

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-ENGLISH

SEMESTER -IV

AFRICAN & CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

ELECTIVE 404

BLOCK-1

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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FOREWORD

The Self-Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavours.

AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

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BLOCK-1 AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

Introduction to Block

This paper helps to understand the various aspects of the life and literary work of African and Caribbean Literature. This module comprises of seven units related to life and works of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adich.

Unit One This unit help to learn about the African Literature. It helps to understand the Oral Traditions of that era along with the colonial African Literature. It helps to understand and learn about the Postcolonial African Literature.

Unit Two This unit help to learn about the Caribbean Literature. It helps to understand The History Of The Caribbean This unit also discuss the Post-Emancipation Caribbean Literature.

Unit contains the Implications on Criticism of that era along with the Major Writers From The Caribbean. This unit also differentiate between Caribbean Literature" and "West Indian Literature". This unit gives the implications of Influences On West Indian Literature.

Unit Three This unit help to learn about the life and work of Chinua Achebe. This unit helps to understand the Teaching of Chinua Achebe. This unit discuss Writings and different awards received by him. Unit explains how he was the voice Of Nigeria And African Writers Series.

Unit Four This unit help to learn about the Literary works Chinua Achebe It helps to understand the Themes and style of his writing. Unit helps to have understating about impact of his writing in various aspects of life..

Unit Five This unit help to analysis and interpret Things Fall apart by Chinua Achebe. This unit helps to understand the writing style of Chinua Achebe.

Unit Six This unit help to learn about the Life of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This unit helps to know about writing styles and work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Unit gives the understanding about the critical perspective about the literary works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Unit Seven This unit help to learn works and style of writing of Literature of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This unit helps to understand the historical situation of writing of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Unit gives the insight of Adichie as an African author and explains how his writing is affected by African culture.

UNIT: 1 AFRICAN LITERATURE

STRUCTURE

- 1.0 Objective
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Oral Traditions
- 1.3 Oral Traditions And The Written Word
- 1.4 Pre-colonial Literature
- 1.5 Colonial African Literature
- 1.6 Postcolonial African Literature
- 1.7 Let Sum Up
- 1.8 Keywords
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- 1.10 Suggested Readings And Reference
- 1.11 Answer to check your progress

1.0 OBJECTIVE

This unit help to learn about the African Literature. It helps to understand the Oral Traditions of that era along with the colonial African Literature. It helps to understand and learn about the Postcolonial African Literature. Unit helps to achieve following objective and learn about :

- Oral Tradition
- History of African Literature
- Pre & Post-colonial African literature

1.1 INTRODUCTION

African literature, the body of traditional oral and written literatures in Afro-Asiatic and African languages together with works written by Africans in European languages. Traditional written literature, which is

limited to a smaller geographic area than is oral literature, is most characteristic of those sub-Saharan cultures that have participated in the cultures of the Mediterranean. In particular, there are written literatures in both Hausa and Arabic, created by the scholars of what is now northern Nigeria, and the Somali people have produced a traditional written literature. There are also works written in Ge'ez (Ethiopic) and Amharic, two of the languages of Ethiopia, which is the one part of Africa where Christianity has been practiced long enough to be considered traditional. Works written in European languages date primarily from the 20th century onward. The literature of South Africa in English and Afrikaans is also covered in a separate article, South African literature. See also African theatre.

The relationship between oral and written traditions and in particular between oral and modern written literatures is one of great complexity and not a matter of simple evolution. Modern African literatures were born in the educational systems imposed by colonialism, with models drawn from Europe rather than existing African traditions. But the African oral traditions exerted their own influence on these literatures.

1.2 ORAL TRADITIONS

The nature of storytelling

The storyteller speaks, time collapses, and the members of the audience are in the presence of history. It is a time of masks. Reality, the present, is here, but with explosive emotional images giving it a context. This is the storyteller's art: to mask the past, making it mysterious, seemingly inaccessible. But it is inaccessible only to one's present intellect; it is always available to one's heart and soul, one's emotions. The storyteller combines the audience's present waking state and its past condition of semi-consciousness, and so the audience walks again in history, joining its forebears. And history, always more than an academic subject, becomes for the audience a collapsing of time. History becomes the audience's memory and a means of reliving of an indeterminate and deeply obscure past.

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Storytelling is a sensory union of image and idea, a process of re-creating the past in terms of the present; the storyteller uses realistic images to describe the present and fantasy images to evoke and embody the substance of a culture's experience of the past. These ancient fantasy images are the culture's heritage and the storyteller's bounty: they contain the emotional history of the culture, its most deeply felt yearnings and fears, and they therefore have the capacity to elicit strong emotional responses from members of audiences. During a performance, these envelop contemporary images—the most unstable parts of the oral tradition, because they are by their nature always in a state of flux—and thereby visit the past on the present.

It is the task of the storyteller to forge the fantasy images of the past into masks of the realistic images of the present, enabling the performer to pitch the present to the past, to visualize the present within a context of—and therefore in terms of—the past. Flowing through this potent emotional grid is a variety of ideas that have the look of antiquity and ancestral sanction. Story occurs under the mesmerizing influence of performance—the body of the performer, the music of her voice, the complex relationship between her and her audience. It is a world unto itself, whole, with its own set of laws. Images that are unlike are juxtaposed, and then the storyteller reveals—to the delight and instruction of the members of the audience—the linkages between them that render them homologous. In this way the past and the present are blended; ideas are thereby generated, forming a conception of the present. Performance gives the images their context and ensures the audience a ritual experience that bridges past and present and shapes contemporary life.

Storytelling is alive, ever in transition, never hardened in time. Stories are not meant to be temporally frozen; they are always responding to contemporary realities, but in a timeless fashion. Storytelling is therefore not a memorized art. The necessity for this continual transformation of the story has to do with the regular fusing of fantasy and images of the

real, contemporary world. Performers take images from the present and wed them to the past, and in that way the past regularly shapes an audience's experience of the present. Storytellers reveal connections between humans—within the world, within a society, within a family—emphasizing an interdependence and the disaster that occurs when obligations to one's fellows are forsaken. The artist makes the linkages, the storyteller forges the bonds, tying past and present, joining humans to their gods, to their leaders, to their families, to those they love, to their deepest fears and hopes, and to the essential core of their societies and beliefs.

The language of storytelling includes, on the one hand, image, the patterning of image, and the manipulation of the body and voice of the storyteller and, on the other, the memory and present state of the audience. A storytelling performance involves memory: the recollection of each member of the audience of his experiences with respect to the story being performed, the memory of his real-life experiences, and the similar memories of the storyteller. It is the rhythm of storytelling that welds these disparate experiences, yearnings, and thoughts into the images of the story. And the images are known, familiar to the audience. That familiarity is a crucial part of storytelling. The storyteller does not craft a story out of whole cloth: she re-creates the ancient story within the context of the real, contemporary, known world. It is the metaphorical relationship between these memories of the past and the known images of the world of the present that constitutes the essence of storytelling. The story is never history; it is built of the shards of history. Images are removed from historical contexts, then reconstituted within the demanding and authoritative frame of the story. And it is always a sensory experience, an experience of the emotions. Storytellers know that the way to the mind is by way of the heart. The interpretative effects of the storytelling experience give the members of the audience a refreshed sense of reality, a context for their experiences that has no existence in reality. It is only when images of contemporary life are woven into the ancient familiar images that metaphor is born and experience becomes meaningful.

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Stories deal with change: mythic transformations of the cosmos, heroic transformations of the culture, transformations of the lives of everyman. The storytelling experience is always ritual, always a rite of passage; one relives the past and, by so doing, comes to insight about present life. Myth is both a story and a fundamental structural device used by storytellers. As a story, it reveals change at the beginning of time, with gods as the central characters. As a storytelling tool for the creation of metaphor, it is both material and method. The heroic epic unfolds within the context of myth, as does the tale. At the heart of each of these genres is metaphor, and at the core of metaphor is riddle with its associate, proverb. Each of these oral forms is characterized by a metaphorical process, the result of patterned imagery. These universal art forms are rooted in the specificities of the African experience.

The Riddle

In the riddle, two unlike, and sometimes unlikely, things are compared. The obvious thing that happens during this comparison is that a problem is set, then solved. But there is something more important here, involving the riddle as a figurative form: the riddle is composed of two sets, and, during the process of riddling, the aspects of each of the sets are transferred to the other. On the surface it appears that the riddle is largely an intellectual rather than a poetic activity. But through its imagery and the tension between the two sets, the imagination of the audience is also engaged. As they seek the solution to the riddle, the audience itself becomes a part of the images and therefore—and most significantly—of the metaphorical transformation.

This may not seem a very complex activity on the level of the riddle, but in this deceptively simple activity can be found the essential core of all storytelling, including the interaction of imagery in lyric poetry, the tale, and the epic. In the same way as those oral forms, the riddle works in a literal and in a figurative mode. During the process of riddling, the literal mode interacts with the figurative in a vigorous and creative way. It is

that play between the literal and the figurative, between reality and fantasy, that characterizes the riddle: in that relationship can be found metaphor, which explains why it is that the riddle underlies other oral forms. The images in metaphor by their nature evoke emotion; the dynamics of metaphor trap those emotions in the images, and meaning is caught up in that activity. So meaning, even in such seemingly simple operations as riddling, is more complex than it may appear.

The lyric

*People were those who
Broke for me the string.
Therefore,
The place became like this to me,
On account of it,
Because the string was that which broke for me.
Therefore,
The place does not feel to me,
As the place used to feel to me,
On account of it.
For,
The place feels as if it stood open before me,
Because the string has broken for me.
Therefore,
The place does not feel pleasant to me,
On account of it.*

*-(a San poem, from W.H.I. Bleek and L.C. Lloyd, Specimens of
Bushman Folklore [1911])*

The images in African lyric interact in dynamic fashion, establishing metaphorical relationships within the poem, and so it is that riddling is the motor of the lyric. And, as in riddles, so also in lyric: metaphor frequently involves and invokes paradox. In the lyric, it is as if the singer were stitching a set of riddles into a single richly textured poem, the series of riddling connections responsible for the ultimate experience of

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the poem. The singer organizes and controls the emotions of the audience as he systematically works his way through the levels of the poem, carefully establishing the connective threads that bring the separate metaphorical sets into the poem's totality. None of the separate riddling relationships exists divorced from those others that compose the poem. As these riddling relationships interact and interweave, the poet brings the audience to a close, intense sense of the meaning of the poem. Each riddling relationship provides an emotional clue to the overall design of the poem. Further clues to meaning are discovered by the audience in the rhythmical aspects of the poem, the way the poet organizes the images, the riddling organization itself, and the sound of the singer's voice as well as the movement of the singer's body. As in the riddle, everything in the lyric is directed to the revelation of metaphor.

The proverb

Work the clay while it is fresh.

Wisdom killed the wise man.

The African proverb seems initially to be a hackneyed expression, a trite leftover repeated until it loses all force. But proverb is also performance, it is also metaphor, and it is in its performance and metaphorical aspects that it achieves its power. In one sense, the experience of a proverb is similar to that of a riddle and a lyric poem: different images are brought into a relationship that is novel, that provides insight. When one experiences proverbs in appropriate contexts, rather than in isolation, they come to life. In the riddle the poser provides the two sides of the metaphor. In lyric poetry the two sides are present in the poem but in a complex way; the members of the audience derive their aesthetic experience from comprehending that complexity. The words of the proverb are by themselves only one part of the metaphorical experience. The other side of the riddle is not to be found in the same way it is in the riddle and the lyric. The proverb establishes ties with its metaphorical equivalent in the real life of the members of the audience or with the wisdom of the past. The words of the proverb are a riddle waiting to

happen. And when it happens, the African proverb ceases to be a grouping of tired words.

The tale

The riddle, lyric, and proverb are the materials that are at the dynamic centre of the tale. The riddle contains within it the possibilities of metaphor; and the proverb elaborates the metaphorical possibilities when the images of the tale are made lyrical—that is, when they are rhythmically organized. Such images are drawn chiefly from two repertoires: from the contemporary world (these are the realistic images) and from the ancient tradition (these are the fantasy images). These diverse images are brought together during a storytelling performance by their rhythmic organization. Because the fantasy images have the capacity to elicit strong emotional reactions from members of the audience, these emotions are the raw material that is woven into the image organization by the patterning. The audience thereby becomes an integral part of the story by becoming a part of the metaphorical process that moves to meaning. And meaning, therefore, is much more complex than an obvious homily that may be readily available on the surface of the tale.

This patterning of imagery is the main instrument that shapes a tale. In the simplest of tales, a model is established, and then it is repeated in an almost identical way. In a Xhosa story an ogre chases a woman and her two children. With each part of the story, as the ogre moves closer and as the woman and her children are more intensely imperiled, a song organizes the emotions of helplessness, of menace, and of terror, even as it moves the story on its linear path:

*Qwebethe, Qwebethe, what do you want?
I'm leaving my food behind on the prairie,
I'm leaving it behind,
I'm leaving it behind.*

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With little more than a brief introduction and a quick close, the storyteller develops this tale. There is an uninterrupted linear movement of a realistic single character fleeing from a fantasy ogre—from a conflict to a resolution. But that fantasy and that reality are controlled by the lyrical centre of the tale, and that seemingly simple mechanism provides the core for complexity. That linear movement, even in the simplest stories, is subverted by a cyclical movement—in this case, the song—and that is the engine of metaphor. It is the cyclical movement of the tale that makes it possible to experience linear details and images in such a way that they become equated one with the other. So it is that the simplest tale becomes a model for more-complex narratives. That lyrical centre gives the tale a potential for development.

In a more complex tale, the storyteller moves two characters through three worlds, each of those worlds seemingly different. But by means of that lyrical pulse, the rhythmical ordering of those worlds brings them into such alignment that the members of the audience experience them as the same. It is this discernment of different images as identical that results in complex structures, characters, events, and meanings. And what brings those different images into this alignment is poetry—more specifically, the metaphorical character of the lyrical poem. The very composition of tales makes it possible to link them and to order them metaphorically. The possibilities of epic are visible in the simplest of tales, and so also are the possibilities of the novel.

The trickster tale, as it does with so much of the oral tradition, provides insights into this matter of the construction of stories. Masks are the weapons of the trickster: he creates illusions, bringing the real world and the world of illusion into temporary, shimmering proximity, convincing his dupe of the reality of metaphor. That trickster and his antic activities are another way of describing the metaphorical motor of storytelling.

It is in heroic poetry, or panegyric, that lyric and image come into their most obvious union. As in the tale and as in the lyric, riddle, and proverb, the essence of panegyric is metaphor, although the metaphorical

connections are sometimes somewhat obscure. History is more clearly evident in panegyric, but it remains fragmented history, rejoined according to the poetic intentions of the bard. Obvious metaphorical connections are frequently made between historical personages or events and images of animals, for example. The fantasy aspects of this kind of poetry are to be found in its construction, in the merging of the real and the animal in metaphorical ways. It is within this metaphorical context that the hero is described and assessed. As in other forms of oral tradition, emotions associated with both historical and nonhistorical images are at the heart of meaning in panegyric. It is the lyrical rhythm of panegyric that works such emotions into form. In the process, history is reprocessed and given new meaning within the context of contemporary experience. It is a dual activity: history is thereby redefined at the same time that it shapes experiences of the present.

Among the Tuareg of western Africa, a stringed instrument often accompanies the creation of such poetry, and the main composers are women. The Songhai have mabe, the professional bards; they are present at all rites of passage, celebrating, accompanying, and cushioning the transformation being experienced. In Mauritania it is the iggiw (plural iggawen) who creates heroic poetry and who plays the lute while singing the songs of the warriors. The diare (plural diarou) is the bard among the Soninke. He goes to battle with the soldiers, urging them, placing their martial activities within the context of history, building their acts within the genealogies of their family. Drums and trumpets sometimes accompany the maroka among the Hausa. When a king is praised, the accompaniment becomes orchestral. Yoruba bards chant the ijala, singing of lineage, and, with the oriki, saluting the notable. Among the Hima of Uganda, the bard is the omwevugi. In the evenings, he sings of the omugabe, the king, and of men in battle and of the cattle. The mbongiwakupfusha is the bard among the Tonga of Mozambique. He too sings of the glories of the past, creating poetry about chiefs and kings.

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The images vary, their main organizing implement being the subject of the poem. It is the metrical ordering of images, including sound and motion, that holds the poem together, not the narrative of history.

The epic

In the epic can be found the merging of various frequently unrelated tales, the metaphorical apparatus, the controlling mechanism found in the riddle and lyric, the proverb, and heroic poetry to form a larger narrative. All of this centres on the character of the hero and a gradual revelation of his frailty, uncertainties, and torments; he often dies, or is deeply troubled, in the process of bringing the culture into a new dispensation often prefigured in his resurrection or his coming into knowledge. The mythical transformation caused by the creator gods and culture heroes is reproduced precisely in the acts and the cyclical, tortured movements of the hero.

An epic may be built around a genealogical system, with parts of it developed and embellished into a story. The epic, like the heroic poem, contains historical references such as place-names and events; in the heroic poem these are not greatly developed. When they are developed in an epic, they are built not around history but around a fictional tale. The fictional tale ties the historical episode, person, or place-name to the cultural history of the people. In an oral society, oral genres include history (the heroic poem) and imaginative story (the tale). The epic combines the two, linking the historical episode to the imaginative tale. Sometimes, myth is also a part of epic, with emphasis on origins. The tale, the heroic poem, history, and myth are combined in the epic. In an echo of the tale—where the emphasis is commonly on a central but always nonhistorical character—a single historical or nonhistorical character is the centre of the epic. And at the core of the epic is that same engine composed of the riddle, the lyric, and the proverb.

Much is frequently made of the psychology of this central character when he appears in the epic. He is given greater detail than the tale character, given deeper dimension. The epic performer remembers the great events and turning points of cultural history. These events change

the culture. In the epic these elements are tied to the ancient images of the culture (in the form of tale and myth), an act that thereby gives these events cultural sanction. The tale and myth lend to the epic (and, by inference, to history) a magical, supernatural atmosphere: all of nature is touched in the Malagasy epic Ibonia; in the West African epic Sunjata, magic keeps Sumanguru in charge and enables Sunjata to take over. It is a time of momentous change in the society. In Ibonia there are major alterations in the relationship between men and women; in Sunjata and in the epic Mwindo of the Nyanga people of Congo there are major political changes.

But, in Mwindo, why was Mwindo such a trickster? He was, after all, a great hero. And why must he be taught by the gods after he has established his heroic credentials? Central to this question is the notion of the transitional phase—of the betwixt and between, of the someone or something that crosses yet exists between boundaries. There is a paradox in Mwindo's vulnerability—how, after all, can a hero be vulnerable?—but more important is his nonmoral energy during a period of change. Mwindo is a liminal hero-trickster: he is liminal while he seeks his father, and then he becomes liminal again at the hands of the gods. “Out there” is where the learning, the transformation, occurs. The trickster energy befits and mirrors this in-between period, as no laws are in existence. There is change and transformation, but it is guided by a vision: in the myths, it is god's vision for the cosmos; in the tales, it is the society's vision for completeness; in the epics, it is the hero's vision for a new social dispensation.

The heroic epic is a grand blending of tale and myth, heroic poetry and history. These separate genres are combined in the epic, and separate epics contain a greater or lesser degree of each—history (and, to a lesser extent, poetry) is dominant in Sunjata, heroic poetry and tale in Ibonia, and tale and myth (and, to a lesser extent, poetry) in Mwindo. Oral societies have these separate categories: history, the imaginative tale, heroic poetry, myth, and epic. Epic, therefore, is not simply history. History exists as a separate genre. The essential characteristic of epic is

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not that it is history but that it combines history and tale, fact and fancy, and worlds of reality and fantasy. The epic becomes the grand summation of the culture because it takes major turning points in history (always with towering historical or nonhistorical figures who symbolize these turning points) and links them to tradition, giving the changes their sanction. The epic hero may be revolutionary, but he does not signal a total break with the past. Continuity is stressed in epic—in fact, it is as if the shift in the direction of the society is a return to the paradigm envisioned by ancient cultural wisdom. The effect of the epic is to mythologize history, to bring history to the essence of the culture, to give history the resonance of the ancient roots of the culture as these are expressed in myth, imaginative tale (and motif), and metaphor. In heroic poetry, history is fragmented, made discontinuous. In epic these discontinuous images are given a new form, that of the imaginative tale. And the etiological aspects of history (that is, the historical alteration of the society) are tied to the etiology of mythology—in other words, the acts of the mortal hero are tied to the acts of the immortals.

History is not the significant genre involved in the epic. It is instead tale and myth that organize the images of history and give those images their meaning. History by itself has no significance: it achieves significance when it is juxtaposed to the images of a tradition grounded in tales and myths. This suggests the great value that oral societies place on the imaginative traditions: they are entertaining, certainly, but they are also major organizing devices. As the tales take routine, everyday experiences of reality and—by placing them in the fanciful context of conflict and resolution with the emotion-evoking motifs of the past—give them a meaning and a completeness that they do not actually have, so in epic is history given a form and a meaning that it does not possess. This imaginative environment revises history, takes historical experiences and places them into the context of the culture, and gives them cultural meaning. The epic is a blending, then, of the ancient culture as it is represented through imaginative tradition with historical events and personages. The divine trickster links heaven and earth, god and human;

the epic hero does the same but also links fancy and reality, myth and history, and cultural continuity and historical disjunction.

What is graphically clear in the epics *Ibonia* and *Sunjata* is that heroic poetry, in the form of the praise name, provides a context for the evolution of a heroic story. In both of those epics, the panegyric forms a pattern, the effect of which is to tie the epic hero decisively and at the same time to history and to the gods. Those epics, as well as *Mwindo*, dramatize the rite of passage of a society or a culture: the hero's movement through the familiar stages of the ritual becomes a poetic metaphor for a like movement of the society itself. The tale at the centre of the epic may be as straightforward as any tale in the oral tradition. But that tale is linked to a complex of other tales, the whole given an illusion of poetic unity by the heroic poetry, which in turn provides a lyrical rhythm.

Storytelling is the mythos of a society: at the same time that it is conservative, at the heart of nationalism, it is the propelling mechanism for change. The struggle between the individual and the group, between the traditions that support and defend the rights of the group and the sense of freedom that argues for undefined horizons of the individual—this is the contest that characterizes the hero's dilemma, and the hero in turn is the personification of the quandary of the society itself and of its individual members.

1.3 ORAL TRADITIONS AND THE WRITTEN WORD

Oral and written storytelling traditions have had a parallel development, and in many ways they have influenced each other. Ancient Egyptian scribes, early Hausa and Swahili copyists and memorizers, and contemporary writers of popular novellas have been the obvious and crucial transitional figures in the movement from oral to literary traditions. What happened among the Hausa and Swahili was occurring elsewhere in Africa—among the Fulani, in northern Ghana among the

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Guang, in Senegal among the Tukulor and Wolof, and in Madagascar and Somalia.

The linkage between oral tradition and the written word is most obviously seen in pulp literature: the Onitsha market literature of Nigeria; the popular fiction of Accra, Ghana; the popular love and detective literature of Nairobi; the visualizing of story in the complex comic strips sold in shops in Cape Town. But the linkage is also a crucial characteristic of more-serious and more-complex fiction. One cannot fully appreciate the works of Chinua Achebe or Ousmane Sembene without placing them into the context of Africa's classical period, its oral tradition. To be sure, the Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese literary traditions along with Christianity and Islam and other effects of colonialism in Africa also had a dynamic impact on African literature, but African writers adapted those alien traditions and made them their own by placing them into these African classical frames.

History and myth

As is the case with the oral tradition, written literature is a combination of the real and the fantastic. It combines, on the one hand, the real (the contemporary world) and history (the realistic world of the past) and, on the other, myth and hero, with metaphor being the agent of transformation. This is the alchemy of the literary experience. Literature is atomized, fragmented history. Transformation is the crucial activity of the story, its dynamic movement. The writer is examining the relationship of the reader with the world and with history. In the process of this examination, the writer invents characters and events that correspond to history but are not history. At the centre of the story is myth, the fantasy element, a character or event that moves beyond reality, though it is always rooted in the real. In the oral tale this is clearly the fantasy character; so it is, in a complex, refracted way, in written literature.

Myth, which is deeply, intensely emotional, has to do with the gods and creation, with the essence of a belief system; it is the imaged embodiment of a philosophical system, the giving of form to thought and emotion. It is the driving force of a people, that emotional force that defines a people; it is the everlasting form of a culture, hence its link to the gods, to the heavens, to the forever. In mythic imagery is the embodiment of significant emotions—the hopes, fears, dreams, and nightmares—of a people. History—the story of a people, their institutions, and their community—is the way one likes to think things happened, in the real world. The hero is everyman, moving through a change, a transformation, and so moving into the myth, the essence, of his history. He thereby becomes a part of it, representative of it, embodying the culture. The hero is everyman with myth inside him. He has been mythicized; story does that. Metaphor is the transformational process, the movement from the real to the mythic and back again to the real—changed forever, because one has become mythicized, because one has moved into history and returned with the elixir.

In serious literary works, the mythic fantasy characters are often derived from the oral tradition; such characters include the Fool in Sheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), Kihika (and the mythicized Mugo) in NgugiwaThiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Michael K in J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), Dan and Sello in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1973), Mustapha in al-ṬayyibṢāliḥ's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), and Nedjma in KatebYacine's *Nedjma* (1956). These are the ambiguous, charismatic shapers, those with connections to the essence of history. In each case, a real-life character moves into a relationship with a mythic character, and that movement is the movement of the hero's becoming a part of history, of culture. The real-life character is the hero who is in the process of being created: Samba Diallo, Mugo, the doctor, Elizabeth, the narrator, or the four pilgrims. Myth is the stuff of which the hero is being created. History is the real, the past, the world against which this transformation is occurring and within which the hero will move. The real contemporary

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world is the place from which the hero comes and to which the hero will return. Metaphor is the hero's transformation.

The image of Africa, then, is that rich combination of myth and history, with the hero embodying the essence of the history, or battling it, or somehow having a relationship with it by means of the fantasy mythic character. It is in this relationship between reality and fantasy, the shaped and the shaper, that the story has its power: Samba Diallo with the Fool, Mugo with Kihika (and the mythicized Mugo), the doctor with Michael K, Elizabeth with Dan and Sello, the narrator with Mustapha, the four pilgrims with Nedjma. This relationship, which is a harbinger of change, occurs against a historical backdrop of some kind, but that backdrop is not the image of Africa: that image is the relationship between the mythical character and African/European history.

The fantasy character provides access to history, to the essence of history. It is the explanation of the historical background of the novels. The hero is the person who is being brought into a new relationship with that history, be it the history of a certain area—Kenya or South Africa or Algeria, for example—or of a wider area—of Africa generally or, in the case of *A Question of Power*, the history of the world. These are the keys, then: the hero who is being shaped, the fantasy character who is the ideological and spiritual material being shaped and who is also the artist or shaper, and the larger issues, the historical panorama. The fantasy character is crucial: he is the artist's palette, the mythic element of the story. This character is the heart and the spiritual essence of history. This is the Fool, Kihika, Michael K, Dan and Sello, Mustapha, Nedjma. Here is where reality and fantasy, history and fiction blend, the confluence that is at the heart of story. The real-life character, the hero, comes into a relationship with that mythic figure, and so the transformation begins, as the hero moves through an intermediary period into history. It is the hero's identification with history that makes it possible for us to speak of the hero as a hero. This movement of a realistic character into myth is metaphor, the blending of two seemingly unlike images. It is the power of the story, the centre of the story, as Samba Diallo moves into the Fool,

as Mugo moves into Kihika, as the doctor moves into Michael K, as Elizabeth moves into Dan and Sello, as the narrator moves into Mustapha, as the four pilgrims move into Nedjma. In this movement the oral tradition is revealed as alive and well in literary works. The kinds of imagery used by literary storytellers and the patterned way those reality and fantasy images are organized in their written works are not new. The materials of storytelling, whether in the oral or written tradition, are essentially the same.

The influence of oral traditions on modern writers

Themes in the literary traditions of contemporary Africa are worked out frequently within the strictures laid down by the imported religions Christianity and Islam and within the struggle between traditional and modern, between rural and newly urban, between genders, and between generations. The oral tradition is clearly evident in the popular literature of the marketplace and the major urban centres, created by literary storytellers who are manipulating the original materials much as oral storytellers do, at the same time remaining faithful to the tradition. Some of the early writers sharpened their writing abilities by translating works into African languages; others collected oral tradition; most experienced their apprenticeships in one way or another within the contexts of living oral traditions.

There was a clear interaction between the deeply rooted oral tradition and the developing literary traditions of the 20th century. That interaction is revealed in the placing of literary works into the forms of the oral tradition. The impact of the epic on the novel, for instance, continues to influence writers today. The oral tradition in the work of some of the early writers of the 20th century—Amos Tutuola of Nigeria, D.O. Fagunwa in Yoruba, Violet Dube in Zulu, S.E.K. Mqhayi in Xhosa, and Mario António in Portuguese—is readily evident. Some of these writings were merely imitations of the oral tradition and were therefore not influential. Such antiquarians did little more than retell, recast, or transcribe materials from the oral tradition. But the work of writers such

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as Tutuola had a dynamic effect on the developing literary tradition; such works went beyond mere imitation.

The most successful of the early African writers knew what could be done with the oral tradition; they understood how its structures and images could be transposed to a literary mode, and they were able to distinguish mimicry from organic growth. Guybon Sinxo explored the relationship between oral tradition and writing in his popular Xhosa novels, and A.C. Jordan (in Xhosa), O.K. Matsepe (in Sotho), and R.R.R. Dhlomo (in Zulu) built on that kind of writing, establishing new relationships not only between oral and written materials but between the written and the written—that is, between the writers of popular fiction and those writers who wished to create a more serious form of literature. The threads that connect these three categories of artistic activity are many, they are reciprocal, and they are essentially African, though there is no doubt that there was also interaction with European traditions. Writers in Africa today owe much to African oral tradition and to those authors who have occupied the space between the two traditions, in an area of creative interaction.

1.4 PRECOLONIAL LITERATURE

Examples of pre-colonial African literature are numerous. In Ethiopia, there is a substantial literature written in Ge'ez going back at least to the fourth century AD; the best-known work in this tradition is the KebraNegast, or "Book of Kings." One popular form of traditional African folktale is the "trickster" story, in which a small animal uses its wits to survive encounters with larger creatures. Examples of animal tricksters include Anansi, a spider in the folklore of the Ashanti people of Ghana; Ijápá, a tortoise in Yoruba folklore of Nigeria; and Sungura, a hare found in central and East African folklore. Other works in written form are abundant, namely in north Africa, the Sahel regions of west Africa and on the Swahili coast. From Timbuktu alone, there are an estimated 300,000 or more manuscripts tucked away in various libraries and private collections, mostly written in Arabic but some in the native languages (namely Fula and Songhai). Many were written at the famous

University of Timbuktu. The material covers a wide array of topics, including astronomy, poetry, law, history, faith, politics, and philosophy. Swahili literature similarly, draws inspiration from Islamic teachings but developed under indigenous circumstances. One of the most renowned and earliest pieces of Swahili literature being UtendiwaTambuka or "The Story of Tambuka".

In Islamic times, North Africans such as Ibn Khaldun attained great distinction within Arabic literature. Medieval north Africa boasted universities such as those of Fes and Cairo, with copious amounts of literature to supplement them.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I:

1. Differentiate between Riddle and Tale?

2. How is oral tradition was different from written?

1.5 COLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

The African works best known in the West from the periods of colonization and the slave trade are primarily slave narratives, such as Olaudah Equiano's The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789).

In the colonial period, Africans exposed to Western languages began to write in those tongues. In 1911, Joseph Ephraim CaselyHayford (also known as Ekra-Agiman) of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) published what is probably the first African novel written in English, Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation. Although the work moves between fiction and political advocacy, its publication and positive reviews in the Western press mark a watershed moment in African literature.

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During this period, African plays written in English began to emerge. Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo of South Africa published the first English-language African play, *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqawuse the Liberator* in 1935. In 1962, NgũgĩwaThiong'o of Kenya wrote the first East African drama, *The Black Hermit*, a cautionary tale about "tribalism" (discrimination between African tribes).

Among the first pieces of African literature to receive significant worldwide critical acclaim was *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe. Published in 1958, late in the colonial era, *Things Fall Apart* analyzed the effect of colonialism on traditional African society.

African literature in the late colonial period (between the end of World War I and independence) increasingly showed themes of liberation, independence, and (among Africans in French-controlled territories) *négritude*. One of the leaders of the *négritude* movement, the poet and eventual President of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, published in 1948 the first anthology of French-language poetry written by Africans, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (*Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in the French Language*), featuring a preface by the French existentialist writer Jean-Paul Sartre.

For many writers this emphasis was not restricted to their publishing. Many, indeed, suffered deeply and directly: censured for casting aside his artistic responsibilities in order to participate actively in warfare, Christopher Okigbo was killed in battle for Biafra against the Nigerian movement of the 1960s' civil war; Mongane Wally Serote was detained under South Africa's Terrorism Act No 83 of 1967 between 1969 and 1970, and subsequently released without ever having stood trial; in London in 1970, his countryman Arthur Norje committed suicide; Malawi's Jack Mapanje was incarcerated with neither charge nor trial because of an off-hand remark at a university pub; and, in 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged by the Nigerian junta.

1.6 POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

With liberation and increased literacy since most African nations gained their independence in the 1950s and 1960s, African literature has grown dramatically in quantity and in recognition, with numerous African works appearing in Western academic curricula and on "best of" lists compiled at the end of the 20th century. African writers in this period wrote both in Western languages (notably English, French, and Portuguese) and in traditional African languages such as Hausa.

Ali A. Mazrui and others mention seven conflicts as themes: the clash between Africa's past and present, between tradition and modernity, between indigenous and foreign, between individualism and community, between socialism and capitalism, between development and self-reliance and between Africanity and humanity. Other themes in this period include social problems such as corruption, the economic disparities in newly independent countries, and the rights and roles of women. Female writers are today far better represented in published African literature than they were prior to independence.

In 1986, Wole Soyinka became the first post-independence African writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature. Previously, Algerian-born Albert Camus had been awarded the prize in 1957.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. To which language African was exposed in colonial period?

2. Who was the first post-independence African writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature?

1.7 LET SUM UP

African literature is literature of or from Africa and includes oral literature (or "orature", in the term coined by Ugandan scholar PioZirimu).

As George Joseph notes in his chapter on African literature in *Understanding Contemporary Africa*, whereas European views of literature often stressed a separation of art and content, African awareness is inclusive:

"Literature" can also simply mean an artistic use of words for the sake of art alone. [...]Traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build

1.8 KEYWORDS

1. **Oral literature**, the standard forms (or genres) of literature found in societies without writing. The term oral literature is also used to describe the tradition in written civilizations in which certain genres are transmitted by word of mouth or are confined to the so-called folk (i.e., those who are "unlettered," or do not use writing).
2. **Juxtaposed**:placed side by side, "Though fans have no problem watching themselves on a screen that is also showing an instructor, more sensitive users (guilty) find seeing their reflection juxtaposed on top of a trainer quite jarring."
3. **Conception**: the process of becoming pregnant involving fertilization or implantation or both, "This was a self-conception of the United

States carefully cultivated by cold war liberalism and seemingly fulfilled in the Clinton era of American power.”.

4. **Authoritative:** having, marked by, or proceeding from authority, possessing recognized or evident authority : clearly accurate or knowledgeable,”In his most authoritative comments about the Broncos’ future, CEO/president Joe Ellis said Monday that if Brittany Bowlen does not rise to the role of controlling owner, the next move would be to put the team up for sale.”
5. **Epic**, long narrative poem recounting heroic deeds, although the term has also been loosely used to describe novels, such as Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, and motion pictures, such as Sergey Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible*.

1.9 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- a. What is role of African Literature in Colonial Period?
- b. Briefly describe the history of African literature?
- c. Write a short note on, “The influence of oral traditions on modern writers”?
- d. What are the types of literature in African language?

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Answer 1 : Check Section 1.3

Answer 2 : Check Section 1.4

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Answer 1 : Check Section 1.6

Answer 2 : Check Section 1.7

UNIT: 2 CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Objective
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The History Of The Caribbean
- 2.3 Slavery In The Caribbean
- 2.4 Abolition
- 2.5 The Post-Emancipation Caribbean
- 2.6 Implications On Criticism
- 2.7 Major Writers From The Caribbean
- 2.8 "Caribbean Literature" Vs "West Indian Literature"
- 2.9 Development Of The Idea Of West Indian Literature
- 2.10 Influences On West Indian Literature
- 2.11 Asian Influences In Caribbean Literature
- 2.12 Let Sum Up
- 2.13 Keywords
- 2.14 Questions For Review
- 2.15 Suggested Readings And References
- 2.16 Answer to check your progress

2.0 OBJECTIVE

This unit help to learn about the Caribbean Literature. It helps to understand The History Of The Caribbean This unit also discuss the Post-Emancipation Caribbean Literature.

Unit contains the Implications on Criticism of that era along with the Major Writers From The Caribbean. This unit also differentiate between

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Caribbean Literature" and "West Indian Literature". This unit gives the implications of Influences On West Indian Literature.

Unit helps to achieve following objective:

- How it influenced by Asians
- History of Caribbean Literature
- Development from colonial period to new ear
- Major writers of Caribbean Literature
- Criticism

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Caribbean literature is the term generally accepted for the literature of the various territories of the Caribbean region. Literature in English specifically from the former British West Indies may be referred to as Anglo-Caribbean or, in historical contexts, West Indian literature, although in modern contexts the latter term is rare.

Most of these territories have become independent nations since the 1960s, though some retain colonial ties to the United Kingdom. They all share, apart from the English language, a number of political, cultural, and social ties which make it useful to consider their literary output in a single category. The more wide-ranging term "Caribbean literature" generally refers to the literature of all Caribbean territories regardless of language—whether written in English, Spanish, French, Hindustani, or Dutch, or one of numerous creoles.

Caribbean literature, literary works of the Caribbean area written in Spanish, French, or English. The literature of the Caribbean has no indigenous tradition. The pre-Columbian American Indians left few rock carvings or inscriptions (petroglyphs), and their oral traditions did not survive 16th-century Spanish colonization. The West Africans who replaced them were also without a written tradition, so for about 400 years Caribbean literature was an offshoot and imitation of the models of the colonial powers—Spain, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. Caribbean writers, however, were not unaware of their environment. The letters and speeches of Toussaint-Louverture, the Haitian general and

liberator, indicate that from at least the end of the 18th century the Caribbean was conscious of its cultural identity. It was not until the 1920s, however, that the challenge of a distinctive literary form was accepted. Then, as part of Spanish-American Modernism, Spanish and French Caribbean writers began to break away from European ideals and to identify themselves with their fellow West Indians, most of whom were black.

The leaders of this movement, mainly poets, were Luis Palés Matos (Puerto Rico), Jacques Roumain (Haiti), Nicolás Guillén (Cuba), Léon Damas (French Guiana), and Aimé Césaire (Martinique). Jean Price-Mars, a Haitian ethnologist, in *Ainsi parlait l'oncle* (1928; "Thus Spoke the Uncle"), declared that his purpose was to "restore to the Haitian people the dignity of their folklore." The achievement of this *negritude*, finely expressed in Césaire's poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939; *Return to My Native Land*), was the construction into poetic forms of the rhythmic and tonal elements of the islands' rituals and speech patterns, using Symbolist and Surrealist techniques.

The British Caribbean, developing its national literature after 1945, made its own contribution in the folk dialect novel: Vic Reid's *New Day* (1949), Samuel Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952) and *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), and V.S. Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), among others; and in the poetry of Louise Bennett (Jamaica *Labrish*, 1966). Paradoxically, anglophone Caribbean development was formally conservative, working toward an "open" rather than an autochthonous, or indigenous, expression in the work of C.L.R. James (Trinidad) and the poetry of Derek Walcott (St. Lucia). In the novels of Wilson Harris (Guyana), the Symbolist and Surrealist techniques of the Modernist movement reappear; and the poetry of Edward Brathwaite (*Rights of Passage* [1967], *Masks* [1968], *Islands* [1969]) attempts to reassert the place of Africa in the Caribbean.

2.2 THE HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN

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The history of the Caribbean is peculiar. It does not evolve gradually and naturally out of a remote mythological and archaeological past, but begins abruptly with the “discovery” of the Bahamas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus. This abrupt beginning has led historians like Eric Williams (1970) and literary artists like V.S. Naipaul (1969) to assert that the Caribbean is merely a geographical expression which lacks a noteworthy history. Naipaul, in particular, claims that the West Indies is a sterile, static, manufactured society due to the accidental nature of its discovery and the brutal mode of occupation and violence among the colonizing forces. Many Caribbean scholars have also concluded that the area is “historyless” and unlikely to proceed further than its crude and violent beginnings. According to Naipaul, “history is built on creation and achievement and nothing was created in the West Indies”, (1969, p. 39).

This lack of creation refers to the dearth of monuments, libraries and other visible public amenities other than the remains of old plantation houses and memoirs of the slave experience. The European colonizers regarded the area as one whose economic potentials were to be fully exploited, but not a place to settle in permanently. This was why the plantation system was entrenched and thence, the proliferation of absentee landlords who enjoyed the fruits of their labour outside the West Indies. And so, the problem with West Indian history does not lie solely in its mode of discovery as there was also the problem of jealousy and in-fighting among the colonizers who were single-minded in their quest for quick self-profit.

Initially, Columbus thought that the West Indies would open up a lucrative trade route for Spain. Also, because of the proliferation of gold body ornaments on the Bahamans he had met, Columbus concluded that there was an inexhaustible supply of gold to be obtained from the West Indies. Thus, his primary interest was the economic exploitation, and not the improvement of the area. Later on, it was discovered that the gold supply was finite and the colonizer’s attention turned to the large-scale cultivation of sugar which was then a highly lucrative crop.

At all times, the European presence in the Caribbean was primarily motivated by selfish economic considerations. Because of this, they did not hesitate to undercut one another and eventually seek all inhumane means of obtaining a steady supply of easily replaceable labour for the effective cultivation of their plantations.

The West Indies can be referred to as an artificially created society because with the exception of the indigenous Indian population which was largely swiftly exterminated, the inhabitants of the Caribbean either migrated or were forcibly transported there. With this conglomeration of people of different races and religious beliefs and with different motives of being in the Caribbean, it was difficult to create a common Caribbean ethos, especially, given the fundamental inequalities created by the institution of slavery.

During Columbus's second trip to the Caribbean in 1493, he brought Spanish domestic cereals, vegetables, fruits and sugar cane to the West Indies. It is therefore; correct to regard the West Indians as an imported people in a largely imported environment. The early and later imperialists in the Caribbean had the sole motive of exploiting the natural, mineral and agricultural resources of the area both for personal benefits and for the good of their various mother countries.

The lure of gold, sugar and slaves thus precipitated imperialist forays into the area by Spain, Portugal, Britain, France and the Netherlands. Each of these imperialists fought to obtain a considerable share of the Caribbean wealth. And this gave rise naturally to piracy, double-crossing, brutality and lack of cohesion among the powers. Each group of Europeans had its own language, religion and political allegiances. They were also constantly engaged in the bid to protect or expand their territories and so had little opportunity or need to exert a unified political and cultural control over the non-European population.

Furthermore, the Europeans' inability to impose a common creolised cultural ethos on the slaves who were also multi-cultural in origin was exacerbated by the imperialists' lack of interest in the continuous spiritual and physical welfare of the Islands and its inhabitants. As a result, the negro slaves were largely left to evolve their own cultural expressions and value systems based on vestiges of different African traditions, various European influences and communal responses to the new milieu.

2.3 SLAVERY IN THE CARIBBEAN

The Spaniards who were the original imperialists in the Caribbean already had a system of slavery which made it easy for them to resort to this method of procuring labour for their mines and plantations. Several sources of labour, including aboriginal Indians, white slaves and convicts labour were sought before blacks were brought into the West Indies. Negro slavery was initiated by the king of Spain on September 3, 1501 and began with the transportation of numbers of Christian negro slaves from Spain to the West Indies. African slave trade began shortly afterwards.

The mining of gold and to a greater extent, the discovery of the great economic potential of sugar- cultivation in the world market precipitated the institutionalization of slavery in the West Indies. Plantation slavery began in the 16th century and from that time onwards, the fortunes of the Islands were greatly influenced by the price of sugar. Also, the requirements of the sugar industry determined the nature of the West Indian population.

The cultivation of cane was highly capital-and- labour-intensive. The more sophisticated and efficient machines for extracting sugar were expensive and the crop itself was highly perishable which meant that it had to be processed shortly after harvesting. Also, the planting and harvesting of cane required considerable labour and the manufacturing process was arduous. The production of sugar on an economic scale therefore, required a considerable initial financial outlay and a large

cheap labour force. Negro slavery provided easily available and replaceable unskilled labour. It also led to a change in the racial composition and social structure of the Islands.

Under slavery, the humanity of the blacks was progressively eroded, especially with the arduous work hours, stringent penalties for absenteeism and the promulgation of slave codes which gave legal sanction to slavery. These codes deprived the slaves of the freedom of movement and the simplest exercise of their freewill. For instance, they could not marry without their masters' permission, could not own property, were considered to be moveable property and could be punished even unto death by their masters.

This brutally indifferent method of slavery, coupled with the racial and cultural diversity found in the West Indies and the uprootment and dispossession experienced by the African slaves helped to rob the negroes of a sense of historical continuity and emphasized the lack of control over their lives. It also gave rise to such psychological traumas as alienation, rootlessness, inferiority complex and the creation of the colonial mentality. The cultivation of cane was thus, the basic reason for the institution of slavery and had important influences on the Caribbean psyche, such as the engendering of the isolationist outlook and an endemic and crippling sense of provincialism, all of which are difficult to eradicate from the 21st century Caribbean mentality.

2.4 ABOLITION

There were three basic reasons for the abolition of slavery: economic, political and humanitarian. By the 19th century, the cultivation of sugar in the British and French West Indian colonies was no longer economically viable because cheaper sugar was obtainable from India and Brazil. Sugar producers in the colonies discovered that they produced sugar at a greater cost than its selling price, thus making it difficult for the plantation owners to make profit after caring for the needs of the slaves.

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Politically, the abolitionist move was part of the increasing global moves by the industrial bourgeoisie against the landed aristocracy, such as the French revolution of 1789 and the victory of the North over the South in the American civil war.

On humanitarian grounds, slavery was considered the height of man's inhumanity to man and so, such figures as William Wilberforce sought the legal end to the institution of slavery. Abolition Acts were passed in Denmark in 1803, Great Britain in 1807, France in 1817 and Holland in 1818, while slavery was legally abolished in the British colonies in 1833, French colonies in 1848, and Dutch colonies in 1863.

2.5 THE POST-EMANCIPATION CARIBBEAN

The post-emancipation period did not usher in immediate fundamental changes in the lives of the slaves. Financially, they were ill-equipped for freedom, yet many preferred to survive through subsistence farming or seasonal itinerant labour rather than work long hours for meagre wages in the plantations of their erstwhile masters. This created a vacuum in the labour force which was later filled by the migration of indentured Indian labourers to the West Indies. This wave of migration started in 1838 and ended in 1924 within which period approximately half a million Indians migrated to the Caribbean. This introduced new racial, linguistic and cultural complications into the already diversified West Indian society. The Caribbean thus, became a deterministic society where social status was predicated on skin pigmentation and people were divided into exclusive water-tight colour compartments. This situation intensified the psychosis nurtured by a sense of racial and cultural void or inferiority which began with the slavery.

Education in the early period of colonial rule was designed to impart the rudiments of reading, writing and moral instructions to the blacks. This , which was initially organized by the missionaries underscored the subordinate and acquiescent status of the negroes, vis-a-vis their white masters. Later on, the blacks were tutored in foreign history, literary and

musical traditions and even the value system of the Metropolis was imposed wholesale on them.

The blacks responded in several ways, which included the total acceptance of foreign values which pre-supposed a negation of one's racial roots. There was also the rejection of Western values and a nostalgic attachment to vestiges of folk tradition, or, a judicious blend of the best of both cultures. This situation gave rise to the creation of a plural society. The post-emancipation West Indies was thus, still strongly under foreign domination through colonialism. As a result, there exists in the Caribbean a complex situation created by the existence and interlocking of two different sets of cultural values. There is a foreign derived metropolitan culture which is mostly seen among the upper and middle classes and the black Creole culture which contains many African-derived elements and is practised mainly by the lower classes. Thus, the various social classes act and think differently and one class is elevated and aspired towards, to the detriment of the other. The upper and middle classes speak Standard English, contract legal marriages and practise the religion and culture of their former European masters. The lower classes on the other hand, generally speak the Creole dialect, engage in fetish practices such as the worship of gods like Shango, gold, and Ifa and usually do not contract legal marriages.

The Caribbean has, therefore, been described as a plural society made up of people displaying different modes of behaviour and who are held together by economic reasons, rather than by a sense of belonging to a common culture. This divisive unity was the result of different responses and modes of adjustment to the void created by dispossession. The slave ancestors had been dispossessed of their motherlands and forced to live in an alien and hostile milieu in which they were made to feel racially and culturally inferior. This deep-seated sense of inferiority and lack of confidence became intensified by the focus of colonial education which encouraged further amnesia and shame about the African past and pushed the blacks towards accepting Europe as good.

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There have therefore, been various literary responses to the realities of the Caribbean historical experience. Some writers, especially, white West Indian writers are apologetic about this history. Some reject the West Indies and claim Africa as their spiritual home, while others reject the concept of Africa and take their cues from Europe. The various writers also hold different concepts about West Indian history. They generally act as spokespersons of their society. They analyze and interpret societal ills and consistently endeavour to make the people aware of their endemic shortcomings and seek positive and enduring responses to the milieu.

And so, there is in Caribbean literature the predominance of the alienation theme in various forms: homelessness, rootlessness and exile. It is a situation of being a part of what you could not become. So, the primary cultural commitment of Caribbean writers remains the search for identity and self-discovery. George Lamming describes this situation as paradoxical since it insists on roots and rootlessness; home and homelessness at the same time. The fragmented nature of the society gives the West Indian an acute sense of exile and because the literature of this area reflects and attempts to come to terms with the consequences of colonization, Edward Baugh describes it as "colonial literature", (1978, p.13). Caribbean literature then, was to celebrate a new ethos and identity. It established the West Indian identity as different from the European, and neither is it African, Chinese nor Indian but a strange and pleasurable mixture of all these. The writer in the New World then, is engaged in an attempt at articulating a trueness of being.

2.6 IMPLICATIONS ON CRITICISM

Bearing the burden of this debilitating history and environment, the criticism of Caribbean literature has often been jaundiced. Primarily, the criticism encapsulates an attitude which sees the visions expressed by the writers as "pessimistic", especially with regard to Naipaul's works. As artistic mediators of their locale and historical experience, the argument

seems to have been that the unrelieved gloom of their circumstances, the apparent absence of any controlling moral centre, makes the only logical,

possible, realistic portraiture absurd, depressing and hopeless. For instance, commenting on the burden of a depressing West Indian history, Rose Acholonu observes that "the dehumanizing influence of colonization... is as damaging as it is permanent" (1987, p.78). An important implication of this observation is the view that the Caribbean man cannot live down the problem of imposed acculturation. However, contrary to the above assertion, time and events have proved that the Caribbean man can evolve a new image in the modern world out of past and present experiences and thus, transcend his alien environment. The emergence in the first place of Caribbean literature as distinct from European, African, Chinese or Indian literature is a step in the positive direction and shows that the West Indian has a future. As Derek Walcott points out, history is not only that which is celebrated by "ruins of castles and forts but is also the chronicle of the past of the common man and his deeds □ the fisherman with his mongrel walking on the beach" (Brodber, 1983, p.13). Creative history also accounts for the present and projects into the future. Walcott continues: "you who feel the pain of historylessness, look at the work patterns, the dances, the dreams, the songs and the memories of your forefathers, analyze these and you will be writing your history" (Brodber, 1983, p.3). Walcott also advises that it is the duty of the West Indian to possess his land, tame and cultivate it and finally produce something original, for the West Indian "behind all his roles and faces, possesses the possibility of a rich, complex and an integrated self which is his by virtue of his exile" (Hirsch, 1979, p.285). As Gerald Moore notes, "...even if the West Indians had created nothing else, they have certainly created a people" (Moore, 1969, p.8). Walcott insists that it would be abhorrent to him to say "I wish we were English again" or "I wish we were African again", that the reality is that, one has to build in the West Indies (Hirsch, 1979, p.285).

Walcott's position became vindicated when in 1992 he got the world's highest literary acclaim by winning the Nobel Prize for literature, a feat, which was repeated by Naipaul a few years later. This, apart from being a reward and recognition of individual excellence, is also a celebration of Caribbean literature, and since literature is a celebration of life, the Nobel Prize indirectly proclaims and recognizes Caribbean life as valid and

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authentic. And so, quite contrary to the claim that history exerts a definitive influence on the creative imagination, it is evident that the Caribbean man can live down the vagaries of history and transcend his alien milieu.

The terms "Caribbean" and "West Indian" are used interchangeably by many people in discussing the literature of this particular portion of the earth. However, "Caribbean" embraces the literature in all the languages of the area □ English, French, Spanish and Dutch □ but by "West Indian", it is meant only the writings of those Island and Mainland territories where English is the official language and the chief medium of literary composition. In this study, therefore, by "Caribbean" it is meant the literature of the English- speaking Caribbean, otherwise known as West Indian literature.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I:

1. Discuss the history of Caribbean Literature.

2. Discuss the role of slavery in Caribbean Literature.

2.7 MAJOR WRITERS FROM THE CARIBBEAN

While the major writers from the Caribbean are Derek Walcott, Edward Brathwaite, V.S Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, Roger Mais and Michael Anthony, others include V.S. Reid, Orlando Patterson, Earl Lovelace, Jean Rhys, Martin Carter, Geoffrey Drayton, Edgar Mittleholzer, Merle Hodge, Zee Edgell, Alvin Bennett, Errol John, John Hearne,

H.D. Delisser, Jacques Roumain, Ian McDonald, Joseph Zobel, Denis Williams, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Glissant Garth St. Orner.

Since Caribbean literature is largely a response by the individual writers to the historical realities of the area, Derek Walcott believes that the West Indian must move towards refashioning the present. The West Indian, Walcott believes, must overcome the sense of inferiority and lack of cohesion which is the heritage of dispossession and alienation. Walcott also tackles the issue of the West Indian loyalty to at least two cultures: one, indigenous, and the other, foreign. He maintains that for true nationalism to exist and for the authentic Caribbean personality to emerge, one cannot adopt one culture to the neglect of the other. Walcott consistently blends elements of the two cultures in his works and even attempts to re-evaluate certain aspects of colonial history.

He is also of the belief that servitude to the muse of history can only result in a literature that is sociological, self-pitying and full of revenge. To him, history is fiction which is subject to the vagaries of memory and thus, open to mis-interpretations or re-interpretations. He, therefore, ignores the claim that history exerts a definitive influence on the creative imagination and rather conceives of the New World negro as an "Adam" who has suffered amnesia of the past and is therefore, free to move forward in time and have a new life for himself in his New World. Poet, dramatist and Nobel laureate for literature, Walcott's publications include: *T-Jean and his brothers* (1970), *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970), *The Sea at Dolphin* (1970) and several volumes of poetry.

Edward Brathwaite, another writer from the Caribbean however, sees the task of the Caribbean writer as being the rehabilitation of the colonial mind through making the West Indian accept folk ways, music and orature and more importantly, shape these things into a tangible literary tradition from which other writers can draw inspiration. Brathwaite believes that the black man who rejects his racial memory is doomed to endless migrations and rootlessness because he can neither define himself in terms of an attachment to Africa, nor in terms of Europe

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which exploits and manipulates his life. He therefore, suggests very strongly a recapitulation of the past, but since this, according to him might not be easy and will involve the excavation of painful memories, Brathwaite does not hold out any ready or easy solutions for the dispossessed New World black. *The arrivants* (1973) which is a trilogy is one of his major publications.

Often referred to as the prophet of doom, (Richards, 1991, p.32), V.S. Naipaul sees the history of the Caribbean as a recurrent void which is characterized by brutality, sterility and lack of visible achievements. According to Naipaul, "history is built on creation and achievement and nothing was created in the West Indies" (1969, p.43).

A dominant feature of Naipaul's writing is the presentation and exploration of characters who are either failures because of their inability to express and realize their full potentials, or characters who are charlatans and mediocre but who, nevertheless, are precipitated into success by the sheer mediocrity and formlessness of the society. To Naipaul, the Caribbean is a place which deliberately denies itself his heroes and is incapable of recognizing and nurturing artistic potentials. Also, the diverse groups of people who inhabit the Islands in Naipaul's view, are not bound by any sense of belonging to one culture. As a result, there is the creation of the formless, casual society with haphazard standards and the emergence of the confused, unaccommodated man who is helpless and cast in a sterile and unfriendly landscape. His works include: *A Bend in the river* (1979), *A flag on the island* (1969), *An area of darkness* (1968), *Guerillas* (1975), *In a free state* (1971), *Miguel street* (1974), *Mr. Stone and the knight's companion* (1963), *The mimic men* (1967), *The suffrage of Elvira* (1969), *The middle passage* (1969), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1969) and *The Mystic masseur* (1971). Clearly, Naipaul is the most prolific Caribbean writer.

The direct opposite of Naipaul's vision is Samuel Selvon's. As a writer, Selvon's historical sense is informed by his optimistic vision of man's ability to transcend the drawbacks of a debilitating past, hence, his being referred to as the "optimistic visionary "par excellence" (Acholonu, 1987,

p.87). Selvon's fictional world centres around the life, customs, beliefs and speech patterns of the peasant West Indian. He reveals the strengths and weaknesses of this world and projects a possible blend of the best of both West Indian and Western ways as the ideal way of coping with a changing contemporary world. Selvon consistently shows that without a fundamental attachment to the beneficial aspects of folkways, the West Indian, whether in Trinidad or abroad is liable to become adrift. He also shows that an inherited sense of racial prejudice is detrimental to progress in the modern world and projects a future in which West Indians will be able to ignore racial differentiations and work for the general good. This vision is conveyed mostly through his fiction which includes: *An island is a world* (1955), *Moses ascending* (1984), *Moses migrating* (1983), *The lonely Londoners* (1989), *Ways of sunlight* (1979), *A brighter sun* (1979), and *Turn again Tiger* (1979).

George Lamming's vision is similar to Brathwaite's. Like the latter, Lamming believes that history is continuous and holds salient lessons for the contemporary society and that without a positive recapitulation of the past, the contemporary Caribbean will be unable to respond positively to his milieu. And so, an intimate contact with the past is necessary in order to chart the path of future progress. This vision is conveyed through his *In the castle of my skin* (1953).

Roger Mais is another renowned writer from the Caribbean. Mais's fictional world is specifically that of the urban dispossessed in Kingston, Jamaica, but his observations about human life are universal. Accordingly, Mais sets his novels like *The hills were joyful together* (1953) and *Brother man* (1974) in urban slums in Kingston, and exposes the lives of the yard-dwellers in all their stark, squalid, deprived and dehumanized horror: they are rootless, hopeless, brutalized, poor, and have broken homes. They also engage in all forms of moral laxity. At the same time, Mais shows the possibility of the existence of positive emotions and intentions in this world. And so, his fictional world is one of paradoxes in which defeat and success, sloth and industry, piety and lawlessness, caring and hatred exist simultaneously. Mais projects that man is trapped in a tragic world of continuous sufferings and reversals.

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Man's actions, Mais maintains are without apparent reasons and his fortunes are at the mercy of an abstract, indifferent and often merciless universal force called "fate". But directly contrary to this is the author's conviction that man holds the key to his salvation and that the very existence of the paradoxes of experience testifies to the possibility of man improving himself in the face of tremendous odds. Fundamentally, therefore, Mais's vision is that in their confrontation with an implacable and unpredictable fate, the urban dispossessed of the West Indies need to rely on themselves and seek redemption either from within themselves or within their group.

Another popular writer from the Caribbean is Michael Anthony although his works generally avoid the exploration of contemporary socio-political issues and also rarely reflect a well-defined sense of commitment to the future of the West Indies. In the stories in *Cricket in the road* (1965) and *The year in San Fernando* (1973), the author highlights different facets of traditional life in such a way as would imply that he advocates the upholding of the values of this world while grudgingly acknowledging the inevitability of the incursion of Western values. He projects a vision of a traditional and practically untouched West Indies which West Indians must be encouraged to appreciate. Anthony appears to consider the writer's responsibility as being predicated on his obligation to make West Indians aware of the inner beauty and integrity of the traditional milieu. Consequently, his presentation of this world is simplistic, idealistic and precludes any intense critical analysis of the merits or otherwise of traditional life so that while being aware of the inevitability of change, Mais does not appear to be actively engaged in preparing West Indians for the positive and negative repercussions of this change. Ultimately, Anthony's vision centres on the assumption that the attachment to traditional roots, irrespective of their drawbacks is the most viable means of confronting incipient change. He also suggests that the destruction of this traditional way of life or abdication from it would be tantamount to metaphorical death. His other titles include: *Green days by the river* (1973), *The games were coming* (1977) and *All that glitters* (1983).

2.8 "CARIBBEAN LITERATURE" VS "WEST INDIAN LITERATURE"

As scholarship expands, there is debate about the correct term to use for literature that comes from the region. Both terms are often used interchangeably despite having different origins and referring to slightly different groups of people. Since so much of Caribbean identity is linked to "insidious racism" and "the justification of slave labor", it is usual to refer to the author of the piece for their identity preference.

West Indian is defined as coming from the "West Indies", which includes "the islands of the Caribbean" and was "used first [for] indigenous population, and subsequently both [for] settlers of European origin and of people of African origin brought to the area as slaves." West Indian can also refer to things that can be "traced back" to the West Indies but the creators "live elsewhere". West Indian "was a term coined by colonising European powers." Caribbean, on the other hand, is defined as "of the Caribbean...its people, and their cultures" only.

Further issues include language classifications like Creole Caribbean literature and Anglophone Caribbean literature. Different languages also make different references to the texts. While there is no terminology that is obsolete, the issue requires acknowledgement due to it being literature of historically oppressed people.

2.9 DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

The term "West Indies" first began to achieve wide currency in the 1950s, when writers such as Samuel Selvon, John Hearne, Edgar Mittelholzer, V. S. Naipaul, and George Lamming began to be published in the United Kingdom. A sense of a single literature developing across the islands was also encouraged in the 1940s by the BBC radio programme Caribbean Voices, which featured stories and poems written by West Indian authors, recorded in London under the direction of founding producer UnaMarson and later Henry Swanzy, and broadcast

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back to the islands. Magazines such as *Kyk-Over-Al* in Guyana, *Bim* in Barbados, and *Focus* in Jamaica, which published work by writers from across the region, also encouraged links and helped build an audience.

Many—perhaps most—West Indian writers have found it necessary to leave their home territories and base themselves in the United Kingdom, the United States, or Canada in order to make a living from their work—in some cases spending the greater parts of their careers away from the territories of their birth. Critics in their adopted territories might argue that, for instance, V. S. Naipaul ought to be considered a British writer instead of a Trinidadian writer, or Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall American writers, but most West Indian readers and critics still consider these writers "West Indian".

West Indian literature ranges over subjects and themes as wide as those of any other "national" literature, but in general many West Indian writers share a special concern with questions of identity, ethnicity, and language that rise out of the Caribbean historical experience.

One unique and pervasive characteristic of Caribbean literature is the use of "dialect" forms of the national language, often termed creole. The various local variations in the language adopted from the colonial powers such as Britain, Spain, Portugal, France and the Netherlands, have been modified over the years within each country and each has developed a blend that is unique to their country. Many Caribbean authors in their writing switch liberally between the local variation—now commonly termed nation language—and the standard form of the language.

Two West Indian writers have won the Nobel Prize for Literature: Derek Walcott (1992), born in St. Lucia, resident mostly in Trinidad during the 1960s and '70s, and partly in the United States since then; and V. S. Naipaul, born in Trinidad and resident in the United Kingdom since 1950. (Saint-John Perse, who won the Nobel Prize in 1960, was born in the French territory of Guadeloupe.)

Other notable names in (anglophone) Caribbean literature have included Una Marson, Earl Lovelace, Austin Clarke, Claude McKay, Louise Bennett, Orlando Patterson, Andrew Salkey, Edward Kamau Brathwaite (who was born in Barbados and has lived in Ghana and Jamaica), Linton Kwesi Johnson, Velma Pollard and Michelle Cliff, to name only a few. In more recent times, a number of literary voices have emerged from the Caribbean as well as the Caribbean diaspora, including Kittitian Caryl Phillips (who has lived in the UK since one month of age); Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian immigrant to the United States; Anthony Kellman from Barbados, who divides his time between Barbados and the United States; Andrea Levy of the United Kingdom; Jamaicans Alecia McKenzie, who has lived in Belgium, Singapore and France, and Colin Channer and Marlon James, the author of the Man Booker Prize-winning novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014) (as well as John Crow's *Devil*, *The Book of Night Women*, the unpublished screenplay "Dead Men", and the short story "Under Cover of Darkness"), Antiguan Marie-Elena John, and Lasana M. Sekou from St. Maarten/St. Martin.

2.10 INFLUENCES ON WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

Indentureship and migration were key factors in shaping Caribbean literature. The migration of Caribbean workers towards the Panama Canal is often used as a foundation by many authors. For example, Maryse Condé's novel *Tree of Life* (1992) discusses the involvement of family ties and working life within the Panama Canal. The idea of influence is further exemplified in Ramabai Espinet's novel *The Swinging Bridge*, which explores the idea of Indian indentureship and the direct silencing of women.

The number of influences are not limited to those stated above, rather, the works within this canon often stem from independence, gender roles, and literary movements.

There have been a number of collected works that focus on women's roles in the Caribbean. A dissertation entitled *Maid* discusses the lives of

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women in Jamaica. A lot of similar work focuses on women and typically treat sexuality as heteronormative. In this specific style of work, analytical approaches to queer theory have not yet appeared or been explored.

Included in the topic of how colonialism effected Caribbean literature is how writers use agricultural symbolism in to represent the need or desire to escape colonial rule. The connection between agriculture and the need to survive represents a closeness with the Earth itself. Native fruits and vegetables were used to speak around the colonized discourse; a way of speaking out in a sort of code. Derek Walcott is an author who utilizes this type of speak in his poetry.

2.11 ASIAN INFLUENCES IN CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

People from India and China make up the largest Asian communities in the Caribbean. In the middle of the 19th century, immigrants from southern China began to arrive in various parts of the Caribbean, especially Cuba and Jamaica. At the same time, immigrants from India mostly settled on the English-speaking islands of the Lesser Antilles, especially Trinidad, and in Guyana on the Caribbean coast of South America.

Some of Cuba's most respected writers are of Chinese descent, such as José Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy and others. Other authors have written about the mark left by the Chinese community in Cuba, such as Mayra Montero, Daina Chaviano and Cristina Garcia with their novels *Como un mensajero tuyo*, *La isla de los amores infinitos* and *Monkey Hunting*, respectively.

With its large Chinese community, Jamaica also has several authors of Chinese descent. Two important examples are Olive Senior (*Arrival of the Snake Woman*) and the poet Staceyann Chin. Some Jamaican novelists have also used the story of Chinese immigrants to Jamaica as the backdrop for their stories. Examples are Patricia Powell with *The*

Pagoda and Margaret Cezair-Thompson with *The True History of Paradise*.

The Indian community in the Caribbean has made a very valuable literary contribution, in part thanks to V. S. Naipaul, winner of the Nobel Prize in 2001. Born on the island of Trinidad, Naipaul wrote various texts that addressed the Indian influence in the Caribbean culture, such as his novels *The Mystic Masseur* and *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Naipul also wrote several books of essays about India. His countryman, Michael Anthony, has also explored the cultural conflicts between Trinidadians of Indian origin and black Trinidadians in his novel *Green Days by the River*. Similarly, in *For the Life of Laetitia* and *No Pain Like this Body*, Merle Hodge and Harold Sonny Ladoo, respectively, examine the complex ties that unite and separate Trinidadians of Indian origin with the other inhabitants of the island.

The cousins Cyril and David Dabydeen have given voice to the Indian community in Guyana and have tried to understand the tensions between it and the country's other cultures. For both authors, the question of identity is made more complicated by the experience of exile. Poet Martin Carter has pursued similar themes from a markedly more political angle. Rooplall Monar (poet and short story writer) and Shani Mootoo (novelist and short story writer) have addressed the question of Indo-Caribbean identity. Meanwhile, some Guyanese artists have turned to the theater to recreate the experiences and cultural coordinates of Caribbean people of Indian descent. Examples are Basil Balgobin, Sheik Sadeek, Harold Bascom and others. Balgobin worked for a while with the British Guyana Dramatic Society and wrote several works that the theater company presented. Sadeek, who also wrote short stories, wrote several one-act plays with Indian topics (*Namaste*, *Black Bush*).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. Write a note about the writers of that era.

2. How Indian community make impact in Caribbean Literature.

2.12 LET SUM UP

This paper has thus, examined the peculiar history of the Caribbean as well as its attendant effect on its literature and criticism since Caribbean literature is also to some extent, a response by the individual writers to the historical realities of the area. The paper concludes that quite contrary to the assertion that history exerts a definitive influence on the creative imagination (as it is argued by some scholars), the Caribbean man can live down the ravages of history and transcend his alien milieu.

2.13 KEYWORDS

1. **Environment:** :the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded; the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival;the aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community
2. **Negritude**, French Négritude, literary movement of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s that began among French-speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris as a protest against French colonial rule and the policy of assimilation.
3. **Indigenous:** produced, growing, living, or occurring natively or naturally in a particular region or environment;”Viking invaders quickly subdued the indigenous population, known as the Picts.”
4. **Caribbean Voices** was a radio programme broadcast by the BBC World Service from Bush House in London, England, between 1943

and 1958. It is considered "the programme in which West Indian literary talents first found their voice, in the early 1950s.

2.14 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- a. How India influenced Caribbean Literature?
- b. Briefly describe the history of Caribbean literature?
- c. How Caribbean literature is developed in new era?
- d. Write the brief about:
 - a. Derek Walcott,
 - b. Edward Brathwaite,
 - c. V.S Naipaul
- e. What is the difference between Caribbean and west Indian literature?

2.15 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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2.16 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Answer 1 : Check Section 2.3

Answer 2 : Check Section 2.3

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Answer 1 : Check Section 2.8

Answer 2 : Check Section 2.12

UNIT: 3 INTRODUCTION TO LIFE OF CHINUA ACHEBE

STRUCTURE

- 3.0 Objective
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Biography
- 3.3 Teaching And Producing
- 3.4 Political Problems
- 3.5 Later Writing
- 3.6 Literary Awards
- 3.7 Voice Of Nigeria And African Writers Series
- 3.8 Nigeria-Biafra War
- 3.9 Postwar Academia
- 3.10 Criticism Of Conrad
- 3.11 Later In His Life As A Publisher
- 3.12 Legacy
- 3.13 Let Sum Up
- 3.14 Keywords
- 3.15 Questions For Review
- 3.17 Suggested Readings And References
- 3.16 Answer to check your progress

3.0 OBJECTIVE

This unit help to learn about the life and work of Chinua Achebe. This unit helps to understand the Teaching of Chinua Achebe. This unit discuss Writings and different awards received by him. Unit explains how he was the voice Of Nigeria And African Writers Series.

Unit helps to achieve following objective:

- His brief about life

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- His legacy
- His understanding for politics and writing
- How his writing effected in different writing wars?

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Poet and novelist Chinua Achebe was one of the most important African writers of the last century. He was also considered by many to be one of the most original literary artists writing in English during his lifetime. He is best known for his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Born Albert Chinualumogo Achebe, Chinua Achebe was raised by Christian evangelical parents in the large village Ogidi in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria. He received an early education in English, but grew up surrounded by a complex fusion of Igbo traditions and colonial legacy. Achebe would later recall, "on one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the bible night and day. On the other my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols" ("Morning Yet on Creation Day").

He studied at the University College (now the University of Ibadan), a British-style university, originally intending to study medicine, but eventually changing his major to English, history, and theology. After graduating, he went to work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos and later studied at the British Broadcasting Corporation staff school in London.

During this time, Achebe was developing work as a writer. Having been taught that Igbo values and culture were inferior to those of Europeans, and finding in Western literature only caricatured stereotypes of Africans, he wanted to conceive of an African literature that would present African characters and society in their full richness and complexity. Starting in the 1950s, he helped to found a new Nigerian literary movement that drew on the oral traditions of Nigeria's indigenous tribes. Although Achebe wrote in English, he attempted to incorporate Igbo vocabulary and narratives.

Things Fall Apart (1958) was his first novel, and remains his best-known work. It has been translated into at least forty-five languages, and has sold eight million copies worldwide. Other novels include: *No Longer At*

Ease (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1966). Many of his novels dealt with the social and political problems facing his country, including the difficulties of its postcolonial legacy.

Achebe became active in Nigerian politics in the 1960s. He left his career in radio in 1966 during the national unrest and violence that led to the Biafran War in 1967, when Biafra, an Eastern region in Nigeria, declared independence. That year he spent thirty months traveling Europe and the United States advocating for the new country. During this period, he produced several short stories dealing with the complex realities of the Nigerian Civil War; the best known of these stories is "Civil Peace."

After Biafra surrendered to Nigeria in 1970, Achebe took a position as a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Nigeria. That same year he co-founded a publishing company with Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo. In 1971, he became an editor for *Okike*, a prestigious Nigerian literary magazine. In 1984, he founded *Iwa ndi Ibo*, a bilingual publication dedicated to Igbo cultural life.

Achebe's university career was extremely successful: he was made Emeritus Professor at the University of Nigeria in 1985, he taught at the University of Massachusetts and the University of Connecticut, and he received over twenty honorary doctorates from universities around the world. He also received Nigeria's highest honor for intellectual achievement, the Nigerian National Merit Award, in 1987. His novel *Anthills of the Savannah* was shortlisted for the Booker McConnell Prize that same year.

Achebe was married and had four children. He last lived in the United States, where he held a teaching position at Bard College until 2009, when he joined Brown University as a professor of Africana Studies. In his later years, he also served as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund. He continued writing throughout his life, producing both fiction and non-fiction, and winning awards like the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. His final published work was the literary autobiography *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. Chinua Achebe died in 2013 of an undisclosed illness in Boston.

3.2 BIOGRAPHY

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Chinua Achebe was born on 16 November 1930. Achebe's parents, Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam, were converts to the Protestant Church Mission Society (CMS) in Nigeria. The elder Achebe stopped practicing the religion of his ancestors, but he respected its traditions. Achebe's unabbreviated name, Chinualumogu ("May God fight on my behalf), was a prayer for divine protection and stability. His writings include his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Anthills of Savannah* (1987), and his last *There Was a Country* originally published in (2012). The Achebe family had five other surviving children, named in a similar fusion of traditional words relating to their new religion: Frank Okwuofu, John Chukwuemeka Ifeanyichukwu, Zinobia Uzoma, Augustine Ndubisi, and Grace Nwanneka.

Early life

Achebe was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in the Igbo village of Ogidi on 16 November 1930. Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam Achebe stood at a crossroads of traditional culture and Christian influence; this made a significant impact on the children, especially Chinualumogu. After the youngest daughter was born, the family moved to Isaiah Achebe's ancestral town of Ogidi, in what is now the state of Anambra.

Storytelling was a mainstay of the Igbo tradition and an integral part of the community. Achebe's mother and sister Zinobia Uzoma told him many stories as a child, which he repeatedly requested. His education was furthered by the collages his father hung on the walls of their home, as well as almanacs and numerous books – including a prose adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1590) and an Igbo version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).[[] Chinua also eagerly anticipated traditional village events, like the frequent masquerade ceremonies, which he recreated later in his novels and stories.

Education

In 1936, Achebe entered St Philips' Central School. Despite his protests, he spent a week in the religious class for young children, but was quickly moved to a higher class when the school's chaplain took note of his

intelligence. One teacher described him as the student with the best handwriting in class, and the best reading skills. He also attended Sunday school every week and the special evangelical services held monthly, often carrying his father's bag. A controversy erupted at one such session, when apostates from the new church challenged the catechist about the tenets of Christianity. Achebe later included a scene from this incident in *Things Fall Apart*.

University

In 1948, in preparation for independence, Nigeria's first university opened.^[15] Known as University College (now the University of Ibadan), it was an associate college of the University of London. Achebe was admitted as a Major Scholar in the university's first intake and given a bursary to study medicine. It was during his studies at Ibadan that Achebe began to become critical of European literature about Africa. After reading Joyce Cary's 1939 work *Mister Johnson* about a cheerful Nigerian man who (among other things) works for an abusive British storeowner, he was so disturbed by the book's portrayal of its Nigerian characters as either savages or buffoons that he decided to become a writer. Achebe recognised his dislike for the African protagonist as a sign of the author's cultural ignorance. One of his classmates announced to the professor that the only enjoyable moment in the book is when Johnson is shot.

He abandoned the study of medicine and changed to English, history, and theology. Because he switched his field, however, he lost his scholarship and had to pay tuition fees. He received a government bursary, and his family also donated money – his older brother Augustine gave up money for a trip home from his job as a civil servant so Chinua could continue his studies. From its inception, the university had a strong Arts faculty; it includes many famous writers amongst its alumni. These include Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, poet and playwright John Pepper Clark, and poet Christopher Okigbo. Elechi Amadi is also another famous writer who studied at the university in the 1950s, although he was in the faculty of sciences.

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In 1950 Achebe wrote a piece for the University Herald entitled "Polar Undergraduate", his debut as an author. It used irony and humour to celebrate the intellectual vigour of his classmates. He followed this with other essays and letters about philosophy and freedom in academia, some of which were published in another campus magazine, The Bug. He served as the Herald's editor during the 1951–52 school year.

While at the university, Achebe wrote his first short story, "In a Village Church", which combines details of life in rural Nigeria with Christian institutions and icons, a style which appears in many of his later works. Other short stories he wrote during his time at Ibadan (including "The Old Order in Conflict with the New" and "Dead Men's Path") examine conflicts between tradition and modernity, with an eye toward dialogue and understanding on both sides. When a professor named Geoffrey Parrinder arrived at the university to teach comparative religion, Achebe began to explore the fields of Christian history and African traditional religions.

After the final examinations at Ibadan in 1953, Achebe was awarded a second-class degree. Rattled by not receiving the highest level, he was uncertain how to proceed after graduation. He returned to his hometown of Ogidi to sort through his options.

3.3 TEACHING AND PRODUCING

While he meditated on his possible career paths, Achebe was visited by a friend from the university, who convinced him to apply for an English teaching position at the Merchants of Light school at Oba. It was a ramshackle institution with a crumbling infrastructure and a meagre library; the school was built on what the residents called "bad bush" – a section of land thought to be tainted by unfriendly spirits. Later, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe describes a similar area called the "evil forest", where the Christian missionaries are given a place to build their church.

As a teacher he urged his students to read extensively and be original in their work. The students did not have access to the newspapers he had read as a student, so Achebe made his own available in the classroom. He taught in Oba for four months, but when an opportunity arose in 1954 to

work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), he left the school and moved to Lagos.

The NBS, a radio network started in 1933 by the colonial government, assigned Achebe to the Talks Department, preparing scripts for oral delivery. This helped him master the subtle nuances between written and spoken language, a skill that helped him later to write realistic dialogue.

The city of Lagos also made a significant impression on him. A huge conurbation, the city teemed with recent migrants from the rural villages. Achebe revelled in the social and political activity around him and later drew upon his experiences when describing the city in his 1960 novel *No Longer at Ease*.

While in Lagos, Achebe started work on a novel. This was challenging, since very little African fiction had been written in English, although Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) were notable exceptions. While appreciating Ekwensi's work, Achebe worked hard to develop his own style, even as he pioneered the creation of the Nigerian novel itself. A visit to Nigeria by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956 brought issues of colonialism and politics to the surface, and was a significant moment for Achebe.

Also in 1956 he was selected at the Staff School run by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). His first trip outside Nigeria was an opportunity to advance his technical production skills, and to solicit feedback on his novel (which was later split into two books). In London, he met a novelist named Gilbert Phelps, to whom he offered the manuscript. Phelps responded with great enthusiasm, asking Achebe if he could show it to his editor and publishers. Achebe declined, insisting that it needed more work

3.4 POLITICAL PROBLEMS

Turmoil in Nigeria from 1966 to 1972 was matched by turmoil for Achebe. In 1966, young Igbo officers in the Nigerian army staged a coup d'état. Six months later, another coup by non-Igbo officers overthrew the Igbo-led government. The new government targeted Achebe for persecution, knowing that his views were unsympathetic to the new regime. Achebe fled to Nsukka in eastern Nigeria, which is

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predominantly Igbo-speaking, and he became a senior research fellow at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In 1967, the eastern part of Nigeria declared independence as the nation of Biafra. This incident triggered thirty months of civil war that ended only when Biafra was defeated. Achebe then fled to Europe and America, where he wrote and talked about Biafran affairs.

When he returned to the University of Nigeria in 1976, he hoped to accomplish three goals: finish the novel he had been writing, renew the native publication of *Okike*, and further his study of Igbo culture. He also showed that he would not restrict his criticism to European targets. In an August 1976 interview, he lashed out at the archetypal Nigerian intellectual, who is divorced from the intellect "but for two things: status and stomach. And if there's any danger that he might suffer official displeasure or lose his job, he would prefer to turn a blind eye to what is happening around him." In October 1979, Achebe was awarded the first-ever Nigerian National Merit Award.

In 1980 he met James Baldwin at a conference held by the African Literature Association in Gainesville, Florida, USA. The writers – with similar political perspectives, beliefs about language, and faith in the liberating potential of literature – were eager to meet one another. Baldwin said: "It's very important that we should meet each other, finally, if I must say so, after something like 400 years."

In 1982, Achebe retired from the University of Nigeria. He devoted more time to editing *Okike* and became active with the left-leaning People's Redemption Party (PRP). In 1983, he became the party's deputy national vice-president. He published a book called *The Trouble with Nigeria* to coincide with the upcoming elections. On the first page, Achebe says bluntly: "the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."

The elections that followed were marked by violence and charges of fraud. Asked whether he thought Nigerian politics had changed since *A Man of the People*, Achebe replied: "I think, if anything, the Nigerian politician has deteriorated." After the elections, he engaged in a heated argument – which almost became a fistfight – with Bakin Zuwo, the

newly elected governor of Kano State. He left the PRP and afterwards kept his distance from political parties, expressing his sadness at the dishonesty and weakness of the people involved.

He spent most of the 1980s delivering speeches, attending conferences, and working on his sixth novel. He also continued winning awards and collecting honorary degrees. In 1986 he was elected president-general of the Ogidi Town Union; he reluctantly accepted and began a three-year term. In the same year, he stepped down as editor of *Okike*

3.5 LATER WRITING

Like many other African writers, Achebe believes that artistic and literary works must deal primarily with the problems of society. He has said that "art is, and always was, at the service of man" rather than an end in itself, accountable to no one. He believes that "any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose."

Continuing his relationship with Heinemann, Achebe published four other novels: *No Longer at Ease* (the 1960 sequel to *Things Fall Apart*), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). He also wrote and published several children's books that express his basic views in forms and language understandable to young readers.

In his later books, Achebe confronts the problems faced by Nigeria and other newly independent African nations. He blames the nation's problems on the lack of leadership in Nigeria since its independence. In 1983, he published *The Trouble with Nigeria*, a critique of corrupt politicians in his country. Achebe has also published two collections of short stories and three collections of essays. He is the founding editor of Heinemann's African Writers series; the founder and publisher of *Uwa Ndi Igbo: A Bilingual Journal of Igbo Life and Arts*; and the editor of the magazine *Okike*, Nigeria's leading journal of new writing.

3.6 LITERARY AWARDS

In addition to his writing career, Achebe maintained an active teaching career. In 1972, he was appointed to a three-year visiting professorship at

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the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and, in 1975, to a one-year visiting professorship at the University of Connecticut. In 1976, with matters sufficiently calm in Nigeria, he returned as professor of English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with which he had been affiliated since 1966. In 1990, he became the Charles P. Stevenson, Jr., professor of literature at Bard College, Annandale, New York.

Achebe received many awards from academic and cultural institutions around the world. In 1959, he won the Margaret Wong Memorial Prize for *Things Fall Apart*. The following year, after the publication of its sequel, *No Longer At Ease*, he was awarded the Nigerian National Trophy for Literature. His book of poetry, *Christmas in Biafra*, written during the Nigerian civil war, won the first Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1972. More than twenty universities in Great Britain, Canada, Nigeria, and the United States have awarded Achebe honorary degrees.

3.7 VOICE OF NIGERIA AND AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES

Once he returned to Nigeria, Achebe was promoted at the NBS to the position of Director of External Broadcasting. One of his first duties was to help create the Voice of Nigeria network. The station broadcast its first transmission on New Year's Day 1962, and worked to maintain an objective perspective during the turbulent era immediately following independence. This objectivity was put to the test when Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa declared a state of emergency in the Western Region, responding to a series of conflicts between officials of varying parties. Achebe became saddened by the evidence of corruption and silencing of political opposition.

In 1962 he attended an executive conference of African writers in English at the Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda. He met with important literary figures from around the continent and the world, including Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor, Nigerian playwright and poet Wole Soyinka, and US poet-author Langston Hughes. Among the topics of discussion was an attempt to determine whether the term African literature ought to include work from the diaspora, or solely that writing

composed by people living within the continent itself. Achebe indicated that it was not "a very significant question", and that scholars would do well to wait until a body of work were large enough to judge. Writing about the conference in several journals, Achebe hailed it as a milestone for the literature of Africa, and highlighted the importance of community among isolated voices on the continent and beyond.

While at Makerere, Achebe was asked to read a novel written by a student (James Ngugi, later known as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) called *Weep Not, Child*. Impressed, he sent it to Alan Hill at Heinemann, which published it two years later to coincide with its paperback line of books from African writers. Hill indicated this was to remedy a situation where British publishers "regarded West Africa only as a place where you sold books." Achebe was chosen to be General Editor of the African Writers Series, which became a significant force in bringing postcolonial literature from Africa to the rest of the world, and he continued in that role until 1972.

As these works became more widely available, reviews and essays about African literature – especially from Europe – began to flourish. Bristling against the commentary flooding his home country, Achebe published an essay entitled "Where Angels Fear to Tread" in the December 1962 issue of *Nigeria Magazine*. In it, he distinguished between the hostile critic (entirely negative), the amazed critic (entirely positive), and the conscious critic (who seeks a balance). He lashed out at those who critiqued African writers from the outside, saying: "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak (and 'language' here does not mean simply words, but a man's entire world view)." In September 1964 he attended the Commonwealth Literature conference at the University of Leeds, presenting his essay "The Novelist as Teacher".

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I:

1. Discuss the Political problems faced by Chinua Achebe.

2. Discuss the Literary awards won by Chinua Achebe.

3.8 NIGERIA-BIAFRA WAR

In May 1967, the southeastern region of Nigeria broke away to form the Republic of Biafra; in July the Nigerian military attacked to suppress what it considered an unlawful rebellion. Achebe's colleague, Christopher Okigbo, who had become a close friend of the family (especially of Achebe's son, young Ikechukwu), volunteered to join the secessionist army while simultaneously working at the press. Achebe's house was bombed one afternoon; Christie had taken the children to visit her sick mother, so the only victims were his books and papers. The Achebe family narrowly escaped disaster several times during the war. Five days later, Christopher Okigbo was killed on the war's front line. Achebe was shaken considerably by the loss; in 1971 he wrote "Dirge for Okigbo", originally in the Igbo language but later translated to English.

As the war intensified, the Achebe family was forced to leave Enugu for the Biafran capital of Aba. As the turmoil closed in, he continued to write, but most of his creative work during the war took the form of poetry. The shorter format was a consequence of living in a war zone. "I can write poetry," he said, "something short, intense more in keeping with my mood ... All this is creating in the context of our struggle." Many of these poems were collected in his 1971 book *Beware, Soul Brother*. One of his most famous, "Refugee Mother and Child", spoke to the suffering and loss that surrounded him. Dedicated to the promise of Biafra, he accepted a request to serve as foreign ambassador, refusing an invitation from the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University in the US. Achebe traveled to many cities in Europe, including London, where he continued his work with the African Writers Series project at Heinemann.

During the war, relations between writers in Nigeria and Biafra were strained. Achebe and John Pepper Clark had a tense confrontation in London over their respective support for opposing sides of the conflict. Achebe demanded that the publisher withdraw the dedication of *A Man*

of the People he had given to Clark. Years later, their friendship healed and the dedication was restored. Meanwhile, their contemporary Wole Soyinka was imprisoned for meeting with Biafran officials, and spent two years in jail. Speaking in 1968, Achebe said: "I find the Nigerian situation untenable. If I had been a Nigerian, I think I would have been in the same situation as Wole Soyinka is – in prison."

The Nigerian government, under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon, was backed by the British government; the two nations enjoyed a vigorous trade partnership. Addressing the causes of the war in 1968, Achebe lashed out at the Nigerian political and military forces that had forced Biafra to secede. He framed the conflict in terms of the country's colonial past. The writer in Nigeria, he said, "found that the independence his country was supposed to have won was totally without content ... The old white master was still in power. He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his dirty work for a commission."

Conditions in Biafra worsened as the war continued. In September 1968, the city of Aba fell to the Nigerian military and Achebe once again moved his family, this time to Umuahia, where the Biafran government had also relocated. He was chosen to chair the newly formed National Guidance Committee, charged with the task of drafting principles and ideas for the post-war era. In 1969, the group completed a document entitled *The Principles of the Biafran Revolution*, later released as *The Ahiara Declaration*.

In October of the same year, Achebe joined writers Cyprian Ekwensi and Gabriel Okara for a tour of the United States to raise awareness about the dire situation in Biafra. They visited thirty college campuses and conducted countless interviews. While in the southern US, Achebe learned for the first time of the Igbo Landing, a true story of a group of Igbo captives who drowned themselves in 1803 – rather than endure the brutality of slavery – after surviving through the Middle Passage. Although the group was well received by students and faculty, Achebe was "shocked" by the harsh racist attitude toward Africa he saw in the US. At the end of the tour, he said that "world policy is absolutely ruthless and unfeeling".

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The beginning of 1970 saw the end of the state of Biafra. On 12 January, the military surrendered to Nigeria, and Achebe returned with his family to Ogidi, where their home had been destroyed. He took a job at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka and immersed himself once again in academia. He was unable to accept invitations to other countries, however, because the Nigerian government revoked his passport due to his support for Biafra.

3.9 POSTWAR ACADEMIA

After the war, Achebe helped start two magazines: the literary journal *Okike*, a forum for African art, fiction, and poetry; and *Nsukkascopes*, an internal publication of the University (motto: "Devastating, Fearless, Brutal and True"). Achebe and the *Okike* committee later established another cultural magazine, *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, to showcase the indigenous stories and oral traditions of the Igbo community. In February 1972 he released *Girls at War*, a collection of short stories ranging in time from his undergraduate days to the recent bloodshed. It was the 100th book in Heinemann's African Writers Series.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst offered Achebe a professorship later that year, and the family moved to the United States. Their youngest daughter was displeased with her nursery school, and the family soon learned that her frustration involved language. Achebe helped her face the "alien experience" (as he called it) by telling her stories during the car trips to and from school.

As he presented his lessons to a wide variety of students (he taught only one class, to a large audience), he began to study the perceptions of Africa in Western scholarship: "Africa is not like anywhere else they know ... there are no real people in the Dark Continent, only forces operating; and people don't speak any language you can understand, they just grunt, too busy jumping up and down in a frenzy".

3.10 CRITICISM OF CONRAD

Achebe expanded this criticism when he presented a Chancellor's Lecture at Amherst on 18 February 1975, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in

Conrad's "Heart of Darkness". Decrying Joseph Conrad as "a bloody racist", Achebe asserted that Conrad's famous novel dehumanises Africans, rendering Africa as "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril."

Achebe also discussed a quotation from Albert Schweitzer, a 1952 Nobel Peace Prize laureate: "That extraordinary missionary, Albert Schweitzer, who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epitomizes the ambivalence. In a comment which has often been quoted Schweitzer says: 'The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother.' And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being." Some were surprised that Achebe would challenge a man honoured in the West for his "reverence for life".

The lecture caused a storm of controversy, even at the reception immediately following his talk. Many English professors in attendance were upset by his remarks; one elderly professor reportedly approached him, said: "How dare you!", and stormed away. Another suggested that Achebe had "no sense of humour", but several days later Achebe was approached by a third professor, who told him: "I now realize that I had never really read Heart of Darkness although I have taught it for years." Although the lecture angered many of his colleagues, he was nevertheless presented later in 1975 with an honorary doctorate from the University of Stirling and the Lotus Prize for Afro-Asian Writers.

The first comprehensive rebuttal of Achebe's critique was published in 1983 by British critic Cedric Watts. His essay "A Bloody Racist: About Achebe's View of Conrad" defends Heart of Darkness as an anti-imperialist novel, suggesting that "part of its greatness lies in the power of its criticisms of racial prejudice." Palestinian-American theorist Edward Said agreed in his book Culture and Imperialism that Conrad criticised imperialism, but added: "As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them". Building on Watts and Said, Nidesh

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Lawtoo argued that "underneath the first layer of straightforward opposition ... we find an underlying mimetic continuity between Conrad's colonial image of Africa [in *Heart of Darkness*] and Achebe's postcolonial representation" in *Things Fall Apart*.

Achebe's criticism has become a mainstream perspective on Conrad's work. The essay was included in the 1988 Norton critical edition of Conrad's novel. Editor Robert Kimbrough called it one of "the three most important events in *Heart of Darkness* criticism since the second edition of his book ..." Critic Nicolas Tredell divides Conrad criticism "into two epochal phases: before and after Achebe." Asked frequently about his essay, Achebe once explained that he never meant for the work to be abandoned: "It's not in my nature to talk about banning books. I am saying, read it – with the kind of understanding and with the knowledge I talk about. And read it beside African works." Interviewed on National Public Radio with Robert Siegel, in October 2009, Achebe remains consistent, although tempering this criticism in a discussion entitled "'Heart of Darkness' is inappropriate": "Conrad was a seductive writer. He could pull his reader into the fray. And if it were not for what he said about me and my people, I would probably be thinking only of that seduction."

3.11 LATER IN HIS LIFE AS A PUBLISHER

In October 2005, the London *Financial Times* reported that Achebe was planning to write a novella for the Canongate Myth Series, a series of short novels in which ancient myths from myriad cultures are reimagined and rewritten by contemporary authors.

In June 2007, Achebe was awarded the Man Booker International Prize. The judging panel included US critic Elaine Showalter, who said he "illuminated the path for writers around the world seeking new words and forms for new realities and societies"; and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, who said Achebe has achieved "what one of his characters brilliantly defines as the writer's purpose: 'a new-found utterance' for the capture of life's complexity". In 2010, Achebe was

awarded The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for \$300,000, one of the richest prizes for the arts.

In October 2012, Achebe's publishers, Penguin Books, released *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. Publication immediately caused a stir and re-opened the discussion about the Nigerian Civil War. It would prove to be the last publication during his lifetime.

Fondly called the "father of African literature", Achebe died after a short illness on 21 March 2013 in Boston, United States. An unidentified source close to the family said that he was ill for a while and had been hospitalised in the city. Penguin publishing director Simon Winder said: "... we are all desolate to hear of his death." The New York Times described him in his obituary as "one of Africa's most widely read novelists and one of the continent's towering men of letters". The BBC wrote that he was "revered throughout the world for his depiction of life in Africa". He was laid to rest in his hometown in Ogidi, Anambra State.

3.12 LEGACY

Achebe has been called "the father of modern African writing" and Africa's greatest storyteller, and many books and essays have been written about his work over the past fifty years. In 1992 he became the first living writer to be represented in the Everyman's Library collection published by Alfred A. Knopf. His 60th birthday was celebrated at the University of Nigeria by "an international Who's Who in African Literature". One observer noted: "Nothing like it had ever happened before in African literature anywhere on the continent."

Achebe provided a "blueprint" for African writers of succeeding generations. In 1982, he was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Kent. At the ceremony, professor Robert Gibson said that the Nigerian writer "is now revered as Master by the younger generation of African writers and it is to him they regularly turn for counsel and inspiration." Even outside of Africa, his impact resonates strongly in literary circles. Novelist Margaret Atwood called him "a magical writer – one of the greatest of the twentieth century". Poet Maya Angelou lauded *Things Fall Apart* as a book wherein "all readers meet their brothers, sisters, parents and friends and themselves along Nigerian roads". Nelson

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Mandela, recalling his time as a political prisoner, once referred to Achebe as a writer "in whose company the prison walls fell down", and that his work *Things Fall Apart* inspired him to continue the struggle to end apartheid. Nobel laureate Toni Morrison has noted that Achebe's work inspired her to become a writer and "sparked her love affair with African literature".

Achebe was the recipient of over 30 honorary degrees from universities in England, Scotland, Canada, South Africa, Nigeria and the United States, including Dartmouth College, Harvard, and Brown University.[194] He was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, an Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1982), a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2002), the Nigerian National Order of Merit (Nigeria's highest honour for academic work), the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, the Man Booker International Prize 2007 and the 2010 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize. He was appointed Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nations Population Fund in 1999.

He twice refused the Nigerian honour Commander of the Federal Republic, in 2004 and 2011, saying:

I have watched particularly the chaos in my own state of Anambra where a small clique of renegades, openly boasting its connections in high places, seems determined to turn my homeland into a bankrupt and lawless fiefdom. I am appalled by the brazenness of this clique and the silence, if not connivance, of the Presidency.

Despite his scholarly achievements and the global importance of his work, Achebe never received a Nobel Prize, which some observers viewed as unjust. When Wole Soyinka was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, Achebe joined the rest of Nigeria in celebrating the first African ever to win the prize. He lauded Soyinka's "stupendous display of energy and vitality", and said he was "most eminently deserving of any prize". In 1988 Achebe was asked by a reporter for *Quality Weekly* how he felt about never winning a Nobel Prize; he replied: "My position is that the Nobel Prize is important. But it is a European prize. It's not an African prize ... Literature is not a

heavyweight championship. Nigerians may think, you know, this man has been knocked out. It's nothing to do with that."

On 16 November 2017, Google showed a Doodle in Nigeria and the U.S. for Chinua Achebe's 87th birthday.

On Achebe's 86th birthday in 2016, young writers in Anambra State , (his homestate) initiated and started hosting an annual literary festival in his honour, known as the Chinua Achebe Literary Festival

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. Discuss the later life Chinua Achebe.

2. Discuss the legacy Chinua Achebe.

3.13 LET SUM UP

Poet and novelist Chinua Achebe was one of the most important African writers of the last century.

Born Albert Chinualumogo Achebe, Chinua Achebe was raised by Christian evangelical parents in the large village Ogidi in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria. He received an early education in English, but grew up surrounded by a complex fusion of Igbo traditions and colonial legacy.

He studied at the University College (now the University of Ibadan), a British-style university, originally intending to study medicine, but eventually changing his major to English, history, and theology.

Things Fall Apart (1958) was his first novel, and remains his best-known work. It has been translated into at least forty-five languages, and has sold eight million copies worldwide.

Achebe's university career was extremely successful: he was made Emeritus Professor at the University of Nigeria in 1985, he taught at the

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University of Massachusetts and the University of Connecticut, and he received over twenty honorary doctorates from universities around the world.

He continued writing throughout his life, producing both fiction and non-fiction, and winning awards like the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. His final published work was the literary autobiography *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. Chinua Achebe died in 2013 of an undisclosed illness in Boston..

3.14 KEYWORDS

1. **The Igbo people** are an ethnic group native to the present-day south-central and southeastern Nigeria. There has been much speculation about the origins of the Igbo people, as it is unknown how exactly the group came to form.
2. **Amasquerade ceremony** is a cultural or religious event involving the wearing of masks.
3. **A bursary** is a monetary award made by an institution to individuals or groups of people who cannot afford to pay full fees. In return for the bursary the individual is usually obligated to be employed at the institution for the duration as the bursary.
4. **Modernity**, a topic in the humanities and social sciences, is both a historical period, as well as the ensemble of particular socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices that arose in the wake of the Renaissance—in the "Age of Reason" of 17th-century thought and the 18th-century "Enlightenment".
5. **Colonial Nigeria** was the era in the History of Nigeria when the region of West Africa was ruled by Great Britain in from the mid-19th century up till 1960 at her independence.

3.15 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- a. What political problems he faced in his entire life?

- b. Explain, "Grew up surrounded by a complex fusion of Igbo traditions and colonial legacy"?
- c. What blueprint he has provided in his life?
- d. What criticism he has faced in his life?
- e. Why he is called as Voice of Nigeria?

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3.17 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Answer 1 : Check Section 3.5

Answer 2 : Check Section 3.7

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Answer 1 : Check Section 3.12

Answer 2 : Check Section 3.13

UNIT: 4 LITERARY WORKS OF CHINUA ACHEBE

STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Objective
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Themes
- 4.3 Style
- 4.4 Research Methodology
- 4.5 Factors Influencing Chinua Achebe's Writings
- 4.6 Achebe's Writing Style
- 4.7 No Longer At Ease And Fellowship Travels
- 4.8 Voice Of Nigeria And African Writers Series
- 4.9 Arrow Of God
- 4.10 A Man Of The People
- 4.11 Things Fall Apart
- 4.12 Let Sum up
- 4.13 Keywords
- 4.14 Questions For Review
- 4.15 Suggested Readings And References
- 4.16 Answer to check your progress

4.0 OBJECTIVE

This unit help to learn about the Literary works Chinua Achebe It helps to understand the Themes and style of his writing. Unit helps to have understating about impact of his writing in various aspects of life. This unit achieve the objective to understand how Chinua Achebe was the voice of Nigeria and African Writers Series.

Unit helps to achieve following objective:

Notes

- Theme of his writing
- Style of his writing
- Analysis of his literary skills
- Understanding of his some of the famous works

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The literary works of Chinua Achebe basically revolve around issues touching directly or indirectly on cultural traditions, effects of colonization and internal conflicts existing among contemporary Africans. The combination of these and other related elements makes it practically impossible for a given audience to have a good understanding of such elements. It is from this domain that Chinua Achebe tries to innovatively incorporate elements derived from the Igbo society in his writings so as to enable his audiences get a clear image of the subject content. In the analysis of Chinua's literary works, this paper shall explore various issues defining his writing style, common themes in his writings, and possible factors influencing his writings.

4.2 THEMES

Achebe's novels approach a variety of themes. In his early writing, a depiction of the Igbo culture itself is paramount. Critic NahemYousaf highlights the importance of these depictions: "Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity". The portrayal of indigenous life is not simply a matter of literary background, he adds: "Achebe seeks to produce the effect of a precolonial reality as an Igbo-centric response to a Eurocentrically constructed imperial 'reality' ". Certain elements of Achebe's depiction of Igbo life in *Things Fall Apart* match those in Olaudah Equiano's autobiographical *Narrative*. Responding to charges that Equiano was not actually born in Africa, Achebe wrote in 1975: "Equiano was an Igbo, I believe, from the village of Iseke in theOrlu division of Nigeria".

The story lines in most of his novels revolve around Nigeria's colonial period and political unrests in the post-independence country. In most

occasions, Chinua Achebe uses his ingenuity to clearly bring out the intended meaning of his writings, by illustrating the impacts of European culture and imperialism on African traditions. This approach is the defining characteristic of his debut novel, *Things Fall Apart*. However, Achebe's novels touch on a wide range of themes for instance the description and illustration of the Nigerian Igbo culture, effects of colonization on African traditions, the relationships between femininity and masculinity, etc.

Culture and colonialism

A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African tradition (particularly Igbo varieties) and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The village of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, is violently shaken with internal divisions when the white Christian missionaries arrive. Nigerian English professor Ernest N. Emenyonu describes the colonial experience in the novel as "the systematic emasculation of the entire culture". Achebe later embodied this tension between African tradition and Western influence in the figure of Sam Okoli, the president of Kangan in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Distanced from the myths and tales of the community by his Westernised education, he does not have the capacity for reconnection shown by the character Beatrice.

The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often effected by individuals from Europe, but institutions and urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. The character of Obi in *No Longer at Ease* succumbs to colonial-era corruption in the city; the temptations of his position overwhelm his identity and fortitude. The courts and the position of District Commissioner in *Things Fall Apart* likewise clash with the traditions of the Igbo, and remove their ability to participate in structures of decision-making.

The standard Achebean ending results in the destruction of an individual and, by synecdoche, the downfall of the community. Odili's descent into the luxury of corruption and hedonism in *A Man of the People*, for example, is symbolic of the post-colonial crisis in Nigeria and elsewhere. Even with the emphasis on colonialism, however, Achebe's tragic

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endings embody the traditional confluence of fate, individual and society, as represented by Sophocles and Shakespeare.

Still, Achebe seeks to portray neither moral absolutes nor a fatalistic inevitability. In 1972, he said: "I never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the New must win. The point is that no single truth satisfied me—and this is well founded in the Igbo world view. No single man can be correct all the time, no single idea can be totally correct." His perspective is reflected in the words of Ikem, a character in *Anthills of the Savannah*: "whatever you are is never enough; you must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism." And in a 1996 interview, Achebe said: "Belief in either radicalism or orthodoxy is too simplified a way of viewing things ... Evil is never all evil; goodness on the other hand is often tainted with selfishness."

In most of his literary works, Chinua Achebe makes several attempts to illustrate the interactions of African culture, in this case the Nigerian Igbo and modernity as an effect of British colonization of Nigeria. In his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the introduction of Christian culture in Umuofia village as a result of the arrival of European missionaries is met by sharp resistance and opposition by the locals who strive to defend their local heritage at all costs (Emenyonu, 1991). In *Things Fall Apart*, the newly created roles of the District Commissioner and magistrate courts are interpreted by the locals as a way of locking them out in major decision making processes of issues directly affecting the community. This in effect acts as a springboard for their opposition to European invasion (Emenyonu, 1991). The interference of local traditions by European culture is further depicted in the novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* by the character, Sam Okoli, a typical example of a Western educated individual who despises his native traditions. This makes it difficult for him to effectively play the role assigned to him by the author, i.e. the president of Kangan (Gera, 2001).

Masculinity and femininity

The gender roles of men and women, as well as societies' conceptions of the associated concepts, are frequent themes in Achebe's writing. He has

been criticised as a sexist author, in response to what many call the uncritical depiction of traditionally patriarchal Igbo society, where the most masculine men take numerous wives, and women are beaten regularly. Paradoxically, Igbo society immensely values individual achievement but also sees the ownership over or acquisition of women as a signifier of success. As seen in *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo society condemns violence but Okonkwo's ability to control 'his' women is inextricably connected to his dignity. Thus, women are automatically disenfranchised in terms of achieving high status related to personal achievement. Others suggest that Achebe is merely representing the limited gendered vision of the characters, and they note that in his later works, he tries to demonstrate the inherent dangers of excluding women from society. It is also suggested that Achebe purposefully created exaggerated gender binaries in order to render Igbo history recognizable to international readers. Still others suggest that reading Achebe through a womanist lens enables an understanding of Igbo conceptions of gender complementarity. Womanism is "an afrocentric concept forged out of global feminism to analyze the condition of Black African women" that acknowledges the patriarchal oppression of women, but also highlights the resistance and dignity of African women. As the representation of Igbo society and kinship structures in novels such as *Things Fall Apart* differs considerably from the work of African feminist anthropology, the representation should not be taken literally; rather, the reader should consider the roles of both women and men as intentionally stark and in opposition. In any case, a careful reading of Achebe paradoxically recognizes the hyperbolic representation of gender politics in Igbo society, while acknowledging the necessary nuance that gives Achebe's women some agency and prominence.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's furious manhood overpowers everything "feminine" in his life, including his own conscience. For example, when he feels bad after being forced to kill his adopted son, he asks himself: "When did you become a shivering old woman?" It is also argued that one's chi, or personal god, is the 'mother within'. This understanding further demonstrates how Okonkwo's hypermasculinity corrupts his conscience, as his contempt for his own mother and other

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women prevents him from being in harmony with his chi. He views all things feminine as distasteful, in part because they remind him of his father's laziness and cowardice. His father was considered an *agbala*—a word that refers to a man without title, but is also synonymous with 'woman'. Thus, Okonkwo not only regrets his father's lack of success, but attributes it to a lack of masculinity. Okonkwo's feminization of all things lacking success or power is a common theme throughout the novel. His obsession with maleness is fueled by an intense fear of femaleness, which he expresses through physical and verbal abuse of his wives, his violence towards his community, his constant worry that his son Nwoye is not manly enough, and his wish that his daughter Ezinma had been born a boy. The women in the novel, meanwhile, are obedient, quiet, and absent from positions of authority – despite the fact that Igbo women were traditionally involved in village leadership. Nevertheless, the need for feminine balance is highlighted by Ani, the earth goddess, and the extended discussion of "Nneka" ("Mother is supreme") in chapter fourteen. Ekwefi's perseverance and love for Ezinma, despite her many miscarriages, is seen as a tribute to Igbo womanhood, which is typically defined by motherhood. Okonkwo's defeat is seen by some as a vindication of the need for a balancing feminine ethos. Some have also argued that all of Okonkwo's failures are tied to his contempt and fear of women and his inability to form quality personal relationships with the women in his life—his wives, his children, and his own mother. Achebe has expressed frustration at frequently being misunderstood on this point, saying that "I want to sort of scream that *Things Fall Apart* is on the side of women ... And that Okonkwo is paying the penalty for his treatment of women; that all his problems, all the things he did wrong, can be seen as offenses against the feminine." Indeed, it is argued that Okonkwo's violent and vehement anti-women position is the exception, not the norm, within his community of Umuofia and the wider Igbo society. Still, post-colonial African writing is intensely male-centred, a phenomenon that is not alleviated by the frequent trope of the African woman as the "embodiment of the male writer's vision for the new Africa". It is argued that even when women and their lives are more

centrally depicted in literature, the male writer continues to be the visionary while the woman is the "sign" of changes to come.

Achebe's first central female character in a novel is Beatrice Nwanyibuife in *Anthills of the Savannah*. As an independent woman in the city, Beatrice strives for the balance that Okonkwo lacked so severely. She refutes the notion that she needs a man, and slowly learns about Idemili, a goddess balancing the aggression of male power. Although the final stages of the novel show her functioning in a nurturing mother-type role, Beatrice remains firm in her conviction that women should not be limited to such capacities

The manner in which Chinua Achebe assigns roles to characters in his novels and other writings puts into consideration the individual roles of both men and women, in regard to the norms and expectations of the society. Tracing his origins back to the patriarchal Igbo community where important family decisions are made by the paterfamilias, Chinua tries to incorporate these societal elements in his writings. Looking at it from the traditional angle, Igbo men were polygamous in nature and were allowed to beat up their wives in case of any domestic misunderstanding (Mezu, 2006). This is probably why he depicts Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* as a man with three wives, and with a chauvinistic attitude that his masculinity allegedly overshadows anything feminine around him (Achebe, 1994).

On the other hand, he portrays women in his writings as cowards and submissive wives, not allowed to take part in either traditional or modern leadership roles. To minimize the chances of being branded as a sexist chauvinistic author, Chinua Achebe at one point tries to appreciate the role played by women in the society. This is seen in Chapter fourteen of *Things Fall Apart* in the characterization of Ani and subsequent discussions of Nneka, translated to mean, the supreme mother. In addition, arguments may be put across that the problems and tribulations faced by Okonkwo may be attributed to his attitude toward women through regular mistreatment and offenses made against the feminine gender (Thomson, 2008).

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In his other novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chinua Achebe treats women with respect as seen when he portrays Beatrice as an independent city woman fighting for her identity and position in the society. She is presented as a principled iron lady with both feminine and masculine character traits and does not rely on men for survival and security in marriage (Bicknell, 1996).

4.3 STYLE

Oral tradition

The style of Achebe's fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people. He weaves folk tales into the fabric of his stories, illuminating community values in both the content and the form of the storytelling. The tale about the Earth and Sky in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although Nwoye enjoys hearing his mother tell the tale, Okonkwo's dislike for it is evidence of his imbalance. Later, Nwoye avoids beatings from his father by pretending to dislike such "women's stories".

Another hallmark of Achebe's style is the use of proverbs, which often illustrate the values of the rural Igbo tradition. He sprinkles them throughout the narratives, repeating points made in conversation. Critic Anjali Gera notes that the use of proverbs in *Arrow of God* "serves to create through an echo effect the judgement of a community upon an individual violation." The use of such repetition in Achebe's urban novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, is less pronounced. For Achebe, however, proverbs and folk stories are not the sum total of the oral Igbo tradition. In combining philosophical thought and public performance into the use of oratory ("Okwu Oka" – "speech artistry" – in the Igbo phrase), his characters exhibit what he called "a matter of individual excellence ... part of Igbo culture." In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's friend Obierika voices the most impassioned oratory, crystallising the events and their significance for the village. Nwaka in *Arrow of God* also exhibits a mastery of oratory, albeit for malicious ends.

Achebe frequently includes folk songs and descriptions of dancing in his work. Obi, the protagonist of *No Longer at Ease*, is at one point met by women singing a "Song of the Heart", which Achebe gives in both Igbo and English: "Is everyone here? / (Hele ee he ee he)" In *Things Fall Apart*, ceremonial dancing and the singing of folk songs reflect the realities of Igbo tradition. The elderly Uchendu, attempting to shake Okonkwo out of his self-pity, refers to a song sung after the death of a woman: "For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well." This song contrasts with the "gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism" sung later by the white missionaries.

Achebe's short stories are not as widely studied as his novels, and Achebe himself did not consider them a major part of his work. In the preface for *Girls at War and Other Stories*, he writes: "A dozen pieces in twenty years must be accounted a pretty lean harvest by any reckoning." Like his novels, the short stories are heavily influenced by the oral tradition. And like the folktales they follow, the stories often have morals emphasising the importance of cultural traditions.

Use of English

As the decolonisation process unfolded in the 1950s, a debate about choice of language erupted and pursued authors around the world; Achebe was no exception. Indeed, because of his subject matter and insistence on a non-colonial narrative, he found his novels and decisions interrogated with extreme scrutiny – particularly with regard to his use of English. One school of thought, championed by Kenyan writer NgũgĩwaThiong'o, urged the use of indigenous African languages. English and other European languages, he said in 1986, were "part of the neo-colonial structures that repress progressive ideas".

Achebe chose to write in English. In his essay "The African Writer and the English Language", he discusses how the process of colonialism – for all its ills – provided colonised people from varying linguistic backgrounds "a language with which to talk to one another". As his purpose is to communicate with readers across Nigeria, he uses "the one central language enjoying nationwide currency". Using English also allowed his books to be read in the colonial ruling nations.

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Still, Achebe recognises the shortcomings of what Audre Lorde called "the master's tools". In another essay he notes:

For an African writing in English is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas ... I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence.

In another essay, he refers to James Baldwin's struggle to use the English language to accurately represent his experience, and his realisation that he needed to take control of the language and expand it. The Nigerian poet and novelist Gabriel Okara likens the process of language-expansion to the evolution of jazz music in the United States.

Achebe's novels laid a formidable groundwork for this process. By altering syntax, usage, and idiom, he transforms the language into a distinctly African style. In some spots this takes the form of repetition of an Igbo idea in standard English parlance; elsewhere it appears as narrative asides integrated into descriptive sentences.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In carrying out this research, various works carried out by critics of Chinua Achebe's literary works were explored. These include peer review journals and other scholarly sources. In order to ensure accuracy and consistency, some of his novels such as *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* were studied closely and used at various levels during the analysis. It should however be noted that the methodology followed in developing this research paper exempted some of his works, especially those touching on children stories and associated juvenilias.

4.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING CHINUA ACHEBE'S WRITINGS

Just like any other author, Chinua Achebe's quality of writing has been positively influenced by several factors. To start with, he in most cases quotes, paraphrases and/or translates Igbo proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and associated folklore to describe Christian dogmas and European political ideologies. This creativity and innovativeness on his part makes it easy for his target audience (especially that derived from contemporary Africa) to identify with, and understand the context of his work. In addition, Chinua's understanding of African traditions, history, politics and the society at large makes it possible for him to compare European and African cultures before presenting insightful and well thought out novels on the same.

The Igbo widely believe that at any given time, no single man or single idea can be regarded as the gospel truth. They believe in accepting corrections and learning from past mistakes and experiences of one another. This attitude of the Igbo is partly responsible for his nature of writing in that he neither portrays fatalistic inevitability nor moral absolutes. This perception is illustrated in the novel *Anthills of the Savannah*, when Ikem, one of its characters accepts the fact that everyone has to accommodate opinions of other people in order to live in harmony (Mezu, 2006)

Arguments may also be put across that the kind of education received by Chinua Achebe from early childhood to graduation is partly responsible for sharpening his writing skills (enotes.com, 2010). At a tender age, Chinua the Church Mission Society School before joining Umuahia's government college for further studies. He then joined the Ibadan University College, a constituent college of the University of London where he majored in English literature. This educational background makes it possible for Chinua Achebe to contribute in arguments touching directly on Christian doctrines, local politics and European affairs. His understanding of both African and European cultural traditions makes him better placed to critically analyze a broad spectrum of issues revolving around race, religion, colonialism, academics and traditions. This has the general effect of minimizing biasness, prejudice and fixed mindsets in most of his writings. His works of literature therefore

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discusses various issues using diverse cultural approaches, making them acceptable to various audiences across the globe.

In one way or another, Chinua Achebe's attitude towards the universality of human nature and active involvement in Nigerian politics (at one time served as the vice president of People's Redemption Party in the early 1980's) also influenced his writings, making them to extend beyond the Nigerian borders and also beyond the political, sociological and anthropological concerns of the post-independence Africa. He also attempts to invert the existing stereotypes and mindsets held by most westerners. Previously, most European literature work and narratives e.g. those composed by Doris Lessing and Alan Paton presented Africa as continent faced by droughts, famine and constant turmoil. It is from this domain that Chinua's work unearths the myths and misrepresentations of Africa (Lyons, 1998).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. What factors influence Chinua's Writing?

2. How was the impact of use of English was there in writing style of Chinua?

4.6 ACHEBE'S WRITING STYLE

In his novels and short stories, Chinua Achebe incorporates various elements of oral literature at different levels so as to make his works interesting and appealing to the readers. Being a Nigerian Igbo by birth, he intertwines the oral traditions, folk tales and related narratives of his ethnic community into most of his books. A case example is the inclusion of the folk tale- the Sky and the Earth in his 1958 novel Things Fall Apart. Other than making the story line appealing, oral traditions in

this case help in making it easier for his target audience to understand and/or interpret various themes of his novels/books. By way of example, the narrative on the Sky and the Earth is used by the author to emphasize on the theme relating various aspects of masculinity and femininity. This is seen when Nwoye, one of the characters in *Things Fall Apart* brands such tales as women stories to avoid being associated with femininity. This is despite the fact that he does like the narratives but only fears the wrath of his father (Ezenwa, 1997).

Other than folk tales and oral narratives, Chinua Achebe widely uses proverbs, idioms and similes derived from the Igbo ethnic community so as to enable his audience and readers to make sound judgment of the community. This is portrayed in his books, especially the *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart*, where Nwaka and Obierika are respectively regarded as great orators of their time (Egejuru, 1996).

In addition, use of folk songs and traditional dancing is a common characteristic of his writing style. In the novel, *No Longer at Ease* – 1960, women are at one point heard singing the Igbo's Song of the Heart for Obi. In *Things Fall Apart*, a comparison of songs sung by the Igbo and Christian missionaries reveals a sharp contrast between the two (Achebe, 1994, pp 135 & 146). In summary, extensive use of oral traditions in his works is intended for emphasizing on the morals and relevance of cultural traditions to the modern society.

Chinua Achebe's other main writing style is depicted by his mastery and extensive use of English literature. His choice to use the English language in his works is in itself ironic based on the fact that he was an opponent of the colonization process and any elements of neo-colonization. In order to reach most people across the multi- ethnic Nigeria and other parts of the world, he had to use English, which by then was regarded as the post-independence Nigeria's national language. His mastery of the English language made it easier for Chinua Achebe to alter the English syntax, idiom and usage, giving it a completely new African approach to help him in translating and accommodating African ideas with no English equivalents (Ogbaa, 1999).

4.7 NO LONGER AT EASE AND FELLOWSHIP TRAVELS

In 1960, while they were still dating, Achebe dedicated to Christie Okoli his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, about a civil servant who is embroiled in the corruption of Lagos. The protagonist is Obi, grandson of *Things Fall Apart*'s main character, Okonkwo. Drawing on his time in the city, Achebe writes about Obi's experiences in Lagos to reflect the challenges facing a new generation on the threshold of Nigerian independence. Obi is trapped between the expectations of his family, its clan, his home village, and larger society. He is crushed by these forces (like his grandfather before him) and finds himself imprisoned for bribery. Having shown his acumen for portraying traditional Igbo culture, Achebe demonstrated in his second novel an ability to depict modern Nigerian life.

Later that year, Achebe was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship for six months of travel, which he called "the first important perk of my writing career"; Achebe set out for a tour of East Africa. One month after Nigeria achieved its independence, he travelled to Kenya, where he was required to complete an immigration form by checking a box indicating his ethnicity: European, Asiatic, Arab, or Other. Shocked and dismayed at being forced into an "Other" identity, he found the situation "almost funny" and took an extra form as a souvenir. Continuing to Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now united in Tanzania), he was frustrated by the paternalistic attitude he observed among non-African hotel clerks and social elites.

Achebe also found in his travels that Swahili was gaining prominence as a major African language. Radio programs were broadcast in Swahili, and its use was widespread in the countries he visited. Nevertheless, he also found an "apathy" among the people toward literature written in Swahili. He met the poet Sheikh Shaaban Robert, who complained of the difficulty he had faced in trying to publish his Swahili-language work.

In Northern Rhodesia (now called Zambia), Achebe found himself sitting in a whites-only section of a bus to Victoria Falls. Interrogated by the ticket taker as to why he was sitting in the front, he replied, "if you must know I come from Nigeria, and there we sit where we like in the bus."

Upon reaching the waterfall, he was cheered by the black travellers from the bus, but he was saddened by their being unable to resist the policy of segregation at the time.

Two years later, Achebe again left Nigeria, this time as part of a Fellowship for Creative Artists awarded by UNESCO. He travelled to the United States and Brazil. He met with a number of writers from the US, including novelists Ralph Ellison and Arthur Miller. In Brazil, he met with several other authors, with whom he discussed the complications of writing in Portuguese. Achebe worried that the vibrant literature of the nation would be lost if left untranslated into a more widely spoken language.

4.8 VOICE OF NIGERIA AND AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES

Once he returned to Nigeria, Achebe was promoted at the NBS to the position of Director of External Broadcasting. One of his first duties was to help create the Voice of Nigeria network. The station broadcast its first transmission on New Year's Day 1962, and worked to maintain an objective perspective during the turbulent era immediately following independence. This objectivity was put to the test when Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa declared a state of emergency in the Western Region, responding to a series of conflicts between officials of varying parties. Achebe became saddened by the evidence of corruption and silencing of political opposition.

In 1962 he attended an executive conference of African writers in English at the Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda. He met with important literary figures from around the continent and the world, including Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor, Nigerian playwright and poet Wole Soyinka, and US poet-author Langston Hughes. Among the topics of discussion was an attempt to determine whether the term African literature ought to include work from the diaspora, or solely that writing composed by people living within the continent itself. Achebe indicated that it was not "a very significant question", and that scholars would do well to wait until a body of work were large enough to judge. Writing about the conference in several journals, Achebe hailed it as a milestone

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for the literature of Africa, and highlighted the importance of community among isolated voices on the continent and beyond.

While at Makerere, Achebe was asked to read a novel written by a student (James Ngugi, later known as NgũgĩwaThiong'o) called *Weep Not, Child*. Impressed, he sent it to Alan Hill at Heinemann, which published it two years later to coincide with its paperback line of books from African writers. Hill indicated this was to remedy a situation where British publishers "regarded West Africa only as a place where you sold books." Achebe was chosen to be General Editor of the African Writers Series, which became a significant force in bringing postcolonial literature from Africa to the rest of the world, and he continued in that role until 1972.

As these works became more widely available, reviews and essays about African literature – especially from Europe – began to flourish. Bristling against the commentary flooding his home country, Achebe published an essay entitled "Where Angels Fear to Tread" in the December 1962 issue of *Nigeria Magazine*. In it, he distinguished between the hostile critic (entirely negative), the amazed critic (entirely positive), and the conscious critic (who seeks a balance). He lashed out at those who critiqued African writers from the outside, saying: "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak (and 'language' here does not mean simply words, but a man's entire world view)." In September 1964 he attended the Commonwealth Literature conference at the University of Leeds, presenting his essay "The Novelist as Teacher"

4.9 ARROW OF GOD

Achebe's third book, *Arrow of God*, was published in 1964. Like its predecessors, it explores the intersections of Igbo tradition and European Christianity. Set in the village of Umuaro at the start of the twentieth century, the novel tells the story of Ezeulu, a Chief Priest of Ulu. Shocked by the power of British intervention in the area, he orders his son to learn the foreigners' secret. Ezeulu is consumed by the resulting tragedy.

The idea for the novel came in 1959, when Achebe heard the story of a Chief Priest being imprisoned by a District Officer. He drew further

inspiration a year later when he viewed a collection of Igbo objects excavated from the area by archaeologist Thurstan Shaw; Achebe was startled by the cultural sophistication of the artifacts. When an acquaintance showed him a series of papers from colonial officers (not unlike the fictional Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger referenced at the end of *Things Fall Apart*), Achebe combined these strands of history and began work on *Arrow of God* in earnest. Like Achebe's previous works, *Arrow* was roundly praised by critics. A revised edition was published in 1974 to correct what Achebe called "certain structural weaknesses".

In a letter written to Achebe, the US writer John Updike expressed his surprised admiration for the sudden downfall of *Arrow of God*'s protagonist. He praised the author's courage to write "an ending few Western novelists would have contrived". Achebe responded by suggesting that the individualistic hero was rare in African literature, given its roots in communal living and the degree to which characters are "subject to non-human forces in the universe."

4.10 A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

A Man of the People was published in 1966. A bleak satire set in an unnamed African state which has just attained independence, the novel follows a teacher named Odili Samalu from the village of Anata who opposes a corrupt Minister of Culture named Nanga for his Parliament seat. Upon reading an advance copy of the novel, Achebe's friend John Pepper Clark declared: "Chinua, I know you are a prophet. Everything in this book has happened except a military coup!"

Soon afterward, Nigerian Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu seized control of the northern region of the country as part of a larger coup attempt. Commanders in other areas failed, and the plot was answered by a military crackdown. A massacre of three thousand people from the eastern region living in the north occurred soon afterwards, and stories of other attacks on Igbo Nigerians began to filter into Lagos.

The ending of his novel had brought Achebe to the attention of military personnel, who suspected him of having foreknowledge of the coup. When he received word of the pursuit, he sent his wife (who was

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pregnant) and children on a squalid boat through a series of unseen creeks to the Eastern stronghold of Port Harcourt. They arrived safely, but Christie suffered a miscarriage at the journey's end. Chinua rejoined them soon afterwards in Ogidi. These cities were safe from military incursion because they were in the southeast, part of the region which would later secede.

Once the family had resettled in Enugu, Achebe and his friend Christopher Okigbo started a publishing house called Citadel Press, to improve the quality and increase the quantity of literature available to younger readers. One of its first submissions was a story called *How the Dog was Domesticated*, which Achebe revised and rewrote, turning it into a complex allegory for the country's political tumult. Its final title was *How the Leopard Got His Claws*. Years later a Nigerian intelligence officer told Achebe, "of all the things that came out of Biafra, that book was most important."

4.11 THINGS FALL APART

Back in Nigeria, Achebe set to work revising and editing his novel (now titled *Things Fall Apart*, after a line in the poem "The Second Coming" by W. B. Yeats). He cut away the second and third sections of the book, leaving only the story of a yam farmer named Okonkwo who lives during the colonization of Nigeria. He added sections, improved various chapters, and restructured the prose. By 1957, he had sculpted it to his liking, and took advantage of an advertisement offering a typing service. He sent his only copy of his handwritten manuscript (along with the £22 fee) to the London company. After he waited several months without receiving any communication from the typing service, Achebe began to worry. His boss at the NBS, Angela Beattie, was going to London for her annual leave; he asked her to visit the company. She did, and angrily demanded to know why the manuscript was lying ignored in the corner of the office. The company quickly sent a typed copy to Achebe. Beattie's intervention was crucial for his ability to continue as a writer. Had the novel been lost, he later said, "I would have been so discouraged that I would probably have given up altogether."

In 1958, Achebe sent his novel to the agent recommended by Gilbert Phelps in London. It was sent to several publishing houses; some rejected it immediately, claiming that fiction from African writers had no market potential. Finally it reached the office of Heinemann, where executives hesitated until an educational adviser, Donald MacRae, just back in England after a trip through West Africa, read the book and forced the company's hand with his succinct report: "This is the best novel I have read since the war".

Heinemann published 2,000 hardcover copies of *Things Fall Apart* on 17 June 1958. According to Alan Hill, employed by the publisher at the time, the company did not "touch a word of it" in preparation for release. The book was received well by the British press, and received positive reviews from critic Walter Allen and novelist Angus Wilson. Three days after publication, *The Times Literary Supplement* wrote that the book "genuinely succeeds in presenting tribal life from the inside". *The Observer* called it "an excellent novel", and the literary magazine *Time and Tide* said that "Mr. Achebe's style is a model for aspirants".

Initial reception in Nigeria was mixed. When Hill tried to promote the book in West Africa, he was met with scepticism and ridicule. The faculty at the University of Ibadan was amused at the thought of a worthwhile novel being written by an alumnus. Others were more supportive; one review in the magazine *Black Orpheus* said: "The book as a whole creates for the reader such a vivid picture of Igbo life that the plot and characters are little more than symbols representing a way of life lost irrevocably within living memory."

In the book Okonkwo struggles with the legacy of his father – a shiftless debtor fond of playing the flute – as well as the complications and contradictions that arise when white missionaries arrive in his village of Umuofia. Exploring the terrain of cultural conflict, particularly the encounter between Igbo tradition and Christian doctrine, Achebe returns to the themes of his earlier stories, which grew from his own background.

Things Fall Apart went on to become one of the most important books in African literature. Selling over 20 million copies around the world, it was

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translated into 57 languages, making Achebe the most translated African writer of all time.

The book, in recognition of its universality, appears in the Bokklubben World Library collection "proposed by one hundred writers from fifty-four different countries, compiled and organized in 2002 by the Norwegian Book Club. This list endeavors to reflect world literature, with books from all countries, cultures, and time periods." The book is also included in the Encyclopædia Britannica's list of "12 Novels Considered the 'Greatest Book Ever Written'".

Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka has described the work as "the first novel in English which spoke from the interior of the African character, rather than portraying the African as an exotic, as the white man would see him."

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. Discuss the impact of Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*.

2. Give brief summary of *A Man OF the People*?

4.12 LET SUM UP

In most of his writings, Chinua Achebe uses various literature tools such as symbolism, imagery, metaphors, language mastery and traditions of the Igbo people to illustrate real life situations of the typical Africans, and possible factors responsible for the erosion of African heritage. The quality of his writings and presentation of well thought out ideas has made it difficult for most people to criticize his novels, short stories and poetry. This may also be attributed to the fact that most critics drawn from outside Africa do not have a clear understanding of the African

culture, making their criticism limited to the themes and writing styles of Chinua Achebe's literary works.

For any individual interested in pursuing his/her studies or career in the line of African or English literature, close studies and analysis of Chinua Achebe's wide range of literary works may be used in laying a strong foundation in one's understanding of literature tools such as symbolism, imagery, oral narratives, poetry, essay writing, etc. If his works are properly utilized, it may be used in expanding one's horizon both professionally and academically, extending beyond the curriculums taught in schools and institutions of higher learning. It is also from this domain that most of Chinua Achebe's literary works have been incorporated into university literature curriculums in most parts of the world.

4.13 KEYWORDS

1. **Racial segregation** is the systemic separation of people into racial or other ethnic groups in daily life. Segregation can involve spatial separation of the races, and mandatory use of different institutions, such as schools and hospitals by people of different races.
2. **Victoria Falls** is a waterfall in southern Africa on the Zambezi River at the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe.
3. **Paternalism** is action that limits a person's or group's liberty or autonomy and is intended to promote their own good.
4. **Swahili**, also known as Kiswahili, is a Bantu language and the first language of the Swahili people.
5. The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) based in Paris, France

4.14 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- a. What are the basic theme of Chinua's writing?
- b. In which style Achebe's writing novel?
- c. What defines, "emphasises the interdependency"?
- d. What is the contribution of Achebe's in African Literature?

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4.16 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Answer 1 : Check Section 4.6

Answer 2 : Check Section 4.4

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Answer 1 : Check Section 4.11

Answer 2 : Check Section 4.10

UNIT: 5 CHINA ACHEBE- THINGS FALL APART- SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

STRUCTURE

5.0 Objective

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Plot Overview

5.3 Characters

5.4 Summary

5.5 Analysis

5.6 Let Sum UP

5.7 Keywords

5.8 Questions For Review

5.9 Suggested Readings And References

5.10 Answer to check your progress

5.0 OBJECTIVE

This unit help to analysis and interpret Things Fall apart by Chinua Achebe. This unit helps to understand the writing style of Chinua Achebe.

Unit helps to achieve following objective:

- Plot Overview
- Summary
- Analysis

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Things Fall Apart is a novel written by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. Published in 1958, its story chronicles pre-colonial life in the south-

eastern part of Nigeria and the arrival of the Europeans during the late nineteenth century. It is seen as the archetypal modern African novel in English, one of the first to receive global critical acclaim. It is a staple book in schools throughout Africa and is widely read and studied in English-speaking countries around the world. In 1962, Achebe's debut novel was first published in the UK by William Heinemann Ltd. *Things Fall Apart* was the first work published in Heinemann's African Writers Series.

The novel follows the life of Okonkwo, an Igbo ("Ibo" in the novel) man and local wrestling champion in the fictional Nigerian clan of Umuofia. The work is split into three parts, with the first describing his family, personal history, and the customs and society of the Igbo, and the second and third sections introducing the influence of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on Okonkwo, his family and wider Igbo community.

Things Fall Apart was followed by a sequel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), originally written as the second part of a larger work along with *Arrow of God* (1964). Achebe states that his two later novels *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), while not featuring Okonkwo's descendants, are spiritual successors to the previous novels in chronicling African history.

5.2 PLOT OVERVIEW

Okonkwo is a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan, a lower Nigerian tribe that is part of a consortium of nine connected villages. He is haunted by the actions of Unoka, his cowardly and spendthrift father, who died in disrepute, leaving many village debts unsettled. In response, Okonkwo became a clansman, warrior, farmer, and family provider extraordinaire. He has a twelve-year-old son named Nwoye whom he finds lazy; Okonkwo worries that Nwoye will end up a failure like Unoka.

In a settlement with a neighboring tribe, Umuofia wins a virgin and a fifteen-year-old boy. Okonkwo takes charge of the boy, Ikemefuna, and finds an ideal son in him. Nwoye likewise forms a strong attachment to the newcomer. Despite his fondness for Ikemefuna and despite the fact

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that the boy begins to call him “father,” Okonkwo does not let himself show any affection for him.

During the Week of Peace, Okonkwo accuses his youngest wife, Ojiugo, of negligence. He severely beats her, breaking the peace of the sacred week. He makes some sacrifices to show his repentance, but he has shocked his community irreparably.

Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo’s family for three years. Nwoye looks up to him as an older brother and, much to Okonkwo’s pleasure, develops a more masculine attitude. One day, the locusts come to Umuofia—they will come every year for seven years before disappearing for another generation. The village excitedly collects them because they are good to eat when cooked.

OgbuefiEzeudu, a respected village elder, informs Okonkwo in private that the Oracle has said that Ikemefuna must be killed. He tells Okonkwo that because Ikemefuna calls him “father,” Okonkwo should not take part in the boy’s death. Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna, telling him that they must return him to his home village. Nwoye bursts into tears.

As he walks with the men of Umuofia, Ikemefuna thinks about seeing his mother. After several hours of walking, some of Okonkwo’s clansmen attack the boy with machetes. Ikemefuna runs to Okonkwo for help. But Okonkwo, who doesn’t wish to look weak in front of his fellow tribesmen, cuts the boy down despite the Oracle’s admonishment. When Okonkwo returns home, Nwoye deduces that his friend is dead.

Okonkwo sinks into a depression, neither able to sleep nor eat. He visits his friend Obierika and begins to feel revived a bit. Okonkwo’s daughter Ezinma falls ill, but she recovers after Okonkwo gathers leaves for her medicine.

The death of OgbuefiEzeudu is announced to the surrounding villages by means of the ekwe, a musical instrument. Okonkwo feels guilty because the last time Ezeudu visited him was to warn him against taking part in Ikemefuna’s death. At OgbuefiEzeudu’s large and elaborate funeral, the men beat drums and fire their guns. Tragedy compounds upon itself when Okonkwo’s gun explodes and kills OgbuefiEzeudu’s sixteen-year-old son.

Because killing a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess, Okonkwo must take his family into exile for seven years in order to atone. He gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his mother's natal village, Mbanta. The men from OgbuefiEzeudu's quarter burn Okonkwo's buildings and kill his animals to cleanse the village of his sin.

Okonkwo's kinsmen, especially his uncle, Uchendu, receive him warmly. They help him build a new compound of huts and lend him yam seeds to start a farm. Although he is bitterly disappointed at his misfortune, Okonkwo reconciles himself to life in his motherland.

During the second year of Okonkwo's exile, Obierika brings several bags of cowries (shells used as currency) that he has made by selling Okonkwo's yams. Obierika plans to continue to do so until Okonkwo returns to the village. Obierika also brings the bad news that Abame, another village, has been destroyed by the white man.

Soon afterward, six missionaries travel to Mbanta. Through an interpreter named Mr. Kiaga, the missionaries' leader, Mr. Brown, speaks to the villagers. He tells them that their gods are false and that worshipping more than one God is idolatrous. But the villagers do not understand how the Holy Trinity can be accepted as one God. Although his aim is to convert the residents of Umuofia to Christianity, Mr. Brown does not allow his followers to antagonize the clan.

Mr. Brown grows ill and is soon replaced by Reverend James Smith, an intolerant and strict man. The more zealous converts are relieved to be free of Mr. Brown's policy of restraint. One such convert, Enoch, dares to unmask an egwugwu during the annual ceremony to honor the earth deity, an act equivalent to killing an ancestral spirit. The next day, the egwugwu burn Enoch's compound and Reverend Smith's church to the ground.

The District Commissioner is upset by the burning of the church and requests that the leaders of Umuofia meet with him. Once they are gathered, however, the leaders are handcuffed and thrown in jail, where they suffer insults and physical abuse.

After the prisoners are released, the clansmen hold a meeting, during which five court messengers approach and order the clansmen to desist.

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Expecting his fellow clan members to join him in uprising, Okonkwo kills their leader with his machete. When the crowd allows the other messengers to escape, Okonkwo realizes that his clan is not willing to go to war.

When the District Commissioner arrives at Okonkwo's compound, he finds that Okonkwo has hanged himself. Obierika and his friends lead the commissioner to the body. Obierika explains that suicide is a grave sin; thus, according to custom, none of Okonkwo's clansmen may touch his body. The commissioner, who is writing a book about Africa, believes that the story of Okonkwo's rebellion and death will make for an interesting paragraph or two. He has already chosen the book's title: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*

5.3 CHARACTERS

- **Okonkwo** is the novel's protagonist. He has three wives and ten (total) children, and is a brave and rash Umuofia (Nigerian) warrior and clan leader. Unlike most, he cares more for his daughter Ezinma than his son Nwoye whom he believes is weak. Okonkwo is the son of the gentle and lazy Unoka, a man he resents for his weaknesses.
- **Ekwefi** is Okonkwo's second wife. Although she falls in love with Okonkwo after seeing him in a wrestling match, she marries another man because Okonkwo is too poor to pay her bride price at that time.
- **Unoka** is Okonkwo's father, who lived a life in contrast to typical Igbo masculinity. He loved language and music, the flute in particular.
- **Nwoye** is Okonkwo's son, about whom Okonkwo worries, fearing that he will become like Unoka. Similar to Unoka, Nwoye does not subscribe to the traditional Igbo view of masculinity being equated to violence; rather, he prefers the stories of his mother.
- **Ikemefuna** is a boy from the Mbaino tribe. His father murders the wife of an Umuofia man, and in the resulting settlement of the matter, Ikemefuna is put into the care of Okonkwo.
- **Ezinma** is Okonkwo's favorite daughter, and the only child of his wife Ekwefi. Ezinma, the Crystal Beauty, is very much the antithesis of a normal woman within the culture and Okonkwo routinely

remarks that she would've made a much better boy than a girl, even wishing that she had been born as one.

- **Obierika** is Okonkwo's best friend from Umuofia. He is a strong and powerful man in Umuofia, but unlike Okonkwo, he is a reasoning man and is much less violent and arrogant. Obierika often talks Okonkwo out of making rash decisions, and helps Okonkwo when he is on exile from Umuofia.
- **OgbuefiEzeudu** is one of the elders of Umuofia. He is regarded as very wise, and gives Okonkwo good advice.
- **Mr. Brown** is a white man who comes to Umuofia. Unlike most Europeans portrayed in the novel, he shows kindness and compassion towards the villagers, thereby earning their love and respect.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. Discuss the various characters in Things falling apart.

2. Give brief introduction of Things Falling apart

5.4 SUMMARY

Plot 1

Okonkwo is a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan, a lower Nigerian tribe that is part of a consortium of nine connected villages, including Okonkwo's village, Iguedo. In his youth, he brought honor to his village by beating Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling contest. Until his match with Okonkwo, the Cat had been undefeated for seven years. Okonkwo is completely unlike his now deceased father, Unoka, who feared the sight of blood and was always borrowing and losing money, which meant that his wife and children often went hungry. Unoka was, however, a skilled flute player and had a gift for, and love of, language.

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One night, the town crier rings the ogene, or gong, and requests that all of the clansmen gather in the market in the morning. At the gathering, Ogbuefi Ezeugo, a noted orator, announces that someone from the village of Mbaino murdered the wife of an Umuofia tribesman while she was in their market. The crowd expresses anger and indignation, and Okonkwo travels to Mbaino to deliver the message that they must hand over to Umuofia a virgin and a young man. Should Mbaino refuse to do so, the two villages must go to war, and Umuofia has a fierce reputation for its skill in war and magic. Okonkwo is chosen to represent his clan because he is its fiercest warrior. Earlier in the chapter, as he remembers his past victories, we learn about the five human heads that he has taken in battle. On important occasions, he drinks palm-wine from the first head that he captured. Not surprisingly, Mbaino agrees to Umuofia's terms. The elders give the virgin to Ogbuefi Udo as his wife but are not sure what to do with the fifteen-year-old boy, Ikemefuna. The elders decide to turn him over to Okonkwo for safekeeping and instruction. Okonkwo, in turn, instructs his first wife to care for Ikemefuna.

In addition to being a skilled warrior, Okonkwo is quite wealthy. He supports three wives and eight children, and each wife has her own hut. Okonkwo also has a barn full of yams, a shrine for his ancestors, and his own hut, called an obi.

Okonkwo fears weakness, a trait that he associates with his father and with women. When Okonkwo was a child, another boy called Unokaagbala, which is used to refer to women as well as to men who have not taken a title. Because he dreads weakness, Okonkwo is extremely demanding of his family. He finds his twelve-year-old son, Nwoye, to be lazy, so he beats and nags the boy constantly.

Okonkwo built his fortune alone as a sharecropper because Unoka was never able to have a successful harvest. When he visited the Oracle, Unoka was told that he failed because of his laziness. Ill-fated, Unoka died of a shameful illness, "swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess." Those suffering from swelling stomachs and limbs are left in the Evil Forest to die so that they do not offend the earth by being buried. Unoka never held any of the community's four prestigious titles (because they must be paid for), and he left numerous debts unpaid.

As a result, Okonkwo cannot count on Unoka's help in building his own wealth and in constructing his obi. What's more, he has to work hard to make up for his father's negative strikes against him. Okonkwo succeeds in exceeding all the other clansmen as a warrior, a farmer, and a family provider. He begins by asking a wealthy clansman, Nwakibie, to give him 400 seed yams to start a farm. Because Nwakibie admired Okonkwo's hard-working nature, he gave him eight hundred. One of Unoka's friends gave him another four hundred, but because of horrible droughts and relentless downpours, Okonkwo could keep only one third of the harvest. Some farmers who were lazier than Okonkwo put off planting their yams and thus avoided the grave losses suffered by Okonkwo and the other industrious farmers. That year's devastating harvest left a profound mark on Okonkwo, and for the rest of his life he considers his survival during that difficult period proof of his fortitude and inner mettle. Although his father tried to offer some words of comfort, Okonkwo felt only disgust for someone who would turn to words at a time when either action or silence was called for.

Plot 2

The clan decides that Ikemefuna will stay with Okonkwo. Ikemefuna is homesick and scared at first, but Nwoye's mother treats him as one of her own, and he is immediately popular with Okonkwo's children. Ikemefuna knows many stories that the children have never heard before and he possesses many impressive skills, such as making flutes out of bamboo sticks and setting traps for little bush rodents. To Okonkwo's delight, he also becomes like an older brother to Nwoye. Okonkwo himself grows quite fond of Ikemefuna, but he does not show any affection because he considers doing so a sign of weakness, which he refuses to tolerate in himself or others. Ikemefuna soon begins to call Okonkwo "father."

During the Week of Peace, Okonkwo notices that his youngest wife, Ojiugo, has left her hut to have her hair braided without having cooked dinner. He beats her for her negligence, shamefully breaking the peace of the sacred week in a transgression known as *nso-ani*. The priest demands that Okonkwo sacrifice a nanny goat and a hen and pay a fine of one

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length of cloth and one hundred cowries (shells used as currency). Okonkwo truly repents for his sin and follows the priest's orders. Ogbuefi Ezeudu observes that the punishment for breaking the Peace of Ani has become mild in Umuofia. He also criticizes another clan's practice of throwing the bodies of all who die during the Week of Peace into the Evil Forest

After the Week of Peace, the villagers begin to clear the land in preparation for planting their farms. Nwoye and Ikemefuna help Okonkwo prepare the seed yams, but he finds fault with their work. Even though he knows that they are too young to understand farming completely, he hopes that criticism will drive his son to be a great man and farmer. Ikemefuna settles into Okonkwo's family and shares his large stock of folk tales.

Just before the harvest, the village holds the Feast of the New Yam to give thanks to the earth goddess, Ani. Okonkwo doesn't really care for feasts because he considers them times of idleness. The women thoroughly scrub and decorate their huts, throw away all of their unused yams from the previous year, and use cam wood to paint their skin and that of their children with decorative designs. With nothing to do, Okonkwo becomes angry, and he finally comes up with an excuse to beat his second wife, Ekwefi. He then decides to go hunting with his gun. Okonkwo is not a good hunter, however, and Ekwefi mutters a snide remark under her breath about "guns that never shot." In a fit of fury, he shoots the gun at her but misses.

The annual wrestling contest comes the day after the feast. Ekwefi, in particular, enjoys the contest because Okonkwo won her heart when he defeated the Cat. He was too poor to pay her bride-price then, but she later ran away from her husband to be with him. Ezinma, Ekwefi's only child, takes a bowl of food to Okonkwo's hut. Okonkwo is very fond of Ezinma but rarely demonstrates his affection. Obiageli, the daughter of Okonkwo's first wife, is already there, waiting for him to finish the meal that she has brought him. Nkechi, the daughter of Okonkwo's third wife, Ojiugo, then brings a meal to Okonkwo.

The wrestling match takes place on the village ilo, or common green. Drummers line the field, and the spectators are so excited that they must

be held back. The wrestling begins with matches between boys ages fifteen and sixteen. Maduka, the son of Okonkwo's friend Obierika, wins one match within seconds. As the wrestling continues, Ekwefi speaks with Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. The two women are good friends, and Chielo inquires about Ezinma, whom she calls "my daughter." They conclude that Ezinma seems to have "come to stay" because she has reached the age of ten.

Plot 3

Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo's family for three years. He seems to have "**kindled a new fire**" in Nwoye, who, much to Okonkwo's pleasure, becomes more masculine in his attitude. Okonkwo knows that his son's development is a result of Ikemefuna's influence. He frequently invites the two into his obi to listen to violent, masculine stories. Although Nwoye misses his mother's stories, he knows that he pleases his father when he expresses disdain for women and their concerns.

To the village's surprise, locusts descend upon Umuofia. They come once in a generation and will return every year for seven years before disappearing for another lifetime. The village excitedly collects them because they are good to eat when cooked. Ogbuefi Ezeudu pays Okonkwo a visit, but he will not enter the hut to share the meal. Outside, he informs Okonkwo in private that the Oracle has decreed that Ikemefuna must be killed. He tells Okonkwo not to take part in the boy's death, as Ikemefuna calls him "father." Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna, telling him that he will be returning to his home village. Nwoye bursts into tears.

During the long walk home with the men of Umuofia, Ikemefuna thinks about seeing his mother. After hours of walking, a man attacks him with a machete. Ikemefuna cries to Okonkwo for help. Okonkwo doesn't wish to look weak, so he cuts the boy down. When Okonkwo returns home, Nwoye intuits that his friend is dead. Something breaks inside him for the second time in his life; the first time was when he heard an infant crying in the Evil Forest, where newborn twins are left to die.

Okonkwo sinks into a depression. He feels weak, and he cannot sleep or eat. When Ezinma brings him his evening meal three days later, she tells

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him that he must finish everything. He repeatedly wishes that she were a boy, and he berates himself for acting like a “shivering old woman.” He visits his friend Obierika and congratulates Maduka on his successful wrestling. Obierika, in turn, requests that Okonkwo stay when his daughter’s suitor arrives to determine a bride-price. Okonkwo complains to Obierika that his sons are not manly enough and says that he would be happier if Ezinma were a boy because she has “the right spirit.” He and Obierika then argue over whether it was right of Okonkwo to partake in Ikemefuna’s death.

Okonkwo begins to feel revived a bit. He decides that his unhappiness was a product of his idleness—if Ikemefuna had been murdered at a busier time of the year, he, Okonkwo, would have been completely undisturbed. Someone arrives to report the death of the oldest man in a neighboring village. Strangely, the old man’s wife died shortly thereafter. Okonkwo questions the man’s reputed strength once he learns how attached he had been to his wife.

Okonkwo sits with Obierika while Obierika bargains his daughter’s bride-price with the family of her suitor. Afterward, Obierika and his future son-in-law’s relatives talk about the differing customs in other villages. They discuss the practice of, and skill at, tapping palm trees for palm-wine. Obierika talks about hearing stories of men with skin as white as chalk. Another man, Machi, pipes in that such a man passes through the village frequently and that his name is Amadi. Those who know Amadi, a leper, laugh—the polite term for leprosy is “the white skin.”

Plot 4

Ekwefi awakes Okonkwo very early in the morning and tells him that Ezinma is dying. Okonkwo ascertains that Ezinma has a fever and sets about collecting medicine. Ezinma is Ekwefi’s only child and the “center of her world.” Ekwefi is very lenient with her: Ezinma calls her by her first name and the dynamic of their relationship approaches equality.

Ekwefi’s nine other children died in infancy. She developed the habit of naming them symbolic things such as “Onwumbiko,” which means, “Death, I implore you,” and “Ozoemena,” which means, “May it not

happen again.” Okonkwo consulted a medicine man who told him that an ogbanje was tormenting them. An ogbanje is a “wicked” child who continually re-enters its mother’s womb only to die again and again, causing its parents grief. A medicine man mutilated the dead body of Ekwefi’s third child to discourage the ogbanje’s return. When Ezinma was born, like most ogbanje children, she suffered many illnesses, but she recovered from all of them. A year before the start of the novel, when Ezinma was nine, a medicine man named OkagbueUyanwa found her iyi-uwa, the small, buried pebble that is the ogbanje’s physical link to the spirit world. Although the discovery of the iyi-uwa ought to have solved Ezinma’s problems, every illness that Ezinma catches still brings terror and anxiety to Ekwefi.

The village holds a ceremonial gathering to administer justice. The clan’s ancestral spirits, which are known as egwugwu, emerge from a secret house into which no woman is allowed to step. The egwugwu take the form of masked men, and everyone suspects that Okonkwo is among them. The women and children are filled with fear even though they sense that the egwugwu are merely men impersonating spirits.

The first dispute that comes before the egwugwu involves an estranged husband and wife. The husband, Uzowulu, states that the three brothers of his wife, Mgbafo, beat him and took her and the children from his hut but would not return her bride-price. The woman’s brothers state that he is a beastly man who beat their sister mercilessly, even causing her to miscarry once. They argue that Uzowulu must beg Mgbafo to return to him. If she agrees, the brothers declare, Uzowulu must understand that they will cut his genitals off if he ever beats her again. The egwugwu decide in favor of Mgbafo. One village elder complains that such a trifling matter should not be brought before them.

Ekwefi tells Ezinma a story about a greedy, cunning tortoise. All of the birds have been invited to a feast in the sky and Tortoise persuades the birds to lend him feathers to make wings so that he can attend the feast as well. As they travel to the feast, Tortoise also persuades them to take new names for the feast according to custom. He tells the birds that his name will be “All of you.” When they arrive, Tortoise asks his hosts for whom the feast is prepared. They reply, “For all of you.” Tortoise proceeds to

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eat and drink the best parts of the food and wine. The birds, angry and disgruntled at receiving only scraps, take back the feathers that they had given to Tortoise so that he is unable to fly home. Tortoise persuades Parrot to deliver a message to his wife: he wants her to cover their compound with their soft things so that he may jump from the sky without danger. Maliciously, Parrot tells Tortoise's wife to bring out all of the hard things. When Tortoise jumps, his shell breaks into pieces on impact. A medicine man puts it together again, which is why Tortoise's shell is not smooth.

Chielo, in her role as priestess, informs Ekwefi that Agbala, Oracle of the Hills and Caves, wishes to see Ezinma. Frightened, Okonkwo and Ekwefi try to persuade Chielo to wait until morning, but Chielo angrily reminds Okonkwo that he must not defy a god's will. Chielo takes Ezinma on her back and forbids anyone to follow. Ekwefi overcomes her fear of divine punishment and follows anyway. Chielo, carrying Ezinma, makes her rounds of the nine villages. When Chielo finally enters the Oracle's cave, Ekwefi resolves that if she hears Ezinma crying she will rush in to defend her—even against a god. Okonkwo startles her when he arrives at the cave with a machete. He calms Ekwefi and sits with her. She remembers when she ran away from her first husband to be Okonkwo's wife. When he answered her knock at his door, they exchanged no words. He led her to his bed and began to undo her clothing.

Plot 5

At dawn, Chielo exits the shrine with Ezinma on her back. Without saying a word, she takes Ezinma to Ekwefi's hut and puts her to bed. It turns out that Okonkwo was extremely worried the night before, although he did not show it. He forced himself to wait a while before walking to the Oracle's shrine. When he found it empty, he realized that Chielo was making her rounds to the nine villages, so he returned home to wait. In all, he made four trips to and from the caves. By the time he departed for the cave for the last time, Okonkwo was "gravely worried."

Okonkwo's family begins to prepare for Obierika's daughter's uri, a betrothal ceremony. The villagers contribute food to the festivities and

Obierika buys a huge goat to present to his future in-laws. The preparations are briefly interrupted when the women retrieve an escaped cow and the cow's owner pays a fine for setting his cows loose on his neighbors' farms. The suitor's family members arrive and settle the clan's doubts about their generosity by bringing an impressive fifty pots of wine to the celebration. The women greet the visitors and the men exchange ceremonial greetings. The feast is a success.

OgbuefiEzeudu's death is announced to the surrounding villages with the ekwe, a musical instrument. Okonkwo shudders. The last time Ezeudu visited him was to warn him against taking part in Ikemefuna's death. Since Ezeudu was a great warrior who took three of the clan's four titles, his funeral is large and elaborate. The men beat drums and fire their guns. Okonkwo's gun accidentally goes off and kills Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son.

Killing a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess, so Okonkwo must atone by taking his family into exile for seven years. Okonkwo gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his mother's natal village, Mbanta. According to the mandates of tradition, the men from Ezeudu's quarter burn Okonkwo's buildings and kill his animals to cleanse the village of his sin. Obierika questions why a man should suffer so much for an accidental killing. He then mourns the deaths of his wife's twins, whom he was forced to throw away, wondering what crime they committed.

5.5 ANALYSIS

We are introduced immediately to the complex laws and customs of Okonkwo's clan and its commitment to harmonious relations. For example, the practice of sharing palm-wine and kola nuts is repeated throughout the book to emphasize the peacefulness of the Igbo. When Unoka's resentful neighbour visits him to collect a debt, the neighbour does not immediately address the debt. Instead, he and Unoka share a kola nut and pray to their ancestral spirits; afterward, they converse about community affairs at great length. The customs regulating social relations emphasize their common interests and culture, diffusing possible tension. The neighbour further eases the situation by

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introducing the subject of debt through a series of Igbo proverbs, thus making use of a shared oral tradition, as Okonkwo does when he asks Nwakibie for some seed yams. Through his emphasis on the harmony and complexity of the Igbo, Achebe contradicts the stereotypical, European representations of Africans as savages.

Another important way in which Achebe challenges such stereotypical representations is through his use of language. As Achebe writes in his essay on Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, colonialist Europe tended to perceive Africa as a foil or negation of Western culture and values, imagining Africa to be a primordial land of silence. But the people of Umuofia speak a complex language full of proverbs and literary and rhetorical devices. Achebe's translation of the Igbo language into English retains the cadences, rhythms, and speech patterns of the language without making them sound, as Conrad did, "primitive."

Okonkwo is the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*, and, in addition to situating him within his society, the first few chapters of the novel offer us an understanding of his nature. He is driven by his hatred of his father, Unoka, and his fear of becoming like him. To avoid picking up Unoka's traits, Okonkwo acts violently without thinking, often provoking avoidable fights. He has a bad temper and rules his household with fear. Okonkwo associates Unoka with weakness, and with weakness he associates femininity. Because his behavior is so markedly different from his father's, he believes that it constitutes masculinity. However, it strains his relationship with Nwoye and leads him to sin in Chapter 4 by breaking the Week of Peace. His rash behavior also causes tension within the community because he expresses disdain for less successful men. Ikemefuna later demonstrates that masculinity need not preclude kindness, gentleness, and affection, and Nwoye responds far more positively to Ikemefuna's nurturing influence than to Okonkwo's heavy-handedness.

Despite its focus on kinship, the Igbo social structure offers a greater chance for mobility than that of the colonizers who eventually arrive in Umuofia. Though ancestors are revered, a man's worth is determined by his own actions. In contrast to much of continental European society during the nineteenth century, which was marked by wealth-based class

divisions, Igbo culture values individual displays of prowess, as evidenced by their wrestling competitions. Okonkwo is thus able, by means of his own efforts, to attain a position of wealth and prestige, even though his father died, penniless and titleless, of a shameful illness.

Whereas the first few chapters highlight the complexity and originality of the Igbo language, in these chapters Achebe points out another aspect of Igbo culture that colonialist Europe tended to ignore: the existence of subcultures within a given African population. Each clan has its own stories, and Ikemefuna is an exciting addition to Umuofia because he brings with him new and unfamiliar folk tales. With the introduction of Ikemefuna, Achebe is able to remind us that the story we are reading is not about Africa but rather about one specific culture within Africa. He thus combats the European tendency to see all Africans as one and the same.

The religious values of the Igbo emphasize the shared benefits of peaceful, harmonious relations. The Igbo always consult the Oracle before declaring war, for they fear punishment from their gods should they declare war without just cause. Their religion also emphasizes the individual's obligation to the community. When Okonkwo breaks the peace during the sacred week, the priest chastises him for endangering the entire community by risking the earth deity's wrath. He refuses Okonkwo's offer of a kola nut, expressing disagreement peacefully. This parrying of potential violence on the interpersonal level reflects the culture's tradition of avoiding violence and war whenever possible.

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Moreover, the belief in the chi, an individual's personal god, also smooths possible tensions in the Igbo community. The chi allows individuals to attribute some portion of their failures and successes to divine influence, thus lessening the shame of the former and pride of the latter. This belief encourages respect between individuals; the men are

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thus able to settle a dispute between Okonkwo and a man whom he insults without resorting to personal attacks.

Although traditional Igbo culture is fairly democratic in nature, it is also profoundly patriarchal. Wife-beating is an accepted practice. Moreover, femininity is associated with weakness while masculinity is associated with strength. It is no coincidence that the word that refers to a titleless man also means “woman.” A man is not believed to be “manly” if he cannot control his women. Okonkwo frequently beats his wives, and the only emotion he allows himself to display is anger. He does not particularly like feasts, because the idleness that they involve makes him feel emasculated. Okonkwo’s frustration at this idleness causes him to act violently, breaking the spirit of the celebration.

Okonkwo’s extremely overactive desire to conquer and subdue, along with his profound hatred of all things feminine, is suggestive of impotence. Though he has children, Okonkwo is never compared to anything thriving or organic; instead, Achebe always associates him with fire, which consumes but does not beget. The incident in which he tries to shoot Ekwefi with his gun is likewise suggestive of impotence. After Ekwefi hints at Okonkwo’s inability to shoot properly, Okonkwo proves this inability, failing to hit Ekwefi. Impotence, whether or not it is an actual physical condition for him, seems to be a characteristic that is related to Okonkwo’s chauvinistic behavior.

Okonkwo disobeys the authority and advice of a clan elder in killing Ikemefuna. His actions are too close to killing a kinsman, which is a grave sin in Igbo culture. Okonkwo is so afraid of looking weak that he is willing to come close to violating tribal law in order to prove otherwise. No one would have thought that Okonkwo was weak if he had stayed in the village. In fact, Obierika’s opinion on the matter suggests that doing so would have been considered the more appropriate action. Instead, Okonkwo’s actions seriously damage both his relationship with Nwoye and Nwoye’s allegiance to Igbo society.

Nwoye shows promise because he voices chauvinist opinions, but his comments are really aimed at Okonkwo. In fact, Nwoye loves women’s stories and is pleased when his mother or Okonkwo’s other wives ask him to do things for them. He also seeks comfort in his mother’s hut after

Ikemefuna's death. Nwoye's questioning of Ikemefuna's death and of the practice of throwing away newborn twins is understandable: Obierika, too, frequently questions tradition. In fact, Obierika refused to accompany the other men to kill Ikemefuna, and Okonkwo points out that Obierika seems to question the Oracle. Obierika also has reservations about the village's practice of tapping trees. Okonkwo, on the other hand, accepts all of his clan's laws and traditions unquestioningly.

Interestingly, Obierika's manliness is never questioned. The fact that Obierika is skeptical of some Igbo practices makes us regard Nwoye's skepticism in a different light. We understand that, in Umuofia, manhood does not require the denigration of women. Like Nwoye, Ikemefuna is not close to his biological father. Rather, his primary emotional attachments to his natal village are to his mother and little sister.

Although he is not misogynistic like Okonkwo, Ikemefuna is the perfect clansman. He eagerly takes part in the community celebrations and integrates himself into Okonkwo's family. Okonkwo and Ikemefuna love one another as father and son, and Ikemefuna is a good older brother to Nwoye. Most important, he is protective rather than critical. He does not allow Nwoye and his brothers to tell their mother that Obiageli broke her water pot when she was showing off—he does not want her to be punished. Ikemefuna illustrates that manliness does not preclude gentleness and affection.

In calling himself a "shivering old woman," Okonkwo associates weakness with femininity. Although he denigrates his emotional attachment to Ikemefuna, he seeks comfort in his affectionate friendship with Obierika. Ezinma is likewise a source of great comfort to him. Because she understands him, she does not address his sorrow directly; rather, she urges him to eat. For all of Okonkwo's chauvinism, Ezinma is his favorite child. Okonkwo's frequently voiced desire that Ezinma were a boy seems to suggest that he secretly desires affectionate attachment with his actual sons, although he avoids admitting as much because he fears affection as a weakness. It is interesting to note that Okonkwo doesn't wish that Ezinma were a boy because she exhibits desirable

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masculine traits; rather, it is their bond of sympathy and understanding that he values.

The relationship between Ekwefi and Ezinma is not a typical parent-child relationship; it is more like one between equals. Ekwefi receives a great deal of comfort and companionship from her daughter and, because she has lost so many children, she loves and respects her daughter all the more. Although motherhood is regarded as the crowning achievement of a woman's life, Ekwefi prizes Ezinma so highly, not for the status motherhood brings her but, rather, for the love and companionship that she offers.

Mutually supportive interaction between women receives increasing focus as the novel progresses. For example, Okonkwo's wives frequently try to protect one another from his anger. Before Ezinma's birth, Ekwefi was not jealous of Okonkwo's first wife; she only expressed bitterness at her own misfortune. While Okonkwo gathers medicine for the fever, his other wives try to calm Ekwefi's fear. Ekwefi's friendship with Chielo, too, is an example of female bonding.

The incident with Chielo creates a real dilemma for Ekwefi, whose fear of the possible repercussions of disobeying her shows that Chielo's role as a priestess is taken seriously—it is not just ceremonial. But Ekwefi and Okonkwo's love for their child is strong enough that they are willing to defy religious authority. Although she has lost nine children, Ekwefi has been made strong by suffering, and when she follows Chielo, she chooses her daughter over the gods. In doing so, Ekwefi contradicts Okonkwo's ideas of femininity and demonstrates that strength and bravery are not only masculine attributes. Okonkwo also disobeys Chielo and follows her to the caves. But he, too, is careful to show respect to Chielo. She is a woman, but, as a priestess, she can order and chastise him openly. Her authority is not to be taken lightly.

Unlike the narration of Chielo's kidnapping of Ezinma, the narration of the egwugwu ceremony is rather ironic. The narrator makes several comments to reveal to us that the villagers know that the egwugwu are not real. For example, the narrator tells us: "Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second egwugwu had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might have

noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat . . . But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves.” The narration of the incident of the medicine man and the iyi-uwa seems likewise to contain a trace of irony. After discussing the iyi-uwa and egwugwu in a tone that approaches mockery on a few occasions, the narrator, remarkably, says nothing that seems to undermine the villagers’ perception of the strength of Chielo’s divine power.

The story that Ekwefi tells Ezinma about Tortoise and the birds is one of the many instances in which we are exposed to Igbo folklore. The tale also seems to prepare us, like the symbolic locusts that arrive in Chapter 7, for the colonialism that will soon descend upon Umuofia. Tortoise convinces the birds to allow him to come with them, even though he does not belong. He then appropriates all of their food. The tale presents two different ways of defeating Tortoise: first, the birds strip Tortoise of the feathers that they had lent him. This strategy involves cooperation and unity among the birds. When they refuse to concede to Tortoise’s desires, Tortoise becomes unable to overpower them. Parrot’s trick suggests a second course of action: by taking advantage of the position as translator, Parrot outwits Tortoise.

In the previous section, we see Okonkwo’s behavior the night of the incident with Chielo as it appears to Ekwefi: Okonkwo shows up with his machete and fulfills the role of the strong, manly protector. At the beginning of Chapter 12, though, the narrator focuses on Okonkwo’s internal state and we see his true feelings rather than his apparent ones. Because Okonkwo views affection as a sign of weakness, he forces himself to wait before following Chielo. Each time he makes the trip to the caves and finds her missing, he returns home again to wait. Not until his fourth trip does he encounter Ekwefi. Okonkwo is not the cruel, heartless man that he presents himself to be; rather, he is gravely worried about Ezinma’s welfare. His hyperbolic understanding of manliness—the result of his tragic flaw—prevents his better nature from showing itself fully. Chielo’s actions force Okonkwo to acknowledge how important his wife and child are to him.

The importance of kinship bonds in manifests itself in the ramifications of the violation of such bonds. When Ikemefuna enters Okonkwo’s

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family as a surrogate son, he begins to heal the tension that exists between Okonkwo and Nwoye as a result of Okonkwo's difficulty in dealing with the memory of his father. Ikemefuna is thus presented as a possible solution to Okonkwo's tragic flaw. But Okonkwo fails to overcome his flaw and, in killing the boy who has become his son, damages his relationship with Nwoye permanently. Moreover, he seriously injures Nwoye's respect for, and adherence to, Igbo cultural tradition.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. Write in brief summary of plot 3 and 4.

2. Analyze the Chinua's Things falling apart.

5.6 LET SUM UP

Things Fall Apart, first novel by Chinua Achebe, written in English and published in 1958. Things Fall Apart helped create the Nigerian literary renaissance of the 1960s. The novel chronicles the life of Okonkwo, the leader of an Igbo community, from the events leading up to his banishment from the community for accidentally killing a clansman, through the seven years of his exile, to his return, and it addresses a particular problem of emergent Africa—the intrusion in the 1890s of white missionaries and colonial government into tribal Igbo society. Traditionally structured, and peppered with Igbo proverbs, it describes the simultaneous disintegration of its protagonist Okonkwo and of his village. The novel was praised for its intelligent and realistic treatment of tribal beliefs and of psychological disintegration coincident with social unravelling.

5.7 KEYWORDS

1. The **British Empire** comprised the dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates, and other territories ruled or administered by the United Kingdom and its predecessor states.
2. A **missionary** is a member of a religious group sent into an area to promote their faith or perform ministries of service, such as education, literacy, social justice, health care, and economic development.
3. A **protagonist** is the main character of a story.
4. **Religion** is a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.
5. The **Igbo** people are an ethnic group native to the present-day south-central and southeastern Nigeria.

5.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- a) What do you understand by the line, “**kindled a new fire**”?
- b) Who is best character in this Novel?
- c) What is the theme of the novel?
- d) Give brief analysis of Plot 2.

5.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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5.10 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Answer 1 : Check Section 5.4

Answer 2 : Check Section 5.2

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Answer 1 : Check Section 5.6

Answer 2 : Check Section 5.7

UNIT: 6 INTRODUCTION TO LIFE OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

STRUCTURE

6.0 Objective

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Personal Life and Education

6.3 Writing

6.4 Critical Perspective

6.5 Let Sum Up

6.6 Keywords

6.7 Questions for Review

6.8 Suggested Readings and References

6.9 Answer to check your progress

6.0 OBJECTIVE

This unit help to learn about the Life of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This unit helps to know about writing styles and work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Unit gives the understanding about the critical perspective about the literary works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Unit helps to achieve following objective:

- **To know more about Personal Life and Education of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**
- **Writing of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**
- **Critical Perspective about the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi (1977–), Nigerian creative writer and essayist, was born on 15 September 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria, the fifth of

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six children, to James Nwoye and Grace Ifeoma Adichie. The Igbo family's ancestral hometown was Abba in Anambra State, but Adichie grew up in Nsukka, where her parents worked. Her father was professor of statistics at the University of Nigeria and later became the institution's deputy vice-chancellor, while her mother, a graduate in sociology, was its first female registrar.

Novelist and feminist campaigner Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in 1977 to a middle-class Igbo family in Enugu, Nigeria. Her mother became the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria, while her father was a professor of statistics there. The fifth of six children, she lived what she describes as a 'very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family.'

Pressured by social and familial expectations, Adichie 'did what I was supposed to do' and began to study medicine at the University of Nigeria. After a year and a half, she decided to pursue her ambitions as a writer, dropped out of medical school and took up a communication scholarship in the US. From day one, she became alert to racial generalisations, having to address the 'story of catastrophe' perspective her American room-mate had of the entire African continent.

Adichie's three novels all focus on contemporary Nigerian culture, its political turbulence and at times, how it can intersect with the West. She published *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003, *Half of a Yellow Sun* in 2006 and *Americanah* in 2013. Each time, she manages to give any amateur a lesson in the recent history of Nigeria. Not simply the history one could peer into a dusty tome for, but one showing us the country's diverse cultures, its personal stories, its idioms, its futures.

Half of a Yellow Sun is set during the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970) in which the Igbo people – an ethnic group of southern Nigeria – sought to establish an independent republic. Adichie chose three unlikely characters to narrate the story: a young houseboy, a woman professor and an English writer who identifies as Biafran. The reader is consequently required to assess narratives of class, gender, race and overall

‘belonging’ throughout. Criticism of Western colonialism and its aftershocks are demonstrated through the conflicted white journalist Richard. He laments to Western journalists that ‘one hundred dead black people equal one dead person’ and is later urged to write about the war because ‘[the West] will take what you write more seriously because you are white.’ This makes a powerful critique of the stories we listen to and why. Adichie herself commented that ‘I wanted to make a strongly-felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa.’

Although her novels and wider writings are the best window into Adichie’s incisive and emotive imagination, she has delivered several impressive talks that get to the heart of their subject. They broadly encompass race and gender, and our tendency to accept what we are taught without recognising ingrained prejudice. Her 2009 lecture, *The Danger of a Single Story*, is a brilliant discussion of race, but her argument is cleverly applicable across much broader contexts. This is where she spoke of her room-mate in the US having a preconceived idea of who she, a Nigerian, would be: ‘In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her [the room-mate] in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.’ In this lecture, her discussion of US perceptions of Mexicans as the ‘abject immigrant’ during the early 2000s, could just as easily be transferred to our current hysteria about Syrian refugees entering Europe.

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Adichie’s 2013 lecture *We Should All Be Feminists* discusses the damaging paradigms of femininity and masculinity. ‘We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, “You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful, otherwise you would threaten the man.”’

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Adichie argues that Feminism should not be an ‘elite little cult’ but a ‘party full of different feminisms.’ It feels a particularly important message to take to heart – we are imperfect, we are attempting to unlearn what we have unconsciously learned and simultaneously discovering new ways of seeing. As she notes so beautifully, ‘Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.’

Novelist and feminist campaigner Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in 1977 to a middle-class Igbo family in Enugu, Nigeria. Her mother became the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria, while her father was a professor of statistics there. The fifth of six children, she lived what she describes as a ‘very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family.’

Pressured by social and familial expectations, Adichie ‘did what I was supposed to do’ and began to study medicine at the University of Nigeria. After a year and a half, she decided to pursue her ambitions as a writer, dropped out of medical school and took up a communication scholarship in the US. From day one, she became alert to racial generalisations, having to address the ‘story of catastrophe’ perspective her American room-mate had of the entire African continent.

6.2 PERSONAL LIFE AND EDUCATION

Adichie was born in the city of Enugu in Nigeria, and grew up as the fifth of six children in an Igbo family in the university town of Nsukka in Enugu State. While she was growing up, her father, James Nwoye Adichie, worked as a professor of statistics at the University of Nigeria. Her mother, Grace Ifeoma, was the university's first female registrar. The family lost almost everything during the Nigerian Civil War, including both maternal and paternal grandfathers. Her family's ancestral village is in Abba in Anambra State.

Adichie completed her secondary education at the University of Nigeria Secondary School, Nsukka, where she received several academic prizes. She studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the university's Catholic medical students. At the age of 19, Adichie left Nigeria for the United States to study communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She soon transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University to be near her sister Uche, who had a medical practice in Coventry, Connecticut. While the novelist was growing up in Nigeria, she was not used to being identified by the colour of her skin which suddenly changed when she arrived in the United States for college. As a black African in America, Adichie was suddenly confronted with what it meant to be a person of color in the United States. Race as an idea became something that she had to navigate and learn. She writes about this in her novel *Americanah*. She received a bachelor's degree from Eastern Connecticut State University, with the distinction of *summa cum laude* in 2001.

In 2003, she completed a master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. In 2008, she received a Master of Arts degree in African studies from Yale University.

Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University during the 2005–2006 academic year. In 2008 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She was also awarded a 2011–2012 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Adichie divides her time between the United States, and Nigeria, where she teaches writing workshops. In 2016, she was conferred an honorary degree – Doctor of Humane letters, *honoris causa*, by Johns Hopkins University. In 2017, she was conferred honorary degrees – Doctor of Humane letters, *honoris causa*, by Haverford College and The University of Edinburgh. In 2018, she received an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, from Amherst College. She received an honorary degree, doctor *honoris causa*, from the Université de Fribourg, Switzerland, in 2019.

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In an interview published in the Financial Times in July 2016, Adichie revealed that she had a baby daughter. In a profile of Adichie, published in *The New Yorker* in June 2018, Larissa MacFarquhar wrote, "the man she ended up marrying in 2009 was almost comically suitable: a Nigerian doctor who practiced in America, whose father was a doctor and a friend of her parents." Adichie is a Catholic and was raised Catholic as a child, though she considers her views, especially those on feminism, to sometimes conflict with her religion. At a 2017 event at Georgetown University, she stated that religion "is not a women-friendly institution" and "has been used to justify oppressions that are based on the idea that women are not equal human beings." She has called for Christian and Muslim leaders in Nigeria to preach messages of peace and togetherness.

Chimamanda Adichie has been hailed as one of the most promising young emerging Nigerian writers who belongs to the group of 'third generation'. (Adesanmi, Dunton) Nigerian writers with their works falling under the category of "New Nigerian Writing". Although the authors of the third generation are generally relatively young, the term third generation specifically refers to an array of works focusing on text rather than an author: A trajectory which exemplifies a new body of writing that makes a paradigm shift from the canon in earlier African writing. Of late the novel has been at the forefront. Writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Seffi Atta, and Chris Abani etc. have made remarkable contribution to the novel writing scenario and have received recognition in Africa and abroad as well. They are the privileged and visible, reside in Europe and America whose literary oeuvre forms a global, borderless, textual location referred to as the 'transnational book' by Rebecca Walkowitz. As writers they have to negotiate their multi-layered spaces on one hand and establish the role of literature into a more significant and renewed dialectics of nation and narration. (Dunton ix) Adichie was born in 1977 in the university town of Nsukka South-eastern Nigeria. Her father was the Vice Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Her parents both worked at the University of Nigeria, her father as a Professor in Statistics and her mother as the first female registrar. They raised Chimamanda and her five other siblings in the

University campus and went to the school at the University campus as well. After completion of school she studied medicine for a year as it is always expected for ‘high achievers’ to study medicine. A year later she realized that she lacked the aptitude and she was merely training to be a doctor. Henceforth, she left for America to study Communication in Connecticut University. She loves the American sense of ‘can do’ and feels grateful for the opportunities she got to get her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* published (2003) in Nigeria which otherwise would have been impossible. Adichie’s career began in the US. She has followed a path which was a little different from the path of her generation of writers from Nigeria. The differences result from her pursuing of her career in the US that strikes a common cord with the Americans. Adichie published her short stories in various journals including prestigious American ones. Her short stories have won laurels like the O’Henry Prize. Her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* was published in 2003 by Algonquin got an overwhelming response internationally. Accolades include winning the Commonwealth Prize and Hurston Wight Foundation Award and was shortlisted for Orange Broad band Prize for fiction (one of UK most prestigious literary prizes awarded to females of any nationality for the best original full length novel written in English and published in UK) in 2007. In the preceding year 2006, an equally successful novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* was published. Adichie received the MacArthur genius grant for her work. She wrote a play *For love of Biafra* and also a couple short stories *That Harmattan Morning*, *Half of a yellow sun* and *Ghosts*. All these have placed her among the group of Third 127 Generation writers whose consistent efforts qualified to enrich tremendously the writings in West Africa.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I:

1. Discuss the early life of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

2. Write a short note on education of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

6.3 WRITING

Adichie began writing stories as a child. Her first pieces were heavily influenced by the British children's literature of which she was an avid reader; her early prose was, more specifically, modeled on the books of English author Enid Blyton. When Adichie was about ten years old, she discovered African novels such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Nigerian Chinua Achebe and *The African Child* (originally published in French as *L'enfant noir* in 1953) by Guinean CamaraLaye. In later essays and interviews, she described the reading of these books as a turning point in her development as a writer, for they led her to understand that her own literary creations need not be cast in European molds but could mirror her own African experiences.

Adichie completed her primary and secondary education at the University of Nigeria School, winning several awards for her academic excellence. She then studied pharmacy and medicine at the university for a year and a half but rapidly realized that she did not want to enter the medical profession. In 1997 she published a collection of poems entitled *Decisions* and left Nigeria for the United States to study communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia on a scholarship. The following year she published a play, *For Love of Biafra*, which deals with the Nigerian civil war. This work marked the author's first imaginative exploration of the Biafran conflict, which had divided the country between 1967 and 1970 and had claimed both of her grandfathers.

After two years at Drexel, Adichie moved to Connecticut to live with her sister Ijeoma, who had recently established a medical practice in Coventry. The writer transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University and graduated *summa cum laude* in 2001 with a major in communication and a minor in political science. When she was a senior at Eastern, she started writing *Purple Hibiscus*, a narrative that was to become her first published novel in 2003. The story, set in Nigeria in the

late twentieth century, focuses on a fifteen-year-old Igbo girl, Kambili, and follows the evolution of the heroine's attitude toward her father – a highly respected businessman who, as an extremist Catholic, rules his family with a rod of iron.

Shortly before the publication of her debut novel, Adichie began to gain recognition on the international literary scene as several of her short stories won, or were nominated for, prestigious awards. In 2002, she was declared joint winner of the BBC Short Story Competition for “That Harmattan Morning” and made the short list of the Caine Prize for African Writing with her piece “You in America.” She further won the 2002-2003 David T. Wong International Short Story Prize for “Half of a Yellow Sun” and the 2003 O. Henry Prize for “The American Embassy.” Adichie's reputation was further enhanced by the critical success of *Purple Hibiscus*. Among other distinctions, the novel won the 2004 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for Best Debut Fiction and the 2005 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book; in 2004 it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction and long-listed for the Booker Prize. Significantly, the narrative was also praised by Adichie's illustrious compatriot Chinua Achebe, whose own *Arrow of God* (1964) she had by then consistently cited as her favorite novel.

Meanwhile, Adichie continued to combine her literary and academic work. In 2004 she obtained a master's degree in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University; in 2005- 2006 she was granted a Hodder Fellowship from the University of Princeton, where she taught a class in introductory fiction. In the fall of 2006 she enrolled in a master's program in African history at Yale University. At the same time, she pursued her writing career, publishing numerous stories in international journals such as *Granta* and the *New Yorker* and several essays in prestigious newspapers, including the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*. Although her short fiction has dealt with themes ranging from the Biafran war to contemporary Nigeria and Igbo immigrants in the United States, her essays often express her complicated attachment to her country of origin, fiercely denouncing its corrupt political system and the hypocrisy of its religious leaders.

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The late summer of 2006 saw the publication of Adichie's second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which once again testified to the author's concern with the complexities of the

Biafran war. Indeed, the book centers on several Nigerian protagonists and an English character before and during the conflict and masterfully associates a vigorous condemnation of the brutalities of war with a sensitive portrayal of individual destinies. The novel, blurbed by Achebe, gained instant critical praise and received major accolades. Most notably, it won the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction in 2007 and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book (Africa region) the same year. *Half of a Yellow Sun* was also a commercial success, especially in the United Kingdom, and sealed the writer's status as one of the leading figures of early twenty-first-century African literature.

While studying in the United States and touring the world to promote her work, Adichie regularly returned to Nigeria, actively supporting emerging local literary talent by organizing workshops for aspiring writers in Lagos. In May 2008 she graduated from Yale and moved to Columbia, Maryland. In September of the same year, she received a fellowship from the MacArthur Foundation, a \$500,000 so-called genius grant awarded to promising researchers and artists.

Adichie's first collection of short stories, *The Thing around Your Neck*, was published in April 2009. The book features revised versions of eleven previously published pieces and a new thought-provoking story that interweaves themes such as religion, homosexuality, and illegal immigration to the United States.

Ngozi Adichie's original and initial inspiration came from Chinua Achebe, after reading late Prof. Chinua Achebe's *"Things Fall Apart"*, at the age of 10. Adichie was inspired by seeing her own life represented in the pages. Adichie published a collection of poems in 1997 (*Decisions*) and a play (*For Love of Biafra*) in 1998. She was shortlisted in 2002 for the Caine Prize for her short story *"You in America"*, and her story *"That Harmattan Morning"* was selected as a joint winner of the 2002 BBC World Service Short Story Awards. In 2003, she won the O. Henry

Award for "The American Embassy", and the David T. Wong International Short Story Prize 2002/2003 (PEN Center Award). Her stories were also published in *Zoetrope: All-Story*, and *Topic Magazine*.

Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), received wide critical acclaim; it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (2005). *Purple Hibiscus* starts with an extended quote from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), named after the flag of the short-lived nation of Biafra, is set before and during the Nigerian Civil War. It received the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been adapted into a film of the same title directed by BiyiBande, starring BAFTA award-winner and Academy Award nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor and BAFTA winner Thandie Newton, and was released in 2014.

Adichie's third book, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), is a collection of 12 stories that explore the relationships between men and women, parents and children, Africa and the United States.

In 2010 she was listed among the authors of *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40" Fiction Issue. Adichie's story "Ceiling" was included in the 2011 edition of *The Best American Short Stories*.

Her third novel *Americanah* (2013), an exploration of a young Nigerian encountering race in America was selected by *The New York Times* as one of "The 10 Best Books of 2013".

In April 2014, she was named as one of 39 writers aged under 40 in the Hay Festival and Rainbow Book Club project *Africa39*, celebrating Port Harcourt UNESCO World Book Capital 2014.

Adichie's short story, "My Mother, the Crazy African" discusses the problems that arise when facing two cultures that are complete opposites

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from each other. On one hand, there is a traditional Nigerian culture with clear gender roles, while in America there is more freedom in how genders act, and less restrictions on younger people. Ralindu, the protagonist, faces this challenge with her parents as she grew up in Philadelphia, while they grew up in Nigeria. Adichie really dives deep into gender roles and traditions and what problems can occur because of this.

In 2015, she was co-curator of the PEN World Voices Festival.

In a 2014 interview, Adichie said on feminism and writing: "I think of myself as a storyteller but I would not mind at all if someone were to think of me as a feminist writer... I'm very feminist in the way I look at the world, and that world view must somehow be part of my work."

In March 2017, *Americanah* was picked as the winner for the "One Book, One New York" program, part of a community reading initiative encouraging all city residents to read the same book.

In April 2017, it was announced that Adichie had been elected into the 237th class of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, one of the highest honours for intellectuals in the United States, as one of 228 new members to be inducted on 7 October 2017.

Her most recent book, *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, published in March 2017, had its origins in a letter Adichie wrote to a friend who had asked for advice about how to raise her daughter as a feminist.

6.4 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

As the author of the highly-praised *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's success has been celebrated by the literary establishment.

These novels are set in Nigeria and separately reveal her deftness as a storyteller. *Purple Hibiscus* has its main focus on the strained relationship between the first-person narrator, Kambili, and her dominant father, and has a military coup as a backdrop. In comparison, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is more engaged with the outside political world and is centred on the effects that Nigeria's colonial past and the Biafran war has had on its more strongly developed cast of characters. She has also written a play, *For Love of Biafra* (1998), which is an earlier dramatised account of the war; short stories; and a collection of poems entitled *Decisions* (1998).

Because Kambili is aged 15 and events are delivered in her first person voice, *Purple Hibiscus* is filtered through her adolescent perspective. Initially, the narrative appears to be overly naive, but, when remembering her age, this gradually becomes an authentic coming-of-age story. The depiction of her violently authoritative father allows for some complexity that criticises both British colonialism and traditional patriarchal powers for their influences on the oppression of marginalised groups. The connection is also made between the two as her father's respectability is measured by himself and others in his adherence to Eurocentric values: "Papa changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, just as he did when he spoke to Father Benedict. He was gracious, in the eager-to-please way that he always assumed with the religious, especially with the white religious." His material success is seen to go hand in hand with his seemingly devout Catholicism and in this way his corrupt view of the world becomes entangled with an imposed religion and the workings of capitalism.

As with Adichie's second novel, the setting of Nigeria is elemental rather than decorative or incidental. The flower of the title represents liberty, not exoticism, and symbolises her brother's challenge to their father's authority: "Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do."

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Although *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set in the 1960s, it is regarded as "eerily current" by Rob Nixon in *The New York Times* because of the parallels that may be drawn with the fallout from the Iraq war as "citizens abandoned on the highways of fear must choose between a volatile federation and destabilizing partition" (1 October 2006). The title refers to the Biafran flag of independence and the narrative is divided into four main parts. These shift backwards and forwards in time alternately from the early Sixties to the late Sixties.

It is written in the third person and each of the 37 chapters gives the reader the perspective of one of the main characters: Ugwu, Richard or Olanna. The first, for example, is from Ugwu's point of view. He is aged 13 at the beginning of the novel and has just started working as a houseboy for Odenigbo, who is a university lecturer. He tells Ugwu that education is a priority and exploitation cannot be resisted "if we don't have the tools to understand exploitation". Odenigbo is a mouthpiece for one who favours civil rights and questions the influence of colonialism, and yet his contradictory views of how full independence may be achieved are made clear in his choice to speak in English rather than Igbo at his campus parties.

The second chapter shifts to Olanna, who is Odenigbo's girlfriend, and, through her the narrative, extends its reach to examine familial relationships as well as the historical influence of colonialism more fully. She and her twin sister, Kainene, are from a wealthy family, and their mother and father are seen to have gained their money from corrupt practices. Their position in society before the war is used as a contrast with Ugwu's rural upbringing.

Richard, who is first used as a focal point in Chapter Three, is the only white main character and is the lover of Kainene. He comes to Nigeria as a writer and wants to research the Igbo culture, but Adichie avoids using him as simply one of a new breed of colonialists that continue the work of the predecessors after Nigerian independence. He comes to identify himself with the Igbo people he loves and is given a part to play in reporting the atrocities of the Biafran war.

However, he is not given the opportunity to re-write the past. Occasionally, excerpts from a book appear within this book and the readers are initially (but erroneously) led to believe that this second narrative has been written by him. It is entitled *The World was Silent When we Died* and explains how Nigeria came about as a nation and how this may be linked to the horrific outcomes of the civil war in 1967: "The Yoruba were the largest in the Southwest. In the Southeast, the Igbo lived in small republican communities. They were non-docile and worryingly ambitious. Since they did not have the good sense to have kings, the British created 'warrant chiefs', because indirect rule cost the Crown less. Missionaries were allowed in to tame the pagans, and the Christianity and education they brought flourished. In 1914, the governor-general joined the North and the South, and his wife picked a name. Nigeria was born." Both books highlight how this war, which came to be synonymous with starvation and supposed in-fighting, has its roots in a history of divide and white rule. The decision to give the authorship of the second book to an Igbo writer rather than a British white man also allows Adichie to reclaim the past and the present in independent terms.

In conclusion, Adiche's postcolonial writing about Nigeria demonstrates a capacity to look at the family and the wider public sphere with equal regard. Her fiction asks questions about the roles played by colonialism and present day corruption in the conflicts of the land of her birth, and she refuses to simplify the problems or solutions.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. Discuss various literature prize received by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

2. Discuss half of a Yellow sun in brief.

6.5 LET SUM UP

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria.

She studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria then moved to the US to study communications and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University. She gained an MA in Creative Writing from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

After initially writing poetry and one play, *For Love of Biafra* (1998), she had several short stories published in literary journals, winning various competition prizes. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published in 2003 and is set in the political turmoil of 1990s Nigeria, the narrative told from the perspective of 15-year-old Kambili Achike. It won the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book), and was shortlisted for the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction.

Her second novel is *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), set before and during the Biafran War. It won the 2007 Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction.

Chimamanda's third novel *Americanah*, was written during a fellowship awarded by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in 2011-2013 and was published to great acclaim in 2013.

Chimamanda divides her time between Nigeria, where she regularly teaches writing workshops, and the United States..

6.6 KEYWORDS

1. The **British Empire** comprised the dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates, and other territories ruled or administered by the United Kingdom and its predecessor states.
2. A **missionary** is a member of a religious group sent into an area to promote their faith or perform ministries of service, such as

education, literacy, social justice, health care, and economic development.

3. A **protagonist** is the main character of a story.
4. **Religion** is a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements.
5. The **Igbo** people are an ethnic group native to the present-day south-central and southeastern Nigeria.

6.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- a) What difficulties Chimamanda faces in her younger life?
- b) Discuss the Critical perspective of writing of ChimamandaNgoziAdichie
- c) What was the impact of literary work of ChimamandaNgoziAdichie on African Literature?

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6.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Answer 1 : Check Section 6.2

Answer 2 : Check Section 6.3

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Answer 1 : Check Section 6.4

Answer 2 : Check Section 6.5

UNIT: 7 LITERATURE OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

STRUCTURE

7.0 Objective

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Historical Situation

7.3 Literary Context: Adichie As An African Author

7.4 Literature And History: Interlinked Discourses

7.5 Reasons For Writing History

7.6 Let Sum Up

7.7 Keywords

7.8 Questions For Review

7.9 Suggested Readings And References

7.10 Answer to check your progress

7.0 OBJECTIVE

This unit help to learn works and style of writing of Literature of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This unit helps to understand the historical situation of writing of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Unit gives the insight of Adichie as an African author and explains how his writing is effected by African culture.

Unit helps to achieve following objective:

- **Historical Situation of writing of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**
- **Literary Context: Adichie As An African Author**
- **Reasons For Writing History**

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an author who is mainly concerned with the ongoing effects of colonization in Africa, and more importantly

Nigeria. Adichie was born in 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria. She grew up in the university town Nsukka, where both of her parents worked at the university. She started the study of medicine but dropped out after a year and a half to pursue her writing career. Adichie's first novel *Purple Hibiscus* was published in 2003; the book has received wide critical acclaim. Her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* was released in 2006, and is set before and during the Nigeria-Biafra War. In 2009 Adichie published a volume of short stories named *The Thing around Your Neck*. Now Adichie divides her time between Nigeria, where she teaches, and the United States.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the best-selling Nigerian author, wants American readers to know that African writers don't just write about Africa's problems. "When we talk about the developing world, there's this idea that everybody should be fighting for the poor," she says. Though it might seem obvious to point out, she adds, "people are diverse, and there are different things that are going on with them."

She calls it the "danger of a single story"—the idea that people living in certain areas of the world all have one kind of experience. Ms. Adichie hopes to show audiences Africa's range of stories as the co-curator of this year's PEN World Voices Festival. For the first time, the weeklong literature event, which starts Monday in New York, will have a regional focus. Along with other book-related programs, authors from Africa and its diaspora will speak about topics like how the West misunderstands African culture and the state of Africa's poetry scene.

Ms. Adichie, 37, has spent her adult life traveling between the U.S. and Nigeria. She first rose to prominence in 2003 with the publication of her first book, "*Purple Hibiscus*," a coming-of-age novel set in postcolonial Nigeria. She went on to write two more critically-acclaimed novels, "*Half of a Yellow Sun*" (2006) and "*Americanah*" (2013), as well as a collection of short stories. She won a MacArthur "genius" grant in 2008.

Ms. Adichie hopes that the spotlight of the PEN festival will help to win a wider audience for the African writers she's chosen, including

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Nigerian-American author Teju Cole and Cameroonian writer Achille Mbembe. “It was important to get people who actually live on the continent,” along with those who have left, said Ms. Adichie by phone from her part-time residence in Columbia, Md. “I think the voices of the African diaspora are important too, but I think there’s often a silence in our voices from the continent.”

Ms. Adichie spent much of her childhood in the town of Nsukka at the University of Nigeria, where her father was a professor and her mother was an administrator. She describes the campus as a closed community, where she attended elementary school and a secondary school on the premises, and stayed for part of college.

Then Ms. Adichie decided she wanted to study in the U.S. instead. She arrived in 1998, and her first shock was finding poverty. Growing up, she had watched many American movies and TV shows, and the conditions that she saw driving through Philadelphia on her way to Drexel University jarred her. Another surprise was her roommate’s pity when Ms. Adichie told her that she had grown up in Africa.

She found that she enjoyed the freedom of the American higher education system. In Nigeria, she says, students were encouraged to focus on one discipline. “One of the things that I loved about the U.S. is that the walls could be broken down,” she says. “You could take philosophy, history and biology, and that wouldn’t happen in Nigeria.” She transferred from Drexel to Eastern Connecticut State University, where she studied communications and political science, while writing on the side. She later earned master’s degrees from Johns Hopkins University and Yale. Then she started writing full-time.

Ms. Adichie says that she felt different from other writers in at least one way: Many of them were able to draw dramatic tales from their difficult early family lives, but her upbringing had been happy. “I feel a little bit guilty for not having massive trauma in my childhood,” she says.

She does, however, experience bouts of depression, “the crazy writer illness” that she thinks is common in her field. “There’s something comforting about that, because you feel you’re not alone,” she says.

Her books have some parallels to her own experience. In “Americanah,” the female protagonist leaves Nigeria to go to college in the U.S., where she faces culture shock. It won a National Book Critics Circle Award and last year, Brad Pitt announced that he would produce a film version, starring Lupita Nyong’o.

She has mixed feelings about both Nigeria and the U.S., where her husband works as a doctor in Baltimore. “I love Nigeria, but it’s a very clear-eyed love,” she says. “I know Nigeria has a lot of problems, but I also know that Nigeria is not about its problems.” She has written about electricity outages in Lagos, for one, and thinks that the privatization of energy companies should have improved service more. The country’s elections in March made Ms. Adichie more optimistic about Nigeria’s prospects. “It was proof that democracy...is making progress,” she says.

In the U.S., she says, she has always felt more like a visitor. (She continues to be a Nigerian citizen.) American grocery stores distress her because so many of the foods on offer are unhealthy. “Why do American supermarkets need so much sugar in everything?” she asks. “If you’re this wealthy, something can be done so vegetables are cheap.”

As for broader issues, she says that “race is a present thing in America, and it isn’t in Nigeria.” But gender is a problem in her homeland. She recounts how, when she recently walked into a grocery store with her brother there, the security guard at the entrance only greeted him. “I was not in a good mood, so I said, ‘This has to change. You have to greet the both of us.’” The difficulty, she says, is that “the invisibility of the female” is part of Nigerian culture.

At the TED conference in 2013, Ms. Adichie gave a now-famous talk titled, “We Should All Be Feminists.” (The singer Beyoncé quoted it in her song “Flawless.”) “My version of feminism means acknowledging

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that women have and continue to have gotten the bad end of things, politically and socially, all over the world,” she says. “Feminism means not only acknowledging that, but wanting to make it better.”

Known for dressing in bright, bold prints, Ms. Adichie says that her mother influenced her preference for lively attire. Also, “Nigerians are just really interested in appearance, and it cuts across class,” she says. “Lagos is the most stylish city in the world.” Ms. Adichie has most of her clothing custom-made and says that she has a notion “in my delusion” of designing her own clothing.

Meanwhile, some days she writes for 12 hours straight; other days she can’t bring herself to write at all.

“I wish I could write every day, but I don’t,” she says. “When it goes well, I ignore things like family and hygiene, but other days, when it’s not going well, I read the books I love to remind myself of how beautiful and essential and nurturing words can be, and I hope that doing that will bring my own words back.”

7.2 HISTORICAL SITUATION

Half of a Yellow Sun, Adichie’s second novel, was published in 2006. It is set in Nigeria, and deals with two periods, the early 60s and the late 60s, which are of pivotal importance in the postcolonial history of Nigeria. In the late 60s, the country was involved in a bloody and violent conflict, the Nigeria-Biafra War, which lasted from 1967 to 1970. Adichie shifts between these two time periods in the novel. In the parts on the early 60s, the events leading up to the violent conflict are sketched, and the main characters are introduced. Since the novel deals with real historic events, it is useful to investigate the way in which the author chooses to portray them. There are many different ways in which historical events can be approached, and depending on where the emphasis is put, a very different picture may be the outcome.

To be able to fully understand the historical context of the events described in the novel and referred to in this dissertation, it is crucial to

touch on the origins of the conflict and explain how the tensions escalated into a full-fledged war. To this end, I have drawn on two works: Falola Toyin's *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (2009) and Aleksandar Pavović's *Creating New States, Theory and Practice of Secession* (2007). Toyin is a Nigerian scholar who focuses on African history; Pavović's work sheds light on the mechanisms of secession, and on the violence they often entail. The territory of Nigeria came under the colonial influence of Britain in the late 19th century and became a British colony in 1914. However, within the territory of what the British called „a country“, they united three entirely different

ethnic groups. The three predominant ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Igbo in the southeast, the Hausa-Fulani in the north and the Yoruba in the southwest.

Nigeria attained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960. Its three ethnic groups formed three major internal units, and each had very different cultural customs and political structures. Due to reasons as less fertile soil, the overpopulated eastern coast, and the search for work, the Igbo and other Easterners migrated to the northern parts of Nigeria. In January 1966 a group of Igbo majors attempted a coup, and Yoruba and Hausa political leaders were killed. The Igbo General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi became President. This coup was perceived as an Igbo conspiracy. It led to riots and a first wave of massacres in which hundreds of Igbos were killed. In July 1966, there occurred a counter-coup by the North, and Ironsi was killed. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon came to power with the support of the United Kingdom and the United States. However, the military governor of the Eastern Region, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, refused to recognize Gowon as anything else than a temporary head of state.

Further ethnic tensions led to more massacres by Northern soldiers of Christian Igbos in the North which brought about a large scale exodus of the Igbo and other Easterners out of the northern part of Nigeria. Peace accords, like the one at Aburi in Ghana failed, and on 30 May 1967 Ojukwu proclaimed the secession of the southeast of Nigeria as the republic of Biafra. Its flag shows half of a rising sun and was the inspiration for the title of Adichie's novel. The Nigerian government did

not recognize this new republic, however, and the Nigeria-Biafra War began in July. Even though the Biafran troops were outnumbered, and had a shortage of weapons, they managed to achieve some wins in the beginning of the war. However, with the support of the United Kingdom and the USSR, the federal troops encircled the area, and blocked all of Biafra's links to the outside world. This led to a great shortage of means and food; it is estimated that up to three million people died in Biafra, mostly from starvation. Ojukwu fled, and Biafra surrendered to the federal troops on January 13 1970. The violence between the different ethnic groups, however, continued after this. Even though the ethnic tensions are still a part of the Nigerian reality today, their intensity has lessened somewhat over the last decades.

7.3 LITERARY CONTEXT: ADICHIE AS AN AFRICAN AUTHOR

During her childhood in Nigeria Adichie read a lot of British novels; she mentions the writer Enid Blyton, a British children's writer, frequently in interviews. When Adichie started to write her own stories, these all revolved around white middle-class characters. It was only when she started to read novels by African writers, such as Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), around the age of eight that she realized that black Africans and the history of her own country was a possible topic of novels. She herself says: „I like to think of Achebe as the writer whose work gave me permission to write my own stories.“ (Adichie, „African “Authenticity” and the Biafran Experience“, p.42) Achebe is seen as the father of African literature, and as someone who paved the way for many writers who came after him. Achebe links Adichie to the African literary tradition.

Heather Hewett discusses Nigerian writing in her essay „Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation“. In this essay she mentions how Ngugi wa Thiong'o has defined three “stages” of African literature: „the age of anti-colonial struggle, the age of independence, and the age of neo-colonialism“. (Hewett) In the same way, critics have divided the literary tradition of Nigeria into three generations. Writers who have published work before and directly after

independence (1960), such as Chinua Achebe, are included in the first generation. Those writers whose work was published after the Nigerian Civil War (1966-1967), as for example Niyi Osundare, are called the second generation. The third generation includes the writers who published their first work in the middle of the 1980s. Seeing as Adichie published her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003 she, strictly speaking, should not be included in this generation. However, other factors do make a strong case for her inclusion.

Adichie is one of the youngest members of the third generation. Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton discuss the third generation in their essay „Nigeria’s Third Generation Writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Considerations“. Some of the important differences between the first and second generation are, firstly, the shift from poetry to the novel and, secondly, the recognition its output received from the international community. (Adesanmi and Dunton, p.8) Some of the important thematic features of the third generation’s fiction include an urban setting, and an emphasis on „deprivation, the denial of individual human rights and aspirations, the degradation of social relations under a series of increasingly despotic and corrupt regimes“. (p.11) These features are present in Adichie’s novel: the novel starts off in the university town Nsukka, and the characters’ travels lead them from one town

to another. The living conditions however, deteriorate heavily as their journey goes on, and as the war continues and the government cuts Biafra off from the outside world, food becomes scarce and people starve to death. The main characters struggle to stay alive, and the interpersonal relationships also suffer under the constant stress and danger of the war.

Furthermore, a focus on „the activities of reading and writing“ and „the perils of journalism“ is also a common characteristic of the writing of the third generation. (Adesanmi and Dunton, p.11) Reading and writing are central themes of *Half of a Yellow Sun*; the university context of the story is an apparent manifestation of this theme, as universities are seen as places of learning, reading and writing. Also, the characters Richard and Ugwu both attempt to write about history. Richard is fascinated by the Igbo-Ukwu art, and wants to write a novel about it. Ugwu writes a

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book about the origins of the Nigeria-Biafra War. Adichie also shows the shortcomings of Western journalism, as it fails to see Nigeria as anything else than a violent, primal country.

Lastly, Adesanmi and Dunton mention the generation's use of „the trope of incarceration and the aesthetics of trauma“. (p.17) The fear of incarceration is present in Olanna's fear for Ugwu being drafted into the army, which seems like a prison. The novel as a whole represents Adichie's trauma of the war of Biafra; a trauma which she inherited from her family: „I was aware of how this war haunted my family.“ („African „Authenticity“ and the Biafran Experience“, p.50) The novel also shows how the different characters deal with the traumas that are the result of terrible experiences or horrors inflicted upon them during the course of the war. Also, the practise of writing and narrating is very significant to all of them as they attempt to work through their trauma. Some characters are significantly changed by their traumas. Ugwu is one of them, the trauma of fighting in the war leads to him raping an innocent girl, which shocks the reader. Another example of this dramatic change is Olanna, who cannot walk for a period of time after she finds the mutilated bodies of her family members. These traumas will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

The new direction the writers of the third generation have taken with their fiction is discussed by Jane Bryce, with a focus on female writers in her essay „Half and Half Children“: Third-Generation Women Writers and the New Nigerian Novel“. This includes a shift from a central masculinity to an identity which is varied and multidimensional. (Bryce, p.50) The characters in the novel are all of different backgrounds, and there is no special emphasis on the male characters. The identity that Adichie puts forward in her novel is an African one; the female and male characters are both well-rounded and full. Adichie shows

the events through the eyes of three different characters; the result of these different voices is a reality which is also multidimensional.

Bryce points out that the majority of the latest novels written by Nigerian female writers have been realist. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a realist novel as well. She says:

„This is perhaps the most puzzling thing about them [recent novels by Nigerian women] – their happy acceptance of the realist imperative to tell a coherent story from a more-or-less unified perspective, in well constructed English sentences“. (p.53) Bryce finds this surprising, as these writers have entire alternative signifying systems available to them, which they make (almost) no use of. Adichie uses realism as „„control“ in metafictional texts, the norm or the background against which the experimental strategies can foreground themselves“. (Waugh, p.18) The question may be raised whether or not the realist mode is an adequate way to describe the trauma of the Nigeria-Biafra War. Adichie makes use of the English language to write her novel, but also frequently inserts Igbo sentences and words. This makes the reader aware that these characters would be speaking in Igbo to one another, and that the story is mediated. These issues will be discussed further in chapters three and four.

Bryce also comments on the question of parentage of these female writers of the third generation and, she concludes that *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe constitutes the

„ground on which later writers endlessly signify“. (p.55) With this novel Achebe operates within the same context as Adichie; they both write about a past that they themselves did not experience. However, their reasons for writing differ. Achebe meant to show that the African continent had a rich cultural tradition, that it had a past, that it was not as dark a place as how the colonizers would portray it. They also have in common that in no way they claim or intend to write history, and portray an entirely historically correct story. Nevertheless, the historical details are also part of the core of the message their novels try to send.

A classification in different categories like the one mentioned above can be criticized as limiting, creating unity where in reality there is none, and giving an illusionary image of the real scope of the Nigerian literary production. But it is also a helpful tool to chart the changes the literature of a nation goes through. Each generation publishes within a certain time-frame, and seems to be characterized by an important event in history, so it would be evident to assume that each generation“s writing is inherently influenced and determined by that event. Adichie actively positions herself in the Nigerian literary tradition, and makes frequent

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references to one writer in particular, Chinua Achebe. Achebe is a Nigerian novelist, poet, essayist and critic; his first and best known novel is called *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Adichie refers to him by opening her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* with the words: „Things

started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion.“ (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, p.3) Thus she directly references Achebe’s novel. She describes Achebe as follows: „Achebe is the most important writer for me, and so every opportunity I have to pay tribute to him I’ll take it.“ (Adichie, „Fortunes of War and Peace“) In her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she cites one of Achebe’s poems in the epigraph. She takes a few lines from *Mango Seedling*, a poem which Achebe dedicated to the poet Okigbo: „Today I see it still – Dry, wire-thin in sun and dust of the dry months – Headstone on tiny debris of passionate courage“ It is believed that the character of Okeoma in Adichie’s novel is meant as a homage to Okigbo. In citing Achebe’s poem and creating the character of Okeoma, Adichie makes a double attempt to link her project with that of Achebe.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I:

1. Why Adichie is considered as an African Author?

Q2. How Adichie writing were affected by different historical situation?

7.4 LITERATURE AND HISTORY: INTERLINKED DISCOURSES

The historical facts of the Biafran conflict form the basis of the story Adichie tells in her novel. But how does Adichie, as a fiction writer,

approach these facts and how does she incorporate them into her novel? To be able to shed light on this, questions about the representation of history, the relationship between history and fiction and goals of writing about history must be answered. Towards the end of the 20th century, the conception of history and history writing changed drastically. This inevitably also had consequences for the branch of literature which is occupied with history, seeing as the historical novel and historiography are two intimately linked domains. The nature of history has been discussed extensively but the relation between historical events and contemporary literature needs to be analyzed further. Scholars such as White, Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner have revolutionized the way in which the relation between history and literature is viewed, and have introduced the narrative turn in historical debate. It is crucial to determine the ways in which authors today deal with history, because with this knowledge it may become clear how this generation of authors deals with their past, how they adapt their literary formats to it, and which sources they draw on. Each author will do this in his or her own personal way, and Adichie's use of „telling“ in the novel relates back to her own views on the use and goals of literature.

In order to come to an understanding of the relation between history and historical fiction, these two terms have to be clarified. The question: „What is history?“ takes this argument into the field of philosophy of history. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy views „history“ in the following way: „history is a temporally ordered sequence of events and processes involving human doings, within which there are interconnections of causality, structure, and action, within which there is the play of accident, contingency, and outside forces.“ (Little, „Philosophy of History“) The key concepts that are important in this definition are chronology, the human element and interaction. The philosophy of history centres on issues like the possibility of objectivity, the ways in which history is recovered, on what scale history should be studied, and whether or not a pattern can be discerned in history. The claim of objectivity is of particular interest in this context, because it seems to be the decisive factor that separates history from historical fiction. However, this will be further nuanced by Ankersmit's insights on the historical novel.

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At first sight, one may see a contradiction in the term „historical novel“. Historical writing has traditionally been seen as producing a factual account, while the subject of a novel

is considered fictional. I would like to attempt to form a tentative definition of the historical novel: when viewed in a broad sense, the historical novel revolves around the attempt to capture a specific moment or period of the past, make sense of it, and find its meaning or cause. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, which is a general encyclopaedia, contains the following definition: „a novel that has as its setting a period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact.“ This definition centres on the attempt at representation, and does not mention any concern for sense-making.

In his work on the historical novel, Jerome de Groot captures some of the main characteristics of this specific type of novel. First of all, he comments on how historical writing can take place within a lot of different genres; it can take the form of a romance, fantasy, gothic, and many others. Its „intergeneric hybridity“ is one of its most characteristic features. (de Groot, p.2) He adds that one of the most common criticisms on historical fiction is its ability to change facts, and how its readers let themselves be knowingly misled by this. This innate strangeness of the genre is also touched on by the authors of historical fiction, as they often write an explanatory note about how they relate to the subject matter and where they underline that the content they have produced is indeed fictional. As de Groot points out:

„The form is obsessed with pointing out its own partiality, with introducing other voices and undermining its authority.“ (p.8) Adichie also introduces such an explanation in the „Author“s note“ at the end of the novel: „This book is based on the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-70. While some of the characters are based on actual persons, their portrayals are fictitious as are the events surrounding them.“ The authors of historical fiction show that they are aware of the strangeness of the act they perform, and of how their fictional project intersects with reality and

history. Such an explanation introduces a metafictional element into the form; it comments directly on the artificial nature of the novel.

Historiography is an entirely different way of writing and thinking about history compared to the historical novel. Kellner, who is part of the narrative school, draws on Huizinga when he contemplates the function of historiography and the historical novel: „[if] history is the way in which a culture deals with its own past, then historical understanding is a vital cultural enterprise“. (Kellner, p.xi) He adds that the historical imagination is an important part of how we manage our past. Again, the emphasis is on the human intervention in the making of these stories. History is written based on sources, and narrative is used in this process of sense-making. As Kellner points out: „Narrative exists to make continuous what is discontinuous; it covers the gaps in time, in action, in documentation.“ (p.55) This links up

with the ideas introduced by White and Ankersmit on how „the historian performs an essentially poetic act“. (Metahistory, p.x) These insights point out the similarities between historiography and the historical novel, rather than emphasizing their differences.

Patrick Brady comments on the historical novel in his book *Memory and History as Fiction*. He addresses the relationship between historiography and the historical novel by first pointing out the differences between them:

History ... refers to a “real” past, a belief or set of beliefs about that past, and purports to report the “truth” about that “real” past. . The historical novel, on the other hand, like the autobiographical novel, refers to a “real” past but neither aims nor claims to reproduce it with scrupulous accuracy. (p.17-18)

However, he goes on to emphasize that these two discourses are more alike than they differ from each other. Historiography largely draws upon memory, and these are not stable entities. Memory has a reconstructive character, and is a fictional construct. Seeing as memory is central to history, history writing is also fictional. Brady points out that „the historical novel is distinguished not by its being fiction but by the greater degree of fictionalization involved and by the consciousness or explicitness of this fictional status“. (Brady, p.18) It is evident that these

two discourses differ in some ways, but also that they intersect in numerous ways.

7.5 REASONS FOR WRITING HISTORY

Writing about history can have many various motivations, and these may be very different for a historian as opposed to a fiction writer. The Stanford Encyclopedia lists three broad reasons for historical representation:

[T]he idea of learning some of the facts about human circumstance in the past; the idea of providing a narrative that provides human understanding of how a sequence of historical actions and events hangs together and “makes sense” to us; and the idea of providing a causal account of the occurrence of some historical event of interest. (Little, part1)

It seems that Adichie does not fall into any of these categories. Her reasons for writing her novel are listed below, and none seem to clearly fit the profile of the historian presented here. However, it seems that there can be no clear demarcation between the identities of the historian and the literary author.

When one takes into account White’s views on historic discourse, a historian and a fiction writer create essentially the same thing: a narrative. Part of the difference seems to lie in their motivation, their intent and their ultimate goal. A historian will try to approach history and his work with at least an objective of adhering to the truth, in as far as this is possible. It is possible that a fiction writer has the very same goal, but in the case of fiction the possible motivations are endless, and may be very different from the truth-objective a historical writer has. In the particular case of Adichie, the first apparent difference between her and a historian would be the goal of her novel. She does not write to represent the Nigeria-Biafra War as objectively as possible; her project is far more personal, and deeply rooted in her individual psyche and life. This also relates back to the Ankersmit’s argumentation about the difference between history and the novel. It is clear that Adichie is mainly interested in the application of history to ordinary people and in an emphasis on „showing“ the past.

Adichie sums up her reasons in an interview. (Adichie, „The Story Behind the Book“) She seems to have some reasons for writing in common with a historian: „because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra“ and „because I wanted to engage with my history in order to make sense of my present, many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today“. She is involved in the goal of sense-making of an event. However, in these remarks, her personal involvement is evident. She does not necessarily want to make sense only of the past, but make sense of the relationship between the „shadow of Biafra“, which represents her past, and her own personal present. In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy this reason is

listed for the writing of history: „And it [history] suggests the possibility of better understanding ourselves in the present, by understanding the forces, choices, and circumstances that brought us to our current situation.“ (Little, introduction) Consequently, it seems that this is a reason for writing that Adichie has in common with the historian, which is made evident by the quote mentioned above. However, she remains, first and foremost, a literary author.

What Adichie stresses is her and her family“s deep personal involvement in the Nigeria-Biafra War and how the effects it had on her family reverberate in her own life:

because I lost both grandfathers in the Nigeria-Biafra war, ... because my father has tears in his eyes when he speaks of losing his father, because my mother still cannot speak at length about losing her father in a refugee camp, because the brutal bequests of colonialism make me angry, because the thought of the egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men and women and children enrages me, because I don't ever want to forget. (Adichie, „The Story Behind the Book“)

This personal involvement is articulated in the novel in the sense that parts of her life are incorporated; she based some of her characters on family members. This novel constitutes a research of a part of her being, of her past. One could argue that this makes her fundamentally different from the historian, but as has already been pointed out, an author can never be entirely absent from his own narration. As Gossman states:

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„Alain Besancon argues that all historical research is in some measure “recherché de soi-même... introspection.”. (Gossman, p.28) A narration is always the result of the interaction between the source and the researcher. Furthermore, the idea of writing about an event to „never forget“ links up with the historian“s project, as well as with trauma theory.

One could argue that a historian is more likely to take up the task of remembering for a whole community, while Adichie here presents it as a personal enterprise. While there are traces of nationalism in her reasons it cannot be equated to the historical novel of, for example, Sir Walter Scott that „might be seen as a tool for national self-definition“. (de Groot, p.94) Nevertheless, Adichie herself states that she wants to write about Biafra „not only to honor my grandfathers, but also to honor the collective memory of an entire nation“. (Adichie, „The Story Behind the Book“) In this quote it is possible to find a concern for both the personal and the community, it seems that for Adichie the two are closely intertwined. Hawley argues that Half of a Yellow Sun „is a national novel, getting at the spirit of the Nigerian people, recreating that spirit in the specific lives of compelling characters“. (Hawley, p.23)

However, what is foregrounded in the novel is the diversity of African experience, not the unified Nigerian national identity. It can be argued that Adichie interprets this identity by showing so many variant points of views from characters that are different with regards to gender, class, race but are still united in their struggle for Biafra. Nationalism is a personal matter and can have many different interpretations. Adichie herself discusses what „African authenticity“ means to her in her essay „African “Authenticity” and the Biafran Experience“. She argues we should see Africa as a multidimensional landscape, that cannot be defined in one particular way: „I do not accept the idea of monolithic authenticity. To insist that there is one thing that is authentically African is to diminish the African experience.“ This confirms her view on the national identity as being multi-dimensional and very difficult to grasp entirely. (Adichie, „African “Authenticity” and the Biafran Experience“, p.48)

De Groot elaborates on how authors of historical fiction tend to write about their own history in so far as they have some kind of „ethnographic, sociological, nationalist, geographical claim“ to that past. (de Groot, p.95) Adichie certainly can be said to have each of those claims to the past of Nigeria. She and her family are Igbo; she herself experiences how the different ethnic groups interact with each other today, after the conflict; she belongs to the group who call themselves „Nigerian“, and for the largest part of her time she lives in Nigeria. De Groot also lists „access to source material, or language problems, or lack of confidence“ as reasons why one would not venture outside of one’s own historical setting. (p.95) It is true that these factors also worked in Adichie’s favor, her family functioned as her source about the war, and she speaks both English as Igbo.

In the novel, the main focus is the personal life and struggles of the characters, not the historical events. It is a character driven story in which personal experience forms the focal point of the tale. Adichie discusses this as well: „But what was most important to me, in the end, was emotional truth. I wanted this to be a book about human beings, not a book about faceless political events.“ (Adichie, „The Story Behind the Book“) Some branches of history writing are also occupied with the more mundane and everyday life of ordinary people, such as *Alltagsgeschichte*. Unlike many other authors of Nigerian war fiction, Adichie does not get involved in fictionalizing events about which there are no historical facts available, such as for example, a rendering of the dialogue between two political leaders. She simply gives the point of view of the characters, and the information they would have available to them through the radio and through their intellectual salon. Rather, she uses the historical events to punctuate the lives of the characters. As John Marx notes: „throughout the novel, the couple’s [Olanna and Odenigbo] romantic turmoil directly parallels Nigeria’s defining postcolonial

crisis, as well as being punctuated by it“. (Marx, p.612) Both story lines, the political and the personal, at no time threaten to overtake each other but rather complement each other. This shows how Adichie makes the historical and the literary intersect in her novel, as complementary narratives. As Marx points out, with regard to the sciences „fiction

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shapes a counterdiscourse, offers a humanizing counterpoint“ (Marx, p.599) The personal story breathes new life and vitality into the historical „facts“ about the past, and by choosing to focus on ordinary people Adichie makes the story more relatable.

Another difference between Adichie and the historiographer is the use and choice of sources. In the Stanford Encyclopedia it is stated that facts form the basis of historical representation: „We use facts in the present ... to support inferences about circumstances and people in the past.“ (Little, part1) Adichie also finds her sources in the present, but these would not be considered as factual by the historian. She says: „my parents“ stories formed the backbone of my research“ and „I read books. I talked to people. ... I would often ask older people I met, “Where were you in 1967?“ (Adichie, „The Story Behind the Book“) She based her story on testimonies of the war, but also on factual resources. However, she herself admits that, while she wanted to adhere to the historical truth of the major events, she let herself stray from the facts, and took some artistic liberty: „I have a lot of research notes that I did not end up using because I did not want to be stifled by fact, did not want the political events to overwhelm the human story“. It is clear that in this aspect Adichie“s objective and focus are different from a historian“s; adhering entirely to the factual truth (in so far as this is possible) is something that Adichie deliberately did not pursue. Far more important to her is the emotional truth of the past, how it felt to be there. This is what she used the testimonies for, to get a sense of what it was like to have been there. This is what she wants the novel to convey.

The use of dates, place names and personal names must be discussed here as well, as it is related to the question of adhering to the truth. All these elements would be of critical importance in the historian“s text; these are fundamental facts that give a backbone of veracity and stability to a story. The first element that is of utmost important is the chronology; a historian will link precise dates to certain events. Biafra became an independent republic on 30 May 1967, and one would assume that this date would appear in a novel that revolves around Biafra. It does not appear in Adichie“s novel. The characters“ reaction to the secession is what is described in the novel when the republic of Biafra is proclaimed. It seems that the ways in which they experience this occurrence is of

more relevance than the event itself. Furthermore, human beings do not live by precise dates; these are not of direct importance to them in the case of a momentous event. This relates back to the notion of the novel being a

character-driven story in which the emotions and the felt history are the focal point. This, for example, is how the secession is announced: „But Odenigbo didn’t need to deliver the letter because the secession was announced that evening”. (Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.161) They listen to Ojukwu’s speech on the radio, the speech is transcribed; then the reaction follows: „This is our beginning.” Odenigbo said. ... She [Olanna] had wanted the secession to happen, but now it seemed too big to conceive.” (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.162) Each character has his or her own distinctly personal reaction to the news.

The only markers of time the reader is given in the novel are the two major time periods in which the events take place: the early sixties and the late sixties. This demarcation of time makes sure that „the events are not made to occur in vacuo but are located in „known” historical time”. (Nwahunanya, p.5) The novel starts off in the early sixties; the characters are introduced, the scene is set, and their lives intersect. Never is an exact date given, arguably because real people do not think or remember in terms of precise dates. However, the attentive reader can deduce some precise dates from historical events that are mentioned. Such as: „They toasted Kenya’s independence”. (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.233) Kenya became independent from Britain on 12 December 1963. Another instance is the death of Winston Churchill: „Richard was almost relieved to learn of Sir Winston Churchill’s death”. (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, p.235) Churchill died on 24 January 1965, and again an important historical event is coupled with the character’s own personal life. Richard is not relieved because Churchill has died, but because of its consequence: he does not have to face his lover Kainene yet.

Where the novel resembles a historian’s account is in the use of place and personal names. Most of the places that are mentioned are real, and are plausible when they are considered in the historical context. Odenigbo and Olanna are both academics, and work at the university in Nsukka. The place names mentioned in the story are places that were

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important in the course of events that took place during the Nigeria-Biafra War, but in the novel they are important because of the presence of the characters in them. Odenigbo and Olanna have to flee from Nsukka, to Abba, to Umuahia, and finally to Orlu. Port Harcourt was an important city, and its fall was significant in the war. It is significant in the story because Richard and Kainene live there. Street names are also mentioned in the novel; the street Odenigbo and Olanna live on is called Odim street, which is a street that exists near the university in Nsukka. In this way, it would be possible for this couple to have lived there. Adichie explains how she handled the geography of Nigerian in her novel: „I invented a train station in Nsukka, invented a beach in Port Harcourt, changed the distance between towns... but I did not invent any of the major events.“ (Adichie, „The Story Behind the Book“) She

treats the geographic reality differently than a historian would, this enables her to frame the characters“ experiences in the real world while maintaining her freedom as a literary author to use the surroundings for the development of her characters. The names of important historical figures are maintained in the narrative, Gowon and Ojuwku are frequently mentioned, but also Harold Wilson is mentioned, who was the British prime minister at the time.

According to White, the historian and the fiction writer come together when the historian must transform his study into a written form. The historian has to „employ the same strategies of linguistic figuration used by imaginative writers to endow their discourses with the kind of latent, secondary, or connotative meanings that will require that their works be not only received as messages but read as symbolic structures“. (Figural Realism, p.8) This is an idea which he derives from Roland Barthes. This „latent“ meaning is „its interpretation of the events that make up its manifest content“. (Figural Realism, p.8) This interpretation is what separates the historical discourse from a list of chronologically ordered events, and what approximates it to narrative fiction. This also refers to what White calls „emplotment“, the events are integrated into a plot structure. This relates back to the way in which the personal events punctuate and parallel the political ones in the novel. Adichie uses the personal to make the political felt. Olanna“s and Odenigbo“s wedding,

for example, is also the moment of the first bombing of the town of Umuahia: „Ugwu heard the sound just before they cut their cake in the living room, the swift wah-wah-wah roar in the sky.“ (Half of a Yellow Sun, p.202) Just as she seemed to let the emotional response to the announcement of the secession take preference over the event itself, here the ruining of the wedding is more important to the characters than the occurrence of the bombing. These two events will always be remembered together by them, just because the bombing occurred at a moment of pivotal importance in their lives. By combining the personal and the political or historical in this way, Adichie makes the political developments of the war part of the characters' felt personal history.

To conclude the analysis of Adichie as a historical novelist, and the investigation of how Adichie uses the novel to reflect on the intersection of literature and history writing, one must acknowledge the different contact points between the two, and recognize that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel. As Chinyere Nwahunanya points out: „The historical novelist combines the techniques of the historian (documentation) and that of the novelist (imaginative re-creation of the events) in the fictional evocation of the past.“ (p.2) In the novel, there is careful attention to fiction writing as an art. This can be recognized in the way in which the plot is built up, the way in which the dialogue is constructed, and how each character is drawn with careful attention to each detail. Adichie documents the Nigeria-Biafra War, but the story

revolves around how this particular period in time was experienced by the characters. Adichie uses the different characters to demonstrate that there are as many versions of reality as there are people to interpret it; she uses her novel to show these different dimensions of one and the same period in time. Furthermore, by combining history and literary writing, Adichie enables herself to engage with the deep personal connection she has to the Nigeria-Biafra War. In this sense, the novel might have a therapeutic effect for her. After all, as White points out, the discourse of history needs to be written first, before it can be digested. This novel is a personal project for Adichie but it also contains a concern for the entire Igbo community, as the final words of the novel show: „May we always remember“. (Half of a Yellow Sun,

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„Author’s Note“) Adichie uses the intersections of history and literature to keep the past in the present, to keep it alive, and also to make the historical and political history felt.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II:

1. What inspires Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie of writing more about history?

2. Explain how literature and history are interlinked discourses.

7.6 LET SUM UP

Clearly history, literature and trauma theory intersect in many different ways in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and most importantly in the depiction of the central characters. Adichie attempts to represent the daily reality of these characters, which she characterizes as multi-interpretable from multiple perspectives. In doing so, the novel is in line with Ankersmit’s ideas on the nature of reality. Thus, it seems only natural that Adichie should have these different techniques intersect, seeing as to approach reality from only one perspective would be to undermine Ankersmit’s concept of it. Adichie is entirely conscious of the way in which she uses these narrative techniques, as she includes an explanatory note at the end of her novel about the fictional nature of it. This shows that she is aware of the intermediary status of the historical novel between fact and fiction.

The three narrators in the novel are the central elements. It is through them that Adichie is able to blur the boundaries between history, literature and trauma. Adichie applies the historical events to the characters, but the historical dimension never takes over the personal one. The emotional truth is what constitutes the core of the story, and what is highlighted the most throughout the novel. The characters live

through the events of the Nigeria-Biafra War, but what takes precedence is how it felt to be there, and how it still feels. Adichie makes the literary (or personal) and traumatic dimension intersect with the historical one to make the historical and political history felt.

In essence, the novel is Adichie's discourse about the past, and it shows her relationship to that past. As White points out, we can only access history through language, and its discourse must be written before it can be digested. Here history, literature and trauma theory converge, seeing as Adichie uses a literary work to mediate her own relation to a traumatic past. The novel thus also serves a therapeutic function on a higher level than the narration: it helps Adichie deal with the trauma she inherited from her parents. However, the novel also has a memorial function for Adichie. The novel seems to oscillate between laying the ghosts of the past to rest and summoning them. (Durrant, p.9) Perhaps this paradox is Adichie's way of coming to terms with the past. As is illustrated in the novel, working through a trauma is a highly personal matter.

According to White, the historian and the fiction writer come together when the historian has to transform his study into a written form. Adichie engages with this insight by introducing snippets of *The Book* in the novel. Here she lays bare the core of her own project, and writes about it metafictionally. In *Ugwu* and his book, the three narrative techniques again intersect. *The Book* is a mixture of history and literature; *Ugwu*, as Adichie, uses the political to make the personal felt. Also, by introducing the different points of view on history, he indicates that the reality of the past should be seen from multiple perspectives and as multi-interpretable. *Ugwu* „emplots“ the historical events in a chronological and causal story. Furthermore, *The Book* serves as an act of atonement for *Ugwu*; thus it also has a connection to his trauma of the war and the rape. In this way Adichie shows that she is aware of her own strategies as a writer of historical fiction, and of how history and memory are constructed entities.

By making *Ugwu* the author of *The Book* and describing his rise to the role of author Adichie puts emphasis on the human intervention in both the process of writing literature and constructing history. Kellner also

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points out the dimension of human intervention in the writing of stories about history. These stories can be of critical importance for an entire culture because, as White points out, before history can be digested, it needs to be written first. This is where trauma theory ties in to the writing of history; the narration of the trauma is a vital component of overcoming it.

Beside the trauma of the past, Adichie is also concerned with the traumatic after-effects of the period of British colonization that are still present in Nigerian society today. By making Ugwu the author of *The Book*, instead of Richard, Adichie not only validates her own role as a writer but also speaks out strongly about who has the authoritative voice to represent the past of Africa. Adichie writes in a postcolonial context, and as in the term postmemory, the „post“ seems to denote a relationship of connectedness, rather than of a period separated from the one that came before. Her novel is an attempt to understand the ongoing consequences of the colonial era.

Clearly the act of narrating or telling is central to the novel and to the intersection of the three narrative strategies. Adichie grew up dominated by the narratives of her family's traumas of the Nigeria-Biafra War, and she then writes her own narrative about that traumatic past. Again the three narrative techniques intersect. Hirsch uses the term „postmemory“ to refer to Adichie's relationship to the past of her parents. The concept of testimony is of major importance in this relation. Adichie testifies to her own trauma by writing her novel, and she incorporates the importance of testimony in the novel by introducing the individual traumas of the characters. Narrating a traumatic experience is the one way in which a subject can work through the trauma. Ugwu's book, Olanna's testimony to Ugwu and Richard's inability to write about his trauma are all examples of the importance of the articulation of certain traumatic experiences. However, even though trauma theory can be of great use to further

understand the postcolonial context, it is still important to take care when one applies this theory.

After the trauma theory had been applied to the individual cases of the central characters, it has become clear that these might lead to some interesting insights into the workings of trauma, and the way in which trauma is depicted in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Adichie emphasizes the importance of articulating a trauma, and underlines the use of writing a narrative as an integral part of articulating it. Furthermore, the listener is an integral part of the act of testifying. Ugwu shows himself to be an attentive listener to Olanna, and in the novel the shortcomings of the Western subject, who fails to listen to the voice of the postcolonial subject, are illustrated. In her novel, Adichie validates the use of narration and of listening, and shows how literature finds itself at the crossroads of many different disciplines.

7.7 KEYWORDS

1. **Published:** prepare and issue (a book, journal, or piece of music) for public sale.
2. **Pivotal:** of crucial importance in relation to the development or success of something else.
3. **Ethnic:** relating to a population subgroup (within a larger or dominant national or cultural group) with a common national or cultural tradition.
4. **Overpopulated:** populate (an area) in excessively large numbers.
5. **Secession:** the action of withdrawing formally from membership of a federation or body, especially a political state.

7.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- a) What is the contribution of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in the African literature?
- b) Why she chosen to write about history only?
- c) Explain what impacts most in writings of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ?

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7.10 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I :

Answer 1 : Check Section 7.4

Answer 2 : Check Section 7.3

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II :

Answer 1 : Check Section 7.6

Answer 2 : Check Section 7.5