

Choices between Politics and Peace: *A Man of the People*

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Abstract

A Man of the People is a political novel by Chinua Achebe which portrays the realistic scenario of post-independence era. This novel reflects the problems faced by Nigerians after attainment of freedom. Achebe, in this novel highlights the conflicts between corrupt and devoted officials of local government in Nigeria. Achebe has introduced the conflict between choices of politics and peace through characters Odili Samalu (representative of intellectuals) and Chief Nanga (representative of Corruption). A nation's value depends on its people that in what direction they want to take their nation for future.

Keywords: Colonialism, Politics, Peace, Conflict, Freedom, Justice, Corruption.

After Nigeria's freedom, the assassinations of political leaders have plunged their country in trouble which is continued until today. The political prosperity, economic security and social freedom were expected before independence is in some way still awaited to be attained. In this article, the reasons that have made Nigerians far away from the worth of freedom and involved leaders in practice of personal profits are discussed. It seems that throughout the twentieth century, African history has passed through different political phenomena such as colonialism and post-colonialism. Both things have left a drastic impact on the lives of Nigerians people which are tired to be reflected by the literary works of African writers.

There have been prominent writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Nadine Gordimer, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ben Okeri, Chimamanda Nagogzi Adichie of Africa who always have taken the theme of sufferings, exploitation, and experiences in past by the Africans in colonial era. It is because of the results of colonial impact, after independence in 1960, Nigeria was under the tight grip of social, political, economical and psychological problems. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Achebe writes "The question of a writer's involvement in politics is a matter of definition." (58).

Achebe, a Nigerian novelist, always focuses on "African Politics", in *A Man of the People*, depicts a conflict between the wrongs of society through corrupt politicians like Chief Nanga at one side and the aware intellectuals like Odili Samalu on other. Achebe wants to emphasise that this young generation has the choices of both, and the future generations will be on the same choice because the question of Peace is a matter to never end in place like Africa which had been slaves, oppressed, exploited by the hands of Europeans. He hopes that after reading his novel by any reader from future generation can fill his heart with national consciousness, he will not decide to choose the side of corrupt politicians who are making the country's Peace and order shallow but to move ahead for one's country's welfare and betterment.

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Chinua Achebe has written so many major works on this theme. His work, *Things Fall Apart* is a portrait of Nigeria during colonialism. His works, *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, and *Anthills of Savannah* are written as an effort to save his country from the pessimistic impact of colonization. He has been an activist in crucial times in Africa, always has made efforts for its freedom, its peace and so on. He just wanted to be witness of a happy and peaceful Nigeria.

This paper portrays the differences among different minds that have been born in same country. Chief M.A Nanga, the Minister of Culture in new independent nation is a man of:

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gun powder in honour of one of those. Who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation? I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you- as my father did- if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth. (*A Man of the People*, Achebe, 2)

Due to such persons in newly made government a many political and social issues has been raised. For Chinua Achebe, Nigeria has become "Cesspool of Corruption" (*Perspectives on African Culture*, Heywood, 82)

So, an attempt has been made to reflect the leadership problems in post-independence time in Nigeria and it explains that how the failed leadership utilizes the freedom for their personal class comforts. As Chinua Achebe says in *The Trouble With Nigeria*:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. The Nigerian problems are the unwillingness and inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership (22).

Though Nigeria got independence in 1960, but it is unfortunate for Nigerians, that even after attainment of freedom, Nigeria has been gravitating in a spiral of political violence.

This paper focuses on two choices one is following corruption by mean politics and other is sustaining peace through social and national awareness and consciousness. Achebe aims to depicts these two choices by two major characters of the Novel, One is Honourable Chief Nanga, Minister of Culture, shows himself to be a patriotic man but he is corrupt, failed as leader in actual who only takes undue advantages of politics for his personal benefits. In *The Trouble With Nigeria*, Chinua Achebe says "The Nigerians Problem is the unwillingness of inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibilities". (22)

Another character, Odili Samalu, is novel's protagonist. He works as a School teacher in Anata. Through this character, we meet the aware intellectual of Nigeria who wants to spread peace in his land. His inner thoughts, feelings and motivations are worth sharing through this novel, which can be proved as a great help for these writers who propagating peace in Nigeria. Through his words, Chinua Achebe says his words:

We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education that only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and

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puts him above his people. (*A Man of the People*, Achebe, 4)

Odili, as an aware intellectual of his country, pays his duty towards his country that he wants to expose Chief Nanga and want to aware others who have blind faith in him. He gives statement, “although I have of winning Chief Nanga’s seat, it was necessary nonetheless to fight him and expose him as much as possible.” (*A Man of...*, Achebe, 103)

The objective of this paper is to highlight the role of intellectual group to enlighten the public against the mean political leaders of one’s nation. But this is not an easy thing to do; the impression of such leaders on public is such strong that if he dares to say something against them, he will get response like:

What a fool! Whose son is he? Was he not here when white men were eating; what he do about it? Where was he when Chief Nanga fought and drove the white men away? Why is he envious now that the warrior is eating the reward of his courage? If he was a Chief Nanga, would he would not do more worse? (*A Man of....*, Achebe, 93)

Odili’s struggle is not an easy task to stand against the prevailing problems which have been an integral part of their lives. It needs courage and intellectuality to take stand against it. Franz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* states:

To be responsible in an underdeveloped country is to know that everything finally rests on educating the masses, elevating their minds and on what is too quickly assumed to be political education... Political education means opening up the minds, awakening the mind, and introducing it to be the word. (138)

Because the education of Negros, as Woodson in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, says, “need workers, not leaders” (118). And, only the group of intellectuals can bring a revolution of awareness for such a nation like Nigeria which is lingering in between of two conflicts among his citizens.

Achebe in *A Man of the People* argues constantly for the need of peace and freedom from corruption. For a nation building he says, “The most important today for the intellectuals is to build up a nation”. (*A Man of the People*, 99)

Odili in an example of intellectuality can serve his country and bring change in society. For him, many Nangas may come and go. He decides to start a political party. Becoming a political figure, he has two choices; one is becoming the part of corrupt political system in which no idealistic and patriotic values have place and other is remain far from corruption and decides to struggle and bring rejuvenation in society by their thoughts and views. Though Achebe says about Nigeria is, “The country was on the verge of chaos”. (*A Man of...*, 97) But he entrusts in the capacity of intellectual group of his nation which have the burden to bring change in the social and political system in Nigeria. He believes that it is the need of time as the consequence of corruption and this quest of attaining power may lead Nigeria towards the way of destruction.

To conclude, I emphasise in favour of Achebe that every nation like or other than Nigeria has both the characters as in *A Man of the People*, but it depends on the generation of that nation that what choice they have believe in. As Nanga meets his end in the last of the novel so does happens to the wrongs of society. Achebe focuses on the value of intellectual group which plays a significant role in changing society and ignite the flame of resurrection and can bring peace on land.

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