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IMMORALITY AND EXPLOITATION IN A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

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Abstract:

Almost all the colonized nations were suffered during colonial period. The natives demanded freedom to get rid from all kinds of exploitation by the colonial administration. But for many nations, independence has proved mere disillusionment. As the native leaders, and politicians have turned into neo-colonizers. Chinua Achebe's fourth novel *A Man of the People* set in independent Nigeria. The citizens in the novel are still suffering at the hands of immoral politicians and corrupt leaders. The present research paper is an attempt to analyze the novel for such immoral treatment to the natives and their exploitation by their own political leaders.

Keywords: Exploitation, Immortality, Corruption, Postcolonial, Idealism, etc.

Achebe's fourth novel *A Man of the People* set in an independent Nigeria marks the post-independence situations. Achebe witnesses a rampage misuse of political power, corruption, social unrest, and economic decline in post-independent Nigeria. Achebe, specially, focuses his attention towards the native political leaders, political parties and irresponsible government. He also comments on the false morality and idealism, socio-cultural and political misuse of the Nigerian people by the Nigerian leaders and democratic government. He represents Chief Nanga M. A. as a champion of post-independent politics and neo-colonial and imperialistic behaviour. Odili Samalu, the protagonist, is an intellectual, disillusioned by the immoral and corrupt politics and tries to correct it by his idealism, but he himself becomes a victim of political system.

Achebe outlines the theme of socio-cultural exploitation of women by the immoral husband and rich political leaders. Chief Nanga M. A. is a minister of culture in democratic government, but he himself is uncivilized man. His wife is not educated woman hence; he tortures her for various reasons. He thinks that she does not know the party manners. She cannot speak English, she is not worth to take to any social party or she is not a perfect host at their own parties. He calls her a bush woman. For this reason he is going to marry a beautiful college going young girl, Edna, a *parlour wife*. Chief Nanga has two children and his age is about fifty-eight although is ready to marry a girl who is almost his daughter's age. Edna's father enjoys his son-in-law's money and forces Edna to marry Nanga. Nanga sends the girl in the college to turn her into a *parlour wife* and pays her education expenses. He also gives money to Edna's father for hospital expenses of Edna's mother. Edna's father takes money from Nanga and drinks wine. He expresses his greed, "He will bring and bring and bring and I will eat until I am tired" (Achebe, 93). Odili Samalu also wants to

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win Edna but nor for himself but as a revenge against Nanga who steals his girlfriend, Elsie. Odili tries to expose Nanga's immoral and corrupt character to Edna and to persuade her from the proposed marriage. Edna too doesn't want to marry Nanga, but she cannot do anything because Nanga has spent money on her, her mother and father. She expresses her helplessness in a letter, she writes to Odili,

I am in a jam about the whole thing. If I develop cold feet now my father will almost kill me. Where is he going to fill all the money the man has paid on my head? So it is not so much that I want to be called a minister's wife but a matter of can't help. What is cannot be avoided must be born. What I pray for is happiness. If god says that I will be happy in any man's house I will be happy (Achebe, 111).

It is clear from the above revelation that Edna is neither happy with her father's decision nor with the money and prestige of Chief Nanga. But she is utterly helpless and suffers at the hands of two men; her father and Chief Nanga.

In next incident Nanga reveals his immortality. Odili has been living in Nanga's official residence for some days. He brings his girlfriend Elsie to live with him for a day. Nanga finds the situation favorable because his wife is not in the house. So at night, he intrudes in Elsie's bedroom and rapes her. Odili cannot do anything to save the girl, "Because the man was a minister bloated by the flatulence of ill-gotten-wealth, living in a big mansion built with public money, riding in a Cadillac and watched over by a one-eyed hired thug" (Achebe, 76). In this situation Nanga abuses both Elsie and Odili. Neil McEwan explains Nanga's daring to rape her because of "he presupposes his power to fix anything and anybody" (Achebe, 8).

Then Achebe switches to explain economic exploitation by the traders in Ananta, the village where Odili is a teacher and the native village of Chief Nanga. As Obi returns from capital city Bori, he sees on the way, a huge crowd in front of Josiah's bar cum shop. Odili eagerly tries to find out what is going on there and joins the commotion. Then he comes to know that Josiah, the trader, invites Azoge, a blind beggar in his shop. He offers the beggar rice to eat and plenty of palm wine. While Azoge eat, Josiah takes away his walking stick and replaces it with another stick. But the blind beggar after eating finds that the stick is different, a strange one and begins to shout. Then the people explain that Josiah is very cunning trader. All he wants to make a medicine for trade. After the incident Josiah hides in the closed shop and hears Azoge and a woman saying, "So the beast is not satisfied with all the money he takes from us and must now make a medicine to turn us into blind buyers of his wares" (Achebe, 87). Josiah wants to blind his customers and wants to earn profit by means of exploitation.

A Man of the People criticizes the political exploitation of the characters and common people. The immoral government has very intellectual and highly educated ministers as well as fools too. The finance minister has a Ph. D. in public finance and proposes a plan to come out of the sudden slowdown in coffee prices, but the price cut is not acceptable to the Prime Minister. Contrary to it, he dismisses the Finance Minister and his team and narrates a different story to the nation that the Finance Minister and his supporters are conspirators. They are anti-nationalists and want to pull down the government with the help of certain external powers. Prof. Supriya Nair quotes Achebe's view on the issues that "The dismissal of the native Other by the colonizers was

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repeated by the petit bourgeois leaders who ignored the needs of the people and continued to exploit them” (Achebe, 111).

In postcolonial nation the democratic government exploits the credibility of the nation and voters, who have voted them for better future. They create false situations and drama of progress and impose their decision on common public.

The most immoral and corrupt man in the cabinet is Chief Nanga, the Minister of Culture. He has the rare gift of befooling people. He knows how to use his political power for personal gain. For instance, the ministry of Foreign Trade decides twenty percent rise in import duty on certain textiles from the *New Year*. But the firm, British Amalgamated manages to send three shipload textiles in December. It is clear that someone has informed the firm about the proposed rise in the tax. Later on it is found that Chief Nanga holds the Foreign Trade Department two years ago, and he might have informed the firm. This act of Nanga causes the government to lose huge revenue from the company.

Moreover, Nanga exploits people from his constituency for votes. As he comes to know that Odili Samalu is contesting his Assembly seat from Urua. He uses his political power and takes away the pipes from Urua village. The Government lays water pipe line in Urua, and the same pipes he takes away and threatens the people, if they vote Nanga he will return the pipes. He takes the pipes in neighboring village Ichida. Nanga promises the people of Ichida that he will implement the water scheme in the village but the villagers never see a single pipe in their village. Prof. Supriya Nair observes Nanga’s political conspiracy and attacks, “party leaders would go to any lengths to win the election, using brute force where bribery could not achieve results” (Achebe, 114).

The political leaders do not hesitate to exploit their voter by using every mean trick with immorality. Chief Nanga harasses Odili’s father by using political pressure. Odili’s father is a chairman of People’s Organization Party in Urua, Nanga too belongs to this party. Nanga finds that Odili’s father supports Odili in the present election because the election campaign of Common People’s Convention party begins in his compound. Then Nanga visits Odili and his father and offers money to step back from the candidature but Odili does not accept the offer. As a result Nanga uses his political pressure. After some days Odili hears special announcement on radio that, “Mr. Hezekiah Samalu, chairman of P. O. P. in Urua, had been “ignominiously removed from his office for subversive, antiparty activities-” (Achebe, 133). Nanga does not stop here, he sends the local Council Tax Assessment Officer to issue a notice to Odili’s father of reassessment of his income. Odili finds that five hundred pound have been added in it as an alleged income from certain business. It is clear that Odili’s father does not have any business at all. It is pure political trick to force Odili to step down. Nanga insults Odili on the stage of his own election campaign. His thugs beat Odili and the people also join in beating. These events criticize not only Nanga but also the general public. According to David Carroll, the trader Josiah tries to blind his customers by stealing and using the blind beggar’s stick (Achebe, 70). But Chief Nanga has blinded them already, he steals the traditional ethics of the people, and they are not able to understand and control Chief Nanga. He blinds them and they cannot see his immorality, corruption, and their own exploitation before, during and after the election campaign. As Nanga wins the election unopposed, he disbands his private army for prestigious issues and to update his status before Prime Minister. But some thugs in his army refuse to be disbanded and stage a minor battle in the streets. They go on a rampage, sacking the shops in the market, seizing women’s wares and beating



up people to whom they meet. They threaten and create fearful atmosphere among the innocent people without any reason.

Odili's father has also misused his power. He is retired as a district interpreter. A District Officer is a kind of supreme deity and the District Interpreter is the principal minor god who carries prayers and sacrifices to the supreme Deity. Interpreters are so powerful; they are also rich, greedy hence hated by the people. The people bring gifts, of yam, pots of wine, bottles of European drink, goats, sheep and chicken to his father. Odili remembers his father used to slaughter a goat every Saturday, which for a common family is not possible once in two years. Odili's family is so rich because his father has accumulated more wealth by means of corruption and misuse of power. In this way, Achebe has presented the exploitative and corrupt political leaders and ministers. Satirically Nanga is called *Man of the People*. But Professor Neil McEwan proposes that, "One of the novel's messages is that men of the people should be received with intelligent suspicion rather than with songs and dances" (Achebe, 92).

To conclude, the novel creates a sense of betrayal of Nigerian independence by both the internal and external exploitative system of governance. The prolonged colonial domination has formed the African character with exploitative values and the native elites have become the new destinies of the nation. The political leaders are not only exploiting the common people but also every governing system, public funds, and national resources.

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