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**Exploitation of the Natives by the Natives**

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**Abstract:**

Achebe has projected the rich traditions, great warriors, traditional religion and the culture of Igbo people in his novels. But while doing this he does not forget the shortcomings, inhuman behavior, and exploitative nature of some of his people. Achebe as a teacher has fingered at the errors, guilt, and brutality in his culture, people and even religion too. As a committed writer, he scrutinizes every aspect of his community, and if there is any evil whether social, political or religious, he corrects it by ridiculing it. His first three novels are embodiment of colonial exploration and exploitation of the natives. He has very minutely analyses the exploitation of the natives by the White church, administration and education. But while doing this he does not forget to highlight the exploitative nature of his own people too. This research paper is an attempt to analyze Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* these three novels also keenly represents the exploitation of the Africans by the Africans.

**Discussion:**

Achebe is conscious about his role in an independent nation, and he makes other writers conscious and wants them to be the torch bearer, educators and teachers. He ridicules the worst and praises the best in his community as well as in his nation.

Achebe begins his attack on unfair behaviour of the Africans towards the Africans in his first novel *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo, the protagonist, is a warrior and great man in Umuofia. He earns fame and wealth by his personal achievements and hard work on his farm, and defeating the enemy in wrestling and in clan's war.

He is physically strong and works hard on his farm throughout a year. He wants to be a rich man. Hence, he makes his wives and children to work with him as hard as he does. But his wives and children are not capable to work equally with him and "they dared not complain openly" (TFA, 13). It suggests their sufferings and exploitation by Okonkwo.

Okonkwo's father had been a poor man and was called a woman. Because of his father Okonkwo hates womanly emotions and nature. He always behaves like a man and

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praises masculinity and condemns femininity. This nature of Okonkwo creates problems to others specially his wives and children. His elder son Nwoye is not growing according to his expectations as strong and masculine. Okonkwo tries to correct his behavior “by constant nagging and beating” (TFA, 14). Okonkwo’s wives and children live under his perpetual fear. He wants his wives to tell the stories of manliness, war and heroic pursuits instead of women’s stories to his children. Okonkwo sits in his obi and tells children masculine stories, even though he finds that Nwoye develops feminine qualities and would not be able to do heroic action and would cause shame for his father. He beats him, and his constant beating causes the boy’s development into, “a sad-faced youth” (AFA, 14). Okonkwo’s such treatment to Nwoye proves his exploitative behaviour towards his son and wives. Okonkwo rules his household with heavy hand and creates fearful atmosphere among his woman flock. Whenever someone makes him angry, he does not speak but beats. For example Okonkwo’s second wife cuts a few leaves off the Banana tree to wrap some food. Okonkwo finds that the Banana tree is almost killed by his wife, so he beats her heavily. But in reality the Banana tree is much alive. He always finds chance to prove his manliness. In second incident his younger wife Ojiugo goes to plait her hair and does not come in time to prepare meal for Okonkwo and her children. He waits for her in vain. As she returns, he beats her ignoring the *Week of Peace*. It is clear from the above examples that to show his manliness, and to control his wives, he takes advantage of the situations. Prof. S. A. Khayyoom searches the reason behind Okonkwo’s constant beating of his son Nwoye and his wives and argues, “Okonkwo’s conscious and constant attempt to erase the image of his dead father from his mind nearly dehumanizes him” (1998, p. 65).

A daughter of Umuofia is killed when she has been to the market in Mbaino. Umuofia gets a young boy Ikemefuna and a virgin as a compensation. The virgin is given to the man whose wife is killed, and the boy is sent into Okonkwo’s household. Ikemefuna is unable to understand why he has to leave his mother, sisters, and his home. He does not eat for many days and weeps throughout the days. He remembers how his mother and sister wept. The young boy, his mother, and sister suffer from nothing they have done. Their traditional laws about compensation cause their sufferings. The innocent boy somehow assimilates into Okonkwo’s household, and becomes friend of Okonkwo’s son, Nwoye.

He becomes very intimate with every member of the family. Ikemefuna calls Okonkwo father. He lives for three years in Okonkwo’s house. Then one day *the Oracle of Hills and Caves* decides his fate and commands the elders of Umuofia that the boy should be sacrificed. On the day of his sacrifice, the elders take him into the forest and Okonkwo himself murders Ikemefuna. When Okonkwo’s friend Obierika asks him that he should not have taken part in the murder because, the boy calls him father. Whereupon Okonkwo defends that he has just executed the wish of the Oracle. But the readers are able to understand that Okonkwo in order to prove his manliness has exploited the situation in which

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Ikemefuna has to die. It means that Okonkwo has not only exploited the situation but the tender boy Ikemefuna too.

There is another example of social harassment in *Things Fall Apart*. If a woman gives birth to twins, it is abomination for the community. So they throw twins into the Evil Forest to die. Neka is a woman in Umuofia, who gives birth to twins every time, and her husband throws the twins in the Evil Forest. Moreover, her family has become critical about her and tortures her for every reason. Therefore, she joins the Christianity to escape from her exploitation in family. This custom is a social evil and it exploits both the mother as well as the twins. Achebe, then attack on *osu* cult. *Osu* is an outcast. He or she is not allowed to live with common person. An *osu* is dedicated to god and the further generations of an *osu* automatically become *osu*. An *osu* person cannot take any title, he cannot touch other people, and he lives a forbidden life in a corner of the village, specially near the Evil Forest. The traditional community treats *osu* people inhumanly for generations.

Then economic exploitation can be seen in the second novel *No Longer at Ease*. The novel is written in Nigeria's transition period from colonial to independence. In this period many Nigerians are exposed to European education at local level in the schools run by missionaries and even in European Universities. The White administration appoints educated people on some clerical posts, court messenger, and teacher and in post office. This appointment does not happen innocently and the native employee too is not innocent. The native employer exploits their own people in the name of British rule.

Joshua Udo, a messenger in the post office is driven out of his service by his senior clerk, who is also an African. At the time of appointment, Udo promises a bribe of ten pounds to the senior clerk. So the senior clerk waits for some time, but Udo fails to complete the payment of ten pounds. The senior clerk traps Udo while he sleeps on duty. But Udo strongly stresses that he never sleeps on duty hours. It is only a kind of revenge by the senior clerk to sack ten pounds. It means senior clerk being an African has the colonial mentality. In another incident Obi witnesses that the police men demand money from the lorry and private bus drivers. When Obi pays a short visit to his home at Umuofia, he travels by a mammy wagon sharing the driver's seat. A few miles after Lagos, the mammy wagon is stopped by two policemen. One asks the driver the documents and the other deals with the driver's mate for bribe. As the driver's mate is about to hand over some money to the policeman, the police man sees that Obi is looking at them. So he does not accept the money and the other policeman finds fault with the documents. The driver again meets the same police man on some distance out of passengers gaze, and the police man takes ten shillings bribe from the driver. The police men accept bribes from the drivers openly on the highway and exploit the drivers of bus, lorry or another vehicle. Obi is disappointed by this kind of exploitation of common people by the police.

*No Longer at Ease* is a fine example of social exploitation. Obi meets Clara in England during his studies and falls in love with her. Both come to Nigeria by the same boat and Obi decides to marry but Clara does not agree. Obi insists the cause of her denial. Clara answers that she is an *osu*. Obi thinks that it does not matter because they are educated and do not mind such bush things. Obi hopes that his father will permit him to marry an *osu* girl, because they are Christian and all are equal in Christianity. But Obi's father, Issac Okonkwo does not permit. He strongly opposes the marriage because it will spoil not only Obi but his future generations too. Obi's mother threatens Obi, if he marries the *osu* girl, she will kill herself. Otherwise, he has to wait till her death. This strong opposition from his parents shocks Obi. He thinks, it scandalous that a man cannot marry because her forefathers had been dedicated to God, and their decedents are also barred to marry the freeborn. Obi mourns the braking of their love-relationship because of the tradition and as they cannot get married, Clara has to abort child in her womb. In this way, both Obi and Clara are exploited by the rigid traditions and tribal mentality. Social exploitation can be understood in terms of the rigid, age old and narrow-minded practices of the Africans.

The rigid behaviour of society can be traced in Achebe's third novel *Arrow of God*. The events in the novel revolve around the chief priest, the chief deity and the village, Umuaro. The six leaders of different but neighboring villages unite into one village, Umuaro, because they are attacked by their neighboring villages like Abame. The British colonizers are settled there. They pull together the native men and send them to new lands as slaves. The village Abame strikes the neighboring village, "in the dead of night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery" (AOG, 15). The inhabitants of Abame bring the persons from the neighboring villages and hand over them to colonizers to be sent to new lands as slaves. Thus, the natives of Abame being Africans, they behave inhumanly with their brothers, sisters and children too.

One of the central themes of *Arrow of God* is the exploitation of a society by its leader; priest. Ezeulu is a religious and social leader of Umuaro. He guides his society and is responsible for the happiness and misery. But he turns into a stubborn man in the course of the novel. It happens that the District Officer arrests Ezeulu after his denial of the offer of *Warrant Chief*. Before his arrest, he pleads his people to assist him to the Government Hill, the office of the colonizers. But no one is ready to go with him because they think that Ezeulu is the friend of the White man who has called him as a friend. Nwaka, a rival to Ezeulu, convinces his people not to accompany Ezeulu and let him go alone to face the might of White man. And after his arrest, nobody comes to rescue him from the White man's custody and sufferings. The villagers turn their back to him and Ezeulu is left to suffering of British Administration. The administration detains him for thirty two days. Only for this reason, Ezeulu determines to take revenge with his own people at the right time, means at the time of *New Yam Festival*. He refuses to call the *New Yam Feast*, and its implication is that no man in Umuaro can harvest his crop of Yam before the celebration of the feast. The whole

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Umuaro is locked into trouble. The children, women and the titled men and old men starve because there are no yams of previous year to eat. Ezeulu's refusal creates crisis between him and the six villages. A delegation of titled men visits Ezeulu to request to eat the remaining ritualistic yam and announce the feast, but he does not pay attention to their request. Ezeulu's children at play and his wives at market suffer hostility by the other people. Ezeulu causes the scarcity of food in Umuaro and people about to die of hunger. Ezeulu is doing this because he wants to take his revenge against his people. The most serious sufferer from the postponement of the harvest is the family of Ogbuefi Amalu, who is dead and waiting in vain to accept the second burial and funeral rites from his son. But his son is unable to give him this funeral fest because of scarcity of yams. He becomes critical of Ezeulu. In this way, Ezeulu harasses his own people as a part of his revenge and personal cause.

Achebe ridicules the political exploitation in *Arrow of God*. British Administration implements the *Indirect Rule System* in Umuaro by means of appointment of the *Warrant Chief* from native people. But it is observed that the Warrant Chief takes disadvantage of his power. Captain Winterbottom has a worst experience of this ruling system. Since three years he has been appointed a Warrant Chief in Okperi, against his better judgment. Winterbottom selects James Ikedi, one of the early converts who have received missionary education. But within three months of his appointment, Captain Winterbottom begins to receive complaints and to hear many rumors about the Warrant Chief's conduct and his high-handedness. James Ikedi has established his own illegal court and private prison through which he exploits the people. He lodges fake complaints against them and demands more money for security reasons. He also molests women in Okperi. He has fancy about the native woman and any woman who attracts his attention, he takes her without paying bride-price. When Winterbottom looks into the matter, he finds a number of scandals of Ikedi. Therefore, Winterbottom suspends Ikedi for six months and reports the senior authority. Then Winterbottom receives order of the cancellation of Ikedi's suspension, and he is reappointed at the same post. Consequently, his misdeeds increase, and he organizes a system of mass extortion in Okperi. He not only demands money from the men but rapes many women out of his fancy and never pays the promised bride-price.

The British Administration builds a road and drainage in Okperi under the supervision of Mr. Wright. But Mr. Ikedi, being a Paramount Chief, does not take approval to the road plan from Winterbottom. The condition is that the road does not interfere with the homesteads of the people as far as possible. But Ikedi misuses his power and tells the peoples that the road goes through their compound, and if they want to save their homes, they have to give him money. If anyone does not have money, he advises him to borrow it from neighbors, or sell the yams, goat or hen. Ikedi chooses the homesteads of rich people to have more money. He deceives them and says that he has already demolished three or four compounds because they delayed the promised amount. In this way, James Ikedi collects a

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huge amount from his own people. He commits crimes in a way that Winterbottom is unable to find out his scandals. Furthermore, Ikedi asks his people to make him an *obi*, or King. He is being called His Highness; the first obi of Umuaro. Winterbottom faces such kinds of problems.

Achebe also handles the theme of sexual harassment of African native women. Not only James Ikedi but the District Officer, Captain Winterbottom is also a man of loose character. Mr. Wright, the supervisor in Public Work Department, finds fault with Captain Winterbottom's morality. Mr. Wright admits that the real trouble with Captain Winterbottom is his immorality "he is too serious to sleep with native women" (AOG, 104). Moreover, Mr. Clark, the Assistant District Officer, junior to Captain Winterbottom is not an innocent man. He too uses the native girls for his sexual gratification. All he wants to know from Mr. Wright that "whether native women are better than white women" (AOG, 105). When he first sees "fully grown girl going about naked," he forces her to sleep with him. It is clear that the colonial officers' sexual exploitation of the native women is condemned by Achebe.

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