CUSTOMS AND CULTURAL ISSUESIN CHINUA ACHEBE'S "ARROW OF GOD"

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Abstract

The Present Paper focuses on customs and Cultural issues in Chinua Achebe's "Arrow of God". The main intention of this paper is to examine African customs and cultural values. In discussing African customs and cultural values, they are not assuming that all African societies have the same explanation for events, the same language, and the same mode of dressing and so on. The culture of Africa is varied and manifold; consisting of a mixture of countries with various tribes that each has its own unique characteristic from the continent of Africa. It is a product of the diverse populations that today inhabit the continent of Africa and the African culture. African culture is expressed in its arts and crafts, folklore and religion, clothing, food, music, and languages. Having looked at the concept and meaning of culture and having established the place of values in a culture, they want to bring this down to the African context. A culture is a personification of different values with all of them closely related to each other. That is why one can importantly talk about social, moral, religious, political, aesthetic and even economic values of a culture.

Keywords: Cultural in literature, Sociocultural theory, and Ibo Culture.

Introduction

Arrow of God (1964) represents the struggle for power and authority between the African and the missionaries and within the Igbo tribe. The title of the novel derives from an Igbo proverb in which an event or a person is said to represent the will ofGod. The identity issues are continued by Achebe as the development of the issues reflected in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) during the colonial power. He points out the continuity of African cultural disruption with the same insight and involvement in the 1920s after the arrival of the missionaries in Nigeria. The previous Igbo culture is depicted through the appealing mode of narration with the diversified change in African culture due to new religion like Christianity, raising the issues of identity

among the Igbo community. The conflicts in the Igbo custom and European culture evoke identity issues.

The novel focuses on the characteristics of the individual's belongings to the homogenous society that is fascinated by the rapid increase of Christianity among Igbo people. The missionaries disintegrated the Igbo society by provoking hostility among them through beneficial trades, education, law and order and the taste of power. Achebe reveals the surprising change in the native culture by shattering that it is bound to the foreign rules of society. Customs as part of cultural patterns identify the characteristics of British power in the Nigerian Igbo tribe. The question of ownership of the land between Umuaro and Okperi results into the conflicts between two tribes and it marked the issues of identity of the social order with a sense of belongingness. The responsibility of traditional religious rituals among Igbo people during the colonial period worried them into the interruption of culture with the major issues of identity.

An Interpretation of Culture in Literature

The Commonwealth countries themselves wrote about their encounter with the colonizer. In many countries a kind of cross-fertilization took place. English language as well as literature, in the process of changing other commonwealth languages and literature, has itself inevitably suffered significant change. The change now influences English language and literature more than ever before into English literature which is bent to accommodate and reflect different landscapes, races, nationalities, religions, and cultures. The most famous examples are to be found in the works of Chinua Achebe, *NgugiWaThiong'o* and *Gabriel Okara*. In the case of African countries, most of them had oral customs and therefore, the complete adoption of the English language and Christian religion is more smooth and even literature is bound to reflect mostly the story of modernization of the tribal's interaction between their culture and western values. Culture is an inner process and associates it with art, religion, literature, which are the cultivating inner development and as a social process relating to the creation of specific and different ways of life. Human culture can be summarized as the interconnectedness between a specific way of thought and an established way of life of a particular people. It is necessary to speak of 'cultures' rather than culture in order to acknowledge the variability and complexity of the shaping forces which define a different way of life.

Sociocultural theory If focused on African literature as a literature of cultural change they have to consider culture as a sociological concept - African society as being communal in nature, unified with cultural and personal identity. Achebe says:

"We may be talking as if individualism was invented in the West – in fact individualism must be as old as human society - from whatever time human beings began to move about in groups, dialogue between polarities of 'social being' and 'inner personality', 'individual and community' must have been called into being. The question is not whether this dialectic has always existed but how particular people resolved it at particular times".

The above lines say there are unsolved debates about the meaning and relationship between literature, culture and social structure. Colonial control in the African context is not just political but psychological in the ruthless suppression and denial of native culture. African writers have taken an articulated commitment to their culture and concept of culture is at the center of modern, African thought and reach for the consciousness of the concept. The Igbo social structure is based on blood relationships. It is traced by the family and the kinships. In society, the family is at the center into which the compound of the Igbo person is considered for the familial relations. It expands at the village level to the tribes and the towns. The family creates associations with the neighbors'. The people take decisions in a democratic way as there is no monarchy. There is a deep faith in religious rituals, trades, and marriages. All the people of different age-groups interact with each other during the war or in peace. The leaders and the 'tilted' men are honored as well as the individuals are promoted and given due credit by the achievements, initiatives, and leadership.

Arrow of God (1964) portrays the traditional structures of social order and leadership in Igbo land. It is mainly based on the typical idea for the fictional presentation. But the differences between the presentation of social structure in the novel and the actual background of the society are crucial for the analysis of the issues of culture of the Igbo tribe. The issues of culture and the leadership of the society directly cultivate the past social issues and the narrator shifts the focus in a flashback way. In such a context, the novel begins with an issue of the leadership in Umuaro and the tribal war between Umuaro and Okperi. The meeting of the elders and the men of 'title' in Umuaro decide the ownership of the land on which the argument takes place. It is believed that the parents explain the true histories to their children as *Ezeulu* remarks; "my father said this to me that when their village first came here to live the land belonged to Okperi. It was Okperi, who gave them a piece of their land to live in" (AOG: 15). On the other hand, *Nwaka,* who had taken the highest title in the tribe, claims that the people of Okperi were wanderers. *Nwaka* wins the favor of the people in the meeting and it creates the issues of confused leadership in the Igbo tribe by the rivalry between *Ezeulu* and *Nwaka*. It makes an influence on the younger generation

about the traditional courage of Umuaro "Before the Whiteman turned upside down" (AOG: 16). It is evidence that the religious power of Ezeulu gets dominated by the political concerns of throughNwaka's appeal. The social structure of the Igbo reflects the importance of rank.

The influence of Igbo culture

The Igbo customary system and the colonial administrative order are the socio-cultural forces, which regulate the norms of the culture of their own. The colonial power gets dominated at the intellectual and philosophical levels in comparison to the logic and the reasoning patterns of the Igbo people. The issues of the culture persist among Igbo people about to follow the traditional patterns or the new religion like Christianity. Ezeulu states that colonial power becomes influential among Igbo people due to the war of Umuaro with Okperi. If we now want him to go away again we must either wait until he is tired of his visitor we must drive him away" (AOG: 132). According to Ezeulu, it was difficult for the missionaries to rule the Igbo people in Umuaro. But the war between Umuaro and Okperi made them know the failings of the people and they interrupted the war by taking the hold of their power. Ezeulu's comment about the Whiteman's dominance in Umuaro and Okperi reveals the agents from the Igbo tribe, who helped the missionaries to get a commendable position. Mr. Winterbottom says about the disintegrations of the Igbo society when some of them began to work as the agents of the missionaries. Winterbottom says; "They all manage to turn themselves into little tyrants over their own people. The Igbo people protested against the warrant chiefs and the native court's systems, but their protests resulted only into the disciplinary group.

The social structure of Igbo people is destroyed by the missionaries as the Igbo kinships fall apart, the blood ties of them got separated to prove the strength in the political and religious spheres. The new system of the missionaries made them dislocate from customary and cultural beliefs. The customary legal system of the Igbo people got destroyed by the courts of the missionaries and the religious power made no way to live on their hopes on the God-like Ulu and Idemili. The strength of the primitive Igbo people was their Igbo religion. But the Igbo tribe gives a message that "no man however great was greater than his people; that no man ever won judgments against his clan" (AOG: 230). The colonial power is the most influential factor in the breakdown of Igbo customs. It can be argued that the cultural patterns of the Igbo tribe are concerned with the nature of the argument between Igbo land and colonial power. The conflict between the man of religion and the man of wealth divided the Igbo tribe. The social structure of the Igbo tribe emphasizes that the power rests with the group, the community, and society. Any

attempt by an individual to tamper with the principle can only be disastrous for the integration of the society.

Conclusion

The issues of the Nigerian Igbo identity and culture, the internal tribal conflicts make the fertile ground for the disintegration of the tribe. The political and religious powers mirror the discourse of their ethnicity. Ezeulu tries to hold the community unified by his thoughtful decisions, but social aggression is seen to challenge the traditional religious ethos. It is evident from the novel that the change in the cultural patterns sows the seed in the minds of the people by the power relations. The missionaries succeed to fall them apart by the influence of religion, trade, education, and justice. Ezeulu simply becomes an 'arrow' or the 'tool' of the religious power of the Igbo people for nothingness at the end when the natives were divided into two groups. One of them, the followers of the missionaries and the second becomes passive due to the 'pride' of Ezeulu, who deliberately delays the *New Yam Festival* to prove himself as the most powerful man in the clan. Nwaka'sappeal to the tribe about the God Ulu leads the confusion among the people. The missionaries divide them on the ground of the conflicts between Ezeulu and Nwaka regarding the war of Umuaro with Okperi. The African Igbo society is reflected by relations with the Missionaries and the presence of the imperial power of colonization. The issues of their individual and social identity subsist in various dimensions of conflict: religious, patriarchal and cultural, as well as traditional. In each of these dimensions revolve around issues of identity and culture. The Igbo people express themselves in spiritual communal ethos by which the individual and social identity are found deeply rooted in a spiritual sense of the kinship that does not keep them vibrant with the changing pace after arrival of the missionaries. The continuation of their cultural patterns becomes the complex issues as they consider the changes are meant to fall them apart from their values. The transmission of the cultural patterns due to imperialism is pointed out as the disruption of their identity.

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