

Review Article

A JOURNEY OF AFRICA THOROUGH THE HEART OF DARKNESS BY JOSEPH CONRAD AS AN OUTSIDER AND THINGS FALL APART BY CHINUA ACHEBE AS AN INSIDER

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Received: 04.11.2019

Revised: 11.12.2019

Accepted: 29.01.2020

ABSTRACT

The depiction of Africa has been an issue since long as the western mindset represented it as a land of hunger, starvation and malnutrition whereas, Africa for the Africans is a land of mystery that can be well explored through deconstructing its myths and stereotypes. The two major classic novel 'The Heart of Darkness' by Joseph Conrad and 'Things Fall Apart' by Chinua Achebe gained immense ground to be read and analyzed together as they depict the two contrasting images of Africa. Both of these novels are modelled upon its author's individual observation and understanding of Africa as a land of mystery with a unique guideline of civilization with a very complex belief system much akin to natural phenomenon rather than being humanly polished with the tincture of artificiality, selfishness and gluttony. To both these novelist, this land remains unconquered 'The Heart of Darkness' is projected under the skin of a defeated idealism by the outsider novelist whereas 'Things Fall Apart' upholds the picture of purity and innocence by the insider novelist whose inheritance is deeply rooted in Africa. So these two novels run on two parallel lines as complimentary texts to be read together in order to understand the incongruities lies beneath the individual perception of both the authors. In this paper an attempt has been made to critically analyze the two opposing projection of Africa in both the novels with the prospect of Conrad as an outsider and Achebe an insider. 'The Heart of Darkness' leaves Conrad in his own territory as a retired captain on board with all calmness whereas 'Things Fall Apart' leaves Chinua Achebe with his symbolic death of Okwonko, that symbolize the death of a culture.

Keywords: Colonizer, Dehumanized, Continent, Subjugated, Civilization.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.02.31>

INTRODUCTION

Standing on the rolling wheels of time, the African sub-continent with all its virginity and rawness seems to hover all over the developmental skies of many of the progressive continents – so claimed, as a baby land still crawling to meet the rising sun of civilization in the eyes of many of the writers, critics, philosophers, foreseers and very mysteriously it is accepted with the bubbles of abhorrence as the 'Dark continent' ever to be explored and explained. Sarcastically enough they uphold, so it be the Europeans or any other developed countries or continents that this "Dark continent" Africa needs all care to make it stand on its own foot or to keep it at par with other civilized nations to taste the sunlight of sanity and human rationality. It is those who feel pity of this aboriginal pre-historic tribe as in infancy and condole with them with their pet phrases as uncivilized, less human, barbaric and brute people by segregating them from the main stream altogether. And most probably under this Eurocentric spell or complex, one of the major novels of Joseph Conrad- The Polish inhabitant and later well-known famous British novelist – "The Heart of Darkness" was brought about. However, this aspect of Africa as it has nothing to inspire except remaining as a blank space on the global graph remains inscrutable with a skeptical mood till the novel "The Heart of Darkness" is refilled with the logical hammering of Chinua Achebe the Nigerian novelist of Igbo tribe with his novel "Things fall Apart" as an insider viewer of Africa in the year 1958.

DISCUSSION

On this prospect it is pertinent to have glimpse on both these works by both Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe side by side either to depreciate Africa as a void one of abysmal miseries and a savage barbaric land of perpetual brutality or to appreciate Africa as a land of rich culture, tradition and customs with their pure form remaining away from affection or trying to protect their culture and belief, from the land of invaders with vested

interest from time to time in the name of spreading the mission of civilization among the African people. However, the present article as it goes under the title "A Journey of Africa through 'The Heart of Darkness' by Joseph Conrad an outsider and 'Things fall apart' Chinua Achebe an Insider is an attempt to establish Africa not as a savage region devoid of Civilization rather to put forth the unimaginable richness of culture and tradition beyond the capacity of human thinking and judging the way of preparation or controlling human behavior not by people but by nature.

On the prospective of making a comparison, it is none the less striking to open the chapters with the vision of Africa with the lines of Joseph Conrad the author of 'The Heart of Darkness' as his Protagonist Marlow, brings about his first sight of Africa:

Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you – smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage and always mute with an air of whispering, come and find out. This one was almost pealines, as if still is the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a closed Jungle, so dark green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled time, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was shoaled by a creeping mist (Conrad 48)."

A close reading of these lines reveals an evocative spirit of a man like Conrad, who fails to portray what real Africa is. He only admits his capacity of comprehending a new land with some negative adjectives like "inviting", "mean", "insipid", "savage", "and always mute" which appears clumsy and unacceptable on one hand and its vast richness, greenness and meaningfulness but only in a less understandable, less comprehensive, less interpretive ways on the other. On the touch stone, also Conrad with the observation of Marlow the central character of his novel 'The Heart of Darkness' seems not to be free from the Eurocentric and European imperialistic view. He also prefers to go

under the spell of an impressionistic mindset for which the African vision gets blurred.

Now, the question arises, why can't this be an African view of Joseph Conrad as an outsider? Moreover, it is pertinently explained that 'The Heart of Darkness' projects the view of Africa as an outsider, a view of the colonizer on the colonized under the prospect of 'Scramble for Africa'. The colonialists are the fortune hunters and there was keen competition among the colonial nations to establish colonies and to plunder the most consumable articles for them and for the longer interest of business economy. The dark land Africa, as it was before its pre-colonial period, was crowded with the colonizers of the French, Belgian, Congo, Algerian, Ethiopian colony and may more. Even The Berlin Conference in 1884 sat to decide the fate of Africa and the Africans seemed to be a formality to make them civilized but it is intended in a fair way to divide the African continent or the African cake among themselves in a much amicable way, that it will not have any squabble or bickering in future as colonizers' domain.

Further the 'expansionist agenda' of the European countries draws much attention why can't Joseph Conrad be grouped one among the colonizers with sympathy and softness in mind towards the subjugated people of the innocent African land. A person with his complexes side by side; a journey maker in the mind of Marlow - Conrad's brain - child - the protagonist of 'The Heart of Darkness' Joseph Conrad prepares his life's journey, as a seeker of fortune, to cherish his wish to be the captain of a steamer - ship with a mind to earn more by being an orphan by fate through as a man of sharp intelligence, high philosophical bent of mind, diplomatic vision, a thorough diver into human tendency. His Journey in the form of Marlow shifts him symbolically from one place to the other with a deeper understanding of his inner self. When this journey by Conrad continues from Poland to Great Britain and from Great Britain to Congo region of Africa, being one of the captains of the steamer by Belgian colonial authority and when capitalism and colonialism went together with rapid industrial set up in the European land it appears confusing and absurd. It set aside Joseph Conrad as an individual totally purged off from the colonial motif of the colonizers by putting off all his passion, zeal for his own colonial authority mission and to side with the Africans who are less human and featureless as described before.

In order to prove Joseph Conrad more as an outsider colonizer than to be a sympathetic colonized being, it is appropriate to bring about the undercurrent - thread where colonizers have started colonization as a religion to sustain living and the hidden agenda was that Africa was the most alluring region for cheap raw materials and less labor charge till the abolition of bonded labor system in 1830 and this becomes quite evident as we can see Marlow who works vehemently for the interest of the Belgian colonial authority. Not only this, the emergence of skirmishes between African natives and the colonizers as protest is more devastating that stands opposed to the missionary discourse, where three forth of the African natives were put to death mercilessly through different forms in the colonized areas with the sophisticated arms. This of course relates to the sad tales fabricated by the European mindset in the name of civilizing the African people. This is of course crystal clear when Marlow meets Mr. Kurtz in the central office as an impersonal character with all sincerity for the Belgian authority and surprisingly enough to find heaps of skulls of the African natives who have been killed as a means of subjugation. It all opens the portals of the bloody process of colonization in the name of civilization and it is not appropriate to judge Joseph Conrad from this under-current and to call him as the savior of colonized or who holds a sympathy for the Africans.

Thus, within the purview of 'The Heart of Darkness' where Africa is looked down upon by many of the readers and where the picture of Africa looked hazy, indistinct, mystery black and dark and there was a need of an emancipator - Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist appeared with the rays of hope through his novel 'Things fall Apart', that opened a new vista for Africa where it could be viewed from internally as a land of inheriting its rich culture and civilization with close communion with nature which might have shaped the timber of African culture which is unique and primitively original and to be understood from within; not from outside. Backed by this stuff and vigor as a native of Nigeria born and brought up under the African sky and being schooled in one of the Christian missionary schools and descending from an Igbo tribe came with a quoted title of his novel "Things fall Apart" - as Yeatsian line of this famous poem "The Second Coming" as depicted;

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall Apart;
The center cannot hold (Yeats, 14)

With an honest mindset, as an ardent seeker of African culture Achebe of course, did not believe in the stereotypes that English writers have created about Africa in their works. To uphold his native, indigenous identity, Chinua Achebe changed his name from Albert Chinuamogolu Achebe to Chinua Achebe when he joined the University of Ibadan. Through his writings he always wanted to improve the image of Africa which is real. He has rightly chosen an appropriate title 'Things fall Apart' and the center happens to be his central character - Okwonko can't hold. Utter chaos and confusion spreads over the mind of the set believers of Conrad's views as what to fall and why to fall, and how to fall? This short of fundamental questions obviously pull the readers and the non-readers inside the real African region where a much higher truth prevails which itself explains that Africa was already rich in its culture and there was no necessity of restructuring it or sufficing it with the name of colonial discourse of civilizing Africa.

The novelist Chinua Achebe goes on detailing about the African ways of living well within its culture and customary boundary by choosing his characters, situation and settings typical to the African natives where they have their unique culture, tradition and social stigmas that are reflected in their behavior and attitude in a very unique way both politically, geographically and socially with all social forms and taboos. By being so much conditioned, being well within their social boundary they cannot be dehumanized and if dehumanized they must be because of a typical perennial bias that exist in the eyes of an outsider who cannot bring the whole picture of the Africans which is inexhaustible and thus cannot be the controlling feature of a leading work of art.

The novel 'Things fall Apart' spontaneously exposes the character - protagonist Okwonko as the son of a father who was of very weak mentality, who succumbs to the negative side of an African race where masculine forces were always considered leading and prominent. Okwonko's family journey what is stated chronologically in the novel, he is forced from within to establish himself as a leading masculine and physically stubborn fellow, though he has posed a character just the opposite of his father and all his psychology project him to be a hero - negative as he happens to be an outlaw by committing murder and beating his young wife mercilessly during a period when it is all denied to do so with the female beings. He even kills his own son 'Nwoye' in a frenzied mood, as he joins a colonial missionary school against his norms and considering him eliminate. Even his offending and beating of his young wife projects Okwonko as a character searching escape not to be described or identified with his

father's passivity and subjugated weak mentality. Throughout his life's journey he struggles for an identification not for himself but for his whole clan and tribe and not to succumb to the missionary tricks for which he never hesitates to kill the envoy of the missionary authority and for which he is finally surrounded by the district commissioner with armed personnel and he is hanged by himself, putting an end to his life by finding no other efficacious way than to keep him out of touch with the colonizers' mission of civilization. So, Okwonko's stubbornness is not for an individual but for a cause and community to remain within its judicious boundary and not to cross the limit or to accept transmigration of greed, violence and corruption. Okwonko's journey against the so-called colonial missionaries is more than a journey of the spirit of freedom as natural as it may be not a journey against bondage and serfdom as he knows how in the name of colonial discourse the colonizers prepare the way hook or by crook to divide and possess the African cake.

Not only this, the character, Ibo-Man displays enough as a translator to understand more than his own language, as he understands and masters better English. So, the narrator establishes the elasticity and informative brain of the so-called de-human African natives. Sarcastically enough he leaves a question to the readers whether or not the African community members are less human and featureless? whether the African or the Europeans are better? The colonized or the colonizers better?

The settings of the novel, the place or the area reveals Okwonko – the central character of 'Things Fall Apart' is an accepted leader not of one clan and not of one unit umofia – the village but of nine units which claims that the Africans were also aware of the unitary principals of governance and the geographical unit as a part of culture as well as traditional operation. Even at the time of harvesting, the celebration happens to be a part of their own customs and traditions. Chinua Achebe has very sympathetically and carefully presented the rich cultural trends in such a natural way from inside Africa that the European culture seems bizarre and there is off course no necessity of civilizing the Africans in the name of civilization.

CONCLUSION

However, within the limited circle of the article the last chapter of the novel 'Things Fall Apart' probably goes under the subtitle: 'The pacification of the primitive tribes of lower Niger' suggests the bloody subjugation process of the colonizers to tame the Africans against their natural sanctity to which they cling their hope not to give and not to take more. The geographical search and the horizon expansionist theory find defeated finally with the symbolic suicide death of the protagonist: Okwonko, the chief of the Igbo tribe of the village Umofia where he cannot find any other alternative way better than ending his life's journey thereby putting a question and leaving a cause behind to brood over impartially whether to accept or reject colonialism as an European imperialism based on expansion and aggrandizement of articles so much necessitated in the European market as symbolized as ivory in the price of belittling and deforming Africa culture. As the protagonist of the outcry against a social culture of Africa, Okwonko feels helpless to unite and to form a matching group against the European missionaries' armed personnel as the center he cannot hold the situation and surroundings at a time under his control to lead his journey any further. So the district commissioner deployed in charge of the lower Nigeria ends the chapter with the title "The pacification of

the primitive tribes of lower Niger". And finally Africa is gifted with a better awakened territory that lends the resolution of "Cubist Movement" where we always prefer to remain under the mask than to borrow artificiality and out of home attribute of getting civilized. The novel ends and opens with a new vista of not exploit a tribe from its rational land in the name of civilization. The journey of Joseph Conrad, hence begins and ends with Africa as a land of "Darkness" really a mysterious one to the outsiders when the journey of Chinua Achebe begins and ends with a lighted and brighter Africa that needs to be explored and which is inspiring and not be inspired.

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