

# **A literary Study of the Cultural and Religious Resistance of Africa and South Asia during Colonial Period**

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## **Abstract**

*Colonization, an evil in the name of good, is pregnant with meanings of human society both for the colonized and the colonizers. Although the colonizers tend to interpret colonization as the elevation of transformation of native culture and tradition to a higher and civilized culture and beliefs, yet, critics and theorists present their implantation of foreign culture and religion as exploitation and as a means of reaping the rich heritage of the South Asia and African regions which they carved out and occupied, making them empires of their own.. This paper therefore attempts to identify the saga of cultural and religious resistance of the colonial culture as presented by the post-colonial writers, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Riaz Hassan in *The Unchosen* (2002). Post-colonial theory is applied as a framework in the paper to address the role of literature on social and cultural perspective of the colonial subjects, and their creative resistance to the culture of the colonizers. However, what perhaps provided justification to the colonization is the weaknesses observed from the colonized culture which give rise to the role of the power politics of the colonizers. It is therefore the objective of this paper to examine the degree of deceit of the colonizers in destroying the rich tradition and culture of the colonized with a view to ascertaining the strengths of the South Asia and African culture. The paper concludes that the impact of the post-colonial writers truncated the devilish colonial rule which brought about independence to the colonized regions.*

**Keywords:** Colonization, Resistance, South Asia, Africa

## **Introduction**

Colonization is a complex phenomenon which has opposite meanings for the colonizers and colonized. It is not, of course, a recent phenomenon. The known history of this colonization is

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essentially one of invasion, enslavement, theft and exploitation through the ruthless application of force<sup>1</sup>.

What is viewed as a glorious, God-inspired triumph by the successful colonizers, who justify their depredations as the benign agents of superior divine or human forces, is seen as a great disaster with the loss of freedom and cherished traditions by the colonized; and neither is completely right<sup>2</sup>.

For purpose of this study the effects of recent European colonization in two different areas of the world, namely Africa and South Asia, will be addressed. A good bit of post-colonial writing emanating from each side is self-justifying in nature. The ex-colonizers point out the material benefits accruing to the people they colonized, such as technology, modern government, education, medicine, scientific and the like. The ex-colonized bewail the loss of tradition, of things their forebears once held dear, and were anxious to set the record straight with regard to the much vilified civilizations that existed before the coming of the colonizers. One usually sees an attempt at reestablishing an older order when colonies regain freedom, although this is idealistic rather than practical. In a Hegelian sense, the clash of propositions leads to new dispensations rather than reversals to older orders. The researcher cannot predict directions or outcomes because these processes are ongoing.

In the part of the sub-continent that became Pakistan in 1947, before the arrival of the British there was a Sikh kingdom roughly comprising the former Punjab province (now divided between India and Pakistan) which once included much of the present province of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa (where Hassan's story is set), another kingdom in Sindh, and a scattering of mutually suspicious tribal principedoms and fiefdoms in the area called Balochistan.

However, the question of what existed before the British changed their presence in the regions from trading to ruling is of less value in this study. In Africa, too, there were much turbulence and changes in nations before they were colonized by Europeans. Shaka and Mzilikazi established fragile empires after much bloodshed and tyranny across much of the southern-to-middle land; endless factionalism and warfare between tribes and nations characterized much of the belt towards the upper middle and the north of the continent.<sup>3</sup> Invasion, settlement, slavery, exploitation and empire-building were the way of things well before the Europeans came. Moreover, there is a qualitative difference between a colonial empire created by a dominant faction within a given set of people, and one imposed on them by outsiders whose values, norms, expectations, language,<sup>4</sup> clothes and cultural underpinnings are significantly different.

Notably, the paper delimits its scope of study to Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and Riaz Hassan in *The Unchosen* to

represent Africa and South Asia respectively. This delimitation is to cover the facts that these continents are heterogeneous societies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Resistance and representation are very vivid phenomena within which most of the colonialists dramas with relation to the postcolonial writer's defense have been discussed. The postcolonial writers have defended their culture, religion and social life and tradition through writings.<sup>5</sup> As stated by Stephen Greenblatt that various texts were the "invisible bullets" in the arsenal of empires. He is of the opinion that texts and textuality have played an important role in colonization and conquests.<sup>6</sup> Most of the European texts such as histories, anthropologies and fictions captured the picture of the non-European subjects in European framework which read her alterity as terror or lack.<sup>7</sup> Through the explanation and elaboration the native cultures postcolonial writers have rejected the colonizers presentation of the colonial culture and their social norms and traditions. They have also declared that the occupants adopted authoritative behavior through suppressing the native voices in the representation of the native people. In short the native writers are of the opinion that all the Europeans presentations about the "others" are based upon their own assumptions and desires.<sup>8</sup>

Postcolonial textual resistance against the colonizers and their supporters has taken many twists and turns from 19th century since the publication of Macaulay's famous Minute in 1835. Many other producers presented resistance through films because there were lots of economic and technological difficulties in the presentation of postcolonial societies. Presentation of the postcolonial resistance in theoretical form has become central to postcolonial debates. Its theoretical form has created binary oppositions between the colonizers and colonized and on the bases of these various oppositions the postcolonial writers have constructed resistance tools.<sup>9</sup> The earlier theorizes of resistance proposes foundation of unallocated binaries such as center/margin, self/other and colonizer/colonized. It will not be wrong to say that various writers have presented different theories on the bases of these binaries oppositions.

### *Resistance, Opposition and Representation*

Said, an essayist has talked about anti-colonial and anti-imperial activities in one of his literary works. Resistance, Opposition and Representation are the three forms of resistance showed by the postcolonial writers in response to colonial writings. The writer has talked about primary resistance where he talked about the recovery of the geographical territory which is considered the heart of decolonization. Nevertheless, the resistance will fail without the restoration of culture of the natives. Second, he talked about

ideological<sup>10</sup> resistance which is literary fighting against outside intrusion.

#### *Sub-continental (Pakistan) Cultural Resistance*

Pakistan was the hub of various religions and cultures, some religions claim that culture should be according to the religion.<sup>11</sup> Religion however is viewed as mode of life. Hassan negates this notion by saying that if the natives want to compete in global world then they must adopt modern ways and methods. If that is not done there will be a threat of colonization because it is the law of nature that the weak ones become the food for the powerful ones either directly or indirectly. This future prediction was given by the writer in a written document: *The Unchosen*. The natives of this region remained fixed and final in their ideas. The same regions have suffered from colonization many times through various colonizers.

*“The British were tremendous gun-makers, much better than the Russians, or any others we knew of. I wanted to learn more about the Ferenghis and their methods because I felt we would come up directly against them at some point in the future”*<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the book is of the view that if any nation wants to make progress in any field of life it should develop its culture as well as the social norms and traditions according to the pressures of the time. The natives should rise above medieval thinking. It will not be wrong to say that the writer has tried to identify one cause of colonization which is excessive idealism of the natives.

*“Abdul Rahman and I came back together, he as a welcome leader, I as the black-sheep of the tribe. The mood seemed to have changed decisively from one of perpetual truculence to one of peace and development, and I was seen as a misfit in the new regime”*.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Religious Resistance*

Religious inspiration plays a vital role in the condemnation of the other's existence and their right to rule the world as Hassan says “The whole of God's earth is a mosque”.<sup>14</sup> Religion justifies its own beliefs and principles where the followers of every religion claim that their ways of thinking and beliefs are verified from God who is the runner of the world, at the same time they condemn others by saying that their belief is against the will of God, so they do not have right to live. This is the reason that followers of one religion consider is their right to govern the whole world. They assume that Creator of this universe is with them because they are loyal to Him. The word ‘mosque’ is very symbolic because it simply signifies “a place for prayer for Muslim” but its literary interpretations are wide for example, if the whole world is a mosque then it is understood that there is no place for unbelievers.

On the basis of religious superiority, the writer is of the opinion that the natives follow them without understanding the reason for doing so. He says that colonization is poisoning the natives day by day and they have become suspicious about God because they have got much less than what they expected. This reference has resembles Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* where the natives expect that their gods will kill the colonizers for daring to because they construct their buildings on graveyards. But when nothing happens, they think that the white man has some magical power or that the God of the Europeans is superior to their own<sup>15</sup>

The novelist claims that the colonial people are fighting the war of God against colonizers because their teaching and preaching are contradictory to each other. It is a fact that every religion emphasizes pilgrimage through one way or another to promote its ideology and vision. In Pakistan, the Muslims are of the opinion that they are fighting to save religion and culture which it prescribes. Religion is superior to culture according to Islam. Islam claims to be a complete code of life. The practitioners and followers of Islam consider that culture should be according to Islam. Every Muslim wants to be loyal to God and His prophet (PBUH) because He alone authenticates one's life and makes it purposeful based on one's belief and loyalty. Without religion, life is absurd and alienated.

*"If these people expect us to change inside ourselves, to become like them, they are fools." 'I have drunk my draught of poison, O Brother Syed,' I replied. 'I shall do no more. Let others take over. I confess that it hurts me to think how little support we got from God, even though we were acting for Him'"<sup>16</sup>*

The novelist is of the opinion that the natives showed resistance against the alien culture primarily because of religion. They consider style of the Ferenghis to be sinful because they have wandered away from the teachings of Prophet Eissa. They consume prohibited in Islam such meat of pig, alcohol, etc. They take interest in money which is also prohibited food and drinks, and indulge in usury.

*"You're trying to copy the Ferenghis in the way you fight. That's a sin. They claim to follow the Prophet Eissa, but they have strayed far from the teachings. They indulge in gambling and usury. They drink intoxicants. They eat forbidden meats. They have no control over their women, who paint themselves and prance around shamelessly in public with strange men. And these are the people you want to emulate!"<sup>17</sup>*

#### *Control, Liberty, Freedom and Feminism in Islam*

Islam is the last of the Semitic religions, so in this sense Islam is modern. The researcher has mentioned two things which are among the principles of Islam, i) Parda, ii) Nano Nafka. Women's

population is increasing rapidly and they are more than half of the world, especially when we talk about the Muslim world they are round about 60% and remaining 40% men. The question arises that whether this 40% population can fulfill the requirements of women all with competing with the developed countries where 100% population is in working position. Was this dependency of women over men is reason of colonization?

*Parda* and *Nan o Nafka* are also interlinked. If females are dependent on males for *Nan o Nafka*, they will have to obey them. Hassan highlights one dilemma of the natives that they believe on fatalism more than realism. They ignore the statement that “where there is a will there is a way”. The colonial people are of the opinion that when their gods will favor them, they will get victory automatically because nothing is beyond the Creator.

#### *Necessities and Resistance*

Science and technology have changed the scenario of the world where the ancient phenomenon that “past is precious” is mainly for those who have enjoyed power in past on the basis of idealism. The idealists constructed the origins of human existence on the basis of the theory that creation have creator. With the passage of time they have questioned some of these premises. Nevertheless, some scholars has started to think that *Science as a religion* because it created many miracles in human beings lives.<sup>18</sup> If science is a religion then the West is its creator which has created a horrible situation for the ancient religions. Besides the presentation of the religions and history as resistance tools, the writer also conveys that science and technology proved such a force which proved a better medicine to overcome the wounds of resistance of the natives when the mullah became helpless to give it the name of satanic machines. Hassan satirizes the situation by using words satanic machines. It is very symbolic because initially mullahs condemned the scientific inventions by saying that these are satanic productions but with the passage of time they become so used to them such that now the mullah’s survival seems impossible without electricity and scientific inventions. The writer says that mullah’s voice was just before the scientific inventions, even though the mullah used the resistance weapons against colonizers through various tactics and techniques.

*“The mullah’s voice rose to howl ‘this is blasphemy, Murad Khan, May God have mercy on you. The Ferenghis are using satanic machines”.*<sup>19</sup>

The mullah uses the word martyred for those who die in the way of Lord. He is not willing to consider it a loss because according to him it is a sacred profession and these Mujahidin will be rewarded in Heaven. This seems a prediction of the past about the present as well as the future. The developing world, and especially Pakistan, is going the way Hassan predicted many years ago. It has created the

confusion as to whether the army is fighting for the will of God in protecting movements like the Talban, or is fulfilling the will of God in attacking them. Hassan indicates how religion became a tool of resistance against the colonizers. However, at this point his tool is ambivalent. The conversation of Murad Khan and the mullah signifies the two aspect of thinking of the common man today. Religions are in competition with postmodern realities. As he states that the reward of earthly victory cannot be compared with God's reward.

*"His voice turned strident; 'But know this, Murad Khan, before you let this temporal leadership go to your head, they were martyred in the way of the Lord, All of us only live to serve God, and if by dying we serve Him then that is how it should be. How do you know they made no impression? I'm sure those sepoys were astonished at their courage and zeal, even as they shot them down. It will make them hesitant next time. There will be a great reward for those boys in Heaven... what is a minor worldly victory compared to God's reward?"*<sup>20</sup>

The writer further narrates the fixity of the mullah's mind on one hand and common man's thinking on another side where ancient beliefs seems stronger than the revolution wrought by modernization and industrialization. Mullah is not ready to listen to a single word beyond the lines drawn by religion using Arabic as the source of communication. The writer's whole debate revolves around the mullah's preaching and requirement of the present time where everything is in a state of revolution. Hassan also talks about the conservative minds of mullah. The writer says;

*"The old man turned fiercely. 'Are you trying to teach me something about religion Murad Khan? You study it once a week, perhaps. I study it all the time'"*.<sup>21</sup>

Beside the presentation of the mullah's steadfastness with religion, the writer shows some behavioral changes as well as intelligence in the attitude of mullah, maybe these changes are one result of globalization (of which colonization was an early manifestation).<sup>22</sup> He is of the opinion that modern mullah is different from the past one. It is also interest to see who a mullah who has no choice in the matter adjusts to changing circumstances

*"I was able to talk to the mullah many times. He was jovial and intelligent, very different from the unyielding, hell screaming clerics of my childhood. Basically I wanted to see how a man of true faith would live under an infidel regime"*.<sup>23</sup>

### *African Cultural Resistance*

Culture plays a vital role in the construction of realities and gives a ready code of life to its natives, which further builds identity for the

natives in the form of a history.<sup>24</sup> Africa as painted by European colonizers presents a dark picture. They are of the opinion that African nations have no culture, no identity and are living like animals in modern age. According to Achebe, most historians are of the opinion that African civilization is without any history and culture. He has mentioned in one of his books<sup>25</sup> that "... did not that erudite British historian a professor at Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper, also pronounce that African history did not exist?" (P-2). After this presentation, a strong response came from the African writers who tried to show the complete picture of the Africa. Among them is the nonured name of Achebe, considered the founder or the father of the restoration of African culture. Before that African culture existed in the form of folk tales. It is also a fact that his Trilogy is also taught as the history subject in the African context.<sup>26</sup>

Postcolonial writers have strongly criticized the Conrad notion of savagery about the Africans. They have tried to establish the notion that Conrad is unaware of the African culture and their social norms and traditions, how can he establish the realities about the region which he has not visited physically, as Achebe has raised this question in his main and powerful novel *Things Fall Apart* that the colonizers and historians are unaware of their cultures as well as the social norms and traditions. How can they picture the cultural scenes of the African societies? "Does the white man understand our custom about land?"<sup>27</sup>

Heart of Darkness is reflection of the dark discourses which the occident created about the orient generation including Africa. This picture creates a division between people.

*"Only the most cultivated person counts as a "real European". A "real Africa", on the other hand, lives in the bush... goes naked... and tells fairy stories about the crocodile and the elephant. But an African who is enlightened and cosmopolitan... who makes political speeches, or writes novels, no longer counts as a real African. In response to the occidentalists' misrepresentation Achebe represented the Igbo culture".*<sup>28</sup>

### *Igbo Representation*

Igbo society has a rich culture.<sup>29</sup> Historical accounts present Igbo's culture, tradition and religious activities before colonialism as having changed due to colonialism in the Igbo society.<sup>30</sup> Southern Nigerian group of ethnic people is known as the Igbo, where the Igbo society was a combination of various dialects. Igbo group is known as the largest ethnic group in Africa.<sup>31</sup> Yams constituted the most important food of the region. Achebe has presented yams as the symbols of prosperity of Africans. From the start of the novel to its end the prosperity of the natives is linked with these yams. In the second chapter of the novel we see that the main threat to their crops is from



locusts which symbolize destruction in African society. In chapter fifteen, the writer compares the colonizers with locusts.<sup>32</sup>

Achebe constructed the Igbo's identity through the presentation of native's culture and religion. History presented by Achebe through *Things Fall Apart* shows that Igbo people were politically independent where they had their own custom and traditions to solve their social problems. It is to be considered that before European's invention of Africa, they did not have strong identity but Achebe has challenged this notion of the negative propaganda and presented the strong identity of the Africans. He has presented the Africans as a nation like Cherokee, the Japanese natives but it is a fact that Igbo is not officially recognized as the physical state of the natives.

Igbo culture is based on the practices and traditions of South East Nigeria in Southern Africa which is in the state of evolution because of the colonization and exploration of the Europeans as well as other colonizers. The traditions of Igbo communities are combination of visual arts, dance, and music as well as language dialects. Igbo culture was a democratic culture before the arrival of the colonizers. The concept of the slave and master is introduced by the colonizers through their tactics and techniques.

Along with presentation of viability of the Igbo's institutions, the writer has also sketched the picture of the Igbo art, music and dance through presenting that how it is intervene with the institutions of the clan. Achebe also shows the beauty of the Igbo language through the use of English in his own style.

The traditional African religion was Odinani but many people were converted into Christianity after colonization. Igbo mythology is considered the tradition of the ancient Igbo religion in which Chukwu is considered the supreme God and small gods serve under the Chukwu. According to the natives beliefs Chukwu created everything on earth and He is associated with all the small as well as big things existed on the earth.

The representation in *Things Fall Apart* shows that it is document against the misrepresentation of the African history and culture through occidental discourses. *Things Fall Apart* irrevocably changed the perception of African Literature in English. Jeffrey Meyers says that:

*"Achebe celebrates the bonds of kinship in family life, the respectful and ceremonial visits, the worship of the ancestral spirits, the veneration of the Oracle and of the elders, ... the arrangement of the bride price, the feasts of marriage, of harvest, and of farewell; the singing, the drumming, the dancing and the wrestling; the village councils and the oratory, the courts of justice and the last rites of the dead."*<sup>33</sup>

#### *African Religious Resistance*

Ideological differences bring physical destruction in societies, among societies and between societies, where sons kill their fathers and mothers, sometimes fathers kill their sons for their pleasure or to make their gods happy or to impress their fetish religious leaders. Wars between the nations in the name of religion are very common and 97 percent wars have been fought on this issue. Even in postmodern times religion is a tool to preserve power. People use it for the perpetuation of their own interests. The entire nation authenticates their actions through religion. But victimized people use religion for resistance and to unite the people for war against the enemy. The African religious resistance was not as destructive as it was seen in other cultures and communities. Thus, Achebe has demonstrated African religious resistance in his novel *Things Fall Apart*.

The writer establishes a tool of resistance as well as identifies one reality that most people converted into Christianity were poor; there was no man of title or fame; the writer has used the *efulefu* for these people. The word *efulefu* means worthless, coward and emptiness. This word is also used with reference to those people who sold their machetes ran away from the war or battle. This conversion of the poor people of the societies and the condemnation of the poor convertors is as old as human history. In African society they got the name of *efulefu* whereas in South Asia societies most of the poor *Shudras* converted in Islam started to claim a separate state but the upper class condemned their actions.

African gods, goddesses and priests turned against the new religion as a mad dog which came to eat them. They were well aware that the coming of the new religion would destroy the harmony and atatus of the existing ones. Along with the condemnation of the new religion the priests described new convert the excrement of African society. Religious conversion or exploitation works like mad dog which challenges existing structures and realities.

*“None of his converts was the man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called efulefu, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an efulefu in the language of the clan was a man who sold his machete and wore the sheath to battle. Chielo, the Priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan. And the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up”.*<sup>34</sup>

It is universally acceptable that every religion has a God with infinite power. The followers of such specific religion share a little bit of that power as messengers, who are just to get hold on the people through the manipulation of the language. Achebe observed thus:

*“The colonizers give the name to God which is understood for the natives. The colonizers always manipulate the religions as well as*

*the native's culture through tracing the gaps and weaknesses in their culture as it happened in Africa and South Asia."*

Again he says,

*"Whenever Mr. Brown went to that village he spent long hours with Akunna in his obi talking through an interpreter about religion. Neither of them succeeded in converting the other but they learned more about their different beliefs. 'You say that there is one supreme God made heaven and earth,' said Akunna on one of Mr. Brown's visits. 'We also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods'".<sup>35</sup>*

It is also a fact that all the strategies proved the wall of sand when the natives demolished the church. The colonizers were surprised and worried to see the demolition of their church. Destruction of the religious institution is common phenomenon among various religions and same thing happened in African context. The destruction of the church shows strong footing as well as the emotional attachment of the natives on the one hand, and revenge as well as resistance of the natives on the other hand.

*"Mr. Smith stood his ground. But he could not save his church. When the egwugwu went away the red-earth church which Mr. Brown had built was a pile of earth and ashes. And for the moment the spirit of the clan was pacified."<sup>36</sup>*

### **Comparative study of Africa and South Asia Resistance**

Establishment and representation of African and South Asia cultures in *The Unchosen* and *Things Fall Apart* are direct or indirect cultural and religious resistance which motivates the readers and writers to raise voices against colonizers as well as imperialists. Cultural and religious inferiority of the colonial people provide a platform to the colonizers for colonization. The postcolonial writers of both the countries presented that the cultures of the natives of both regions were not inferior as presented by the colonizers.

South Asians' physical resistance described by Hassan is based on the cultural and the religious resistance. According to Hassan religious and cultural resistance are mixed in South Asia because Muslims and Sikhs consider their religions as the complete code of their life. There will be no wrong to say that their culture was attached to their religion. Hassan has presented a very complicated issue in depiction of resistance. It is not only the representation of resistance against the colonizers but also against the natives as well. He is of the opinion that natives provided an opportunity to the colonizers for colonization. Moreover, the novelist also represents a lack of unity among natives as results of colonization.

## Notes & references

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- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (UK: *Blackwood's Magazine* 1899)
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- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.,
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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.,  
<sup>35</sup> Ibid.,  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid.,