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EZEULU'S INNER CONFLICTS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S ARROW OF GOD

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Abstract:

Chinua Achebe is one of the most acclaimed African writers. Achebe's writings deals with the rich African heritage and Igbo culture, various conflicts between Igbo traditions and Christian modernity, between protagonist and his own community, between the natives and the colonizers, the exploitation of natives at various levels, oppression of the natives and their conversion into Christianity, imposition of Western religion, education and English language, corruption of money, power and natural resources, independence and disillusionment of the natives, and the responsibility of the leaders, intellectuals, elite people and citizens of a newly independent nation. Chinua Achebe's novels can be studied in a variety of ways such as an anthropological studies, postcolonial discourse, novels as history, African heritage, the traditional Igbo culture, and writing back to the centre and so and so forth. Achebe's first three novels are a faithful picture of different conflicts within the protagonists and within the community, and conflicts between the two cultures. It can be observed that Achebe's protagonists are embodiments of heroic qualities and nature. But there are some flows within them and these flows create some kind of conflicts within them.

Keywords: *Identity, Duality, Kashmir Refugee, Iranian Refugee, Vietnamese Refugee, Post-Modernism, etc.*

Conflict within the Protagonist:

One can define the word conflict that two or more persons, ideas, groups of people may have different beliefs, values and they create contradictory situation between them. Whenever it comes to any society, conflicts are inevitable because a society consists of people, groups, different beliefs and worldviews. Being social animal the members of a society are always in each other's contact, in such situations their thoughts, beliefs and ideas to which they stick often clash. Therefore, it can be said that when two different things or cultures meet the conflict is unavoidable.

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* is thematically continuation of the *Things Fall Apart*. The events of the novel revolve around the chief religious priest and British administration in the village, Umuaro; an amalgamation of six villages. The novel is a record of the colonial situations in and around Umuaro. It is also a record of what has happened in the period between *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. Achebe represents clashes arose of the British administration and the local priest. In *Arrow of God* Achebe records a world in which there is a priest, a community full of internal rivalries and jealousies, and the colonial administration with Christian education. The colonial forces have been well settled and exercising its administration and governance far and wide in Africa. The traditional people are still following their way of life under British government but the traditional way of life and



the new administration often get into conflict with each other. Achebe presents personal and internal conflicts with the conflicts between two religions and administrative systems.

The conflicts in *Arrow of God* are developed around the main character Ezeulu, the chief priest of the village deity *Ulu*. The first conflict within the priest is his ambitious nature as a chief priest of *Ulu*. The second conflict is a kind of internal politics in Umuaro between the supporters of the chief priest and those of the supporters of Idemili, the rival god of *Ulu*. The third and the most important conflict is between the local British administration of Captain Winterbottom, the District Officer, and the traditional native authority of the chief priest, Ezeulu.

The leaders of six villages of Umuaro come together and establish a common deity *Ulu* to protect them from neighboring village. They also select their religious leader, Ezeulu and decide his duties too. He is an intelligent and visionary man who is fully aware of his role and his place in his society and knows how to sustain it. Though he is an old man, he is physically strong that is why he denies his weak eye sight, "Ezeulu did not like to think that his sight was no longer as good as it used to be and that some day he would have to rely on someone else's eyes-" (Achebe, *AOG*, 01). Prof. Nahem Yousaf points to Ezeulu's primary behaviour as, "Ezeulu is reluctant to rely on any one's judgment but his own" (Yousaf, 478). Ezeulu, to show his physical power, tenses his arm and puts more power into his grip, when the young men shake hands with him and they wince and recoil with pain by Ezeulu's grip. As the novel opens, he is looking at the sky finding signs of the new moon. It is his duty to eat one of the thirteen sacred yams at every new moon to maintain the agricultural calendar of his community. His duty is to act as an arrow in the bow of the god, to interpret the will of the god *Ulu* to his people and in this way, he is an intermediary between god and the village, Umuaro. While performing his religious duty, he thinks about his immense powers and his office, and wonders at the true nature of his position and power. He thinks about his control over the New Year, crop and over the people and feels proud of his powers. It is his right and duty to name the day for *New Yam Festival* although he does not decide it because, "He was merely a watchman-No! the Chief Priest of *Ulu* is more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival-no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? - He would not dare (Achebe, *AOG*, 3).

Ezeulu broods over the limitation of his power as a religious leader. His powers have a precise nature and the powers are for the welfare of his community rather than his personal gain or will. Ezeulu examines the nature of his power in his soliloquy: "Take away that word dare," he replied to this to his enemy. "Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not been born yet" (Achebe, *AOG*, 04).

The role of mere watchman is unacceptable to the chief priest. Though Ezeulu has powers, he thinks that what is the use of such power which cannot be exercised? He develops a kind of tension within himself about the absoluteness and limitations of his powers. He tries to mix himself with his god *Ulu*, to exercise his power. One can say that Ezeulu is arrogant and mere an arrow in the bow of god. His use of the word 'dare' suggests that if Ezeulu decides he can forget about the limitations of his office and will extend it not as an arrow but as the god. Umuaro knows that Ezeulu is half man and half spirit. But he tries to be full spirit. Eustace Palmer sums up his character as, "Ezeulu appears to be spiteful, ill tempered, contemptuous, overbearing, tactless, proud, haughty, uncompromising and even vindictive" (Palmer, 94). Hence, he suffers by this conflict within his two personalities spiritual and human. Throughout the novel, he is trapped in his dilemma about true nature of his power. He identifies himself with the god *Ulu* in such a way that he cannot separate himself from his god and feels duality of his personality as a chief priest and mere an arrow to his god. This thought creates pride and arrogance in him. He always wants to be powerful and this is his master passion and contrary to it Umuaro people expect a priestly behaviour from him, and this causes the conflict in him. His ambitious nature makes him to impose his own will as *Ulu's* will and to test his powers.



Ezeulu's behaviour in his family is also different. He treats his grown up children like small boys and expects them to act and behave as he wants to be. If any child ever says no to him, he quarrels with him. Edego his elder son remembers what his mother has said about Ezeulu, "Ezeulu's only fault was that he expected everyone-his wives, his kinsmen, his children, his friends and even his enemies-to think and acts like himself. Anyone who dared to say no to him was an enemy" (Achebe, AOG, 93).

In this way, Ezeulu's two divisions; spiritual and human always mingle with each other and create conflicts in Ezeulu. He cannot control his human aspiration taking over his religious duties and it gives birth to other conflicts in his personal and communal life.

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