow of God* develop around the person, the Chief Priest of Ulu, Ezeulu who is the ritual and religious leader of Umuaro. On the one hand, there is the conflict between the local British administration represented by the old fashioned administrator, Winterbottom and the native authority represented by the Chief Priest Ezeulu, on the other hand, there are internal politics of the Umuaro and the conflict between the supporters of the Chief Priest and those of his rival Ezedemili. On yet another level the conflict takes place within the Chief Priest himself, a conflict between personal power, temptation to constitute himself into an 'arrow' of God and the exigencies of public responsibility. It is in his madness that all these desperate situations ultimately culminate.

The tragic heroes Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu are portrayed as caught up in the dynamics of human responsibility and destiny. Okonkwo's inflexibility comes in conflict with flexible nature of his society. His desire to assert individuality in a communalistic society is a major factor contributing to his fall. Obi is caught in an immediate post-colonial situation, which demands him to create a firm moral order out of the flux of values in which he lives. His dilemma is contained in the conflict between his developed intellectual insight and his lack of moral strength to sustain it. He is torn between two sets of values. Ezeulu is a victim of history. Tragedy results from Ezeulu's failure to realize that time, and his people would move ahead leaving him behind and his alienation from his own people becomes overt when he not only opposes Umuaro's decision to go to war with Okperi but also betrays his people by witnessing against them before the white man. These heroes conceived in tragic terms, are men in varying degrees conscious of the fact that life turns out to be less manageable and less perfect than they had expected; they react to life in various ways – with

courage, honesty with pessimism and cynicism in their attempts to get through life with honour and reward.

The present study explores the extent and degree to which existentialism has been absorbed by Achebe's literary consciousness and expressed in his novels. His works appear to be inherently existential in outlook. Analysis and interpretation of the novels of Chinua Achebe have been undertaken from the point of view of an existentialist.

Sartre, Camus, Jaspers, Marcel and Heidegger are other great exponents of Existentialism. Existentialism can be explored under these headings, philosophical, theological and literary. The nineteenth century thinkers Kierkegaard, a Dane and Nietzsche, a German are recognized as initiators of the movement. Chatterji in the book *Existentialism in American Literature* states that "Existentialism is a philosophy which is historically and culturally of European origin. It has become almost an international phenomenon of the modern times. As a philosophy its impact on literature has been both substantial and significant" (10). It is a post-war European phenomenon, which subsequently has become one of the modern intellectual trends.

According to Sartre, man is burdened with the terrible freedom and responsibility to make or create his own self and so an individual must face the anguish of conscious decision at every instant of life. Chatterji in the book *Existentialism in American Literature* quotes Sartre who asserts that there is universal human condition, "when the absurdity of life is fully recognized, the dread converted, the choice made and the responsibility assumed, existence is felt as a value in itself. Existentialism thus becomes an active way of life to be practiced and lived through effort and achievement" (81).

Chatterji makes a further statement that “Man’s quest of meaning is regarded by the existentialists as something which permeates his whole life that it has to do with living rather than with speaking” (27). In addition Satre declares, says Chatterji in the book *Existentialism in American Literature* that “every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity” (11). By the term subjectivity it is meant that man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. This is the foremost principle of Existentialism. According to him it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity. Chatterji quotes Muddler who is of the opinion that Existentialism is “an attempt to reaffirm the power of the self to deal with experience” (11). This experience finds it more or less adequate expression as the mind, the Ego, the I or the self.

In the book *Existentialism in American Literature*, Chatterji makes a mention that certain themes recur in existentialist literature such as a

man alienated from an absurd world, the individual estranged from society, the individuals isolation and subjectivity, his consequent feelings is anxiety, anguish, despair, nausea; the individual facing his own nothingness, or confronting his guilt; his struggle to distinguish between inauthentic and authentic selves; his assertion of personal freedom through irrevocable choice particularly in extreme actions limit situations and crisis situations; death consciousness and the need to define oneself against it; the victim hero, who creates his own values from within. (81-82)

Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edward in the book *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought* reiterates the words of Professor Barrett who writes that the

themes of existentialism are the alienation and strangeness of man in his world; the contradictoriness, feebleness and contingency of human existence, the central and overwhelming reality of time for man who has lost his anchorage in the eternal... The concept of protagonist who must freely choose, in loneliness and anguish, that course of action which is for him the authentic life and bear the full responsibility of his choice. (503-04)

The uniqueness and distinctiveness of the novels of Chinua Achebe lies in the philosophically specialized form of its quest for authentic selfhood and analysis of the human condition, which acquire psychological subtlety, metaphysical intensity and a sense of emotional urgency that are peculiarly modern.

The first chapter entitled Introduction introduces the African novelist, Chinua Achebe, whose fiction is a literary echo of general cultural reality. It deals with the meaning of existentialism, its exponents and its nature. It further proves how the novels *Things Fall Apart*, *No longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* present an externalized conflict between the individual protagonist and hostile society or a meaningless universe. The novels successfully exemplify the existentialist situations as the urgent predicament of man's being in the world. One can identify the problems of self-hood, identity, isolation, frustration, despair, feelings of anxiety, meaninglessness, futility, impotence, lack of freedom and contingency. It also describes the scope of the thesis.

Chapter two entitled Champion to Victim, deals with the dominating consciousness of the heroes remains persistently one of the existentialistic alienation in *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. The tragic heroes are subjected to the evil and hence are alienated. Their arrogance, pride, individualism, idealism, failure, self-assertion,

impulsive decisions and acts longing for order and justice, the misinterpretation and misjudgement of the clan alienate them from their family and the clan. Their moral alienation lead them to social alienation. Their feelings articulate the basic existentialist motives and recall vividly the experience of estrangement. They experience the existentialist agony of total isolation and alienation. To them both society and the entire human conditions are frustrating.

Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, Obi Okonkwo of *No Longer at Ease* and Ezeulu of *Arrow of God* are the heroes conceived in tragic terms who are men of varying degrees conscious of the fact that life turns out to be less manageable and less perfect than they had expected; they react to life in various ways. One can find an existential gulf between man and himself, man and others and man and the product of his labour, while surveying the theme of alienation in the novels of Chinua Achebe. Ultimately the Champion becomes a victim to his own beliefs, circumstances and society. The novels are demonstrative of a total corpus of experience and remain however in the confines of tragically isolated world of alienation, man from man, man from nature, man from God and man from himself.

The next chapter entitled Unconquered Agony deals with the frustration, anxiety, meaninglessness, anguish and despair as portrayed in the characters of Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu. In the face of threats the struggle of the protagonists is a hopeless one resulting in anger, anguish, despair and frustration. In the end of their life's journey there is no sense of satisfaction and reward. These protagonists are placed in existential situations when they are driven from one desperate state to another experiencing great anguish and agony which they never conquer.

In the chapter Conclusion recapitulates the findings of the earlier chapters, revealing how the experiences portrayed are of universal value. Achebe's intention is to explore the depths of human condition. As a writer he shows concern with the loss of human values and dignity, due to exploitation of man by man. He points out that the protagonists Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu are not destroyed because of their flaws but because they perform more than what is expected of them. They sacrifice their personal life to an exaggerated and even pathological sense of communal duty. His novels challenge the modern man to accept life freely and fearlessly for the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality.

Okonkwo's exile isolates him from all he has ever known in *Things Fall Apart*. The good name he had built for himself with his men is a thing of past. He must start anew. The thought overwhelms him and Okonkwo feels nothing but despair. His return to the village does nothing to lessen his feelings of alienation and loneliness. He grieves the loss of his tribe and the life he once knew. He is not able to overcome his sense of complete alienation. His death may have marked the passage of great era in Umuofia, but his suicide is not a sacrifice to his great society since his suicide is an abomination in Igbo society. His death comes because he realizes that he has failed both the people and their goddess, Ani. Though he has the spirit to endure misfortunes such as the loss of his yams during the drought that hit Umuofia, the traumas of exile and the humiliation of imprisonment, he does with others. In all three cases, the people are behind him. It is not the fear of what "the white man whose power you know too well" (165) might do that makes him commit suicide. It is the recognition of the truth of the statement, "it is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone" (23); the words of wisdom his father, who is considered an 'agbala' left with him before dying. Achebe discusses the role of the individual in traditional Igbo society and

how the extent of power is limited by the standards set by Igbo cosmology and what happens when the individual oversteps certain boundaries.

Obi Okonkwo stands victim of the same historical circumstances, which overwhelmed his grandfather, Okonkwo. The themes of individual morality and public responsibility are brought together at this point because of the collapse of his moral fibre. His western education and moral standards that he derives from it render him incapable not only for standing against the traditional and conservative beliefs of his parents and their generation, but of existing effectively in 'modern' Nigeria. Obi is a tragic figure and this tragedy proceeds from his modernity. He succumbs to the many temptations around him, accept bribes to reduce his debts. Achebe portrays Obi to be a man who has no moral strength to match and support his intellectual strength.

Personality deficiencies and mistaken judgements are the causes for the major conflicts to develop around Ezeulu. Ezeulu is not only complex but an ambiguous character. He is ambiguous because his motives are always mixed and spring from numerous, often conflicting interests dictated in part by his personal drives and in part by the demands of his priestly office. The result is that he appears in different ways to different characters in the novel. Ezeulu is unaware of the limitation of his power and of the precise nature of his priesthood as the expression of corporate rather than personal will. In his delicate calculation to keep the old, traditional world apart from the new, alien world of the white man until he knows more about the nature of the latter, Ezeulu commits an error of judgement as a result of his blindness to a universal truth that no matter how one stands one can see all the sides of the dancing mask. He is the master of two opposing worlds. It is precisely in this strength of broad comprehension that Ezeulu's total weakness lie. In his belief that the mask of the

world can actually be seen in its entirety, he forgets that some phases of reality can never be known because of the limited capabilities of man.

From the existentialist mentality individuality represents the condition as 'being divided from' the rest of the community. This further suggests the traits of singularity, disparity, uniqueness, exclusiveness, which in turn implies the condition of loneliness. Hence individualism is not perfection but the source of unwanted limitations and imperfections. On account of their crucial significance in each case, the crisis situations, which generate them and above all the change in the lives of the individuals concerned, are all in some form acts of betrayal involving self-deception in different degrees. The novelist reveals deliberate acts of choice undertaken by the characters, which may be regarded as existentialist decisions. In the novel Achebe explores the search for values in a world where change is the only certainty.

## Chapter II

### Champion to Victim

The very proposition existentialism stems from the human subject, also bring into its fold the thinking subject, the human feeling and the individual in relation to the given milieu. The starting point is characterized by a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless and absurd world. This may be seemingly too abstract and remote from concrete human experience. The individual is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living with all sincerity and passion.

This chapter deals with the existentialist agony of loneliness, total isolation and alienation with reference to Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, Obi Okonkwo of *No Longer at Ease* and Ezeulu of *Arrow of God*. Novels of Chinua Achebe are a study of psychological problems. Achebe's protagonists Okonkwo and Ezeulu suffer from frustration and loneliness. These characters act independently and carry responsible attributes perhaps deny fitting into labels, roles, stereotypes or other perceived categories, arbitrarily.

Alienation means loneliness, or the absence of relationships, the feeling of dissociation from others or the explicit rejection of social values and norms, the sense of both powerlessness in the face of existing social structures as well as the sense of their meaninglessness. Chatterji in the book *Existentialism in American Literature* quotes Heidegger who "equates alienation with being cut off from one's potential authentic existence" (163).

The protagonists are involved in a psychological conflict because of their sins and are ultimately led to a state of loneliness, isolation and alienation. Their condition is not just one of the physical pain but is far the most part characterized by mental and metaphysical

agony. The desire of these men is to express the independence of the self in a world, which to them has lost meaning. They are not only alienated from their family and clan but even from their own conscience.

Alienation is an evil to which the protagonists are usually subjected. Their pride, individualism, idealism, failure, self-assertion, impulsive decisions and acts, longing for order and justice, the misinterpretation and misjudgment of the clan alienate them from their family and clan. Their moral alienation leads them to social alienation and they end up in complete despair and frustration.

The Protagonists equally destructive actions result not only in their deaths but also alternately lead the performers to face a tragic end. They fall a victim. Their choices are also tragic, since the disturbing sense of guilt that grips the characters as a consequence of their actions brings about different kinds of self-knowledge and self-recognition, which help the characters to make their final existential resolutions. In fact the agony that the heroes experience is never conquered. The confrontation of hero's own nothingness becomes for him annihilating experience, an icy touch of death. Achebe's inquiry into the nature of the human condition is made in the existential mode and hence deals with some of the major existential themes such as alienation, frustration, loneliness and despair with reference to *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*.

The rise and fall of Okonkwo is dealt with in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. G. D. Killam, in the book *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* states that

Okonkwo was 'one of the greatest men of his time', the embodiment of Ibo values, the man who better than most symbolized his race. His stature is presented as heroic. His story, is presented in terms which resemble those of

Aristotelian tragedy – working out in the life of a hero of industry, courage and eminence, of an insistent fatality (symbolized by the Chi or personal God) which transcends his ability, to fully understand or resist a fore-ordained sequence of events. (16-17)

The tragedy of the novel is seen through the symbol of the life of this one man – the hero, Okonkwo. Though not born great he achieves greatness. In true tragic fashion he is shown as having some great heroic qualities. G. D. Killam in *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* expresses that “At the centre of the community is Okonkwo, a character of intense individuality, yet one in whom the values most admired by Ibo peoples are consolidated” (15). He continues to say that

Okonkwo is clearly cut out for the great things but he has earned in his reputation as a wrestler (he brought fame to himself and his village); as a warrior (he had taken the approved symbols of his prowess, the heads of five victims by the time he is twenty one years old); as a man who has achieved personal wealth symbolized by his two barns full of yams, his three wives are of great importance, the two titles he has taken. These are titles which can only be acquired when wealth has been achieved and quality proven. (16)

This reveals the premium, which is placed on wealth, courage and valour among Ibo people. In the words of Achebe “Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements” (17).

In the beginning of the novel, Okonkwo is shown as a leader in his village, a wealthy man, with three wives and a man of great reputation for hard work. He is chosen to represent his tribe when threatened with war by the neighbouring village. He is also one of the

Egwugwu, who represent the spirits of the ancestors when they are involved for some special purpose. He is sent as an emissary to Mbaino to make demands to the enemy and negotiate for hostages and returns successfully with a virgin for a man of their village whose wife has been murdered and with a boy Ikemefuna, who is then given to his household by the tribe. Ikemefuna is a good friend of Okonkwo's son, Nwoye. Soon Okonkwo also likes him.

Okonkwo is physically very strong and this strength enables him to build up his reputation as a successful farmer, a good warrior and a winner of titles. He is very persevering and continues his efforts as an achiever inspite of handicaps, drawbacks and the inclement weather restrictions. Okonkwo is even accepted as an elder who can represent the ancestors or Egwugwu. Through out the novel Achebe explains that personal achievements and piety are the basic qualifications that any one who calls himself a 'man' in Umuofia must possess.

Okonkwo is presented as a man whose life is ruled by one over-riding passion to become successful, powerful and rich, find a dynasty and become one of the lords of the clan of Umuofia. Throughout the novel he is shown exhibiting these qualities. He is alienated due to his pride of success as a self-made man, which makes him impatient of others who are not so successful. His very strength and success make him proud and contemptuous. For instance at a public meeting of the tribe's elders, he calls another man – a woman “Okonkwo had said, ‘This meeting is for men’. The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit” (34). He is obviously asked to apologise and he obeys.

Okonkwo is psychologically opposed to his father's way of life. "Okonkwo was ruled by one passion to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness" (25). Emphasis here is placed on Okonkwo's divided self. In reaction to his father's disastrous life and shameful death, there is an inner struggle to control and suppress his fears of failure.

The whole of Okonkwo's life is dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness. It is deeper and more intimate than fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within him. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate told him that his father was an 'agbala'. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that 'agbala' was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title" (25).

There is an inner feeling in Okonkwo that he must succeed in everything that his father has failed. This is a hidden motive behind his impressive achievement. Driven by his private obsession, Okonkwo has only one aim in life, which is to succeed and to succeed in terms of warfare, wrestling, wealth and status. At first, the impetus of his fanatical ambition brings quick results. Only later does the rigidity of his aims begins to upset the equilibrium of a system developed in conformity with far less aggressive concept of character.

Unoka, the father represents everything, which Okonkwo personally despises and his life embodies the antithesis of those values most cherished by Ibo people. G. D. Killam in the book *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* views that "Achebe suggests the flaw or flaws in his

nature – his inordinate ambition and his refusal to tolerate anything less than excellence taken in conjunction with an impulsive rage to which he easily gives way and which produces irrational responses to situations.

Commenting on Okonkwo's character Achebe remarks,

That was many years ago, twenty or more, during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush fire in the harmattan. . . . When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and would not get his words out quickly enough, he could use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had no patience with his father. (17-18)

Okonkwo's youth was traumatized by his father's failure owing to his gentleness and idleness. Because of this reason, Okonkwo determines to be all that his father was not, firm and active. But in living up to this design, Okonkwo becomes inflexible and his action allows no room for reflection throughout his life; he clings to his pattern steadfastly and without question.

Okonkwo's personal development is thwarted because of his rigid commitment to a code of behaviour and design for action. He does not grow and change with age and experience. As a man he is dedicated to the same stereotypes he forms in his youth. Okonkwo is not able to see the limitations of that code on its denial of 'feminine' principles, even after his code fails him.

Okonkwo violently repudiates all that his father has represented. Unfortunately Okonkwo repudiates not only his undignified irresponsibility, but also those positive

qualities of love and compassion and sensitivity. He increases his status, wealth and self-assertion with such principles and motive but one sees the growing alienation between him and his easy going clansmen as he enforces his will more and more emphatically upon his family. There is little of the softer side of human nature seen in him. This is only because Okonkwo must play the man, sometimes to the loss of his own understanding of the true situation, and to his own cost in isolation from his kith and kin.

Okonkwo feels estranged and alienated amidst his own family members. He is hard and stern with his own family and particularly with his son, Nwoye who does not take after him in strength or will. He is also very strict with his wives. He frames an impression as a man with no soft nature of compassion in him at all. This is because he is always afraid of being considered weak like his father.

Achebe emphasizes the fact that “Okonkwo rules his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, live in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children” (25). Even in the informal relaxed story telling sessions, Okonkwo sees a threat to himself and his ‘dynasty’, for these stories will make women of his sons, make them like their grandfather rather than like his father. So at those times “Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his obi, and he told them stories of the land – masculine stories of violence and blood-shed” (53).

Okonkwo’s growing estrangement with family and clansmen is dramatized by yet another incident. That is his breaking of the week of peace before the ceremonial planting of yams by beating his youngest wife, Ojiugo unmercifully, when she absents herself and does not send him his third dish of food as required. She had gone to a neighbour to plait hair. He is so angry that he forgets the time and the place. He commits sin of anger when he beats his

wife on the one hand and on the other breaks the law of the tribe by desecrating the week of peace to placate the earth Goddess, Ani. Okonkwo's alienation is further aggravated due to his over hasty and impulsive acts.

Shortly after the New Yam festival Okonkwo has beaten his favourite wife Ekwefi for destroying the banana tree. When he wanted to go hunting, his wife who had just been beaten murmured about his gun that never shot. Though Okonkwo was a great man whose prowess was universally acknowledged he was not a hunter. Hearing the wife's contemptuous remark he almost shoots her with his gun. This again shows his short temper and tendency to act on immediate impulse. Okonkwo's downfall and the eventual banishment from the tribe proceeds from the offenses committed against the earth. This volatile nature and inclination to violence are again faults that rebound upon him resulting in alienation. Commenting on the crime, Ezeani the priest of the earth goddess remarks,

you know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth. Without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil.' He brought down his staff heavily on the floor. 'Your wife was at fault, but even if you come into your obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her'. His staff came down again. 'The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish. (37)

Another feature that breaks the organic links between him, the family and the village is Okonkwo's self-assertion. According to the villagers, he has not only challenged his Chi, but has shown disrespect to the gods of the clan. Although he is repentant, he does not admit his error and so opinion turns against him.

The killing of Ikemefuna whom Okonkwo loves as his own son, is very significant. No episode in the novel dramatizes Okonkwo's desire to assert his manliness more clearly than this incident. With the killing of Ikemefuna and the beating of Nwoye, Okonkwo's brutal force creates for him great dilemma. This unintentional crime of Okonkwo isolates him from the society. Unfortunately he faces a period of trial for his unintentional crime. At the funeral of the leader of the tribe Ezeudu, there is much dancing and firing of crackers and guns. Okonkwo fires his gun, but it explodes and a fragment of metal kills Ezeudu's own son, a sin he must expiate through exile. For his fault against the tribe, he is banished for seven years meaning to say that he has been alienated from society too. This was his final pitiable predicament.

For the unintentional mistake Okonkwo had to abandon his home and go to Mbanta, his mother's home village and live on the bounty of his uncle. Okonkwo is disappointed, dejected and forlorn. In the words of Achebe "The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years" (105).

In the next half of the novel the critical social conflict takes place. Achebe presents the social and psychological effects and the tragic consequences, which results from the clash between the traditional Ibo society and the British Christian Imperialism.

Okonkwo finally alienates even the 'dynasty' his actions sought to insure. In order to conform to his ways Okonkwo cajoles, threatens and even beats his son Nwoye. After Ikemefuna's unjust murder, Nwoye grows increasingly alienated from his father and seems to lose respect for him. Without Ikemefuna's companionship and influence, and with a loss of faith in his father, Nwoye reverts to his former gentle nature, instead of adhering to the false masculine one he pretended to have in Ikemefuna's presence. Increasingly, Okonkwo comes to view Nwoye as a disappointment and extremely effeminate. Neither father nor son is unable to see and understand the other on his own terms. Ultimately, Nwoye is unable to forgive Okonkwo for his betrayal in killing his adopted brother. Nwoye's betrayal of his father by converting to Christianity can be read as an attempt to get back at his father for his crime. Christianity, too, has its appeal for Nwoye. The missionaries' hymn about brothers living in 'darkness and fear, ignorant of the love of God' touches Nwoye deeply. This is another way to live that Nwoye never knew about – a way of life in which fathers don't kill their adoptive sons and twins are not abandoned to die in the Evil Forest.

Nwoye does not allow himself to be kept enslaved to Okonkwo's ways; he seeks release from the bondage in the new religion of the white man. For, this new religion questions radically all the basic tenets of Umuofia and in providing answers to some of their dilemmas it undermines their other sanctities. Okonkwo's tragedy is that he fails to comprehend certain of society's values, as well as understand the needs of his son, Nwoye.

Okonkwo is unsuccessful in changing himself, and does not accept change in others, in the world around him, in the people of Umuofia. When he returns from exile, Okonkwo faces an altered society, a society that in its flexibility has allowed a place for the white Christian missionaries like the recalcitrant Rev. Smith. Okonkwo views the situation in terms of absolute irreconcilable antipodes. He forces a clear-cut confrontation out of a complex process which has been going on for some time and seeks to involve against its will, a society he does not understand in a war against the intruders. Okonkwo acts as if he understands these dangers.

The reaction of Okonkwo is that the people should use force to fight these changes and retain their own old ways of life. Okonkwo sees the whole situations as supporting his method of turning to violence for a solution to all problems. Instead of questioning and seeking a compromise between conflicting views, Okonkwo demands a violent action “‘They were fools’, said Okonkwo after a pause. ‘They had been warned that danger was ahead. They should have armed themselves with their guns their matchets even when they went to market’” (117).

There is a demand of a violent repulsion of the new religion, as the victims brook no compromise. But this recourse to violence is not the view of this society any more now than in the past. Indeed Okonkwo’s views set him apart from his clan. It is the religious principles embodied in Christianity, which Okonkwo sees as the force that changes the nature of village life. To quote

In a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messengers crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo’s matchet descended twice and the man’s head lay beside the uniformed body.

The waiting backcloth jumped into tumultuous life and the meeting was stopped. Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard a voice asking, 'why did he do it'?

'He wiped his machet on the sand and went away'. (165)

The precarious link between Okonkwo and his people is severed by this most recent act of violence. When the society does not respond as he does, Okonkwo comes to the sudden, belated realisation that he is all-alone, set apart from his clan by the values he holds. His isolation and suicide are inevitable, and they provide the final example of the dislocation between the human predicament and the divine decrees. Okonkwo will be buried 'like a dog' in the 'evil forest' rejected by the tribe. Even the Earth Mother whom he has defended with such loyalty will reject him.

Okonkwo is alienated, isolated from his family and the tribe even at the time of his death. Okonkwo hangs himself when the District Commissioner comes to arrest him with a band of soldiers. His own men refuse to touch the body of Okonkwo since suicide is an abomination against the earth goddess. In the words of Achebe "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it" (167).

Okonkwo's mode of death is an offence against the tribal laws. The whites cut him down and bury him. Once again it is symbolic of Okonkwo's being out of place in the new world and out of place with his own tribe. His friend Obierika's last words describe the tragedy most powerfully to the District Commissioner "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to cut himself; and now he will be buried like a dog . . ."

(167). In death as in life Okonkwo's commitment to achievement through violence ostracizes him from the very society he seeks to desperately champion and honour. Thus David Carroll in the book *Chinua Achebe* makes a remark that "The embodiment of traditional law has become the outcast of the tribe" (58). It is a tragic end, when Okonkwo's abominated form of death, earns for himself a dishonourable burial like his father, Unoka, the thing that Okonkwo had sought all his life to avoid.

*No Longer at Ease* has a plot that concerns the fall of Obi Okonkwo from the eager promise of the first government job that crown an excellent academic career to the penalty of jail for the taking of bribes. The demands made upon him by his commitments to the family and the clan and his necessary standard of living in Lagos make Obi desperate for money, even when his salary is such unimaginable largesse to the villagers who have so cruelly taxed themselves. The events that happen bring the hero to his downfall.

In *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo is the fortunate youngster who receives scholarship to pursue his studies in England from the Umuofia Progressive Union. Obi returns from Britain to Nigeria where new types of eminence are in vogue, the 'senior service' post; the car; the European type house; all the allowances and privileges, which had hitherto been reserved for the white man. Obi's story reincarnates the tragedy of his grandfather Okonkwo. Like Okonkwo, Obi achieves them only to lose them.

Obi Okonkwo is alienated from his family and tribe because of his individualism, just as Okonkwo's fierce pride frequently brings him into conflict with his fellow villagers in Umuofia. Simultaneous pressures from two incompatible worlds the old Africa of his Umuofia village and the westernized milieu of urban Africa, destroy obi just as his

grandfather Okonkwo who had succumbed to both the external impact of the growing British presence and the internal tensions of his own society.

Obi, a British University graduate, has been sufficiently westernized to feel alienated from the old dispensation of his Nigerian background. But Obi's self-conflicts isolate him from his people. Bruce King in his *Introduction to Nigerian Literatures* writes that "the sense of alienation is significant because it refers to the young men who are, after all, returning to their own country and the alien people are not the British but their families and acquaintances" (103-04). When he returns from an alien country to discover that the assumptions of his elders and the traditional society of which he has been once a part, no longer coincide with his view of life. At the same time he is adrift in decadent, modern Lagos. He lacks the resourcefulness necessary to handle this predicament satisfactorily. It is only due to his defiance of the assumptions of his society. Obi's tragedy proceeds from this modernity. He is crushed by the clash and ends in tragedy.

Obi Okonkwo feels lonely because the society expects too much from the university graduate and he realizes his inability to keep up to others expectations. He fails to live upto the image of one who has been to England. His western education and the moral standard he derives from it render him incapable not only for standing against the traditional and conservative beliefs of his parents and their generation but of existing effectively in 'Modern' Nigeria. In his decisions Obi is left alone. He has no one to discuss nor has he anyone to confide with. He goes against the wish of the clan in choosing his subject English which the clansmen consider to be of no use to them. But there comes a time when Obi himself is ashamed of his choice of subject. This is the first clash between Obi and his clansmen.

Umuofians wanted their son to “read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours. But when he got to England he read English; his self-will was not new. The union was angry but in the end they left him alone. Although he would not be a lawyer, he would get a ‘European post’ in the civil service” (178).

Okonkwo’s visit to England causes a big stir in Umuofia. The following lines reiterate the great expectations of the Umuofians who sponsor the study of Obi.

‘... men from other towns who went to the white man’s country... instead of facing their studies they went after the sweet things of the flesh. Some of them even married white women.’ The crowd murmured its strong disapproval of such behavior. ‘A man who does that is lost to his people. He is like rain wasted in the forest. . . We are sending you to learn book. Enjoyment can wait. Do not be in a hurry to rush into the pleasures of the world like the young antelope who danced herself lame when the main dance was yet to come.’ (181)

Filled with idealism Obi is determined to rid his country of corruption and to create a new and better nation. Obi’s high principles and self-righteousness alienate him because he lives in a corrupt society. In England he writes a nostalgic poem visualizing a pleasant Nigeria.

How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree  
 At even time and share the ecstasy of jocund birds and flimsy butterflies;  
 How sweet to leave our earthbound body in its mud,  
 And rise towards the music of the spheres,  
 Descending soft with wind,

And the tender glow of the fading sun. (186)

He believes that when the places are filled with young educated people like him corruption would disappear in Nigeria. Obi considers it a great service to rid his country's public service of corruption and this is his principal call. He likes to think that he has consistent theory of a hero to cure the country of the evil. The naivety of his theory is indicated by the way the author describes it: "Obi's theory that the public services of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities was first formulated in a paper read to the Nigerian Students' Union in London. But unlike most theories formed by students in London, this one survived the first impact of home coming" (205).

The first Nigerian, whom he meets on his arrival in his noble fatherland, is a customs official who tries to extract bribe from him. He refuses to pay the bribe and has to bear with the rough treatment which is meted out to him as a result. Another incident which highlights Obi Okonkwo's alienation due to his high principles is his experience with a young man, dealing with his cabin. The young man tells him that the duty on his radiogram would be five pounds. In the words of Achebe, 'Right' said

Obi... 'Write a receipt for me'. The boy did not write. He looked at Obi for a few seconds, and then said: 'I can reduce it two pounds for you'

'How'? asked Obi

'I fit do it, but you not go get government receipt'

For a few seconds Obi was speechless. If there was a policeman here I would hand you over to him'. The boy fled...

‘Dear old Nigeria’, he said to himself as he waited for another official to come to his cabin. In the end one came when all the other passengers had been attended to. (198-99)

This incident throws light on Obi Okonkwo’s isolation and alienation caused by his idealism. While Obi Okonkwo is waiting for an employment interview with the public service commission all his friends advise him to go and ‘see’ some highly placed official in the government because this is the accepted way of getting jobs in Nigeria. Bribery, graft and corruption are endemic. He returns to Umuofia with a determination to work towards ridding his country of corruption of this kind. He pins faith on the intellectual insights he has gained through this western education to support his strongly defined moral strength. He draws a distinction between the position of the established civil service and the members of the new elite, of which he is a representative and shows how the latter may avoid the errors and the pressure to which the former were subjected.

Obi self- importantly denounces Mr. Mark, who comes to bribe him and turns him out of his office. To quote,

After his encounter with Mr. Mark he did feel like a tiger. He had won his first battle hands-down. Everyone said it was impossible to win. They said a man expects you to accept kola from him for services rendered and until you do, his mind is never at rest... A man to whom you do a favour will not understand if you say nothing, make no noise, just walk away. You may cause more trouble by refusing a bribe than accepting it. It was easy to say to keep one’s hands clean. It required no more than the ability to say: ‘I’m sorry, Mr. So-and-so. . . .’ (245)

Obi's Okonkwo sees social ills around him and develops a hatred, which alienates him and does not motivate him to any positive action. By striving to do better than his fellows, he does worse. His true friend Joseph and the tribal union would have offered him real support and protection but because of his quick temper and resentment he quarrels with both.

The novel centres on two main issues—duty and marriage. Duty is the constant awareness of the self as an integral part of the organic whole of the tribe through which one acts and achieves identity. Obi has been educated at great cost by his clan but the lesson he learnt best is the inviolable independence of the individual. The regression from his earlier ideals has been quickened by the problems, which bedevil his private life. Obi Okonkwo is gradually alienated from his clan and family. To begin with, Obi incurs their displeasure. His affair with Clara, an osu girl precipitates the clash with the society. In spite of the strong opposition Obi is determined to marry her. He shatters the great expectations of Umuofia Progressive Union, which looks forward for Obi's return and that he would build a zinc house as a mark of prestige. Obi exhibits disrespect in every way. Obi is forced to go on doing his acts though he recognizes his total guilt and knows that they are wrong and deplores them.

In spite of repeated advices by his father, Isaac Okonkwo and his friends, Obi is not prepared to give up his relationship with the osu girl. Accordingly Isaac Okonkwo, his father remarks "Osu is a 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... You will bring sorrow on your head and in the heads of your children" (282).

Joseph his friend exclaims: “You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an Osu is? But how can you know? In that short question he said in effect that Obi’s mission –house upbringing and Europeans education had made him a stranger in his country-the most painful thing one could say to Obi” (282).

Due to his denouncing of his high principles in the latter portion of the novel, Obi is alienated. Jonathan Peters in the book *Dance of Masks* comments that Obi due to lack of control over his personal affairs,

. . . descends from his lofty denunciation of bribery to a bare acceptance of it; however, he clings to a warned sense of morality in his capacity as secretary to the scholarship board since he takes offers only from candidates who had minimum requirement. His continuance of the practice after the financial problems which give rise to his lapse under pressure are solved is indicative of his moral weakness. (132)

Soon Obi gets financially suppressed. He is not able to maintain a car, nor pay even the electricity bills. He borrows from Clara, the osu girl and at least goes to the extent of borrowing from a moneylender. He goes in for which he has to face serious consequences. He is hit on all sides.

Even though he is in the civil service, the clansmen do not give him special treatment. They too insult him as they do to an ordinary man. When Obi goes to see Clara in the hospital after the abortion, he has to make his way into the doctor’s room, when one of the men in queue tells him. “‘You think because Government give you car you fit do what you like? You see all of we do wait here and you just go in. you tink not play we come play’. Obi passed on without saying a word. ‘Foolishman. He tink say because him get car

so derefore he can do as he like. Beast of no nation” (297). Obi has to put up with harsh words as these. He is able to withstand these insults only because he senses his loss of identity. Obi gradually declines in status and loses his identity when he can no longer maintain his morality. He too starts taking bribe and is in a period of trial like any other civil servant.

Obi is finally caught taking bribes. Mr. Green, Obi’s boss in the civil service, dismisses any sympathy for Obi by saying categorically “The African is corrupt through and through” (175). Out of disappointment and disgust the clansmen do not care to know how the court is going to handle Obi. They felt “...there was no reason why the Union should worry itself over the troubles of a prodigal son who had shown great disrespect . . .” (176). Obi sacrifices Clara to his mother, a sick and dying woman. He then fails to attend to latter’s funeral for which he is mocked by the clan as seen in the following lines:

Whatever happens in this world has a meaning. As our people say,  
 “Wherever something stands, another thing stands beside it.” You see this  
 thing called blood...? I have seen many things in my life, but I have never yet  
 seen a banana tree yield coco-yam... This boy that we are all talking about,  
 what has he done? He was told that his mother died and he did not care. It is a  
 strange surprising thing, but I can tell you that I have seen it before. His  
 father did it. (304)

Ultimately the failure of Obi Okonkwo as a civil servant, citizen, son and lover proves to be the cause of his loneliness, isolation and alienation from the society, tribe, family and himself. Obi’s downfall by the ‘thousand cuts’ of emotional, financial and professional failure deepens his alienation.

The novel *Arrow of God* centres around the character, Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, the major deity of Umuaro. The powerful and forceful character, Ezeulu with nobility, in many ways resembles Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, but he experiences none of the inner doubts and uncertainties of the latter. He towers above the other characters with such an eminent force of personality that he is set apart in a noble solitude, which circumstances and an understandably arrogant contempt of lesser men first impose upon, then emphasize. His leadership brings a certain kind of loneliness, which is the loneliness of responsibility.

There is rivalry between Ezeulu and Nwaka, a wealthy chief and principal supporter of Ezidemili the chief priest of god Idemili, one of the deities displaced by Ulu. The theme is centered in this rivalry. Ezeulu is compelled to define his unique position of priest of Ulu, the most powerful of the village deities, against, on the one hand the reactionary forces within the tribe and, on the other against European culture and religion. The rivalry results in his alienation as it promotes internal division in the tribe.

Ezeulu is a truly impressive figure. The principal character is a memorable creation. His figure is cast in a mould that is at once forceful and noble. Unlike Okonkwo whose exterior demonstration of strength is a compensation for an internal weakness, Ezeulu's external stature reposes upon the firm foundations of a stable coherent mental structure. The strength of his moral fame is demonstrated in his forthright stand against the 'war of blame' that his villagers complain against their neighbours. Ezeulu advises against fighting the unjust war of blame.

Nwaka and Ezidemili's fight against Ezeulu prevails and a war starts only to be brought to a sudden close by Winterbottom. Ezeulu testifies before Winterbottom that the Okperi land does not belong to Umuaro and with this statement wins favour with the District

Officer. During war blame dispute, Ezeulu's testifying to the truth that the land belongs to Okperi, is opposed to the wrong claim of Nwaka and Ideimilli and the other clansmen, results in his alienation from his people, but it enables him to win the friendship of Winterbottom. In the words of Achebe,

Every time he prayed for Umuaro bitterness rose into his mouth, a great smoldering anger for the division which had come to the six villages and which his enemies sought to lay on his head. And for what reason? Because he has spoken the truth before the white man. But now could a man who held the holy staff of Ulu know that a thing was a lie and speak it. Even the whiteman, had called Ezeulu the only witness of truth. That was what riled his enemies. (325)

The words of Winterbottom bear testimony to the character of Ezeulu. He remarks,

‘One thing you must remember in dealing with natives is that like children they are great liars. They don't lie simply to get out of trouble. Sometimes they would spoil a good case by a pointless lie. Only one man- a kind of priest-king in Umuaro witnessed against his own people. I have not found out what it was, but I think he must have had some pretty fierce taboo working on him. But he was a most impressive figure of a man’. (357)

It is testified by John Nwodika, kinsman of Ezeulu and servant in Winterbottom's household that Ezeulu is held in high esteem by the whites. This is reflected in the following lines. “The whiteman called me, the other day and told me that there was a wiseman in my village and that his name was Ezeulu. I told him yes. He asked if he was still alive and I said yes. He said: ‘Go with the Head Messenger and tell him that I have a few questions I want to

ask him about the custom of his people because I know he is a wise man. I said to myself: This is our chance to bring our clan in front of the white man.” (494). It is very unfortunate that his own clansmen do not recognize such a man. They misunderstand his motives and actions. This isolates and alienates Ezeulu from his community. The attitude of the rivals make Ezeulu feel out of place and lonely despite his power. Ezeulu’s relationship with Winterbottom is falsely accused by the envious Nwaka and is as expressed in the following words:

The white man is Ezeulu’s friend and has sent for him... He has asked Ezeulu, Why? Because they are friends. Or does Ezeulu think that their friendship should stop short of entering each other’s houses? Does he want the white man to be his friend only by word of mouth? Did not our elders tell us that as soon as we shake hands with a leper he will want an embrace? It seems to me that Ezeulu has shaken hands with a man of white body. (467)

It is by personal and political jealousy that Nwaka is motivated. Nwaka is also motivated by the disquiet of a number of well-intentioned members of the clan who have been resentful of Ezeulu’s friendship with the white and claims him as a priest alienating from society due to acquaintance of an alien force posing a threat to their independence and the purity of their traditions. They see Ezeulu as undermining the basis of traditional society, with reason and hatred. Nwaka shows his disrespect to the chief priest in assemblies. “The man who carries a deity is not a king. He is there to perform his god’s ritual and to carry out the sacrifice to him. But I have been watching this Ezeulu for many years. He is a man of ambition: he wants to be king, priest, diviner of all” (346).

Ezeulu feels lonely and deserted after surveying the limits of his power since,

His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must to more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival- no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare. (321)

The kinsmen and the family members often have misjudged Ezeulu. He therefore feels lonely. He is misinterpreted and misjudged by the polygamous household. The misrepresentation of Edogo, his other son, makes Ezeulu feel lonely and dejected. This is intensified when Edogo tries to win the sympathy of others by his misrepresentation. Ezeulu feels miserable for having been discussed as a parent who shows partiality to just one son. He is made to feel that he has not done justice to the rest of his heirs and finally is left alone to contemplate over his behaviour. He feels bad to face his other sons.

Oduche is Ezeulu's son. Ezeulu's decision to send him to the mission school is another factor, which intensifies his alienation from his clan. At the suggestion of Winterbottom, Ezeulu sends Oduche to the mission school. Unlike the misinterpreted view of the tribe, Ezeulu is actually seeking to invade the boundaries of power. He is ready to challenge forces in order to change his passive voice in the clan into a more active mode, which is misjudged by the people.

At first he had thought that since the white man had come with great power and conquest it was necessary that some people should learn the ways of his deity. That was why he had agreed to send his son, Oduche, to learn the new

ritual. He also wanted him to learn the white man's wisdom, for Ezeulu know from what he saw of Wintabota and the stories he heard about his people that the white man was very wise (361-62).

Ezeulu, by witnessing against his own men to the white loses his identity. Another reason for Ezeulu to lose his identity is his decision of sending his son to the mission school. Akueke points out to Ezeulu what the village claims to be his faults and thereby reasons out for his loss of identity. Akuebue in a sudden access of impatience and recklessness, adds "but you forget one thing; that no man however great can win judgement against a clan. You may think you did in that land dispute but you are wrong. Umuaro will always say that you betrayed them before the white man. And they will say that you are betraying them again today by sending your son to join in desecrating the land" (454).

Ezeulu is alienated from society because of his own son. As soon as Ezeulu realises that he could no longer put up with the oscillation of his people, he is determined that his son must continue in the mission school. There are times when he feels that he ought not to have send Oduche to the mission school but at later stages when Ezeulu is affected and alienated he becomes determined that his education should prove its purpose. He advices Oduche "...of the importance of knowing that the white man knew. 'I have sent you to be my eyes there. Do not listen to what people say people who do not know their right from their left. No man speaks a lie to his son; I have told you that before. If anyone asks you why you should be sent to learn these new things tell him that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time" (514).

Oduche, a student of the missionary school, is advocated that converts should not be afraid to kill the sacred python. Oduche's attempt in killing the python adds flavour to the

accusations. He challenges the youth to prove himself a man by killing his first python. So he traps a python in the box. The python is sacred to Idemili, the principal deity of Nwaka's village. The discovery of royal python in Oduche's box intensifies the disputes between Umuaro and Umauchala.

When Ezeulu refuses the offered chieftanship, he is humiliated and imprisoned by Clarke. Now Ezeulu sees the villagers and not the white man as his first enemy. He is depressed by the behaviour of his clansmen who do not take an effort to resist his humiliation. Nwaka holds Ezeulu responsible for his humiliation "You tied the knot, you should also know how to undo it. You passed the shit that is smelling; you should carry it away" (467).

Ezeulu feels that he has no identity and hence is prepared to take revenge on his men. As a revenge, he decides not to announce the date of the New Yam Feast and thereby loses his identity since he is considered irresponsible. Ezeulu does this act with complete awareness of the consequence. His friendship ends in hostility with his kinsmen and friends due to his honesty. His magnanimity and broad-mindedness, which promote his friendship with captain Winterbottom further aggravates the situation. He is alienated from his family because of his polygamous household and is isolated by the misinterpretation and misjudgement of the clan and the enemies Nwaka and Ezidemili. Thus Ezeulu is lonely in his leadership.

The characters Okonkwo, Ezeulu are strong willed men of tradition who cannot adapt and who are crushed by their virtues in the war between the new, more worldly order and the old conservative values of an isolated society. What destroys them is their failure to adapt to any change. Their tragedy is not merely personal, but the end of the black

individualist, the tribal chieftain and their traditional rule. Obi Okonkwo, a product of biculturalism is 'no longer at ease' which is indigenous decadent system of 'osu,' the arranged marriages, nor is he comfortable with his position as the civil bureaucrat being unable to maintain high standards of living expected of him. His zeal to recall his society, his intention to marry the osu girl, Clara, the growing financial burdens and pressures make him insensible. He is lost due to cultural alienation. He does not know how he can go about to translate his ideas into actions. He proves a misfit because of his inability to understand his own people to adjust to the changed circumstances of life.

Achebe teaches through his novels that no civilization can either remain static or evolve forever towards a more inclusive perfection. The village is held together by a network of relationships, with a common recognition, much stronger than in European civilization, that the community is greater than the individual and is the source and means of his self-fulfilment.

### Chapter III

#### Unconquered Agony

Absurdity coupled with uncertainties prevailing in the milieu confers a face of unfairness to the immediate world that these characters deal with. This obviously leaves the sufferers with no choice other than being dejected and utterly despondent. The same could plummet and reach the abyss of tragic consequences, which are bound to have a devastating impact on their lives. Confrontations trail, conflict within and without push those to metaphysical anguish that forms the basis of existentialist literature. A deep sense of alienation and the anguish of failure torment man incessantly. A complete breakdown poses a threat to their life itself and eventually compelling them to become existentialists.

Chinua Achebe effectively brings out this existential anguish and despair giving a clear picture of man's insecurity, aggressiveness, evasiveness and hypocrisy. The protagonists are Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, Obi Okonkwo of *No Longer at Ease* and Ezeulu of *Arrow of God*. These characters more often meet with defeat and despair. Through it all the spirit of the protagonists and the belief on the possibility of triumph endure. Instead of separating them from action, the anguish of the heroes becomes part of action itself.

Achebe is concerned with considerations of right and wrong as they are revealed by the individual's response to the circumstances, which surround them. The plight of these individuals is characterized by uncertainty, pain, violence, anguish and despair. Okonkwo meets one calamity after another, which fills him with anguish and despair. One of the disappointing and frustrating events in Okonkwo's life is the failure of the harvest. With the heavy responsibility of supporting his mother and two sisters from his meager harvest, despite his hard times, he works very hard to build his own barn. He borrows yams from his

master Nwakibie, but that year, rains destroy the plants. “. . . the harvest was sad, like a funeral, and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams. One man tied his cloth to a tree branch and hanged himself” (33).

Okonkwo could not forget this tragic year for the rest of his life but did not sink under the load of despair. Achebe comments that that “year had been enough to break the heart of a lion” (33). His father Unoka comforting his son remarks “it is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone” (33).

Ikemefuna has grown “like a yam tendril in the rainy season and was full of the sap of life” (53). The oracle of the Hills and the Caves orders the death of Ikemefuna who has become as a son to Okonkwo. The deity eventually decrees that Ikemefuna must be killed. Okonkwo is warned that he must take no hand in the killing. The boy is led away into the forests and Okonkwo is warned by the messenger of the oracle not to partake in the killing of the boy but to show his fearlessness and impartiality, Okonkwo goes with them.

According to David Carroll, in the book *Chinua Achebe*

The death of Ikemefuna is a turning point in the novel. The guardianship of the boy is a mark of Okonkwo’s hard-won status and the highest point of his rise to power. The execution of Ikemefuna is the beginning of Okonkwo’s decline, for it initiates the series of catastrophes, which end with his death. But this event is not only a milestone in the career of the hero. The sympathetic rendering of Ikemefuna’s emotions as he is being marched through the forest of his death has wider implications. (44)

The scene of the death of Ikemefuna is one of the great tragic intensity and a moment of despair to Okonkwo. C.L.Innes and Bernth Linfors in the book *Critical Perspectives on*

*Chinua Achebe* opines that “He walks behind the others and gradually draws to the rear as the moment of execution arrives; indeed he looks away when one of the men raises his matchet to strike the boy. But he is forced by his own dogged insistence on masculinity to deal the fatal blow” (101). The child runs to Okonkwo for protection but finds instead the cold, hard steel of Okonkwo’s matchet, “As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his matchet, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, ‘My father, they have killed me!’ as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down” (58). He does so, as the narrator affirms, because ‘he is afraid of being thought weak’ (58). So strong is his desire that he does not appear weak.

Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* matches other tragic heroes who in their extremes are simultaneously the most heroic. Okonkwo is not wholly a brutal force. Even at the moment of violence against Ikemefuna one can get a glimpse of the humanity locked inside; when the man who had cleared his throat draws up and raises his matchet, Okonkwo looked away not because he is a coward, nor because like his father, “he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia’s latest war he was the first to bring home a human head” (23). Okonkwo looks away because this brutal act is too much even for his eyes and his ‘buried humanity’ struggles to express itself.

He becomes desperate because he tries to stifle the positive human aspects for fear of appearing weak. The narrator includes these subtle details, which emphasize the submerged human tragic dilemma. Achebe sympathetically relates Okonkwo’s desperate reaction to his own violence, as seen in the following words.

Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor.

He did not sleep at night. He tried not to think about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried the more he thought about him. Once he got up from his bed and walked about his compound. But he was so weak that his legs could scarcely carry him. He felt like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito. Now and then a cold shiver descended on his head and spread down his body. (60)

Okonkwo ensures that others do not see him submit to the human feeling of grief. In private, unguarded moments, Okonkwo cannot but allow his 'buried humanity' to express itself. But he does not allow his reaction to Ikemefuna's death to lead to self-pity. Since in his rigid view, any brooding introspection, or questioning is a sign of weakness. For this reaction on the morning of the third day of brooding over Ikemefuna, Okonkwo calls for food. His attitude these three days brings him to question himself, but these questions do not investigate motive nor justify his deed, instead they chastise him for his weakness in responding so to the death of his son. "He sprang to his feet, hung his goatskin bag on his shoulder and went to visit his friend Obierika"(61).

The accidental killing of Ezeudu's son is another significant incident which makes Okonkwo more desperate. When killing is furthest from Okonkwo's mind, his gun explodes killing a kinsman Ezeudu's son, a sin, he must expiate through exile. The only course open to Okonkwo is to flee from the clan. Killing a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess

and a man who commits it must flee from the land. This results in despair. “His life had been ruled by a great passion – to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting” (110).

A crowd of men from Ezeudu’s quarter dressed in garbs of war, storm Okonkwo’s compound. In the words of Achebe, “They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman” (105).

When Okonkwo and his household depend on his uncle Uchendu for yam seeds, the tragic intensity is heightened. It is a start all over again. “Okonkwo and his family worked very hard to plant a new farm. But it was like beginning life anew without the vigour and enthusiasm of youth, like learning to become left-handed in old age. Work no longer had for him the pleasure it used to have, and when there was no work to do he sat in a silent half-sleep” (110).

To expel the thoughts of despair from Okonkwo’s mind, Uchendu plays a significant role. He exclaims, “You think you are greatest sufferer in the world. Do you know that men are sometimes banished for life? Do you know that men sometimes lose all their yams and even their children?” (113)

Obierika recapitulates the painful tensions within the tribe. He mourns his friends’s calamity and questions the dictates of the inscrutable tribal gods. “Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his *obi*

and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer" (105-06). He rules against a system in which two sets of values, the tribal and the personal are juxtaposed but remain distinct. The individual is punished and the tribe is safe.

The conflict between father and son is built on their being so different in character. Okonkwo condemns story telling unless they are heroic while Nwoye relishes stories other than those of war and bloodshed. Nwoye's espousal of the feminine principles and Okonkwo's dedication to the masculine, create an unbridgeable impasse that ends in total alienation. Nwoye is tender hearted. He is crushed by his father's violence. Achebe throws light on internal situation of Okonkwo's life and his immediate concern, revealing the alienating relationship, which exists between him and his son, Nwoye who finally abandons father and the traditional world. He has been terribly upset by the cruel fate meted out to his friend and companion Ikemefuna and is thus drawn to the new religion. His subsequent rejection makes the desperate Okonkwo violently react when he meets Nwoye as revealed in the following passage:

It was late afternoon before Nwoye returned. He went into the *obi* and saluted his father, but he did not answer. Nwoye turned round to walk into the inner compound when his father, suddenly overcome with fury, sprang to his feet and gripped him by the neck.

‘Where have you been?’ he stammered.

Nwoye struggled to free himself from the choking grip.

‘Answer me’ roared Okonkwo, ‘before I kill you.’ He seized a heavy stick that lay on the dwarf wall and hit him two or three savage blows.

‘Answer me!’ he roared again – Nwoye stood looking at him and did not say a word. The women were screaming outside, afraid to go in’.

‘Leave that boy at once’ said a voice in the outer compound. It was Okonkwo’s uncle Uchendu. ‘Are you mad?’ (125-26)

While in exile, Okonkwo hears about the destruction of the whole village of Abame, because they kill a white man. Even the oracle foretells the break up of the tribe. Okonkwo gets frustrated. “He felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation” (126). The village falls apart. It is the annihilation of Okonkwo, his family, his clan and his entire system by which he has lived. The victory of the outside forces is seen in the disintegration of the tribal solidarity. There are occasional outbursts of tribal solidarity as when the mission church is burned down.

When Okonkwo returns to Umuofia, he finds that during his seven years of absence much has changed. The white man has brought in a government with his own laws. These laws administer justice in a total different way. He learns that these laws are not the tribal laws. The moment Okonkwo thinks about the whites, Okonkwo’s frustration develops. “He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women” (149). He exclaims that they “... put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (145).

It is the religious principles embodied in Christianity, which Okonkwo sees as the force that changes the nature of village life. He remains firm to the old ways. “A sudden fury rose within him and he left a strong desire to take up his machet, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang” (126). And soon it is learned that the “white man has

not only brought a religion but also a government” (128). Okonkwo is unsuccessful in convincing the people of Mbanta to kill the missionaries: “This was a womanly clan, he thought” (131). All that Okonkwo could do was to control his rage and become desperate.

Okonkwo does not change his old ways. He remains firm, joins an attack, which is made against the Christian church and so gets arrested by the District Commissioner. His sense of humiliation precipitates his final actions, which culminate in his death. The court messenger humiliates them. Okonkwo is arrested for his destruction of the local church and is imprisoned.

The clansmen burn down the white man’s church. Three days later Okonkwo and five other village leaders are humiliated by the District Commissioner and thrown into jail. The District Commissioner orders Umuofia to pay two hundreds bags of cowries as reparation for the destroyed church. Once the fine is paid, the six leaders are released from prison. And on their return from the prison, Okonkwo holds another meeting of the whole village. The meeting is called to decide whether Umuofia should go to war against the white man, the white man’s messenger arrives, ordering that the gathering be broken up. The District Commissioner sends six men to inform them to stop the meeting. Okonkwo who was in a fit of rage beheads their leader on the spot. Okonkwo’s abortive act marks the end of Achebe’s novel. To quote, “In a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo’s matchet descended twice and the man’s head lay beside his uniformed body” (165).

Okonkwo plans his own revenge. Out of his bitter experience, he takes the opportunity to kill the white man in the meeting. Okonkwo’s futile attempt to bring back the old heroic age with a single matchet-blow may look noble in retrospect; at the time it only

causes frustration and fear. Achebe says “Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult” (165).

Okonkwo is filled with deep foreboding and brooding nostalgia. He prepares for the last day of his life. The following lines highlight on the grief stricken Okonkwo’s desperate state.

Okonkwo slept very little that night. The bitterness in his heart was now mixed with a kind of childlike excitement. Before he had gone to bed he had brought down his war dress, which he had not touched since his return from exile. He had shaken out the smoked raffia skirt and examined his tall feather headgear and his shield. They were all satisfactory, he had thought. As he lay on his bamboo bed he thought about the treatment he had received in the whiteman’s court and he swore vengeance. If Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they choose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself. He thought about wars in the past. (161)

The Okonkwo is approximated to the female ethical principle, which although institutionalized in the form of Ani, the earth goddess, practice tended to the despised. He is committed totally to the active pursuits of the tribe, consequently is reprimanded for offences against Ani. His policy is complete success. Once the missionaries come they appeal to the sense of loss or failure; the cry of the twins in the wilderness and to which Nwoye responds. As the influence of the missionaries spread the masculine assertive principle is undermined. Personal prowess, which had been the path to social acceptance finally destroys him.

Okonkwo hangs himself. He thereby puts an end to his life. Nobody is willing to touch the body since, “It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil and only strangers may touch it” (167). Okonkwo’s suicide represents the ultimate overthrow of masculinity. It is the culmination of self-destructive pride.

G.D. Killam in the book *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* writes “Okonkwo’s suicide is reported off stage. The tragic pattern is complete, his shame is absolute. There is, moreover, irony of a tragic kind at the end of the novel for Okonkwo in hanging himself, an abominated form of death, earns for himself a dishonourable burial like his father Unoka, the thing he had sought all his life to avoid” (31). Publicly, especially among the members of his own clan, Okonkwo struggles to maintain the image of an unusually calm and stalwart individual. He wants to project himself to be a man worthy to be a lord of clan. Okonkwo’s violent actions lead him to his tragic doom. Robert Fraser in “A Note on Okonkwo’s Suicide” quotes Arthur Ravenscraft who perceives Okonkwo’s suicide as a positive existentialist choice. According to him, Okonkwo “hangs himself, not to avoid arrest but out of despair for the future of his people” (108).

In the novel *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo is a tragic figure; his mental agony proceeds from his modernity. Obi does not recognize the contradictions of his life style until he goes through painful experiences that bring him into conflict with his fiancé his family, his tribe and the law, as well as with his own ideals which result in his disillusionment. Achebe traces and records Obi’s moral, professional and social decline. One of the causes of Obi Okonkwo’s anguish and despair at the beginning of his career is his idealism.

Obi Okonkwo is a chief of the two worlds of the African and the European. Jonathan Peters in *A Dance of Masks* says that “Obi’s impatience with corrupt practices in Nigeria stems from the fast crumbling nostalgic vision he had in London of a romantic, pastoral landscape in a mother country peopled with brave, peaceful and noblemen working in unison to build a nation” (131).

Obi is shown as an enthusiastic and idealistic young Nigerian in one of his first appearances. He is intent on serving his country through a highly idealized yet acceptable moral code. At the end he is defeated; his idealism is destroyed and he is the subject of popular interest not so much because he ‘ate bribe’ but because he was caught. Achebe portrays the changes through which, Obi passes with considerable astuteness of observation. Obi clings to the native theories after his return to Nigeria even though he realizes that his original picture of the country is a false one.

Obi’s return to Nigeria gets him increasingly absorbed with personal problems. Obi Okonkwo is no longer at ease in the old dispensation. There is no way out for a man of Obi’s nature and character. He being a modern Nigerian pulled between two sets of values, those modern and those traditional. This is emphasized throughout the novel. He has the highest principles having cut himself free from the pull of traditionalism. Obi, in the clutches of decadent modern Lagos fails to achieve complete freedom.

The novel, at one level, reveals the wide gulf, which exists between Obi’s idealism based on his western education, and the relevance of this to his status as an individual within a complex and contradictory society in which many of the old values are still operative. Obi allows himself to be overwhelmed by his problems. Sometimes he appears inexplicably simple minded, which makes him an inadequate expression of the social conflict of his

society. He makes no attempt to bridge the wide gap between his idealism and the social wealth, which confronts him. Achebe reminds that he is the impatient idealist who asks for a place to stand on in order to move the earth. But the author also reminds that there is no such place and that “We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace” (310).

Obi gets into conflict with his parents and kinsmen because of his choice of an osu girl.

This results in despair.

. . . this was the greatest crisis in his life. He waited for his father to speak that he might put up another fight to justify himself. His mind was troubled not only by what had happened but also by the discovery that there was nothing in him with which to challenge it honestly. All day he had striven to rouse his anger and his conviction, but he was honest enough with himself to realize the response he got, no matter how violent it sometimes appeared, was not genuine. It came from the periphery, and not the centre, like the jerk in the leg of a dead frog when a current is applied to it. But he could not accept the present state of his mind as final, so he searched desperately for something that would trigger off the inevitable reaction. (284-85)

Having adopted western values, Obi believes that an individual has the right to choose his own life. The crisis is afforded by his disagreement with his family over his choice of Clara, an osu for a wife. Against an irrational caste system that demands of him a firm rational stand against the pressure of a moral problem that calls for individual resolution, Obi has nothing to offer but abdication. The conflict that opposes him to his father provokes from him anger and resentment and the unsoundness of his position does not

escape him. He manages to grasp the nature of his problems in one of his rare moments of introspection.

The continuing conflict between traditional beliefs and Christian teaching is exposed by Obi's desire to marry Clara, an osu. At home Obi is questioned about his relationship with Clara. No appeals to his father's conversion can make him acquiesce to this abominable relationship.

'We are Christians,' he said. 'But there is no reason to marry an osu.'

'The Bible says that in Christ there are no bond and free'

'My son,' said Okonkwo, 'I understand what you say. But this thing is deeper than you think.' (281)

Commenting on Obi's affair the President of the Progressive Union remarks, "Lagos is a bad place for a young man. If you follow its sweetness, you will perish. We cannot afford bad ways... We are pioneers building up our families and our town. And those who build must deny ourselves many pleasures. You may ask why I am saying all this. I have heard that you are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry, and even thinking of marrying her?" (240-41)

Obi leaps to this fact trembling with rage, hardly able to speak by this last meddling statement; his first stuttering words are characteristically British as the unruffled president calmly tells him to sit down. After which Obi has no peace of mind. Obi's love affair with Clara is destroyed by his society's conservation. However Achebe does not demonstrate that social forces are to be blamed. Although his father expresses complete disapproval, it is obvious that he will be won over in time, since he himself had once been a rebel. His mother

too opposes his marrying the osu girl “...if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head,’ because I shall kill myself” (284).

Obi’s mother was not in favour of him marrying Clara. Mrs. Okonkwo’s objections are serious but although she threatens, to kill herself if Obi were to marry Clara during her life time she does not extract a promise from him not to marry the girl after her death; indeed she virtually gives him permission, provided he waits until she is dead. Clara’s conduct is implausible and we are given no sight into her feelings, which might explain it. The affair is destroyed not by the clash between the old and the new, but of Clara’s unreasonable behaviour, when asked to marry Obi she even refuses to see him.

Obi vacillates at critical moments when his mother says she will kill herself, if he marries Clara, sheer terror replaces moral resolve and the rationalization process, which is to prove his undoing, begins. All this is made quite plain at the time when Clara is taken away by the doctor who is to perform the abortion, which almost costs her life; “Obi wanted to rush out of his car and shout: ‘stop. Let’s go and get married now’, but he couldn’t and didn’t” (295).

When Clara is admitted in the hospital and Obi succeeds to see her with great difficulty. When Clara sees him “. . . she had turned on her bed and faced the wall. There were other patients in the ward and most of them saw what had happened. Obi had never felt so embarrassed in his life. He left at once” (299). Although well-meaning his attitude shows little attempt on his part to understand the underlying motivations of such practices, Obi is in fact, an individual so thoroughly desensitized that he cannot feel deeply and protractedly or act competently about any of the crisis in his life; the practical implications of marrying an osu; Clara exits from his life after aborting his baby; with his mother’s death or his financial

problems. The climax of the novel is effectively reached at his point. Obi's moral resolution, capable of resisting the pressures to which he is subjected in his professional life, cannot withstand the more powerful conviction of his mother. He repudiates Clara.

Obi is left dispirited and inert because of Clara's leaving him, the death of his mother and more financial demands. Now in neither his private life nor his public affairs can he at critical moments, display the courage to take the stand required of him. Consequently his interests suffer and he loses all. The pressure on him in his private and public life lowers his spirits, reduces his moral strength and ultimately causes him to put scruples aside and become utterly desperate. But however much he has altered at the close of the book one can see him as the same Obi whom one meets when the flash back section of the book begins. Obi does not change at all.

Achebe's words, highlight on the tragic intensity of the situation.

I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this that a sudden and marked change occurred.

Treacherous tears came into Obi's eyes. He brought out a white handkerchief and rubbed his face. But he did it as people do when wipe sweat. He even tried to smile and belie the tears. A smile would have been quite logical. All that stuff about education and promise and betrayal had not taken him unawares. (174)

Obi gives way to his weakness, vacillates and adjusts his principles to suit his actions. The weakness in his nature in difficult circumstances render him impotent, Obi has not the moral strength to match and support his intellectual strength, when his intellectual

decision about what is right, the need to thwart corruption and in the case of Clara. The need to stand against the osu tradition is challenged and he has little to resist the challenge.

The fact is that Obi is never in the mood for consecutive reasoning. What the passage illustrates is his unwillingness to come to grips with his situation in a nature, responsible and committed manner. His mind contemplates the most obvious solutions, and when he realizes their inadequacy he abandons the effort and is soon absorbed in his financial problems. He wants a secure job in the civil service. He stomachs the scorn of Green and his complaints against the system slowly diminish. When he gets into financial difficulties he tries to claim as many allowances as he can. On one occasion he wanted to claim a local leave allowance for travelling home, so he locks himself up in his house at Lagos over a week end. The crisis that finally leads to his ruin is his financial situations. The financial situation is one of the most desperate situations that he faces. About money Obi is singularly inept. Obi is stripped of ideals including his vision of Nigeria freed from corruption, owing allegiance to nothing and having lost all self-respect, obi finally succumbs to the financial pressures upon him. His decision to take bribes is a confirmation of his loss of identity of which he is aware and the defeated gesture of a man who has been unable to find the means of expressing himself.

Obi's sense of moral right reasserts itself, ironically when it is too late to do him any good. His decision to reform almost at the precise moment that he is caught may appeal as rather too self-conscious, plotting on Achebe's part as a device to underline a conviction that evil is to be punished. This is too facile an interpretation for clearly Obi's guilt is as nothing when compared with that of society; he is punished for his offence and society goes its untrammelled way. The event indicates rather the consistency of Achebe's approach to his

theme by pointing out the morality, both public and private which he recommends. Achebe writes, "In due course he paid off his bank overdraft and his debt to the Hon. Sam Okoli, M.H.R. The worst was now over, and Obi realised 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" (312).

The passage quoted above is important not only because it suggests the alternatives open to a country by which it may achieve its goals at the time it achieves independence, but also because it reveals the reason for Obi's failure to realise his ideals. At critical moments Obi is either not prepared or not able to engage in 'consecutive reasoning'. By the time he gets down to serious self-scrutiny, when he is rejected by his mother, when he has lost Clara and when his career and his idealism are in jeopardy, it is too late to mind.

The Umuofia Progressive Union, Lagos branch which has paid for his education overseas expect Obi to repay the eight hundred pounds they have advanced him while at the same time it is to display a standard of living appropriate to his 'European rank'. This places a heavy burden on Obi's finances. In addition to repaying the loan, Obi feels obliged to purchase an expensive automobile, to lease and furnish an expensive flat in Ikoyi and to send money home to pay for his brothers' education.

Obi feels incapable. He does not show much ability to face up to the reality of his situation. When he renounces his sentimental dream he allows himself to fall into a deep cynicism, he takes bribes, is arrested, tried and sent to prison. Obi gives in too easily. The betrayal of his original principles remains unmitigated by any dignity or irony of motive. He takes a bribe merely to keep up appearances as a member of the affluent elite who are busy maintaining their cars and paying back the loans for their education. Towards the end of the

novel his attitude towards money and appearances has completely changed from what it was when he first arrived back from England when, though the Umuofia Progressive Union had boarded a room for him in an expensive hotel, he refused to use it and stayed with an old friend, a clerk in Lagos.

Gradually he surrenders to the influence of a sterile social system and his actions illustrate moral degeneration. Obi begins to take bribes and becomes like those around him whom he formerly despised. He has exchanged one kind of modern morality for another. His attempts to draw distinctions between accepting bribes from those candidates who are qualified and would likely win scholarships and those who would not also were of rationalization. Obi is now demoralized and he succumbs to the many temptations around him, accepts bribes and reduces his debts and at the precise moment he decides, because of his troubled conscience to reform his ways, he is arrested and sent for trial. The opening passages of the novel show the outcome of it.

Shatto Arthur Gakwandi in *The Novel And the Contemporary experience in Africa*, quotes Arthur Raven Scroft who in a discussion on *No Longer at Ease* states, “While this story can also be read partly as a paradigm of a man caught between the irreconcilable values of different ways of life, his enmeshment happens too easily to win out sympathetic involvement. As the catalogue of debts and expenditure mounts, one becomes too aware of the cards being stacked against him. It is a very simple minded young man indeed who does not expect to receive a demand for income tax as an electricity bill” (29).

Obi’s experiences testify in situations which are sometimes comic, sometimes pathetic, sometimes given to the oppressive weight of doubt, guilt, shame and regret. In *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, Bruce King remarks “He knows his acts are wrong,

deplores them, but is forced to go on doing them, recognising his total guilt. It is a low-level Macbeth story of inevitably increasing villainy granted the first step has been taken. He exists upon a financial treadmill. Only continuing bribery can hold off his fall, yet the fall will be the more catastrophic when it finally inevitably occurs” (105-106).

The hero in the novel *Arrow of God* is Ezeulu and his reason to sink under the load of despair is his obsession with power which warps his thinking. It is a known fact that Ezeulu’s eminence is not based on physique or wealth, like that of Okonkwo, but on his awesome status as a priest, ‘half-man, half-spirit’ who has in his care the political unity and health of the six villages which compose Umuaro. Ezeulu seeks to explore and exploit the boundaries of power enclosing himself in despair, though he is aware of the limitations of his power.

Everytime he prayed for Umuaro bitterness rose into his mouth, a great smouldering anger for the division which had come to the six villages and which his enemies sought to lay on his head. And for what reason? Because he had spoken the truth before the white man. But how could a man who held the holy staff of the Ulu know that a thing was a lie and speak it? ...Even the white man, wintobota, understood...He had called Ezeulu the only witness of truth. That was what riled his enemies. . . . (324-25)

Ezeulu is thrown in despair when a struggle for spiritual authority becomes a political battle. However he still does not lose confidence due to his priesthood. This paves the way for intensified conflicts between the two chief priests of two deities, Ezidemili the chief priest of Idemili and Ezeulu the chief priest of Ulu, the main clans deity as to who is superior and more authoritative than the other. Since Ezidemili dare not challenge Ezeulu

openly, he hides behind Nwaka the most powerful and wealthiest layman, one of the three surviving members who have taken all the titles of the class. Nwaka comes from the largest village Umuaro and therefore thinks the leadership of the clans ought to be his. He is a famous wrestler.

When Ezeulu gathers his clansmen to inform them about his visit to Winterbottom, they do not lend their ears to his talk. This becomes one of the great moments of despair for Ezeulu. In the words of Achebe

Ezeulu stood up then. The big fire which had been lit some distance away shone in his face. There was complete silence when he spoke. His words did not carry the rage in his chest. As always his anger was not caused by open hostility such as Nwaka showed in his speech but by the sweet words of people like Nnabenyi. They looked to him like rats gnawing away at the sole of a sleeper's foot, biting and then blowing air on the wound to soothe it, and lull the victim back to sleep. (468)

Ezeulu has good intentions but the clan's misjudgement and misinterpretation drive him desperate. However Ezeulu strives for the welfare of his people, they are blind to truth. Ezeulu becomes the centre of attraction when he is called to Okperi and offered chieftainship but his refusal brings great frustration and distress to Umuaro. Ezeulu's rejection of the offer of the post of warrant chief made by Clarke is greeted with suspicion by the people of Umuaro. "At first few people in Umuaro believed the story that Ezeulu had rejected the white man's offer to be a Warrant Chief. How could he refuse the very thing he had been planning and scheming all these years his enemies asked" (500).

When Ezeulu visits Okperi he is imprisoned and later is humiliated by Mr. Clarke when he refuses to accept the post of a warrant chief. Ezeulu's subsequent arrest and imprisonment pushes him to the thought of revenge, both personal and divine. While he remains in prison Ezeulu has a prophetic dream which foreshadows his final position although at the time Ezeulu sees it merely as an anthology of the disregard in which he is held by his people. The dream is significant because it is an exposition of his mental agony and despair. In the words of Achebe

That night Ezeulu saw in a dream a big assembly of Umuaro elders, the same people he had spoken to a few days earlier. But instead of himself it was his grandfather who rose up to speak to them. They refused to listen. They shouted together. *He shall not speak; we will not listen to him.* The Chief Priest raised his voice and pleaded with them to listen but they refused saying that they must bale the water while it was still only ankle- deep, 'Why should we rely on him to tell us the season of the year?' asked Nwaka. (482-83)

Nwaka had a rebellious nature and this has been disturbing Ezeulu all through. The perpetual thought of Nwaka haunts Ezeulu which extends to a dream.

'Is there anybody here who cannot see the moon in his own compound? And anyhow, what is the power of Ulu today? He saved our fathers from the warriors of Abam but he cannot save us from the white man. Let us drive him away as our neighbours of Aninta drove out and burnt Ogba when he left what he was called to do and did other things, when he turned round to kill the people of Aninta instead of their enemies. Then the people seized the

Chief Priest who had changed from Ezeulu's grandfather to himself and began to push him from one group to another. Some spat on his face and called him the priest of a dead god. (483)

Ezeulu woke up with a start as though he had fallen from a great height. Upon his return home, however he receives a hero's welcome and his anger is assuaged; while he was in exile it was easy for Ezeulu to think of Umuaro as one hostile entity. But back in his hut he could no longer see the matter as simply as that.

All these people . . . could not be called enemies. Some of them . . . were different from the enemy he had seen in his dream at Okperi. . . Ezeulu continued his division of Umuaro into ordinary people who had nothing but good will for him and those others whose ambition sought to destroy the central unity of six villages. From the moment . . . thoughts of reconciliation began, . . . He knew . . . that if one finger brought oil it messed up the others; but was it right that he should stretch his hand against all these people who had shown so much concern for him during his exile and since his return? (511-12)

The desperate Ezeulu, on his return home, wants to punish his people for ignoring him during his imprisonment. He at one stage thinks of reconciliation but soon becomes obvious that deep down he is still craving to fight with the people because he wants to demonstrate the extent of his power. Achebe points out that "Behind his thinking was, of course, the knowledge that the fight would not begin until the time of harvest, after three moons more. So there was plenty of time. Perhaps it was this knowledge that there was no

hurry which gave him confidence to play with alternatives - to dissolve his resolution and at the right time form it again” (516).

Before hearing of the voice of Ulu, Ezeulu has decided to use harvest time, the New Yam Festival to hit Umuaro. Ezeulu “After a long period of silent preparation [he] finally revealed that he intended to hit Umuaro at its most vulnerable point – the Feast of the New Yam” (527). Ezeulu wanted to take revenge against his people. The frustrated Ezeulu with a vengeance against his people refuses to give the right time for the New Yam Festival since his own men humiliate him; they took no efforts to rescue him during his imprisonment. Ezeulu does not miss his chance, he uses the day of harvest, assuming it to be a successful deed but all ends in misery.

The reason for Ezeulu’s decision not to announce the date of festival is that two of the sacred yams remain uneaten while he has been in prison. It seems cruel in a man who has been so aware of his responsibilities, but decides to take revenge. The crops, on which the people’s livelihood depends, will remain rotting in the ground. It also means death, famine, disease and general disaster; despair to both, his own men and to his own self. Ezeulu believes that God must punish the villagers and so views as Ulu’s instrument or, as he puts it, ‘an Arrow of God’.

When the villagers are diverted to get out of the misery, Ezeulu is in utter despair. Mr. Goodcountry, the African Missionary, capitalizing on the discomfiture in Umuaro asks the people who are turning to the church as a means of avoiding disaster to bring not one, but as many yams as they can and any crop, whatsoever or livestock or money. Ezeulu does not tolerate the idea of the Christians reaping the harvest of Umuaro. This leaves Ezeulu grief stricken.

Ezeulu never anticipates that he would be deceived. It makes everyone analyse Ezeulu's strange behaviour towards his duties. Akuebue, Ofoka are able to understand Ezeulu, but they plead with him to withdraw his false attitude. Ezeulu feels that he is defeated by his own God, for Ulu, the creation of the people at the time of intense need is rejected by the people in like circumstances when he is seen to conspire against them. It is one of Ezeulu's worst moments of his despair.

Even the members of Ezeulu's family do nothing to help him feel better. Despite the heavy burden Ezeulu bears on his shoulder as a priest, his family members drive him desperate. There are moments when Ezeulu is in anguish, about his son Oduche. He is sent to the missionary school but when he goes against the traditional practices, it makes Ezeulu feel whether he had done a wrong deed by sending his son to church. Oduche's sacrificial offering to the new forces, precipitates the first of Ezeulu's crisis. He becomes a Christian die hard, tries to suffocate a royal python, the totemic animal sacred to Idemili and is found out. This heightens the ill-will between the priests of Idemili and Ezeulu, their families, villages and partisans in clan.

Ezeulu has another son named Obika. He often gets tensed because he is very arrogant. He has indulged himself in arguments and fights. He is bold enough to stand against Mr. Wright for which he is whipped. Ezeulu gets frustrated and thinks that it all happens because Obika starts the issues. Ezeulu dislikes Obika's friendship with Ofoedu. It makes him tensed even more just by the sight of Ofoedu. Achebe expresses that "Ezeulu could never get used to this worthless young man who trailed after his son like a vulture after a corpse. He was filled with anger which was so great that it also engulfed his son" (409).

Ezeulu's lowered gaze intensifies the parent child relationship between god and priest, which upon the death of Obika causes anguish. Ezeulu's whole hearted repentance comes after he hears the death of Obika. The sudden death of Obika picks up the hint of madness in Ezeulu's family, and finally resolves the tensions, which is built between Ulu, his priest and the clan. Obika takes the responsibility of performing the role of night spirit in a second burial ceremony. As he runs round the village he is possessed by the spirit, so collapses and dies. This crisis only shows that Ulu disapproves of the conduct of his Chief Priest. Fully committed in his self-righteousness to the role of an arrow of Ulu, Ezeulu is desolated. Achebe in a nut shell portrays the desperate state of Ezeulu in the succeeding lines:

But the heaviest load was on Ezeulu's mind. He was used to loneliness. . .  
 Few people came to his hut now and those who came said nothing. Ezeulu  
 wanted to hear what Umuaro was saying but nobody offered to tell and he  
 would not make anyone think he was curious. So with every passing day  
 Umuaro became more and more an alien silence - the kind of silence which  
 burnt a man's inside like the blue, quiet, razor-edge flame of burning palm-  
 nut shells. Ezeulu writhed in pain which grew and grew. . . . (544)

Ezeulu is nearly at the point of collapse gloating over his inevitable mistake.

Because no one came near enough to him to see his anguish - and if they had  
 seen it they would not have understood- they imagined that he sat in his hut  
 gloating over the distress of Umuaro. But although he would not for any  
 reason now see the present trend reversed he carried more punishment and  
 more suffering than all his fellows. (544)

Ezeulu remains unmoved and unintimidated when they remind him that customs have often been changed in the past. The traditional reciprocity of the tribe and god is of no interest to him and exercises power in an unequivocal way.

What troubled him most – and he alone seemed to be aware of it at present was that the punishment was not for now alone but for all time. . . . Beneath all anger in his mind lay a deeper compassion for Umuaro, the clan which long, long ago when lizards were in ones and twos chose his ancestor to carry their deity and go before them challenging every obstacle and confronting every danger on their behalf. (544-45)

Ezeulu, the ‘arrow of god,’ Ulu, should not pay attention to god’s rival, Idemili. There can be no substitute for the words of Chinua Achebe who graphically portrays Ezeulu’s despair in all its intensity. Ezeulu realizes that

Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors – that no man however great was greater than his people; that no man ever won judgement against his clan.

. . . Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold that truth, for in destroying his priest he had also brought disaster on himself, like the lizard in the fable who ruined his mother’s funeral by his own hand. For a deity who chose a moment such as this to chastise his priest or abandon him before his enemies was inciting people to take liberties; and Umuaro was just ripe to do so. (555)

But this final act of malevolence proved merciful. It allowed Ezeulu, in his last days, to live in the haughty splendour of a demented high priest and spared him knowledge of the final outcome. (555)

Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu are in the grip of fear and failure. They feel themselves forlorn and live in a world in which they act without hope of any meaning other than what they themselves introduce and end up in despair. Their anguish and despair spring from the recognition that they are surrounded by area of impenetrable darkness. The novels reveal deliberate acts of choice undertaken by the protagonists. The emotional intensity accompanying the choice, the critical situations, which generate them and the change in the lives of the individuals concerned, are in some form acts of betrayal involving different degrees of self-deception.

Chinua Achebe, through the protagonists, focuses on the struggle of man against society, and man and the inevitable devaluation of ideals. The conflicts between passion and reason, result in frustration and despair. Achebe thus exemplifies existentialist situations successfully as the urgent predicament of man's being in the world. They are tragically driven to a desperate end. Indeed the agony that they experience is never conquered.



## Chapter IV

### Conclusion

Achebe voices the past, reflects the present and moulds the future. His novels are more about human nature. Through his novels, Achebe teaches the scope and meaning of the disrupted lives and makes life more beautiful and meaningful by pointing out its harmony on its diversity. His characters Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu are genuine characters with individual qualities and traits and yet their behaviour is influenced by history and social conditions.

Emphasizing the many dimensions of the ideology of existentialism, Chinua Achebe had painted the uniqueness of the related elements in his writings. This makes the reader feel the characters' plight and individual experiences in a totally hostile or indifferent immediate world. Achebe stresses the freedom of choice and decisions that invariably entail responsibilities and demands on the men in this deterministic and seemingly absurd and meaningless universe. The perverse attempts made to counter the consequences of their own acts are brought to light so that the truth behind the philosophy is rendered justice with clarity.

In addition, Chinua Achebe has exhibited penetrating insight into the trends of modern life. He deals with some of the major existential themes such as loneliness, isolation, alienation, frustration and despair. His very inquiry into the nature of human condition is made in the existentialist mode. Achebe in his novels deals with the dominant themes of Existentialism such as loneliness and alienation of modern man. Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, Obi Okonkwo of *No Longer at Ease*, Ezeulu of *Arrow of God* are inextricably enmeshed in a vicious network of guilt, inadequacy, self-deception

and recrimination to which each has contributed and of which each is a victim. They champion the cause of their own beliefs, convictions and desires, of which they become victims.

The protagonists of the novels meet the meaninglessness of existence by becoming courageous and through exiles of suffering. The overwhelming absurdity of life makes them feel terribly incensed at their helplessness to fight the injustice and arbitrariness of life. In their longing for order and justice they are estranged and frustrated. Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu are alienated from their family, clan and their own deepest being. They are isolated and alienated due to their fear of failure and weakness, hasty and impulsive acts, self-assertion, acts of violence, individualism, idealism, and pride of success.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is a man who has grown up in a community, which because of its passionate desire for survival, places its faith above all in the individual quality of manliness. This makes Okonkwo start off with a disadvantage on this score – the failure of his own father to satisfy this social norm, which adds urgency to his own particular position. It is the need for him to live down the shame of his father that compels him to an excessive adherence to the social code to an extent, which in fact transforms a value into a weakness. Okonkwo never shows any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. According to him to show affection is a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating is strength.

Okonkwo is bound to violence and despair results in violence throughout his life. He rigidly commits himself to a code of values, which negates human response and serves him from his traditional roots. He holds firmly to the values to his death, even at

crucial moments when all indications point to the limitations. Okonkwo is alienated from his family, clan and himself because of his pride, violent behaviour and bad temper and this result in his desperate tragic doom. He faces one calamity after another and his violent actions lead him to his doom. David Carroll in the work *Chinua Achebe* finds “. . . the embodiment of traditional law becomes the outcast of the tribe” (58). *Things Fall Apart* is a perfect example of what effect new ideas and technology can have on societies that have been isolated for generations and have created a unique culture and society because of it.

Obi Okonkwo’s modernity, western education, moral standards and principles as opposed to that of traditional standards and views isolate and alienate him. He is alienated from the clan and family due to the choice of the osu girl. In the corrupt society he is isolated for his lofty principles of denouncing bribery. On the contrary at the time of his decline in status and moral code and behaviour, he accepts bribery for which he is once again separated from the society. Obi’s individualism, idealism, his high principles and self-righteousness, his choice of an osu girl, alienate him from the family and the clan. Ultimately the cause of his loneliness, isolation and alienation from the society, tribe, family and himself is the failure of Obi Okonkwo as a civil servant, citizen, son and lover.

Ezeulu is alienated from his family because of his polygamous household. He is lonely in his leadership and his magnanimity and broadmindedness, which promotes his friendship with Captain Winterbottom further aggravates the situation. His friendship ends in hostility with his kinsmen and friends due to his honesty and is isolated from the clan. Even with the envious Nwaka and Ezidemili he has problems. The tension starts

with Ezeulu's defense of his god and himself, to evoke this Achebe has constructed a complex yet unified dramatic treatment displaying a combination of events which lead to tragic consequences at both the individual and social levels which result in Ezeulu's loneliness, isolation and alienation.

Alienation becomes the quintessence of the nature of Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu. Their condition is not just one of physical pain but is for the most part characterized by mental and metaphysical agony. The desire of these men is to express independence of the self in a world, which to them has lost meaning. They are alienated from their family, clan and their own deepest being. They are subjected to the evil of alienation. Their moral alienation leads them to social alienation. Their choices are also tragic, since the disturbing sense of guilt that grips the protagonists as a consequence of their actions brings about different kinds of self-knowledge and self-recognition, which help them to make their final resolution. The confrontation of the protagonists' nothingness becomes for them annihilating experience, and an icy touch of death. In fact the agony that the heroes experience is never conquered. In the face of threats the struggle of the protagonists is a hopeless one resulting in anger, anguish, despair and frustration. In the end of their life's journey there is no sense of satisfaction and reward.

Achebe explores the role and rights of the individual in the community, and the role of community and its responsibilities to the individual. He deals with the frustration, anxiety, and meaninglessness, anguish and despair as portrayed in the characters of Okonkwo, Obi Okonkwo and Ezeulu. These protagonists are placed in existential situations when they are driven from one desperate state to another experiencing great anguish and agony. These novels *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of*

*God* are expressions of the tensions, stresses and conflicts, presented in personal, social and spiritual terms. The protagonists are tragic in the modern sense of being caught in situation from which there is no way of escape.

*Things Fall Apart* is a novel of character and environment. A thorough understanding of Umuofia society is essential to understand the character, Okonkwo. To Achebe, 'environment is character'. Okonkwo is what his society made him, for his most conspicuous qualities are responses to the demands of his society. He is a personification of his society's values and he is determined to succeed in the rat-race. The tragedy of the tragic hero is that he does not hesitate to do a thing all alone. He chooses to fight 'alone' and on behalf of the community against colonial administration. He is aware that his community is not prepared to support him in his fight. He is an iron man with a fiery disposition who fails to take the community with him. Okonkwo's leap into death is a desperate solution for his crisis of conscience, infact an escape. His suicide marks his attempt to escape his guilt stricken self. His suicide is actually a desperate attempt expressing his despair for the future of the people. His tragic death not only cuts him off from his ancestral spirit but from the new religion that might have allowed him to be a gentler person, a better son, husband, father and a clan member.

Chinua Achebe presents a complex existentialist figure in Obi Okonkwo. He is also made to see through his self-deception by becoming gradually involved in corruption. Obi Okonkwo is a picture of the modern man suffering from a deep moral malady and frustration, desperately unable to free him from dishonesty and fraud. Modern man's fear, dread, anger and self-hatred which end in a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness of life anguish and despair have been graphically portrayed in the

character of Obi Okonkwo. In the character of Obi Okonkwo, Achebe successfully portrays some of the existentialist characteristics such as importance of the individual as against the mass, insistence upon freedom of choice, anxiety and dread in the awareness of the uncertainties attending his choices and despair on the consciousness of alienation from society, from the family and the clan.

Achebe views Ezeulu as existing in his subjective concreteness and his self as a dynamic agent involved in a situation of inevitable tension and conflict. He involves himself and realizes that he is not only the person he chooses to be but also a law maker who is at the same time choosing all mankind as well as himself, cannot help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility. This anguish of the hero becomes part of action itself instead of separating him from action.

Ezeulu is a man of power and influence in his community. He possesses the characteristics of the classic tragic hero, a leader who epitomizes the spirit of his times. A man, too, with a tragic flaw, arrogance and pride, which cause him to commit an error in judgement when he lets his personal feelings interfere with his usually keen assessment of circumstances. Even so, he acts on the injection of his god and the seeming ambiguity this accounts for the series of ironic reversals he experiences, the loss of power, position, authority and reputation, goodwill love and loyalty of his clan and family precipitate Ezeulu's collapse. This is because of his refusal to yield totally to change.

The fall of Ezeulu is not due solely to external forces. It is the combination of the man and his circumstance that create the tragic hero. The imprisonment of Ezeulu is the direct cause of the theological crisis that destroys the harvest. However, not all of the tribal elders agree with Ezeulu's decision to postpone the harvest. Ten of the most

respected elder approach Ezeulu and try to cajole him into eating the remaining ritual yams and declaring the harvest. Ezeulu refuses, for questionable reasons. Achebe clearly wants to show that there was a way around the problem; if someone else were chief the situation could have been resolved. Ezeulu himself contributes to the downfall of the tribe and to his own demise. The decision to postpone the harvest was particular to Ezeulu and his weaknesses.

Chinua Achebe handles man's suffering, meaninglessness, frustration, anguish and despair brilliantly. The struggle of the protagonists is a hopeless one, proving anger, anguish, despair and frustration in the face of threats. In the end of their life's journey there is none of the sense of satisfaction and reward. However it ends in the despair facing a tragic end. Achebe's passionate and desperate concern makes life inseparable from his work. He has exhibited penetrating insight into the trends of modern life. The novels cover different aspects of life and its moral emptiness and also reveal the frightening spiritual emptiness of humanity.

The novels are a unique vision of life so rich and so subjectively true and coherent that one finds it deeply moving permanently interesting and analytically inexhaustible. They are a criticism of life itself. The novels with their modern settings are seen as Achebe's analysis of the conflicting forces, political and social which determine the quality of contemporary Nigerian life. The novels of Chinua Achebe challenge the modern man to accept life freely and fearlessly for the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality. He has an assured grasp of the problems of the time and approaches them with profound knowledge and proper intellectual equipment. He is one of the powerful

writers who have painted such true pictures of modern life. His fiction is a literary echo of a general cultural reality.

Chinua Achebe has been concerned exclusively with the reality of African life. He gives an honest interpretation of the changes in life and culture of his people as it appears to him. He as a moralist tries to point out that even in the most ordered society essential human values are constantly being assaulted. In *Things Fall Apart* the individual is often portrayed struggling to set up his code of conduct and the society fails to appreciate the difficult dilemma of the man of conscience. In the case of *No Longer at Ease* the competitive values of the society have been given free rein and have made man lose his sense of justice and self-sacrifice. Achebe in *Arrow of God* emphasizes that power rests with the community and with the society. Achebe explores the role and rights of the individual in the community and its responsibilities to the individual.

Achebe's work has a structural strength and architectural coherence unmatched by other novelists. In the opinion of Bruce King as said in the book *Introduction to Nigerian Literature* Achebe "is one of the few novelists from Africa to write his stories with a historical setting. It is in itself indicative experience from that of his protagonists and thus achieves artistic rather than personal expression" (97).

Killam in the book *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*, suggests that "the writer's duty is not to beat this morning's headlines in topicality; it is to explore the depth of the human condition" (11). Achebe's overall intention is to explore the depths of the human condition. One of the major philosophic achievements of this novel is his emphasis from the communal, back to the individual. His novels transcend their setting and show the characters values, motivation, actions and qualities are permanent in human kind. The

novelist challenges the modern man to accept life freely and fearlessly since the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality.

The importance of Chinua Achebe's novels derives not simply from his theme, but also from his complete presentations of men in action in living reaction to their fate, as well as from his own perception that underlies in his imaginative world and confers upon it relevance and truth. Chinua Achebe neither idealizes nor patronises the Africa of Yesterday. His villages are not paradises. They are scenes of love as well as hatred, good and envy, peace and war. His success in bringing out general humanity above the African men of his themes is what gives him a high place among the great literary figures of the world. As a writer he visions a world, which is better than what exists because he sees the possibilities of a man rising higher than he has risen.

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