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**CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNAL DISSENSION AND DEEP-ROOTED  
TABOOS WITHIN THE AFRICAN SOCIETY AS DEPICTED IN CHINUA  
ACHEBE'S TRILOGY**

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**Abstract:**

*Chinua Achebe, one of the greatest novelists of African literature, is mainly famous for his trilogy which consists of Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease and Arrow of God. He has gained immense popularity among the readers across the world for his trilogy. These novels are important for two reasons; firstly, in these novels Achebe has countered the European writers' depiction of Africa as a dark, uncivilized continent and secondly, Achebe wanted to bring back the lost self-confidence of the African readers who had developed a wrong notion about their continent. They had a deep-rooted belief that Africans have borrowed civilization from the Europeans and they have no history of their own. Chinua Achebe has depicted the true picture African society and its relation with the colonizers in an unbiased way. He prefers to reveal the darker side of both traditions as well as the better side to leave us to draw our own conclusions as argued by David Cook. Chinua Achebe shared the similar view with W.B Yeats who believed that a civilization falls due to two reasons- external & internal. In Achebe's trilogy the internal cracks within the African society is quite discernable along with the external forces. If we talk about our own country then we can see that our motherland had been under the British rule for almost two hundred years. The treachery of Mirjafar, the disunity among the Indian leaders and the rigid caste system of our country immensely helped the colonizers to spread their tentacles in India. Similarly, the internal dissension in African society paved the way for the Europeans to solidify their influence on African society.*

**Keywords:** *Dissension, Cracks, Colonizers, Africans, Okonkwo, Ezeulu, etc.*

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, the protagonist, is man of action. He becomes very popular in Umuofia after defeating Amalinze the cat. Okonkwo's father Unoka, on the other hand, is a lazy man. He likes to spend his time in merry making and playing on his flute. He often borrows money from his neighbours & never repays. Unoka does not pay any attention to his wives and children in his life time. He is a complete failure in his life. For this reason, Okonkwo has immense hatred for his improvident father. Okonkwo was ruled by one passion- to hate everything that his father Unoka loved. He abhors his father's gentleness & idleness. Nwoye, Okonkwo's son closely resembles his grandfather Unoka. Okonkwo fears that his son will end up a failure like Unoka. Okonkwo who held an important position in Umuofia was given the responsibility to take care of Ikemefuna. Ikemefuna was given up to Umuofia by a neighbouring clan, Mbaino as a sacrifice to settle the dispute between two clans. Actually, the people of Umuofia became very angry when Ezeugo, Ogbuefiudo's wife, was killed at Mbaino. So, in order to appease the anger of the people of Umuofia the people of Mbaino gave them a young boy & a virgin girl. In course of time Ikemefuna and Nwoye developed a strong bond between

them. Okonkwo also loved Ikemefuna dearly. However Okonkwo's tragedy began when Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a respected person of the clan, informed Okonkwo about the oracle's wish. According to the oracle's wish, Ikemefuna must be killed by the people of Umuofia. But, Ezeudu advised Okonkwo not to participate in killing Ikemefuna as he called him father. But, his fear and pride forced him to kill Ikemefuna with his machete. After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo's became very disappointed. He could not take any food for a few days. He could not even sleep properly because of his misdeed. Another important event was the funeral of Ogbuefi Ezeudu. In Ezeudu's funeral Okonkwo's gun exploded & accidentally killed Ezeudu's son. For this 'female crime' he was sent into exile for seven years.

Achebe says, "His life had been ruled by a great passion- to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like fish on to a dry, Sandy beach, panting" (Achebe, 92). After completing his exile, when he came back to Umuofia he saw a sea-change in his community. The white settlers established their own church, law & government. Many people were coming converted to Christianity. The clash between the colonizers & the colonised reached to the climax when Enoch, a convert unmasked an egwugwu during an annual ceremony. After this incident the egwugwu burnt down churches as unmasking an egwugwu was a humiliating act for them. Later, during a meeting with his clansman Okonkwo killed one of the messengers of the colonizers. But, to his utter surprise Okonkwo noticed that his fellow clansman didn't join him during his fight with the messenger. Okonkwo realised that his clan would not go for a war with the whites. This realisation forced him to commit suicide. Now, I'll try to find out the internal cracks that paved the way for the colonizers.

In Umuofia the people with achievements were highly respected and the people who faced failure in their lives were called agbala. Once Okonkwo addressed a man Osugo as 'woman' and this attitude towards a man with no title created rift among the people of Umuofia and the colonizers capitalised the rift to the fullest.

Wife beating was prominent in Umuofia. Okonkwo beats his wife severely during the week of peace which was sacred for the people of Umuofia. Ojiugo's fault was that she went plait her hair at her friend's without preparing the afternoon meal. Achebe says, "And when she returned he beat her very heavily. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the week of peace. His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (Achebe, 23). This inhuman treatment of women led them to go against their husband and take recourse to something different. In *Arrow of God*, there are few lines which justify the fact that women were treated like an object". Different people have different reasons for marrying. Apart from children which we all want, some men want a woman to help on the farm, others want someone to cook their meals, some want a woman to help on their farm, others want someone they can beat". This inhuman treatment of the women led them to go against their husbands and take recourse to something different. Nwoye's laziness was a major concern for Okonkwo. For his laziness, he was often beaten by his father. The narrator says, "he (Okonkwo) sought to correct him (Nwoye) by constant nagging & beating. And so Nwoye was developing into a sad-faced youth" (Achebe, 12). The death of Ikemefuna by the hands of Okonkwo created a gap between them. And later Nwoye, disgusted by his father's attitude, accepted Christianity. Another important incident that shows the friction in the African society is that when Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudu's son during his funeral.

After this incident, Achebe says, "a large number of people from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound & set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals & destroyed his barn" (Achebe, 87). Okonkwo's best friend Obierika raised a pertinent question on the unpardonable action of his fellow men. "Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently?" (Achebe, 87)

The Osus or outcasts we're not allowed to live with the Igbo people. The Osus had to live in a special area of the village. So, there was a disharmony between the free-born people and the Osu people. The colonizers took the full advantage of their lack of harmony". These outcasts or Osu, seeing that new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received" (Achebe, 110).

Twins we're not accepted in the Igbo society. They were considered as abomination. Immediately after their birth, they were thrown into the Evil Forest. Nneka was one such woman who

had to bear the pain of her separation from her new born children. The narrator says, “Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and childbirths. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such woman and we’re not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was good riddance” (Achebe, 107).

In this way the supremacy of the whites became more firmly established mainly because of the divisions and dissensions among the local people themselves. The white brought a new religion, a new government and established schools and law courts. Slowly but steadily, the white settlers solidify their ground in Umuofia due to the internal cracks in African society. And it becomes clear when Obierika tells Okonkwo, “How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He had put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe, 124).

In Arrow of God, there is a dispute between Umuaro, which consists of six villages, and Okperi. Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu forbids the people of Umuaro to go for a war against Okperi over the dispute of a land. He warns that the land belongs to the people of Okperi & if the people of Umuaro go for unjust war they will be deprived of the favour of Ulu. According to Ezeulu, “It was Okperi who gave us a piece of their land to live in. They also gave us their deities-their Udo and their Ogwugwu”. But, Nwaka, Ezeulu's arch rival instigated the people of Umuaro and they went for a war against Okperi. Nwaka says, “We shall fight for our farmland and for the contempt Okperi has poured on us. Let us not listen to anyone trying to frighten us with the name of Ulu”. A few men from both the sides were killed in this war. Winterbottom, the British district officer took the full toll of this conflict between Umuaro and Okperi. He, along with his soldier, stopped to the war and destroyed all the guns used by the people of both sides. Jai Ram Jha argues, “The dissension within the African society is merely precipitated by the interference of the the white man, and this unhappy realization is only dexterously projected through Arrow of God” (Jha).

There dissension within the African society comes to the surface when captain Winterbottom says to Mr Clarke, an assistant district officer that, “Those guns have a long and interesting history. The people of Okperi and their neighbours, Umuaro, are great enemies. Or they were before I came into the story. A big Savage war had broken out between them over a piece of land. This feud was made worse by the fact Okperi welcomed missionaries and government while Umuaro, on the other hand, has remained backward” (Achebe, 325).

There is internal disharmony among the sons of Ezeulu. Edogo, eldest son of Ezeulu, is jealous of Nwafo, the youngest one Edogo thinks that after Ezeulu’s death Nwafo will be the next chief of Ulu. So, he joins hands with Nwaka, opponent of Ezeulu.

The decision of Ezeulu to send his son Oduche to church went against him. Achebe says, “He also wanted him to learn the white man's wisdom, for Ezeulu knew from what he saw of wintabota & the stories he heard about his people that the white man was very wise” (Achebe, 330). Inspired by the Christian missionaries, Oduche decided to kill the royal python which belonged to the god Idemili. Later, out of fear, he changed his decision and put the python in a box. When the priest of Idemili came to know about this incident he became furious and asked for an explanation from Ezeulu about this Ezeulu’s decision to send his son to learn the secrets of the white men created suspicion among the people of according to the people of Umuaro Ezeulu is responsible for the arrival of the colonizers in their village. Achebe shares the same view when he utters these following lines “Umuaro will always say that you betrayed them before the white man. And they will say that you are betraying them again today by sending your son to join in desecrating the land” (Achebe, 418). But, Ezeulu is not ready to accept this allegation against him. He gives his argument in the following manner, “Let me ask you one question. Who brought the white man here? was it Ezeulu? we want to war against okperi who are our blood brothers over a piece of land which did not belong to us and you blame the white man for stepping in. Have you not heard that when two brothers fight a stranger reaps the harvest?” (Achebe, 418). However, Ezeulu realises that the white settlers are spreading their influence in Umuaro. Achebe says, “But now Ezeulu was becoming afraid that the new religion was like a leper. Allow him a handshake and he wants to embrace” (Achebe, 330).

Ezeulu has a vision in which he realises that his real battle is with his own people not with the white man at all. In his vision, he sees Nwaka challenges ulu and the people spitting on him, saying he is the priest of dead God.

The disagreement between Ezeulu and the people of Umuaro reached to the peak when Ezeulu denies announcing the Feast of Yam. He can't declare Feast of the Yam because he has three yams left with him. Ezeulu can only declare a new festival when there is only one yam left from the last. He was unable to eat the sacred yams due to his imprisonment in Okperi. The people of Umuaro are horrified. If they wait for three months before they are allowed to harvest their crops will be ruined and they will suffer widespread famine.

So, the people of Umuaro are now ready to go against Ezeulu. Achebe narrates, "Almost overnight Ezeulu had become something of a public enemy in the eyes of all and, as was to be expected, his entire family shared in his guilt. His children came up against it on their way to the stream & his wives suffered hostility in the market" (Achebe, 495).

Mr Good country, catechist of saint Mark's C.M.C church, seizes the opportunity for fruitful intervention in the crisis of umuaro over the New Yam Feast. He declares that if the people of Umuaro make their thanksgiving offer to the god of the Christians they could harvest their crops without the fear of Ulu.

Margaret E. Turner argues that "Arrow of God is the central novel in Achebe's work as it describes the relationship between religion & social order. The loss of spiritual bearings causes the collapse of both the individual and social order" (Turner, 36).

No Longer at ease, Achebe's second novel, and deals with the decline of social values in Nigeria in 1950s. The protagonist of this novel is Obi Okonkwo who is a brilliant student but ends up in jail for taking bribe. Obi Okonkwo is the victim be of two cultures- Igbo & English.

Obi falls in love with a girl called Clara who belongs to Osu or outcaste. Obi cannot marry her because his parents disallow their union. Obi's father says to obi, "Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame & of leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children. Who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your son marry? Think of that my son" (Achebe, 256 & 257).

Obi's mother also threatened him by saying that if he marries her (Clara) she will commit suicide. Clara, after realising that their Union is impossible, wants to break up with obi. "I am an Osu, she wept silence. She stopped weeping and quietly disengaged herself from him...so you see we cannot get married, she said, quite firmly, almost gaily- a terrible kind of gaiety. Only the tears showed she had wept" (Achebe, 207).

Though she is pregnant with Obi's child, yet he wants to separate from him. With the help of obi, Clara aborted her baby. But the whole experience traumatized her. So, we can say that the internal taboos in African society denied obi and Clara to fulfill their love.

Thus, Chinua Achebe has dexterously brought into light the internal dissension and deep-rooted taboos of African society. And after reading the trilogy of Achebe, the readers can perceive the far-reaching consequences of those taboos and internal dissension in African society.

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