



# ACQUISITION OF POWER: A JOURNEY TOWARDS DESTRUCTION OF AFRICAN SOCIETY: EXPLORING THROUGH TWO NOVELS OF ACHEBE-THINGS FALL APART AND ANTHILLS OF SAVANNAH.

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## **Abstract**

Albert Chinualumogo Achebe, was born into Igbo family on 16 november 1930 in Ogidi which is now eastern Nigeria. He wrote multiple novels and made tremendous contributions in African literature and is known as Father of African Literature. His first novel, Things Fall Apart, which was written at a time when Britishers were relinquishing rule in Nigeria, reflects on the irredeemable historical rapture made by the arrival of the colonisers, and his fifth novel, written after the end of colonialism era, Anthills of Savannah depicts the harm the authority of Nigerian leaders have done to their own society. Even after Nigeria got complete freedom the situation remained stable. Britishers claimed their responsibility to teach and develop Africa and left it hollow and when Nigeria got freedom the officers who took over the government claimed to restore its foundation and weaken it further through corruption and other undesirable means and the reason behind this downfall is the desire of achieving power for the sake of power which never bears fruit. For the betterment of African society what is needed is not one class overthrowing the other but a leader who can act as a role model and whose ideology encompasses compassion and understanding for all sections of the society. The system cannot make itself work, but leaders with the art of good governance can improve the economic, social and political condition of the African people. It is evident in both of his works that to achieve power one can go at any length which only results in corruption, destruction and loss of values.

**Key Words:** Power, Ideology, Colonialism, Violence, Devastation, Restoration of Society.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

History has witnessed that war has consumed the jewel of the world by destroying places, hammering peace and taking away the lives of many people. War is not the initial step but it strengthens from brutality for a very small thing to the desire of overpowering everything. This journey of ferocity that leads to war is filled with trauma for every passerby and whosoever comes in that way and all these losses only to gain power. Power as described by German sociologist Max Weber is “the ability to exercise one's will over others”. Ideology also plays a major role in creating a person and destroying the same person. In Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, we witness initially, Okonkwo, the main protagonist, tries to defy his father's ideology and in order to match the Paradigm set by the Igbo society he turns apathetic, later when the British incursion started they did it through imposing their ideology with the help of their religious book and teaching and when this didn't work as per their wishes they even used coercion since they were powerful and had pistol and guns with them. Likewise, in the novel *Anthills Of Savannah*, written at a time when missionaries have left Africa and now the control is in the hands of educated people who used it fallaciously destroying their society and culture in order to make their own ends meet. So my take in this paper is to present how ideology and power, which leads to war and violence in addition to grief and sufferings of living beings, play an important role in Achebe's novel. Humans are mad for being powerful at the cost of exploding their own people to dismantle their own place. I have also touched on how looming colonialism encompasses brutality and leaves everything to the verge of destruction. Achebe, in *Home and Exile*, says his writings are a part of a “process of re-storying peoples who had been knocked down by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession”. Achebe was much concerned about reinvigorating African culture and rebuilding Africa's image. Achebe, in all his works, shows the extent to which violence takes place in the uncontrollable desire of people to reach the zenith, be it of power, position or occupying a place. The violence and trauma Achebe projected were all at different levels. In his initial work, which was his masterpiece *Things Fall apart*, Okonkwo, the protagonist is hailed for his bravery in killing people and creating fear among people. Although Achebe was focused on showing the richness of Africa's culture, power, principle and dignity, the novel is filled with barbarity.

### **Okonkwo a man of war**

Violence and war are inexplicably related to each other. It has more bane than boon counting the lives and destruction it causes. Similar is the case with Achebe's novel. The first novel of Achebe, *Things fall Apart* presents a tragic drama of the society vividly and concretely validated in the tragic destiny of a representative individual. As the title suggests, it covers the displacement of the African society troubled with the interference of another way of life yet it encompasses savagery at vast. Okonkwo, the main principle of the novel, is praised by his members of society for his manliness. The definition of manliness is attached to violence and ferocity. The novel begins appalling Okonkwo as a great man since he kills Amalinze, a wrestler, who was unbeaten for seven years.

“Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze, The Cat.”(ch-1 p-3)

Okonkwo prevented himself from showing emotions since a man with feelings would be considered weak in the eyes of Igbo society. That proves that he was more concerned with the image he had built. Okonkwo was not afraid of Wars and had brought home five human heads. Achebe puts it as,

“On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity, he drank his palm-wine from his first human head.”(ch- 1 p-10)

Achebe's words that Okonkwo had his palm wine in a human head justifies Conrad's portrayal of Africans as savage in *Heart Of Darkness* where Kurtz who had lived in the jungle with Africans so long that he himself was turned to an animalistic creature and when Marlow visited him, Kurtz compound was decorated with skulls.

**Manliness and Igbo practises-**

It was because of Okonkwo and medicine-men that Ummuofia was feared by all its neighbours hence when Mbaino killed the daughter of Ummuofia, instead of choosing to go for war Mbaino decides to give a virgin and a young man, Ikemenufa, as compensation and these practises are circled in cultural violence. Not only did Okonkwo make strangers and other members of the society feel scared of him but also his own family members. As phrased in the novel-

“Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart, Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness.”(Ch-2 P-13)

He resented his father as his father who was introduced to the present generation as Agbala, which has two meanings, one it is another name for women and it could also mean a man who had taken no title. Unlike him, his father was lazy, sentimental and weak. These are societal practices and pressures that turn man into an animal. He dehumanises himself to such a level that he feels not at all bothered while killing Ikemefuna, the boy from Mbaino, who was guardian of Okonkwo. Ikemefuna loved Okonkwo like his father and he entrusted Okonkwo when he was taken by Igbo people to be sacrificed. His eyes asked for help but Okonkwo for the sake of his image killed him with his machete. When Okonkwo returned after sacrificing Ikemefuna he was sorrowful and didn't eat his meal. But it was this day that Nwoye, his son, had some resentment for his father. He was already perplexed with the Igbo practice of exiling twins, considering them ill omen and bad fate and these practices lead to Nwoye's defection to Christianity later on in this novel.

**Means of showcasing power and self esteem-**

Okonkwo's concern for public image is empowered to the extent where his actions become a pure contradiction of the values they are meant to defend. He beats his wife for the trivial reason of her being late from the market which resulted in delaying Okonkwo's dinner. Okonkwo's final action lies in his killing of the white man. He had been exiled for long and it brought him disgrace. In order to reestablish his image and reinstate his fear among people. This frustration piled up all along his exile period and when his banish period was over the situation of Umuofia was brought to his knowledge of how it has been dealing with the unwanted hindrance of the white people. It instantly clicked in his mind that this could be an opportunity for him to regain his position but to his bad as soon as he killed the messenger he could hear voices questioning his action rather than supporting him. The situation can be summed up-”Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in the tumult. He heard voices asking: ‘Why did he do it?’ He wiped his machete on the sand and went away. (ch.24,pp.146-147)

Finally he puts an end to his life by committing suicide. Since his fear among people is vanished and his value, his reputation is no more the same. He feels worthless with power and thinks he failed both his people and his god. His suicide had dubious symbols. One shows the gesture of rejection to the new order and the other is the collapse of the old order that was represented by Okonkwo.

**Colonialism and violence-**

These were the series of violence that took place in the Igbo society itself which had catastrophic results. Okonkwo and his family could never live like a family does because of Okonkwo's fear and disillusionment of being the most powerful and brave. The malpractices like sending twins in the forest and no funeral was given to a person who commits suicide as they were considered weak and ominous were also brutal practices of the Igbo society. This was not the end since colonialism was blooming causing darkness in the Umuofia; there was a split among the community and darker days were awaiting ahead. Colonialism came with an agenda to flourish a new empire by destroying the old one. Despite Igbo society being following some of the harsh practices and culture, it was in coherence. There were rules and principles, there was an order. This order was broken down slowly by inciting.

When the white man first appeared they killed him together but then in revenge colonists opened fire in the marketplace and killed many of them. The horror of violence begins from here. Missionaries started to occupy places and used their religion as a weapon to handle situations and convert people.

“He (the white man) said "he was one of them, as they could see from his colour and language. The white man was also his brother because they were all sons of god. And he told them about this god, the creator of all the world and all the men and women.” (ch.16 page 136)

Obierika told Okonkwo in exile about the situation, “They had built their church there, won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages. That was a source of great sorrow to the leaders of the clan; but many of them believed that the strange faith and the white man’s god would not last.” (ch.16 page 139)

These converts were from the Igbo society, not the man of title or someone given recognition but those who had been marginalised and treated as an ill omen. Since Nwoye always had questioned such practices and was triggered by his father’s killing of Ikemefuna he also became the one who converted to Christianity.

Missionaries used Igbo cultural practises to defy their belief in their multiple gods who asked them to kill and abandon their own people. Violence is again used to display power and the priest asks some converts to abuse and knock down all their deities. This was purposely done to terrify the people of Umuofia. Consequently, the men were seized and beaten until they died.

What colonists brought with them in *Things Fall Apart* and how modernization has affected the moral fabric of African people is distinct in Achebe’s *Anthills of Savannah*. There is a clear indication of distortion of everything once a person chases power for the power’s sake. Although this novel has been written after the Nigerian freedom it has all the malicious characters of the previous government. In other words, Africa was left devoid of values and a proper leader.

### **Post-colonial period in Kangan**

*Anthill of Savannah* symbolises discipline, determination, endurance and unity, without which restoration of the society is impossible. Achebe sets his novel in imaginary Kangan and presents contemporary political situations through three friends and the issue of the purpose of political power is discussed.

It begins “Our civilian Politician finally got what they had coming to them and landed unloved and unmourned on the rubbish heap”(Ch 1,p-12).

This suggests that the civilian government had been replaced which we further come to know that a military government has been formed and now its a directionless way to go. The title of head of the state is given to a young army commander, Sam. The new executive members are selected on the advice of Sam’s friends. The executive members consider themselves as a puppet to other excellency and hence they are spineless and with no vision and stick themselves only to boot licking. Whoever came complaining was executed immediately and hence it was a single man ruling complete Africa. The military had power and possessed the power to silence any form of opposition, they were least concerned with people's lives and looted national treasures. The ideology of Sam is put to action and his orders were creating disasters in the society. Treatment given to the people of Kangan was like one given to dumb-driven cattles. Then there is the execution of four armed robbers who are being humiliated and murdered on the street which is a minor crime in comparision to the corrupted and inhumane behaviour done by militarian army. But the people around didn't speak a word or question their own government. Achebe puts the dumbness of the people of Africa in the lines “Even if her mother was held by legs and torn down the middle like a piece of old rag that crowd would have yelled with eye watering laughter”.(p-42)

### **Dictatorship and exploitation of power-**

In Kangan it was a complete dictatorship and we come to know that nothing has changed after the departure of the white settlers and with the coming of the militarian government moreover things have gotten worse since there was no proper leadership and it is only the ideology of a dictator which was put to action there was chaotic building processes deliberately designed to cover message fraud, the burning of entire accounts and Audit departments to prevent bribery on the highways and open murder on the road

shooting of striking railway workers and most importantly destruction of independent unions social injustice and the elevation of the cult of mediocrity. The activities of workers and students are portrayed as anti-development; their position was used as a weapon of sabotage and exploitation. They destroyed public facilities making it difficult for the rural villages to use it and also looted public treasury and all this happened because the presidential retreat functioned as a barrier between the government and the people and people's basic needs of water.

Ikem Osodi, the poet generalist who was murdered because he wrote about governments excesses, embodies Achebe's political ideology that shows inability of the government to build relationship between poor people and their needs he could clearly see that this government was failing and bruising the heart of the poor people causing the pain and leaving them with no one to help.

Ikem holds the view that reform offers the most promising route to success in the real world. Ikem points out that Sam's free spirit has made him unpredictable and now nothing can stop him. The only way out is hoping for an ideology that will confer freedom and will work best to ensure social justice and wake up call for different African countries. Ikem also emphasises that nothing can be changed or amended by blaming the outsider for the complete destruction of Africa as of now Africa is in the hands of its own people. Africa needs to sweep all the problems that are being internal barriers in achieving meaningful development.

Sam Is live example of how power leads to complete destruction of a society as Sam became paranoid and temperamental, he decides to be elected President for life. National referendum is called but the people of Amazon refuse to choose him as president for life as a reaction to this Sam decides to not to give them access to the water, as a result there was complete drought in Amazon. Moreover, when the people of Amazon come to him seeking mercy, Sam suspects that they have been here to plan an insurrection which is being assisted by Chris. Sam orders Chris' arrest and to threaten anybody who holds information about him. While escaping police, Chris encounters some soldiers dragging Adamma to rape her. He tries to rescue Adamma but the soldier shoots and kills him. At the end it is distinct that Africa is left with people who lack leadership qualities and are devoid of all moral, religious and ethical values. What is left behind is an Africa with a shallow image of Okonkwo and Igbo society which was enriched with its own beautiful rules and regulations, governed by their own people, although with different means, peace was prevalent. The calmness of things falling apart has turned completely into the chaotic noises in the Anthills of Savannah.

## CONCLUSION-

It is well defined in both the novels of Achebe that to establish one's state one must put his power on display which was done through frantic actions. Neither the colonial nor the post-colonial Africa was class neutral and played a major role in class division. One who was in power made policies that consolidated their domination, both politically and economically and to reinstate power coercion was used and to suppress voices of the people killing was used. It is also evident that the main Issue of dependency and underdevelopment in Africa was not completely rooted in capitalism and imperialism but also the internal shortcomings. The corrupt and incompetent attitude of African government should also be taken in account. Any system in society needs manpower to be enforced and work properly and that can only be achieved by electing a good leader who is willing to bring reformation rather than filling his own pocket at the expense of the life of the people.

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