

# Random Thoughts

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### **Literary Criticism**

*Realism in the Romances of Shakespeare*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1993.

*Dynamics of Poetry in Fiction*. Foreword by Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah. New Delhi: Pencraft Publications, 1994.

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*Divya-Janapath* (Upanyasa). New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2015. (Translation of Shiv K. Kumar's *Rough Passage to the Bodhi Tree*, Random House India, 2013)

# Random Thoughts

*Essays in Criticism*

By

Prabhat K. Singh

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By Prabhat K. Singh

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*For*  
Prabha, my wife,  
whose loving care and sacrifices have sustained me.



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## PREFACE

It is a pleasure to put together in *Random Thoughts* some selected individual pieces of my critique on the different subjects written on different occasions. Of these essays, those published earlier in the literary journals and anthologies in India and abroad have been revised and enriched further, and others have gone into print for the first time. These essays are the outcome of my reading and revaluation of the authors and their works that came up for discussion in the postgraduate classes or with scholars pursuing their doctoral research in English literature, or that I was invited to write on.

The original text of the writer, I believe, is the only salvation in all matters of literary discourse, and criticism is always secondary. Analyses and interpretations, simple and orderly, therefore, have been chiefly based on the texts under discussion in this book. The literary genres and the theoretical perceptions have been examined and elucidated with focus on the particular critical posture adopted in the piece.

The essay, “Autobiography and the Metaphysic of Transparency”, has grown out of my presentation in the international seminar on Commonwealth Autobiography at Dhvanyaloka, Mysore, in the presence of celebrated autobiographers like C. D. Narasimhaiah and Zulfikar Ghose. It shows, with illustrations from several works, how transparency contrives the patterns of revelation in an autobiography and thereby becomes in some cases a burden and in others a state of transcendence. “Notes of Resistance and Reconciliation in the Poetry of Edwin Thumboo” was another delivery at the international seminar at Dhvanyaloka, luckily with Professor Thumboo himself in the audience. It traces the inner currents of thought and feeling that articulate the mind and art of the father of Singapore’s poetry in English whose cultural and nationalistic concerns are at the centre of his creativity.

“The Indian English Children’s Literature and the Ghost of Colonialism” has been developed from my paper at the Eleventh Triennial Conference of the ACLALS, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. It emphasizes the need for disentangling the writings for our children from the consciousness of the colonized and the subjugated to give a

disencumbered futuristic direction to the post-Independence generation of adolescents. “Brand India: Shashi Deshpande’s Female Subjectivism in Her Novels” discusses, in the backdrop of a worldview of the feminist movement, the distinguishing features and essences of Indian feminism with reference to the novels of Deshpande.

“The Revolutionary Optimism of Chinua Achebe: Countering the ‘Other’ in *Things Fall Apart*” has evolved from my deliberation at the India-Africa Summit of the Ministry of External Affairs, Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, Delhi. “The Dalit and Marginalized in Cyrus Mistry’s *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer*” was part of my keynote address at the national seminar in Katihar, and “Edward Said’s Memoir, *Out of Place*, and the Aesthetic of Dislocation” and “The Dialectics of Centrality in Author-Text Relationship” comprised my plenary lectures at the two different national seminars in Cuttack. These essays are intensive studies of the chosen books from the specific points of view, and of the theoretical approaches to the intricacies of author-text connection.

I was invited to write “Tagore’s Poems for Children: A Fountain of Delight and Wisdom” for *Bookbird*, Baltimore, USA, “Expanding Moments: Siddhartha’s Renunciation and Lear’s Reconciliation” for *The Literary Criterion*, Mysore, “The Pakistani Poetry in English: An Overview” for *Creative Neighbour*, SAARC Writing in English, Kolkata, and “The Buddhist Vision in English Literature” for *World Focus*, New Delhi. Each of these essays presents a comprehensive critical survey of the works falling in the concerned area and makes close observations on them.

“Shiv K. Kumar’s Translation of the Love Lyrics of Faiz Ahmed Faiz” gives a comparative estimate of the different translations of Faiz and shows how Kumar’s is the closest to the original writing in tone and temper, emotional intensity and intellectual comprehension. The essay also touches upon the art and craft of translation.

“The Metaphors of Rain and Fire in Salman Rushdie’s ‘The Firebird’s Nest’” and “The Mythical Images in the Poetry of K. N. Daruwalla” are, in a way, an extension of my engagement with the students of the Faculty of Letters, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain, where in my lectures in the areas of Indian English literature and Indian culture, I discussed the Indian English poetry, the use of myths in literature, and the mythical perspectives of the holy river Ganga.

In the context of the changing mental outlook of the contemporary readers, this book, I hope, will be helpful in drawing an increased attention to the critical studies of English literature. Since the works and authors discussed herein often form part of the university syllabi, these essays would be of diverse interest to the students, teachers and researchers all over the world.

I am thankful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing and its team for bringing out this book.

April, 2015  
Varanasi, India

**Prabhat K. Singh**



## THE DIALECTICS OF CENTRALITY IN AUTHOR-TEXT RELATIONSHIP

The author-text relationship has always been both intimate and intricate because it constitutes an undeniable truth about creativity – the author being the artist, his text the work of art and his vision the breathing spirit. But this triangle of artist, art and vision forms by the activity of the mind, a complex and sophisticated activity, in which inspiration plays a profound role, both in the interior and the exterior of the author's self. Plato in his *Ion* (c. 390 BCE) and Longinus in his *On the Sublime* (1<sup>st</sup> century CE) have affirmed this truth in their own ways. However, the author is not just a 'passive vehicle of inspiration'; rather his creative imagination, which is rooted in his primary power of perception, coexists with his willful and conscious contemplation of the idea or the vision that seeks expression, which it finds in the text. And the reader, I believe, is the fourth angle of the triangle whose response to the work forms an important component of the whole exercise in the discovery of meaning.

In the shifting polarities of literary criticism, the identity of the author and the validity of the text have undergone a variety of changes. In the traditional humanist approach, the author is granted almost an omniscient position as the maker of his work, the sole centre of his creativity. But in the contemporary critical practice, he is reduced to the status of a mere writer, or a scripter, having lost his authorial control over the work and its meaning. Similarly, in the old convention, the text is validated by the author's conception and delivery of the truth, the subject, but in the structuralist or post-structuralist stance, both the 'signifier' and the 'signified' are disentangled from the enigmatic authorial web. The text becomes purely an integrated structure or a system of language containing aspects of human society that derive meaning not from the parts but from the whole of the structure. In addition, the subject becomes a variable and complex function of discourse having created a space of its own and drawn into its orbit the historical and socio-cultural perspectives of life in the given context. In this perception, the text is declared an obituary without any account of the so-called dead author's identity.

Thus, the notion of the centrality of the author or the text develops an interesting dialectic in critical discourse. Since 'dialectic' is essentially the examination and analysis of the mental processes involved in moving towards the truth, it seems necessary to locate and acknowledge the nature and function of the author's as well as the reader's mind vis-à-vis the text, desirably from the vantage point of neutrality. I, therefore, intend here to look into the inner matrix of this author-text relationship with a view to showing that the author, the text, the reader and the meaning of the text are inseparable and indispensable entities of the creative canon, and the dialectic of centrality is a matter of shift in critical focus.

Broadly speaking, there are two critical postures. One is to view the author in the centre and his powers of creativity, which bring the text into existence, at the periphery. And the other is to keep the text in the centre, which in turn decentres itself, as the deconstructionists believe, marginalize the author to a non-entity dispossessing him of all his claims to privilege, and finally announce his 'death', as Roland Barthes did. To me, these are the postures of extremity in the game of supremacy in which the value of the author is appropriated at the cost of the text or the value of the text is appropriated at the cost of the author. Therefore, it is worthy to understand their relative merits and limitations for a holistic view of literature.

Let me begin this estimation from the age-old idea of literary text as essentially expressive of the author, the idea that reached its zenith in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This suggests that the work of art is the expression of the author's innermost feelings, impressions, thoughts and intentions delineated in a language that is competent, and satisfactory to his creative zeal. Since the text carries the original idea of the author, its language serves as a vehicle for the tenor. The meaning of the text, therefore, constitutes in the combination of the thought and its formulation in the words used for communication. M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) shows how the literary work is not just a mirror that reflects nature but also a lamp that emits light from its original source, i.e. the interior of the author's mind and heart. Poetry in this sense is the direct representation of the poet's mind. Immanuel Kant's philosophy also suggests that the "authorial subject" should be placed "at the centre of the literary universe" (Bennett 49) because the world can be better understood by the structure of the human mind. This is another way of giving primary importance to the author's intentions and his vision that the reader or the critic is expected to value. And Aristotle's concept of Catharsis, the purgation of emotion, extends the author's emotion to the



reader, or the character and the audience in the theatre. This further acquires a philosophical or metaphysical dimension when the man (reader/character/audience) does not realize his kinship with all the members of the universe while the Infinite is present in all. No wonder the Indian aesthetes consider the experience of identifying man with the Infinite the goal of human existence.

To Wordsworth, the powerful feelings that overflow in poetry originate “from emotion recollected in tranquility” (Wordsworth 361). As such, this recollection of emotion commences through a process of contemplation and articulation, a process that joins the art with the craft. Therefore, the text is basically the expression of the author’s experience. And because the experience is always greater, richer and deeper than the expression, the text becomes a supplementary document in which the original emotion manifests itself in an organized form. Besides, the text is also the experience of writing the text, an act in which the author’s abilities to internalize the experience, harmonize the discordant notes by the power of imagination, and organize the communication with a critical sense are at play.

Contrary to these subjective author-centric interpretations and analyses of the text, the modern readers, both structuralists and post-structuralists, hold the text as central to all literary or aesthetic realizations. The concept of the ‘*lisible*’ or ‘readerly’ classic text that makes the reader a passive recipient of the singularity of meaning has been replaced by the ‘*scriptible*’ or ‘writerly’ modern text that makes the reader an active participant in the production of meaning with a plurality simultaneously operating at different levels or in different codes. The writer or the scripter has no precedence over the text for both are born in the immediate present, i.e. the moment of creation. The writer is not the sole commanding intellect but just a mediator with a competence to handle the narrative code. And the writing is a neutral space where all identities, all voices and points of origin are lost. In the words of Roland Barthes (1915-1980), “As soon as a fact is *narrated* ... disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (Barthes 165). Thus, the text gets liberated from the tyranny of its author-centric interpretations, and the language of the text substitutes the author, as one finds in the Mallarmean poetics. Linguistically, it is not the author but the language that knows the subject. That is why they say that there is no getting outside the language, which is innately figurative, and the human subject is constituted precisely by its entry into language. Therefore, the view that the author is an autonomous self that transcends the limits of

language is both fallacious and illusory. To the deconstructionists, it is the language, containing multiple shades of meaning, which performs in the text. And this role-switching is in the interest of the writing for there remains no final or absolute 'signified'. In Derrida's terms, writing is the interplay of signs chiefly governed by the very nature of the signifier rather than the signified content. So the text is a multidimensional space, "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes 167). It also promotes the autonomy of the reader. Subsequently, the reader becomes the 'space' where the text enjoys a semantic free play without commitment to history or biography or intention. The author's identity, thus, dissolves and the text gains in validity from multiple sources. That is why, in textual analysis, in which the narrative is subsumed in the notion of the 'text', which is the 'space', we study and analyze the "meanings at work" in that space, because the text or the space is not a "closed product" but a "production in progress, 'plugged in' to other texts, other codes" (Barthes 169). We study not the structure of the written narrative but the explosion of significance in it. We locate the different avenues of meaning, the avenues that help in showing the departures of meaning. This is because each text is inter-textual, or has a subtext, or a metatext.

The perception of Michael Foucault's (1926-1984), however, is a little different. He does not declare 'the death of the author'; rather he talks in terms of the author's disappearance by which he means "transcendental anonymity" (Foucault 194), a kind of voluntary effacement, a singularity of absence. Although the author is not an indefinite source of significance, his name, along with identifying the person, does indicate his function in his mode of discourse (the text) in the society and culture of the time. The author may also be defined by his conceptual coherence, by his stylistic unity, by his historical and cultural significance. Therefore, the author has a plurality of self that opens up endless possibilities of discourse through the text. He may also acquire a trans-discursive identity by becoming a "founder of discursivity" (Foucault 201) providing a literary discipline for the formation of other texts. And the text, to Foucault, is a designation we give to the curious unity of thought and structure, content and form and their internal relationship. The text itself is a discourse and its full meaning unfolds not only through language but also in relation to its author and its socio-historical and cultural properties that articulate the unique space it creates in the given time and place. That is why Foucault concentrates on the modes of existence of discourse, whether it is the author or the text.

Therefore, in both the author and the text, there is an ordered structure of thought and expression. Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), the famous critic of the orthodox psychological theory and practice, says, "...what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language" (Lacan 81). This means that even the unconscious is structured, as opposed to the Freudian doctrine of the unconscious as chaotic, primordial, instinctual and pre-verbal. Lacan equates Freud's 'condensation' and 'displacement' with 'neurotic symptoms' (memory) and 'desire', parallel to Roman Jakobson's 'metaphor' and 'metonymy'. Perhaps that is why "an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (Lacan 86) takes place, and meanings are sustained with reference to other meanings. Meaning is also determined by the literary conventions vis-à-vis the given structure of feeling. Sometimes, the author's identity may get transferred to some unacknowledged self that causes the text. During the Nazi aggression of Russia, for example, some child made a charcoal sketch of a bayonet-pierced pregnant belly on a mud-wall to expose the nature of atrocity. As such, the sketch was the text and the child of undisclosed identity was the author. But the child perhaps meant to convey that the real author of the sketch, the text, was the atrocious army man who performed the act of cruelty.

Thus, it is evident that the author, the text and the reader – all contribute to the making of the significance, as all undergo the processes of signification. Meaning resides solely and independently neither in the author's intention nor in the reader's response, nor in the language. In fact, it is a matter of accentuation of the essence of the whole transaction. And there is no denying the truth that all transactions take place in the mind. The author's intention or the reader's response each congregates at the formal features of the text to articulate the meaning. Therefore, the formal features are not independent. In other words, the text is incomplete and lifeless without the function of the other two spaces – the author and the reader. Stanley Fish, the American exponent of Reader-response Criticism, rightly argues that both the authorial intention and the formal features are produced by the interpretive assumptions and procedures the reader brings to the text, and that they have no prior or objective existence outside the reading experience. I think there is an inherent simultaneity in the experiences of the author and the reader. The "...interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because the interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned" (Fish 322).

Therefore, the author's relationship with the text and the reader is never severed completely. Directly or indirectly, his identity (personal, ideational or ideological) keeps facilitating the validity of the text. He functions both in his presence and absence, and absence is not death. It may be the sublimation of his self. He may become a disembodied voice, like the voice of Paul de Man posthumously heard by none else but Derrida. In the words of Sean Burke, "the authorial subject returns and enhances the aspects of the work and this return takes place almost instantaneously with the declaration of authorial departure" (Burke 7). In fact, the more one tries to dispossess the author of his legitimate position, the more his (author's) identity is affirmed in the mind. This is psychological reassertion. Sometimes the text contains subjective words such as 'I', 'my', 'me', 'mine' that denote the author's identity. Even in the case of effacement, which is the state of impersonality, as T. S. Eliot suggests in his man-mind dichotomy that acknowledges the validity of the creative process that links the man with his mind, the text perpetuates beyond the author's self. So it is a kind of game, an exercise in creativity and criticism, in which the author or the writer with the help of the language, and the reader or the interpretive community in course of the reading experience create the space of the text. The reader occupies the space vacated by the author through effacement. The man-milieu connection is ingrained in the whole edifice of argument regarding the socio-cultural and historical perspectives of the text that determine the meaning. Roland Barthes's dictum that the text (for the modern scripiter) has its origin in the language and not in the mind of the author, and it is the recorded structure of verbal form, is not holistic. Verbal utterances presuppose a speaker, identified or unidentified, whose presence or absence works through consciousness at the ordinary or elevated or spiritual or supramental level. The *Vedas*, for instance, which are said to have their origin in the respiratory system of Lord Brahma, may be taken as the verbal structures of the divine thoughts or the visions emanated from the supramental consciousness. The *Rishis* (the seers who heard the sounds of the *mantras*) discovered the truths in the forms of poetry, prose and songs, and taught them to their disciples. The *Puranas* came into existence through the verbal narration by Suta, the son of Uchchshrava who knew the essence and had communicated it to his son. Veda Vyasa, whose real name was Krishna Dvayapayan and who was the son of *Rishi* Parashar, arranged the truths in the four *Vedas*: *Rig Veda* (rik+veda), *Yajur Veda* (yajus+veda), *Sama Veda* (sama+veda) and *Atharva Veda* (truths gathered by *Rishi* Atharva). Bhartrhari's concept of *sphota* in Indian

aesthetics also refers to the idea of the word that resides in the mind of the user who distinguishes it from *dhvani*, which has a physical structure.

Therefore, the thought, undoubtedly, arises in the mind of the speaker or the author, then, passing through different stages, gets its full-bodied form in the chosen words, and ultimately reveals itself through a comprehensible sound that the listener, the reader, or the interpretive community gathers. The thought and the expression are differentiated only to have proper comprehension of the nature of the word and its meaning. After all, language communicates in the mind – the writer’s mind or the reader’s mind, the speaker’s mind or the listener’s mind. Moreover, the meaning of the text depends on the reader’s level of response, his imaginative capability to connect and comprehend. A knowledgeable reader and an ignorant one make different responses for they have different perceptions of the same text. In addition, *Rasa*, which the listener or the reader enjoys, does not emanate from the text alone. Had it been so, the text would have been complete in itself and there would have been no need of an author or a writer or a scripter. To me, these are active participants in a large and complex process. Ted Hughes’ poem, ‘The Thought-Fox’, is a beautiful example of how the idea enters the firmament of the creative mind and, progressing warily, concretizes in the word on the page. Therefore, the text is the product of the idea conceived in the womb of the mind and delivered in space and time. W. B. Yeats’ vision of anti-Christ in ‘The Second Coming’ finds its true meaning in the image of the tiger couching towards Bethlehem that he chooses to convey the condition of the world and the humanity.

Hence, the author never dies, and his identity cannot be abolished. I wonder why after all the advocates of the death of the author put their names in their writing. Why do they assert their theological self in their discourse? Each writer stakes his claim to authorship in the book published, a matter of copyright and intellectual property right, a creation and sustenance of legacy. Salman Rushdie’s *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012) is a fusion of Polish Joseph Conrad and Russian Anton Chekhov to secure both identity and validity through a pseudo name. The author and the text, therefore, are complementary modes of discourse. The politics of theory creating a sharp breach between the contemporary literary criticism and the broad intellectual culture should be discouraged for a harmonious and holistic perception of literature.

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THE REVOLUTIONARY OPTIMISM  
OF CHINUA ACHEBE:  
COUNTERING THE ‘OTHER’  
IN *THINGS FALL APART*

In any academic discourse today – whether on economy or politics, trade or technology, education or healthcare, environmental challenges or human resource capital – the buzzword, invariably, is globalization. However, for India, it is an age-old proposition essentially nourished by the global vision of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, a vision embedded in the ancient scriptures, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the religious epics, and enriched by the words of Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira, Guru Nanak and Kabir Das. People talk of all kinds of material – gold, diamond, oil, uranium, agro-products, to mention a few – but seldom look into the human material which is the most precious material of the universe, of course its quality, unfortunately, has deteriorated. The moral, cultural and spiritual perspectives of life have suffered neglect in the wake of securing economic prosperity or military might. The growing thrust on infrastructural development is understandable. It is necessary no doubt. But no less important is the structure of feeling that helps sustain the bonds of humanity all over the world. In all bilateral co-operations, the trust of the ‘other’ is required, without which the fairness of the transaction and the freedom and protection of mutual interests are likely to be suspected. One way to contain this ‘other’ is to accommodate and harmonize it with our identity and the structures of our feeling and thought thus making both the parties relevant to each other through sharing.

India and Africa together stand for a shared consciousness. Both have suffered the bouts of British imperialism and both have struggled to disentangle their national identities from the tentacles of their colonial past. They have been natural allies contributing to each other’s awareness through experience and experiment. Mahatma Gandhi tried the philosophy of non-violence and *satyagrah* in South Africa and applied it with success in India’s fight for freedom. The tested policy, in turn, benefited Africa in her struggle for Independence that culminated under the leadership of

Nelson Mandela and other African freedom fighters. But the philosophy having originated from the thoughts of Thoreau, the arena of intellectual co-operation gets extended to the land of dreams across the Atlantic. With President Barack Obama formidably seated in the saddle and having his second term in office, it appears to be a queer configuration of African genealogy and American identity. India and Africa are more vigorous than earlier in their co-operation with each other in the areas of economic growth and socio-cultural and intellectual enrichment. Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Barack Obama have invigorated through their leadership the sweep of a new hope of defeating the forces of disintegration and alienation.

Studying each other's literary works of art, which also involves a large-scale book trade, the publishing industry and other associated enterprises, is undoubtedly a potent means of transferring ideas, of sharing knowledge and creativity. It is a kind of investment to harvest intimacy by dismissing the gaps created by the sense of the 'other'. It is with this assumption that I have chosen to locate and highlight in this essay the revolutionary nature of Chinua Achebe's optimism as discernible in his effort to counter the identity of Africa as the 'other' in his epoch making novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Although his other novels – *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *The Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988) – are also powerful expressions of his rich historical, cultural, political and humanist visions of life, they are but an extension, in a way, of what he pioneered in his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*. His first novel is a classic of African literature that consolidated his position as the father of the modern African literature, as a source of inspiration for the writers of the world, and as a great humanist capable of giving the feel of emancipation to the fighters of the world. No wonder Nelson Mandela felt the prison walls crumbling down when he read *Things Fall Apart* while in jail. A Nigerian by birth and an academic by profession (Senior Research Fellow and Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and then Professor of English Language and Literature at Bard College, New York), Chinua Achebe (16 November 1930 - 21 March 2013) happened to be the founder of the Nigerian literary movement in the 1950s. He was the author of more than twenty books (novels, short stories, poems and essays), the winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the 2007 Man Booker International Prize for fiction, and an icon of cultural integrity endowed with an indomitable spirit of protest reflecting tirelessly on the states of alienation and elitism.



Alienation is a condition of identity. Howsoever stubborn, this condition cannot resist change everlastingly. It rather tends to mix with the 'other' identity, sooner or later, either by calculated assimilation, as is noticeable in Lucy's response to her unwanted pregnancy in J. M. Coetzee's novel, *Disgrace*, or by alert optimism, the stance that Chinua Achebe maintains in *Things Fall Apart*. Resistance turns into creative concourse and forges a common bond of humanity. There is something Marxian about this perception, i.e. man seeing and recognizing himself in other man through comparison and contrast. In an interview in 1982, Chinua Achebe told Kwame Anthony Appiah,

I am an Ibo writer because this is my basic culture; Nigerian, African and a writer...no, black first, then a writer. Each of these identities does call for a commitment on my part. I must see what it is to be black – and this means being sufficiently intelligent to know how the world is moving and how the black people fare in this world. Or an African – what does Africa mean to the world? When you see an African, what does it mean to a white man? (Innes 208)

Alienation and self-recognition, in this process, go hand in hand. Achebe's novels in this respect are a search for the common bond of humanity in the midst of the apparently exclusive and antagonistic extremes of socio-political conditions. His optimism reflects in his implied will to hold the universe together instead of letting it blow apart. His deep discomfiture surfaces in his Yeatsian anxiety over the state of things falling apart. However, his vision of life is sustained by a discreet revolutionary optimism. It is revolutionary because it works with a uniqueness sparing none in the scrutiny, neither the aliens nor the natives, neither the elites nor the alienated. It is revolutionary because it resists the idea of Africa as primitive, as the 'other', because it is a trendsetter in the African response to the European ideologies that posed a threat to the socio-religious constructs of the Umuofia clan, a lower Nigerian tribe. Above all, it is revolutionary because it is precisely aimed at welcoming the winds of change without disturbing the cultural climate, without shattering the historical and racial roots, and without offending the national pride, that matters most.

The fictional narratives have very much been the products of history impregnated with a variety of subliminal, religious and cultural nuances that maintain a close link with the activities of the life of the past. They record and reflect on the conditions of humanity and thus become essentially a matter of representation through imaginative approach to the historically conditioned realities. The history of African literature is also

inseparably joined with the colonial rule and its phenomenal impact on the shaping of the literature of the continent. This is also because there was no written history of Africa, nor was there any written tradition of literature. The oral tradition found a written form and thereby acquired a historicity. In other words, the history was textualized and the text got a historicity. Although a work of fiction cannot be judged by its verifiability of the facts of history, the novels of Chinua Achebe present an encounter between the native perception and the outsider's approach. In the end of *Things Fall Apart*, history is planned to be written by the District Commissioner who is engaged in an anthropological study on the local tribes and has already decided his book's title – *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (TFA 197). When he visits the site of Okonkwo's suicide, he tells that he had travelled through Africa and seen such things for himself. He, perhaps, visualizes the utility of the incident, for it might become an interesting episode in his book. Although a European account of the African history is likely to give a tinted picture of the reality, Achebe at least succeeds in establishing the humanity of the Africans. His fictional narrative arranges facts in such a manner as makes his work an image of human experience. The novel shows that the Africans, too, live in this very world, and they are not the 'others'.

The clash between the Igbo religion and the Christian religion in this novel marks the transition in the awareness of the Africans from the pre-colonial days to the time when they felt the European presence. The missionaries had created a situation in which they learnt the lessons of mutual tolerance and open-mindedness. Achebe shows that beneath the differences of language and ritual, there always lies a common quest for God and a common view of human nature. Mr Brown, a missionary who acts on the principles of non-aggression and compromise, and Akunna, a clan leader, discuss their religion amicably, draw parallels between their modes of worship, and work with mutual understanding. Showing respect for each other, they speak in the general terms of God and not in the terms of Christ or Ani, the ruling earth Goddess of the land who also symbolizes the position of the women in the Igbo society. Up to the first two thirds of the novel, there is a whole society. But when the missionaries appear on the scene, there occurs a change, because they necessitate change. Consequently, the Igbo culture enters a new phase of history that blossomed at the turn of the century. Chronologically, the novel is set in the 1890s.

So in *Things Fall Apart*, which is a novel in twenty-five chapters structured in three parts, history has not only been used as a fact of the past but also as a means to understand and interpret the emerging facets of human existence. T. S. Eliot's words denoting time as a flux – "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past" (Eliot 185) – seem to be lodged in Achebe's consciousness. Past in his novel is not just a contrast to the present; instead, it unravels to his protagonist the living perspectives of a continuing civilization undergoing a process of change. That is how the African culture and the European invasion come to understand and value each other thereby trying to end the conflict in an integral self. That is how history becomes a meaningful pattern of relationships and values. These relationships and values seek to revolutionize themselves in the given context. History thus helps Achebe in focusing the aspects of the radical redefinition of society.

The dichotomy of the past and the present, the tradition and the modernity, has been further explored in this novel through parent-child-relationship. Okonkwo, the chief protagonist, is a man of strong likes and dislikes, of courage and valour. Being always willing to conquer and subdue his opponent, he is a true warrior, a well-established wrestler who had defeated Amalinze, the 'Cat', and a wealthy man of his clan who had earned the second highest title of his country. He is also a short-tempered man who beats his third wife, Ojiubo, kills the white-man's messenger, and has the courage to wrestle with Chi, his own personal God. He is a tragic hero in the classical sense. But such a fiery person, in turn, is rejected by his own son, Nwoye, who converts to Christianity. Achebe has tried to show that Okonkwo's rejection by his son has an invisible link with his own disapproval of his late father, Unoka, who seldom repaid debts and was neither a manly figure nor a successful farmer. Okonkwo honoured the spirits of his ancestors but not his father's spirit. His son, too, abandons the traditional ways and joins the Christians. This enrages Okonkwo for he feels identified with his late father. Therefore, these spirits cannot join their ancestors. Okonkwo thus appears as both a representative and an individual. As a representative, he shares the fate of the traditional Igbo society particularly when the white-men, like James Smith, enter his world and try to split the natives and spoil their kinship. And as an individual, he is physically strong, hardworking, ambitious, proud, honest and generous, but also quick to anger. It is not the rights of the ancestors that he cares about, but his own rights as a father and his own authority as a lawmaker. Unfortunately, his own son, who develops doubts

about the religion of the family and the tribe, violates his law. The songs of Christianity fill his mind with joy and peace.

In this rejection and selection of religion, Achebe's artistic purpose is to reveal to the world that the Igbo people were becoming aware of themselves making their own world of choice. Both in body and spirit, matter and mind, the rebelliousness of Nwoye was intended to achieve a new harmony. The particular social and religious structures that determined the identity and mindset of the Nigerian masses now tended to be decentred as a way of thinking. It was a step towards ending the opaqueness of alienation and making it amenable to change, to the new tunes of the Christian ideology. Nwoye's conversion is shocking to his society, particularly to Okonkwo, popularly called the "Roaring Flame" (*TFA* 145), who feels hurt and defeated from within. To him, his son was a "cold, impotent ash" begotten from "living fire" (*TFA* 145). But Achebe as a maker and reformer of the African sensibility wants to suggest that alternative structures of faith and practice should not be discarded outright and hope should not be lost, for that is how the confrontation can turn into creativity and the redefinition of society can be possible. Nwoye's change of religion may be taken as a way of resolving the conflict, which otherwise could be endless, and heading towards a modernist tradition. At the same time, Achebe also suggests that the missionary zeal should not be selfish and misdirected. Herein reflects his alert optimism that seeks to maintain a point of neutrality. All he wants is to say that the missionaries or the European intellectuals engaged in the socio-cultural transformation of the so-called 'dark continent' should not forget to placate the conservative sentiments. The native structures should not be allowed to wither away in the wake of introducing new modules. The inadequacies and imperfections of the past should not be considered meaningless. The white-men should honour, protect and help preserve the grains of Nigerian culture and modify them, only if necessary, harmoniously. Harmony between tradition and change is always required for the humankind because it helps in resolving the nature-culture conflict.

Achebe thus favours a careful handling of the prospects of life and society in the given situation because a reckless transaction, especially by a man of power, native or foreigner, may damage the delicate ligaments of the indigenous culture. Obi, the grandson of Okonkwo and the protagonist of Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, misuses his acquired power. In *A Man of the People*, a novel on the subject of democratic liberalism, the abuse of people's trust and the misuse of power lead to a

coup. And in *Anthills of the Savannah*, this ill-practice is institutionalized by the military dictators. Thus, both the sons of the soil and the outsiders are equally inclined to abuse of power. Okonkwo also wields absolute power in his family. He is a brute force who becomes a tyrant when pitted against the invading culture and religion of the colonizers'. Achebe's subtle irony reveals the truth psychologically without discriminating between the ruler and the ruled. He is cautious and concerned about the question of power in relation to tradition and change. His concern is anthropological, and Foucaultian. Michael Foucault's idea, which has influenced the new-historicists, is that "the patterns of power-relations at any given era in a society constitute the concepts, oppositions, and hierarchies of its *discourse*" and thereby "determine what will be accounted knowledge and truth" (Abrams 249) of life in the society. This idea may find brilliant illustrations in the plots of the novels of Achebe that are deeply embedded in the varied contexts of Africa. In *Things Fall Apart*, the natives are uneducated Bushmen grappling with family commitments and financial pressures including debts. They lack opportunity to grow and flourish. They are like the tortoise (in chapter eleven) that lends from the birds the wings to fly. They are not incapable but incapacitated, partly by their own condition and partly by the nature and structure of the colonial power. The tortoise, the most potent metaphor of African identity, very significantly named "*All of you*" (*TFA* 92), is deprived of the borrowed wings as a punishment for taking nourishment from the stock of food meant for the birds. He is, thus, alienated through elitism. Achebe projects his vision ironically.

The political changes that promise reversal of fortune and that work through the lives of the common people do reorder and introduce new modules, but they do not necessarily eliminate human misery. The history of the world is replete with the evidences of the fact that the expansionist forces often penetrate the cultural domain of a nation in the name of bringing about social and economic emancipation, but they gradually dispossess the nation of her indigenous identity. It is against this possibility that Okonkwo reacts violently. His suicide, which looks like his defeat, is indeed a symbolic rejection of the imperialist ideology. It is a purist's response. His refusal to yield to the District Commissioner is a gesture of atonement. He would have been amenable to the proposed change had the District Commissioner been a little accommodating towards the native traditions of the Umuofia. The Commissioner says in chapter twenty-three:

‘We shall not do you any harm ... if only you agree to cooperate with us. We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen. I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn people’s houses and their place of worship. That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world. ...’ (*TFA* 184)

These words sound to Okonkwo like a threat to his community’s pride for there is no touch of respectability in the proposal. He smells subjugation. Perhaps he thinks that if change does not come honourably, it had better not come. Therefore, his act of committing suicide is an evidence of his being over self-conscious of his cultural exclusivity. He is neither pessimistic nor stubbornly unyielding; rather his optimism is quite discreet. Since he finds himself positioned in an extreme situation, he takes the extreme step to protect his land’s traditional glory, and thus becomes a representative symbol of protest. He is fully identified with his clan, with the Umuofia, the children of the forest. This gives the impression that the land is the central protagonist of the novel.

*Things Fall Apart* offers multiple glimpses of the traditional life of the natives. For instance, the new-year feast (in chapter five) reflects the joys of community experience and social harmony. It entertains the people of Umuofia and rejuvenates their will and passion. Similarly, in chapter six, the annual wrestling contest of the village youths excites everybody. It is a matter of both individual valour and social prestige. Conventional marriages with the custom of “bride-price” (*TFA* 68) are also prevalent in the tribal society. On the other hand, the village trials (in chapter ten) show the judicial system of the clan whose ancestral spirits are impersonated by Egwugwu who emerges from a secret house to settle disputes. It is believed that *ogbanje* (one of the wicked children who, when they died, entered their mothers’ wombs to be born again) dies repeatedly and continues to return to his mother to be reborn until the *iyi-uwa* (the stone that linked *ogbanje* with the spirit of the world) is found and destroyed. It is also believed that the angry ancestors put the offenders to suffering. Okonkwo suffers exile for seven years because the young son of Ezeudu, the old warrior of the clan, is killed by the accidental shot from his (Okonkwo’s) gun. And this happens when the grand traditional funeral of Ezeudu, as described in chapter thirteen, was in progress. Okonkwo is believed to be cursed by Ezeudu for participating in the killing of Ikemefuna against his advice. In *No Longer at Ease*, too, Obe suffers the