



CLASS NOTES ON CHINUA ACHEBE

Part – 1

FOR
B A ENGLISH
SEM - VI

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CHINUA ACHEBE

(16 NOV 1930 - 21 MARCH 2013)

- ✘ Chinua Achebe is the best known novelist not only from Nigeria but from the entire continent of Africa.
- ✘ He is perhaps the first African writer whose books have been prescribed as a part of the curriculum in Africa, although his earlier writings were definitely aimed at foreign audiences in Europe and America.

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- ✘ As the first black novelist from Africa, not only has he got an appreciative global readership but also an acclaim which is richly deserved.
 - ✘ most widely translated novelists in the world
 - ✘ most universally respected ones too.
 - ✘ For example. ***Things Fall Apart*** is ,an important part of the heritage of world literature and is considered a classic.

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- ✘ Achebe was born in Ogidi near Onitsha on the banks of river Niger on 16 Nov 1930.
 - ✘ His father was a missionary, one of the earliest Ibos to take to that profession.
 - ✘ By the time Achebe went to school major changes due to the intervention of colonialism had already taken place and were a reality.

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- ✘ His school education was at Umuahia Govt. Secondary school. After having been selected for medicine and after spending a year in that course, Achebe went back to University College of Ibadan to take a graduate degree in humanities.
 - ✘ This brought him in close contact with European culture and particularly the European literary traditions.

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- ✘ Simultaneously, his interest in the history of Nigeria grew and he started filling the gaps in his readings by asking questions about the pre-colonial society, although remnants/remains of it were still around in the day-to-day lives of the people.

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- ✘ However, when Achebe began to write In the latter part of the fifties, he was quite conscious of the fact that **he was writing about a part of the world with which his foreign readers in Europe and America would be quite unfamiliar.**
 - ✘ Achebe evokes values which go beyond the narrow confines of space and time.

ACHEBE'S NOVELS

- ✘ Like his other fellow African writers Achebe too finds himself in a unique situation as an **interpreter of a society** whose traditions have been disrupted by the intervention of colonialism.
- ✘ His novels, therefore, **reflect on the changes** which have come about in Ibo society in particular and Nigerian life in general as a result of what he calls a '**chance encounter**' between Europe and Africa during the colonial period.

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- ✘ Achebe's novels are unique and quite different from those written by his counterparts in England, although attempts have been made to fit them into the tradition of novel-writing in England.
 - ✘ It is true that his formative years were influenced by Christianity as well as the English school system

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- ✘ Achebe has acknowledged that a number of European writers, particularly Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh have influenced his development as a writer.
 - ✘ But it would be unfair to put him in the tradition of any one of these or any other European writer.

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- ✘ This is because Achebe, once again like other African novelists, has modified the form of novel as a genre while adopting it for the specific needs of his society where the tradition of literature has been primarily oral and has been entrenched for hundreds of years.

NOVELS BY ACHEBE

- × Things Fall Apart (1958)
- × No Longer at Ease (1960)
- × Arrow of God (1964)
- × A Man of the People (1966)
- × Anthills of the Savannah (1987)

THE AFRICAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

- ✘ The statement that there was no literature in various parts of Africa before the advent of Europeans is as false as the statement that Africa had no history and no past before the arrival of the Europeans.
- ✘ And yet both these statements have been made by many responsible European scholars and unfortunately many Europeans have believed them to be true as well.

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- ✘ The **misconception** about the lack of any literary achievements on the part of Africa could have arisen because of the fact that a **large number of African languages** lacked the **tradition of a script or a writing system**

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- ✘ In fact out of **seven hundred odd languages** spoken in Africa, there are **no more than forty-four** which have been used for written literary expression.
 - ✘ The literate western societies equated literature with literacy and the absence of literacy in a number of African societies was interpreted as their having no Literary tradition at all.

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- ✘ It is said that story-telling is as old as man himself. If this is true, story-telling must also have originated in Africa because, the origin of man can be traced to Africa.
 - ✘ Parlicularly in **southern Africa** there did exist a **tradition of writing**.
 - ✘ Most of the literary activities in Africa were confined to the genres of **poetry, drama and stories** since these suited the oral form of literature better. Novel as a genre of literature is alien to Africa.

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- ✘ Most literary writings in Africa in the written form began after the European colonial powers had introduced their own systems of education and their own religion – Christianity – on the continent.
 - ✘ The influence of the Bible is quite pronounced on these early writings.

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- ✘ African novel writing in English is a direct result of the process of **urbanisation, introduction of market economy** and the **emphasis on literacy**.
 - ✘ The initiative in writing novels in English came from the Western parts of Africa - Ghana and Nigeria.
 - ✘ South Africa was perhaps the last to draw Africans to writing novels in English primarily due to the government's policy of denying the Africans access to European languages

THANK YOU