

SEARCH FOR ROOTS

"
Listen Ocol, my old friend
The ways of your ancestors
Are good,
Their customs are solid
And not hollow
They are not thin, not easily breakable
They cannot be blown away
By the winds,
Because their roots reach deep into the soil"

(Okot P'Bitek : Song of Lawino)

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The colonial forces make a deliberate attempt at throwing the colonized out of history making process completely by distorting, disfiguring and destroying the past of the colonized as also by denying him the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The colonial education teaches the colonized that he has no worth while past, no history. All history, he is told, begins with the arrival of the colonizer, who like Prospero, has magical powers and is capable of civilizing Ariels and Calibans. Racial memory of the colonized is obliterated by destroying his social, cultural and religious institutions. Those institutions which somehow or the other survive are scorned and the colonized is made to feel ashamed of them. They thus serve no useful purpose and get petrified. These dead institutions are gradually replaced by institutions of the colonizer who is too eager to rename the streets, towns and cities of the colonized country as also to put up statues of his own kings and statesman. The colonizer replaces the old historical monuments of the colonized with new buildings designed after the fashions of his own country. Sometimes a Neo-Eastern style inclined more favourably towards the colonizer too is developed more for exotic reasons than as a natural outcome of renaissance of the Eastern Style and culture. This makes the colonized all the more ashamed of himself and his past.

Colonial education, as already discussed in the previous chapter is designed to fulfil the needs of the colonizer. Lord

Brougham in his speech in the House of Commons on 29 January, 1828 said, "The Schoolmaster is abroad, and I trust more to him, armed with his primer, than I do to the soldier in full military array, for upholding and extending the liberties of his country."¹

The Schoolmaster armed with his primer not only establishes the colonial system of education, but also helps in eradicating the earlier tradition of learning. Moreover, he gives only that much education which helps smoothen the inroads of colonization and makes the governance of the colony easy by turning the educated colonized into legal subject, a kind of robot. Like Njoroge in Ngugi's Weep not, child, the colonized is made to believe in the efficacy of his education as a means of personal and communal salvation, but is denied all opportunity to achieve that. Again, like the protagonist of Invisible Man, the colonized is ensnared to maintain his status through the subtle device of teaching him the use of eloquence and other polite virtues, as examined in the previous chapter. The colonized is taught history, not of his own country but that of the colonizer's. To him everything seems to have taken place out of his country. He and his land become nonentities. His religion is equated to heathenism and his civilisation to barbarity. Even the nursery rhymes he learns in school celebrate the queen's marriage in London. The books talk

1. Quoted in The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations.

(ed.) J.M. and M.J. Cohen, (Aylesbury, Bucks, ELBS ed. 1964) p.68(4).

to him of a world which in no way reminds him of his real world or the people he lives with. His very life becomes marginal turning him into a "marginal man".

And then he is taught another language, the language of the colonizer :

"You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse, the red plague rid you,
For learning me your language!

(Shakespeare : The Tempest 1.II.363)

is the cry of the colonized whose fate is trapped in linguistic dualism. It is not an act of possessing two tools, of living in two totally divergent and conflicting worlds, of "participation in two psychical and cultural realms"² His is not a case of bilingualism, in which the participant has competence in two languages, instead of one. In his case the two languages are the languages of the colonizer and the colonized, of the oppressor and the oppressed. They are never assigned the same status and role. Thus, colonial bilingualism is a linguistic drama with the roles of the ruler and the ruled assigned to the two languages, separately.

The colonized writer, therefore, has a special responsibility. He has a difficult role to perform as "he incarnates a magnified vision of all the ambiguities and impossibilities of the colonized."³ (Memmi, p.108) He thus, records the anxiety, ~~anger~~ agony, anguish and anger of his race. By using the oppressor's

2. Albert Memmi, p.107.

3. Ibid, p.108.

language and also his tools, the oppressed writer first expresses the shock of his race and the trauma of his people as is done by Achebe in Things Fall Apart and Ngugi in Weep Not Child. He, then, like Raja Rao in Kanthapura (the 'Harikatha' episode) tries to enthuse his people by evoking their past and finally proclaims in the words of Kofi Awoonor, the Ghanaian poet -

"We have found a new land

This side of eternity

Where our blackness does not matter....

.....-----.

And in the new land we have found

The water is drying from the towel.

Our songs are dead and we sell them dead

to the other side

Reaching for the stars we stop at the house of Moon

And pause to relearn the wisdom of our fathers"⁴

So, "selling his songs dead to the other side" and also pausing to "relearn the wisdom of our fathers" is perhaps the tragic predicament of the colonial writer who cannot remain content with the depiction of sheer 'human condition'. Having been born in a disjointed world, he tries to find meaning in the colonial experience which has fallen to his lot: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them."⁵

4. Quoted in, Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pitsoe, African Writers Talking (London : H.E.B, 1975), p.29.

5. Chinua Achebe, "The novelist as Teacher" in Morning Yet on Creation Day (London : Heinemann, 1977), p.45.

asserts Achebe. This is exactly what he does in his Things Fall Apart and An Arrow of God, perhaps with two fold aim of rehabilitation of the Igboland as also to justify the creation of a future national culture.

The missionary, the spiritual policeman of the coloniser, went to Africa and proclaimed that the African had no culture, no social organisation, no religion and no value system worth the name. He was a bushman, a brute who had to be taught Christianity both for the good of his soul and body. The so called altruistic missionary was supported by his countrymen; the soldiers and the merchants who were too eager to help the missionary in his 'civilizing' efforts. The missionary brought the Bible, the merchant, the money economy and the soldier, the central authority to Africa. All the three of them together plundered the native of his ancient religion, traditional value system, communal living and land. The missionary and the schoolmaster (and usually the two functions were combined in one and the same person) finally destroyed whatever was left of the traditional culture in the native African. The "colonial complex" became so strong in the colonized mind that he felt ashamed even of his weather as Achebe tells us about a boy who was asked to write a composition on harmattan. Instead, the boy wrote on winter, because "the other boys would call him a bushman if he did such a thing!" - was the reply the boy gave to his teacher. Achebe very poignantly remarks: "Now, you wouldn't have thought, would you, that there was something shameful in your weather? But apparently we do."⁶

6. Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" Morning Yet On Creation Day, p.44.

Achebe, therefore, feels concerned about this state of affairs and affirms : "The writer has the responsibility to teach his audience that there is nothing shameful about the harmattan, that it is not only daffodils that can make a subject for poetry, but the palm tree and so on."⁷

Achebe's commitment as an artist springs from his faith in the traditional view of art among the Igbo people, who treat art as a communal activity and not an individual pursuit. The artist in that society is someone chosen by Ala, the earth Goddess, who is also the controller of morality and all creativity. The artist is ordained by the Goddess herself to prepare the images of Ala and present them at the "colourful ceremony called 'mbari', a profound affirmation of the people's belief in the indivisibility of art and society."⁸ Achebe therefore asserts that art is a communal affair and "is a 'function' of society"⁹ It is a kind of spiritual experience both for the artist and the society. The artist, does not live in an ivory tower, totally cut off from the society indulging in his whims and creating works of art to be bought by kings or business tycoons. The traditional Igbo artist is commissioned by the goddess herself through her priest to make her images under the guidance of a master artist and once that assignment is complete, he goes back to his society and takes up his normal duties. He thus no more remains a professional artist.

7. Chinua Achebe in his interview with Donatus Nwoga, published in African Writers Talking, p.8.

8. Chinua Achebe, "Africa and her writers" Morning Yet On Creation Day, p.21.

9. Ibid, p.22.

Achebe, like the traditional artist, feels so much committed that he makes a plain statement : "Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure".¹⁰ He believes that art is the medium through which he can control his environment and help his people regain their self-confidence. He does this by creating a useful past which in his case is "the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son"¹¹ to the traditional way of life of his people.

Achebe in Things Fall Apart realistically portrays the past of his people. He maintains artistic detachment necessary for this kind of portrayal. He revalues Africa's past and takes a leaf from its history in which real people lived in real situations. On being asked about the authenticity of the life painted in Things Fall Apart, Achebe commented in an interview with Duerden,

" It was purely from the experience and of course a bit of imagination. I did not have to do any research as such. The festivals were there,...the whole attitude, (really it's the attitude of the people), their philosophy of life was still there. I mean, you could see it; and the rest really was using your own imagination to create the details of the story." 12.

Novel, for him, is an instrument of self-discovery through which he finds his historical roots and thus defines his identity and that of his people too. His picture of the Igbo life has its weak as well as strong points.

10. Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher", Morning Yet On Creation Day, p.45.

11. ~~xxx~~, Chinua Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England", Morning Yet On Creation Day, p.70.

12. African Writers Talking, p. 10.

Enumerating the strengths of Igbo life, Kate Turkington maintains that it has a homogeneous culture, "a total view of life in which nature, gods, people, ancestors, the past and present are all ~~mystically~~ ^{spiritually} linked...(through)...'egwugwu', an image which synthesizes all those aspects. Or through Chielo, Ani's priestess who also symbolizes the homogeneous ~~view~~ view of life held by Umuofia."¹³ This is essentially a good life with a communal ethic. The villagers have native wisdom and a shrewd common sense which is represented through the character of Obierika. The collective security and stability of the society is being guarded by the village goddess, Ani.

The life in Umuofia follows a natural rhythm marked by periodic festivals. Harvests and feasts measure time. Music and dances are as common as the new moons. The life here goes on as it always has been since the time the first man and woman came to live in the Igbo land. This continuity of tradition is marked by its timelessness.

Igbo life as depicted by Achebe is not idyllic. It has its weaknesses too. Brutality, inflexibility, too much of materialism, a virtual obsession with success and an arbitrary system of justice are some of the weaknesses of Igbo society. These weaknesses are highlighted through the arbitrary killing of the white man who came

13. Kate Turkington, Chinua Achebe : Things Fall Apart

(London : Edward Arnold, 1977), p.16.

to Abame on 'iron horse' (bicycle). The people not only killed him but tied his iron horse to their sacred silk-cotton tree for many months. They take no notice of the three white men who came to find out the cause of the murder. Finally, all the people of Abame are killed on a market day by the colonizer. The episode, as narrated by Obierika to Okonkwo in his exile illustrates the artistic control, restraint and economy that Achebe exercises over his narrative. Though the image of the 'iron horse' Achebe points out the inability of his ancestors to understand the implications of an inevitable historical change. By killing the white man, the society also exposes its another weakness : arbitrary system of justice. It is this system which is criticised by Uchendu, when he remarks: " Never kill a man who says nothing. Those men of Abame were fools." (p.98). But Uchendu's remark is not taken seriously by Okonkwo and Obirika, the two elders of Igbo community.

Harshness and brutality are shown in the arbitrary killings of Ikemefuna and Nneka's twins. Ikemefuna lives in Okonkwo's family for three years like his own son, but is killed by Okonkwo because the custom demands it so. Achebe describes the whole scene with a Greek sense of detachment, but comments upon this tribal customs of human sacrifice at two levels : one through the mouth of Obirika who tells Okonkwo : "If the Oracle said that my son should be killed, I would neither dispute it, nor be the one to do it." (p.61): and another, through Nwoye, Okonkwo's own son, who reacts to it sharply and embraces Christianity because of "the

poetry of the new religion" which "seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted the young soul - the question of Ikemefuna who was killed.." (p.134). Here is the irony of Okonkwo's life : the irony of the man who wanted to uphold the tribal customs, but could not hold his first born, even.

Again, it is the harshness of the attitude of the community which has produced 'osus' - the outcastes. It is they who embrace Christianity first. One of them, Okoli, denouncing the religion of his ancestors, kills the royal python in his zeal for christianity. Another convert, Enoch tears off the mask of an 'egwugwu', In the Igbo cosmology, an 'egwugwu' is not only a masquerade of the ancestral spirit, it is a force possessed by a person representing that ancestor. Thus, in an 'egwugwu' the living and the dead meet. It is that moment when the dancer becomes the dance. It is that point of legendary past where the time present and the time past become one and get frozen into eternity for the continuation of the life of the whole clan. Thus the death of an 'egwugwu' is the death of the past of an individual as also of the people. It has to be avenged and avenged it is by razing the local church building to the ground, which consequently brings the Imperial government to the very threshold of Umuofia.

The strain and tension of the colonized are orchestrated through the character of Okonkwo " the first protagonist in the Black African novel to symbolise the position of the African tragically under pressure in a rapidly changing social situation."¹⁴

14. Kate Turkington, p. 45.

Achebe, through this character, creates a controlled tension between the general and the particular by maintaining a balance between the two perspectives : social and individual. At the societal level, Okonkwo symbolises the traditional Igbo past which the community wants to preserve. Okonkwo's inflexibility, his insistence on 'manliness' and his rigidity to accept any change are as much individual traits as the traits of his culture : "I think in (Okonkwo's) time, the strong men were those who did not bend and I think this was a fault of the culture itself"¹⁵ maintains Achebe. Similarly, Okonkwo's matrix of values : a trust in kinship and a belief in human dignity is also the matrix of his society. But as is revealed in the final paragraph of the novel, this matrix is no longer valid and Undergoes a change. Okonkwo refuses to accept the new situation and therefore commits suicide : the great man dies the death of a dog.

Ezeulu, in Arrow of God, on the other hand, is not so rigid. By this time, colonialism has come to stay and hence he sends his son Uduche to be educated ~~at~~ the Mission school in order to become "his eyes and ears" over there. Moreover, he is an intellectual. He thinks about why things happen - of course as a priest...he's ready to accept change, intellectually."¹⁶ But he too comes to a sort of "Sticky end" mainly because of his pride, a kind of egocentric concern. The Igbo society however has

15. Quoted in Kate Turkington, p.23-24.

16. Chinua Achebe in an interview with Robert Serumaga in African Writers Talking, p. 16-17,

accepted the change. He has undergone a kind of social transformation.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the village community at Umuaro is a kind of extended family. The elders are respected and old customs are observed with grace and dignity. Village festivals are celebrated with gaiety. Gods mix freely with the humanbeings. Eru, the god of wealth is seen by young Obika "at a flash of lightening near the Ugili tree between their village, Umuachala, and Umunneora" (p.8). The continuity of their tradition is marked by the timeless quality of their folk tales and history. Ezeulu's enactment of the cosmogonic act of the "First coming of Ulu" annuls time by projecting the concrete time into the mythical time. "At that time, when lizards were still in ones and twos..." (p.70) unfolds a consecrated space and also a sacred time. The ritual thus marks a cyclical orientation of the existence and continuation of the clan. Similarly the meeting of two friends, Ezeulu and Akuebue at latter's obi after the Pumpkin Festival in chapter Eleven, described with rare delicacy and taste, also marks the continuation of the traditional way of life.

After exchanging verbal pleasantries, Akuebue asks his son to bring Kolanut, symbolic of a warm welcome. It is brought and presented to Ezeulu :

"Thank you," said Ezeulu. "Take it to your father to break."

'No,' said Akuebue. 'I ask you to break it.'

'That cannot be. We do not by-pass a man and enter his compound.'

'I know that,' said Akuebue, 'but you see that my hands are full and I am asking you to perform the office for me.'

'A Man cannot be too busy to break the first Kolanut of the day in his own house. So put the yam down,' it will not run away.'

'But this is not the first Kolanut of the day. I have broken several already.'

'That may be so, but you ~~did~~not break them in my presence. The time a man wakes up is his morning.'

'All right,' said Akuebue. 'I shall break it if you say so.'

'Indeed I say so. We do not apply an ear-pick to the eye.' (p.111).

This stately, graceful and leisurely piece of conversation marks the tempo and rhythm of the traditional Igbo life which is upheld by its elders who make a judicious use of the native idioms and proverbs. 'We do not by-pass a man and enter his compound', 'The time a man wakes up is his morning' and 'We do not apply an ear pick to the eye' not only describe the situation appropriately, but are also packed with the collective wisdom of their clan and mark continuity of their people.

The community of Umuaro is "an acephalic society"¹⁷ in which customs and traditions perform the functions vested otherwise in the rulers (as is the case with the British community of Okperi). The continuity of the tradition, in this community, is also ensured by the principle that a man always speaks truth to his son, and the tradition is kept up by Ezeulu, who tells, his son, Nwafo : "A man does not speak a lie to his son", he said, 'Remember that always.' (p.93). He is deeply distressed to learn that his children do not believe him. He complains to his friend Akuebue. "That is why a stranger can whip a son of mine and go unscathed, because my son has nailed up his ear against my words." (p.98). The tradition is also upheld by Akuebue who explains it to Edogo and the other two sons of Ezeulu : "Those of you who think they are wiser than their father forget that it is from a man's own stock of sense that he gives out to his sons." (p.99). Achebe with a deft stroke of irony tells us : "Edogo Nodded. He was wondering whether it was true that a man never spoke a lie to his son (p.99). It is through this 'honest doubt' of Edogo's nodding that the novelist suggests the changes being brought about by the colonialists in the social structure of the tribal life. Obika's mixing with the other boys has nothing to do with his being beaten by the young British colonizer, Mr. Wright.

Ezeulu and Akuebue both fail to see the facts. Ezeulu thinks that Obika was beaten by the British Officer because he was drunk and also because he did not follow his instructions. Akuebue puts the

17. Molly Mahood, p.40.

blame on Obika for keeping bad company. Their failure in locating the real cause is the failure of the Igbo community itself, which fails to identify the colonial forces of disruption.

Achebe, here, in Arrow of God, tries to create a realistic picture of the Igbo past and thus points out its weaknesses as well. While the village community has cohesion and continuity, it lacks dynamic leadership. ^{Ezeulu,} Having been denied access to real political power, ^{which he} gets retributive, and makes his community suffer for the humiliation, he believes, it has inflicted upon him. Like the other members of his clan, he fails to identify the real source of disruption. As he cannot do anything against the colonizer who has humiliated him, Ezeulu, like a typical colonized, priest, tries to make his religion rigid and formal to manifest his power. Acquisition, retention and dispensation of power, in fact, can define Ezeulu's personality. He is afraid to lose it and whenever he gets even an inkling of it, he is on his guard. The novel opens with Ezeulu's realisation of the loss of power of sight due to old age : "Ezeulu did not like to think that his sight was no longer as good as it used to be..." (p.1). He tries to console himself that he is still young and to prove this to others he played a "game" on the young people : "Whenever they shook hands with him he tensed his arm and put all his power into the grip, and being unprepared for it they winced and recoiled with pain." (p.1).

Being a 'king-priest,' Ezeulu does enjoy power over his people. Considering the "immensity of his power over the year and crops... he wondered if it was real" (p.3). He debates this question of power

in his mind for a long time and finds that he cannot use it. He is not satisfied with it. Achebe through a telling Igbo proverb tells us that "it was no more than the power in the anus of the proud dog who sought to put out a furnace with his puny fart" (p.4). The phrase not only describes the condition of a colonized leader appropriately, but also expresses the agony of Ezeulu's soul. Ironically, it defines the theme of the novel, too. The power that he thinks he has over his people, proves to be no better than a dog's fart.

At least three episodes in the novel prove that his power is limited only to religious and cultural matters. First, he fails to convince Umuaro about the futility of war with Okperi. The war is stopped not by Ezeulu, but by Winterbottom, the colonizer. Secondly, he could not do anything regarding the beating given to his son, Obinika by Mr. Wright. Thirdly, he had to pocket insult at the hands of the colonizer at Okperi. But he is too proud to accept his defeat. Like a typical colonized father, he tightens his grip over the extended family of Umuaro. Even a dream of his Grandfather's failure to control his people does not dissuade him from not declaring the Feast of New Yam at the desirable time. It is this political alienation that makes him so rigid in the observance of religious rituals and rites.

While the village community accepts change, its leader ironically fails to do so. He does not change, not because of egoism so much as because of the colonial forces of disruption which have drained him of real power.

Thus, Achebe in Arrow of God gives a balanced picture of the past of his people. On the one hand, he salutes the magnificence of Ezeulu who could stand fast, even in the face of oddest circumstances. On the other hand, he points out the necessity for a change by suggesting the defection of the people whose survival itself is threatened.

So, we see that Achebe interprets the African past from within. His novels chronicle the cultural, social, political and historical change among his people. "Each novel is a chapter in the checkered history of Nigeria. Since the turn of the century, as well as a literary expression of the cultural, traditional and religious practices of the Igbo people."¹⁸ Some critics tend to consider them as sociological and historical documents ignoring their literary merit. Achebe had these people in his mind when he remarked : "Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares?"¹⁹ In his missionary zeal for educating his people, he does not recognize a dichotomy between a purely literary art and art as social protest. In fact he raises social protest, ~~in fact he~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ to the level of art in the true 'Mbari' tradition of his people. Art and social protest are integrated in his

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18. Ihechunku Madubuike, "Achebe's ideas on Literature" Black World, 24, 2 (Dec., 1974) p.60-70.
19. Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" Morning Yet on creation Day, p.45.

fiction and make a unified whole like the two aspects of the Yoruba god, Eshu who painted himself black on the left and white on the right. It is the viewers who got confused about his colour, and quarrelled and fought with each other. Eshu, on the testimony of Achebe,²⁰ enjoyed this confusion. Education and not confusion, however, is what Achebe aims at when he asserts that the African writer has "Still the inescapable grammar of values to straighten out"²¹ and this he does first by destroying the false image created by the colonizer of the past of his people and then by re-interpreting it at the individual and the societal level through his novels of the Igbo past.

Tyranny of the past and the conflict between the past and the present form the theme of the later novels of Achebe. The protagonists of these two novels, Obi Okonkwo and Odilli have inherited their tribal past as also the colonial legacy of exploitation and corruption. They try to fight these forces, but alas! they lose the battle half way, because they are weak individuals fighting a whole lot of people. Moreover, they are not incorruptible totally besides being inheritors of the colonial past.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, Obi Okonkwo is living

20. Chinua Achebe, "Africa and her Writers" Morning Yet On Creation Day, p.20.

21. Ibid, p.22.

is living in Lagos within the fold of Umuofia Progressive Union whose members "are very proud of its (Umuofia's) past when it was a terror of their neighbours, before the whiteman came and levelled everybody down." (p.4). These Umuofians believe that here in Lagos, they are strangers. They have their own set of values, inherited from their tribal and colonial past. Umuofia Progressive Union is an ancient relic, a remnant of the tribal past. Obi Okonkwo, on the other hand, believes in a different order of society. They (Obi and the Union) represent "two different sets of assumptions as to what society is and should be."²² Obi has no patience with the old tribal ways of life and yet he does not win our sympathy fully because he fails to understand the social, historical, psychological and religious compulsions of the tribal set up and the colonial legacy. He fights the old ways and the new temptations in the beginning, but finally succumbs to them. His shoulders are too weak to bear the burden of the tribal past. His mind is benumbed by the tyranny of the colonial customs and ways. Unlike his fictional grandfather Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart, Obi's tragedy proceeds from his modernity. As a matter of fact his is a kind of modern tragedy which has no resolution but only suffering, and of course, a sense of loss and waste. His experiences which are grim, pathetic but sometimes comic, originate from "the oppressive weight of doubt, guilt, shame and regret that the colonial experience has imposed on modern Nigerian."²³

22. Davind Cook, p.86.

23. G.D. Killam, p. 58.

The experiences of Odilli are none too pleasant, either. He, however, takes a comic stance with the result that A Man of the People becomes a farce. The irony of the earlier novels, here, turns to satire, sardonic pungent and even biting. The Mask which in the earlier novels represented the continuity of the past and was a serious affair, here becomes a source of sheer entertainment. It no more unites people with their ancestors, as is done by 'egwugwu' in Arrow of God. Moreover, now, it is being performed to entertain christmas guests, and not to celebrate the New Yam Feast or any other agricultural festival propitiating a god. The elders have nothing to do with it. The boys dance more for collecting money than for any religious reason. The whole thing has been reduced to a farce: "The children sang, beat drums, gongs and cigarette cups and Mask danced comically to the song :

Sunday, bigi bele Sunday

Sunday, bigi bele Sunday

Atakakata done come!

Everybody run away!

Sunday, Alleluia!"(p.96-7).

The contemporary Nigeria painted in this novel is the "fat-dripping, gummy, eat-and-let-eat regime," (p.149) a thoroughly corrupt and cynical society. The proverbial tribal past is perhaps lost irrevocably, Odilli, the anti-hero, too is completely disillusioned. Social parameters have changed. The traditional proverbial culture is so much shattered that the proverbs seem to

have lost their meanings and have thus become empty : "Koko had taken enough for the owner to see" said my father to me reflects Odilli, "My father's words struck me because they were the very same words the villagers of Anata had spoken to Josiah, the abominable trader" who had stolen the stick of the blind man for preparing some juju. The whole village had boycotted him and he had to wind up his shop. "Only in their case the words had meaning. The owner was the village, and the village had a mind;... But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner. The laws of the village became powerless." (p.148). This is how Odilli sums up the novel. But, when we read between the lines, and try to understand the intention of the novelist through the "slightest variation in tone of voice and satirical inflections"²⁴ as suggested by Ravenscroft, we find that "Achebe does not share Odilli's 'realistic' view that man's basic nature is grasping and selfish." (p.189). On the contrary what we discover is that Achebe maintains a comic-ironic stance even to Odilli, who fails to understand the ways of his father almost completely. His grammar of values is different from that of his community. He is almost blind to the communal mores which are valid even to-day. It is through the character of Odilli's father that Achebe presents some of the admirable values of the past. The father

24. Arthur Ravenscroft "Novels of Disillusion" Readings in Commonwealth Lit., William Walsh (ed.), (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 189.

is the local chairman of Nanga's party but still reconciles with his son's friends who belong to the opposite party : " I believe that the hawk should perch and the eagle perch, whichever says to the other don't, may it break its own wing." (p.122) He is made to suffer on account of his son, but does not renounce his nobility.

Similarly, Edna's mother is gifted with a kind of native wisdom. For her Odilli and chief Nanga are similar : "What is my share in that? They are both whiteman's people. And they know what is what between themselves. What do we know?"(p.106).

Though Odilli's father has the traditional wisdom, he has the traditional weaknesses too. One of them is fondness for having more children (he has thirty five of them! from five wives!) . Similarly, Edna's father has no shame in bargaining over her bride-price. What he expects from his son-in-law is : "He will bring and bring and bring and I will eat until I am tired." (p.91). But this perhaps, can be treated, as a case of personal greed and not a representative of the whole society, as there are other cases of bride price in the earlier novels too. Those cases are dealt with more sympathetically.

T.M. Aluko however, has no patience with all these customs. His One Man, One Wife is as much the story of a rebellion against

this custom of forced marriage and the tyranny of bride-price ~~xxxx~~ as of the victory of Christianity over heathenism. "To Aluko nothing is sacrosanct."²⁵ He is an iconoclast who debunks African past with the zeal of a reformist and the bitterness of a sardonic satirist. His satiric eye does not spare the christians, either. The village elders, Pastor David, Teacher Royasin, village men and women - Christian or heathen all fall prey to his pungent comments. He spares no one. His method becomes obvious from the opening chapter itself in One Man, One Wife. The villagers of Isolo look at "lightning and thunder" as Shango's way of "registering his anger at this strange talk of a new God taking hold of simple folk who were once unquestioning votaries of his order" (p.3) For Royasin, the village schoolmaster and catchist, "A heavy peal of thunder which tailed off into rumbling and died out grumbling behind the clouds effectively emphasized the case for repentance." (p.3). Similarly he exposes the Pastor's hypocrisy, Royasin's rapacity and the village elders' gluttony and bouts of drinking whatever may the occasion be with equal force and zeal. He, therefore, seems to be attacking both the present and the past. On a closer examination, we find that in his case present is nothing but an extension of the tribal past, as the old customs still continue. An interesting example of this is Jacob's letter of 25th March, 1922 to his father Joshua, in which he praises Lord Jehovah for all his

25. O.R. Dathone, African Literature in the Twentieth Century (London, HEB, 1975) p.75.

blessings but at the same time adds a postscript : "P.S. Father, do you remember that medicinal soap that the old chief Lotun prepared for me as protection against witches and wicked men?..." (p.22) But then, remembering that he is a christian now, he stresses that "I do not believe in Chief Lotun's medicine any longer." (p.23). This oscillation between the Christian and the tribal ways represents the dilemma of the first generation christian converts. Living on the margins of two cultures, they belong to neither completely. The village elders in One Man, One Wife are caricatures. Their characters have not been fully realised. They lack the dignity, grandeur and even humanity of their compeers from Achebe's fictional world. One such character is Chief Lotun, the priest of Shango. He tries to play the role of a 'griot', the village chronicler. After speaking only three sentences about Fagbola, Joshua's brave father, he finds that he does not have anything else to say: "After another fruitless attempt the old man sank on to his chair. The fountain of ancient history had apparently dried up." (p.69) Even their meetings for solving certain critical problems like the smallpox epidemic end in a fiasco, as the elders have no solutions to offer. The traditional methods like human sacrifice to appease god Shonponna cannot be applied due to the whiteman who has interfered in their world.

The village community at Idasa, thus, we see is superstitious, ignorant, illiterate and exploitative. It has all the characteristics of a typically colonized society as described by

Memmi. It is being exploited by the colonizer from the outside and by the religious practices and social customs from within. The internal dynamics so very vital for the growth and sustenance of a social order has yielded to stagnation. It can produce only cheats like Royasins and village elders like chief Lotun, Asolo and Badas whose chief aim is to exploit people. The tyranny of social customs drives people away from their traditional way of life. They embrace Christianity, not out of love for the Christian ways but out of frustration with their own religion which has failed them.

Aluko, however, fails to exploit his theme fully. Unlike Achebe, he takes the conflict of the past and the present only on the cultural level, ignoring economic, social and psychological implications. Perhaps he sees nothing worthwhile in the past of his people.

Folk tales, proverbs and folk songs which lend flavour of authenticity to the novels of Achebe, too, serve a comical and satirical purpose in Aluko's fiction. In One Man, One Wife, it is Toro, a teenager, who tells a folk tale to the village urchins. She concludes it with the remark : "Since that day every girl must marry whichever man her parents ask her to marry." (p.18) and most ironically, she herself does not marry the man her parents ask her to. She thus breaks an age-old, well respected tradition of her people. Again, the folk tales are

not told by village elders, but by young persons like Toro. This also defeats the main purpose of these stories. Similarly, the initiation ceremony of Titus on his return from England in Kinsman and Foreman into the ways of his clan is devoid of seriousness so very necessary for such ritual to state sentiments and mystiques that a group values and needs. Pa Joel, the head of the extended family lacks the grandeur and dignity of Ezeulu or Ukonkwo. Men and women participating in the ceremony are not inspired by him. As a matter of fact some women giggle when he suggests that Simeon is entitled to inherit Deborah after her husband's death. His speech at the ceremony is bereft of any insight, which is indicated by the choice of words as also of the metaphors. "If the railway train runs non-stop for a hundred years, will it not always find that land is still ahead of it?" (p.6) The image of running a train for a hundred years and still not finding the end of the land is indicative of a short sighted view that Pa Joel takes of technology. The moribund approach of his culture is further intensified in the next sentence : "If a child boasts that he has as many clothes as his father, can he equally boast of having as many rags as his father?" The comparison of one's personal past with 'rags' not only marks the decadent state of a culture, but it also indicates the mental health of a leader who makes this comparison. The point can be illustrated by contrasting Titus's involvement in the ceremony with that of Ramaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope.

Ramaswamy is overwhelmed when he performs the funeral ceremonies of his dead mother in Benares. He describes one such

ceremony : "So with wet cloth and an empty stomach, with devotion, and sandal paste on my forehead, I fell before the rice-balls of my mother and I sobbed" (p.6) He is so much emotionally involved with the country of his ancestors that everything to him seems to be living and holy. For him, "Benares is eternal. There the dead do not die nor the living live. The dead come down to play on the banks of the Gange\$, and the living who move about, and even offer rice-balls to the manes, live in the illusion of a vast night and a bright city."(p.22). Rama, who too has just come back from the whiteman's country, is moved when he sings a hymn of Sri Sankara's at the request of Little Mother : "Maybe it was the evening", he tells us,"or something deeper than me that in me unawares was touched. I had a few tears rolling down my cheeks." (p.22). Rama, in fact, sheds too many tears, as he does not differentiate between the past and the present. Present for him is just an extension of the past. Titus and the other Aluko heroes, on the other hand, have no patience with the past, which has become dehumanized, impersonal and irrelevant for them. They have lost touch with the past as a source of collective identity and ancestral pride. That may be the reason for their being too much preoccupied with the present, which stands for modernisation.

Unlike Udo Akpan (One Man, One Matchet), the narrator of His Worshipful Majesty seems to be sympathetic to his past. He however, begins the story in a mock epic style : "Where does

one begin the story of Aiye,.... To begin at the beginning (would mean) telling the story of the day of creation when the gods separated the sea from the land, and gave our ancestors this kingdom,...I would have to tell the story of how the gods sent one of their own number from their abode in the sky to become the first Alaiye who ruled over this land..." (p.1) So, he does not begin his story from the beginning but brings it straight to a recent date of 1951, obviously with an idea of exposing the anachronism of the feudal set up as also of satirising the feudal past.

Oba Olayiwola Adegoke, the king of Aiye though living in 1951, is a typical tribal king of the feudal days. He fails to understand that the "Treaty of Friendship and Trade" executed between his grand father and a representative of the British queen in 1893 is no more valid as a national democratic government has taken over the reign from the British. He still believes that he is the supreme ruler of Aiye and goes on distributing chieftaincies and collecting money and gifts from his people as a matter of birth right. He is totally ignorant of the new ways, so much so that he orders the council to give to each participant in the novelty football match a brand new ball as he thinks that to be the bone of contention. "That would stop men like the Treasurer who had four wives and grown up children from disputing with a hospital nurse for possession of an ordinary leather bag filled not with money but ordinary air." (p.49).

Unlike the village elders and chiefs, the Oba is not a mere caricature. He inspires awe in his subjects and holds the reins of

his kingdom firmly. His ways, of course, are traditional and therefore, not valid in today's changing world. Like Ashok Kumar, the Maharaja of Sham Pur, in Mulk Raj Anand's Private Life of an Indian Prince, he fails to visualise the political change. While Ashok Kumar loses his kingdom because of a personal trait, his lust for Ganga Dasi, the Oba is dethroned because of not mending his feudal ways. But the Oba maintains the heroic tradition of his ancestors. He prefers death to exile from his own kingdom. Aluko, thus, through the character of the Oba brings out both the weaknesses and the strengths of the feudal past. But he fails to create any memorable characters. His picture of the past, too, is one-sided : "Unlike Achebe, Aluko does not imaginatively capture the complexities of the encounter between the new and the old. He sees the conflict too much on one place, the cultural and does not emphasise its social and economic basis enough,"²⁶ maintains James Ngugi.

Ngugi's understanding of the conflict of the old and the new is definitely more incisive and thought provoking. He goes to the very root of the problem, analyses it from all sides and realises it in artistic terms, fully. In his The River Between, he examines the relevance of the new religion, christianity, to the tribals of Gikuyuland in Kenya. The novel is set in Thirties when the

26. James Ngugi, Home Coming :

(London : Heinemann, 1972) p.57.

Christian missionaries had converted some tribes in Kenya and the colonizer had established a central authority in Nairobi. Here the novelist deals with what a Nigerian critic Omlera Lerlie calls "the soft paw of colonialism : the division brought about by Christianity acting sometimes unconsciously but usually consciously in tandem with colonialism."²⁷

Like Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Ngugi's The River Between presents the picture of an African (albeit, East African, this time) village community which falls apart due to the intrusion of an alien religion.

The novel opens with a beautiful, yet very significant description of the Gikuyu landscape. A bird's eye view of the landscape reveals many ridges, and valleys, sleeping like lions. "They just slept, the big deep sleep of their creator."(p.1). But a closer periscopic look opens a different vista. The sleeping lions cease to be sleeping any more. They become roaring lions, in fact fighting lions, championing their own causes.

This is how we are introduced to the two tribes of Kameno and Makuyu, the former upholding the tribal customs and the latter denouncing them completely in favour of Christianity, the whiteman's religion. Between the two roaring lions of the ridges, flows Honia, the river which is the soul of both the tribes. It

27. Peter Nazareth in Iowa Review, spring/Summer 1976.

Quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, No.7, p.266

is the symbol of life, or regeneration : "The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring back to life" (p.1). It is perennial and holds the hope of unifying the two tribes, not in the near future, though. People from both the tribes fetch water from it, hold their initiation rites in it and continue to live and fight with each other on its banks. Honia also comforts the troubled minds. Waiyaki and Nyambura as also many other characters visit the river quite often to comfort themselves, to regain their lost peace due to tribal quarrels. Again, it is on the banks of Honia that Waiyaki and Nyambura who belong to two antagonistic tribes, fall in love with each other. Honia, thus serves as a neutral ground, a kind of 'no-man's land' between two warring factions which stand for the old and the new, the pagan and the Christian ways of life.

The village community at Kameno has cohesion and continuity. It is deeply rooted in its past and is proud of its heroes : Mugo Wa Kibiro, The great seer, Kamiri, the powerful magician and Wachiori, the glorious warrior of ancient fame. This land of ridges and hills "Kept the tribe's magic and ritual, pure and intact." (p.3) Their life is a closed secret to themselves, strangers cannot share it. Ngugi, through a beautiful Kikuyu proverb states that "the oilskin of the house is not for rubbing into the skin of strangers." This proverb also defines the narrow world-view that the community has. Even those heroes who left the ridges for some other place are treated as strangers : "Thereafter the oilskin of the house was not for them" (p.4)

Like the village communities of Umuofia and Umuaro, the

the Kameno people are inflexible, immobile and tradition bound. In fact they are proud of these attributes. Chege, a village elder, however has a vision. He therefore asks his son, Waiyaki, to go to the mission at Siriana and learn the ways of the white man. His inflexibility is not unqualified, though. He tells Waiyaki "Be true to your people and the ancient rites" (p.24) and yet learn the white man's magic. Waiyaki is a kind of Black Messiah who takes upon himself to save both the tribes of the ridges by uniting them and also by taking the best from both the tribal and the Christian ways. He is the 'human river between' the two human ridges of Kameno and Makuyu. But the ridges are made of hard rocks and stubborn stones of tribalism and convert Christianity. The river between flows on without making any ostensible impression on either side. The human river between is first made to flow by Muthoni's sacrifice who wants to be both a Christian and a woman "beautiful in the tribe" (p.61) by circumcision, a central rite in the Gikuyu way of life.

Her sacrifice bears no fruit. After her death Joshua becomes all the more bitter in denouncing circumcision. Nyambura, Mithoni's sister also rebels against her father. Now the two of them together become 'the river between' the Kiama on the one side and the Christians on the other. Waiyaki, the teacher, is charged with betrayal : "How could he work for the togetherness and purity of the tribe and then marry a girl who was not circumcised?" (p. 174) They are handed over to the Kiama to be punished.

Ngugi, through a subtle use of ironic design brings out the

strengths and weaknesses of the tribal past of his people. Like the early Jewish Christians, the 'gentile' society of Kenya holds fanatically to circumcision as the sole criterion for a total acceptance into the tribe. It is this rigid attitude of the community that fails its own leader, whose tragedy ironically, springs from his noblest intentions of welfare and unity of the two warring tribes. A founding father of Kiama is branded a traitor. Like Okonkwo, Waiyaki, the upholder of the tribal traditions, is finally betrayed by his people, but unlike Okonkwo, he disorients himself from his cultural roots : "In fact, his contact with the whiteman's civilization disorients him long enough from that kind of cultural roots possessed by Kabonyi that makes the latter's opposition very formidable."²⁸

While Aluko fails to create any memorable woman characters, Ngugi makes them guardians of the past and custodians of the Gikuyu customs. The ancient myth of a woman who ruled the Gikuyus in the days of yore is told both in The River Between and A Grain of Wheat to emphasise their role of preserving the tribal past as also some special qualities which they alone possess. For example, Muthoni in The River Between "reveals the kind of assurance and commitment which was an integral part of Gikuyu life."²⁹ These tribal virtues, shaken by the missionary, are high-lighted by her rebellion and sacrifice. She, in fact "becomes

28. Charles E. Nnolim, "Background setting : Key to the structure of Ngugi's The River Between", Obsidian, 2,2 (Summer, 1976)

29. Judith Cochrane, "Women as Guardians of the tribe in Ngugi's novels" ACLALS Bulletin, Fourth Series, No.5 (1977) pp.1-11

the embodiment of her people's tribal past, exerting an influence over her tribe which borders on the spiritual and mystical." She inspires even Waiyaki, whose attitude to his tribal rites at best can be described ambivalent. While Waiyaki endures circumcision, Muthoni enjoys it. She is magnificent even in her death, when she tells Waiyaki : "I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe...Tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe." (p.61).

Similarly, the two mothers, Njeri and Nyakabi of Ngatho in Weep Not, Child, not only preserve the tribal custom of a polygamous society, they also act as the joint maternal guardians of home. They live together peacefully, devoid of jealousy and intrigue and share all the responsibilities of the household equally and jointly. They together effect "a syncretism of the past, present and future."³⁰ Their harmonious relationship is indicative of the peace and security provided by family which is the basis of "Collective Consciousness" of African life.

Like the women in Raja Rao's Kanthapura, the women characters in A Grain of Wheat participate most enthusiastically in their freedom struggle. Though they suffer in this process, they still uphold their traditions and customs. Wambui (A grain of Wheat) is as much respected as Achakka (the woman narrator of Kanthapura). Both are leaders of their village communities and play the role of the mother in the extended families of their villages. They have

30. Judith Cochrane, "Women as Guardians of the tribe in Ngugi's novels", p.8.

grit, authority and command. They guide their communities at their most critical moments. Mumbi, in A Grain of Wheat is another woman character who suffers, endures and yet preserves the traditional values of life. It is she who judges and appreciates the cultural values of her people. She acts a kind of "cultural bearer of her people" when she recognises and appreciates Gikonyo's great skill of carpentry : "I once watched you in your workshop and it seemed.- it just seemed to me you were talking with the tools." (p.80). She tells him. It is she who is the sole inspiration behind Gikonyo's desire to carve a magnificent stool.

Thus Ngugi in his novels creates a sense of the past both through the setting and characterisation.

While the African novelist has tried to settle his score with the colonizer - historian by re-creating a sense of the past which the colonizer had almost obliterated from the memory of the colonized, the Afro-American novelist aims at restoring black self-esteem which his people lost due to slavery. A classic case of this effort is that of Alex Haley who researched for twelve long years to locate his historical roots in a Gambian village called Juffure, in Africa. Haley embarked on this extraordinary personal adventure of tracing his family to its deepest roots in 1962 and as he himself tells us "the next 12 years of travelling on three continents, visiting back-country African villages, researching in some 58 libraries, archives or other repositories,"³¹ made his Roots possible. About its title he states that

31. Quoted from Alex Haley's "Roots" published by Jay W Gildner for United States Service, New Delhi, p.2.

"I have called it Roots because it not only tells the story of a family, my own, but also symbolizes the history of millions of American blacks or African descent. I intend my book to be a buoy for black self-esteem.." ³²

Black self esteem in a nut-shell, then, is the subject of almost all the Afro-American novelists. Like his African counterpart, the black American novelist searches his pedigree with a missionary zeal, but unlike the African or the Indian novelist, his search is the most arduous one because the dislocation of identity done by the colonizer in his case is almost complete. (Perhaps the only other case of this kind of complete dislocation of identity is that of the West Indian) The Afro-American novelist therefore has to examine and reject a number of false pedigrees before he can accept any one, as is done by the protagonist of Ellison's Invisible Man, who after his archetypal journey from South to North learns to accept the Afro-American part of his past, before he embarks on his journey into the existential world of 'human condition'. During this journey, he first accepts and then rejects a host of false pedigrees.

The first object that reminds the invisibleman of his pedigree is a grinning and "ugly ebony African god", which is kept alongwith other cracked relics from slavery time" in a room of the black college he attends. He, we are told, could never

32. Alex Haley, "How I traced my African Heritage" Readers Digest, Vol.105, No.627 (July,1974) p-136.

identify himself with these objects : "Though I had seen them very seldom, they were vivid in my mind. They had not been pleasant and whenever I had visited the room I avoided the glass case in which they rested." (p.148). These objects reminding him of his African heritage always remain vivid in his mind, but he tries to avoid them. They are the unpleasant aspects of his pedigree. At this stage he neither accepts nor rejects it. He just avoids it.

But he simply cannot avoid Ras, the Destroyer who stands for Pan African black nationalism. When the riots break out in Harlem, Ras appears on the battle scene dressed like an African chief riding a horse with "a fur cap upon his head, his arm bearing a shield, a cape made of the skin of some wild animal around his shoulders." To Invisibleman he appears to be "a madman in a foreign costume...a figure more out of a dream than out of Harlem... yet real, alive, alarming." (p.454). Ras, the tribal chief, looks absurd in an industrial society of contemporary America. Ellison describes Ras's Pan-Africanism 'exotic', 'crazy' and 'funny' through his dress, his shield, spear and fur, which are "evidently intended to indicate cultural distance"³³ between the two countries as also the inappropriateness of the idea of Pan-Africanism for the Afro-Americans.

33. Marion Berghahn, Images of Africa in Black American Literature (London : Macmillan, 1977), p.170.

For Alex Haley journey to Juffure was a highly emotional experience. It had the intensity of a religious, almost mystical experience. He calls it "the peak experience, a moment which emotionally, can never again be equalled in your life,"³⁴ because he discovered his pedigree, eight generations back and filled a wide gulf of his break with the past. Moreover, he also unearthed the mystery of kinta Kunte who had been severed from his roots in 1767 by the "king's soldiers" who enslaved him when he had gone away from his village to chop wood for making a drum. But Haley's experience is unique and is not available to an average Afro-American, who may not be interested in such a meticulous search for a true pedigree, either. The protagonist of Invisible Man is one such average man who is not interested in finding out his African ancestors. Pan-Africanism therefore cannot provide a solution to his present problems. Africa cannot furnish the right weapons for his liberation struggle. "Rather it is a leg chain, symbolising the period of slavery and given to the narrator as a present by a former prisoner, which is turned into a weapon." He uses this chain as a knucleduster against his enemies including Ras. It is this chain, again, which gives him "a new sense of self".³⁵ He turns his back on Ras and his black nationalism.

34. Alex Haley, "How I traced my African Heritage", Reader's Digest 105, No.627 (July,1974) p.134.

35. Marion Berghahn, p. 170-171.

He now knows that the black Americans do not have to search their pedigree in Africa. They have to find it out within the U.S. and more so within themselves : "And I know that it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether Ras's or Jack's," (p.484) asserts Invisibleman. This is a clear rejection of Africa and an acceptance of the existential position which we have already discussed in the preceding chapter.

Ellison, thus, is not interested in finding the real historical roots of the black Americans somewhere in Africa. He believes that there is no significant kinship between American Negroes and Africans. His search for roots therefore is within the United States. If anything, rootlessness, can define the state of the black American, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, can be explained through existentialism, too.

Ellison believes that the Negro culture is an American sub-culture and has ~~no past~~ ^{past} except whatever has happened to the Negroes on the American soil and of course, in the middle passage. Being a minority culture, the black Americans have always concerned themselves with survival. It has its own tradition and a world view. Founded upon the hard rock of racial, social and economic exploitation and gross injustice, the black American culture has evolved a strategy of survival through a kinship network. This culture of the oppressed, colonised Negro has found its expression in different forms of behaviour, speech and arts and has an "autonomous character" of its own : "Negro folk culture, to his (Ellison's) way of thinking, is an indestructible monument to the

national past. Embodying as it does three centuries of American history, it is a bittersweet reminder of what we were and are as a people."³⁶

Ellison thus re-captures the past of his people through his folk cultural tradition as also through a judicious use of Black English. For example, in his famous short story, "Flying Home," he explores the motif of the Black character who falls down from heaven because he tries to fly with the wings of an angel. Todd, the black aviator falls in a farm when a buzzard strikes his airplane. Jefferson, a black, illiterate, farm-hand takes him to his house and gets him medical care. Todd tells us :

"But I was kept in bed for a week and I constantly saw the plane in my sleep, flying just beyond my fingertips...And each time I'd reach to grab it I'd miss and through each dream I'd hear my grndma warning :

Young man, young man,

You' arms too short

To box with God.... " ³⁷

It is this strategy of survival, symbolised here in grandma's warning that the past of the Negro teaches every Negro child through songs, stories, folk sayings and many other linguistic and oral devices which have been evolved over three hundred years of oppression. Todd, the black aviator, here reminds us of the

36. Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of Imagination" John Hersey (ed.), Ralph Ellison : A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs N.J. ; Prentice Hall, 1974), p.111.

37. Ralph Ellison, "Flying Home", Francies E. Kearns (ed.) Black Identity : a Thematic Reader (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p.290.

mythical Icarus who ignores his father, Daedalus's warning while flying and falls into the sea.

The grand father in Invisible Man also goes on reminding the black protagonist of his past. He appears at strategic points in the novel to remind the protagonist of his bitter racial past. He is also in "Ellison's words the "ambiguity of the past," a sphinx-like riddle which must be approached creatively" asserts George E. Kent. One of the solid survival techniques of the folk tradition is symbolised by the grand father's yessing to the whites through which he knows, they would be destroyed.

The spirituals singing Trueblood is a very powerful dramatic representation of folk culture. By becoming an expectant father of both his wife and daughter, he powerfully re-creates a chapter in the history of his people and also becomes "a person who can face the results of his humanity".³⁸ Unlike the narrator he has no illusions about himself. That is why he sings first the spirituals and then the blues whole heartedly. The spirituals dramatise his "struggle and pain", and the blues celebrate "self-confrontation" that puts him together. Norton, the white philanthropist commits a mental incest with his daughter, while Trueblood commits a physical incest in a dream. Trueblood faces

38. George E. Kant, "Ralph Ellison and Afro-American Tradition", John Hersey (ed.), Ralph Ellison : A Collection of Critical Essays. (Englewood : Prentice Hall, 1974), p.163.

it boldly, Norton almost collapses because the former is a product of the survival culture, the latter of European culture obsessed with the sin of the flesh.

Mary Rambo, who runs a boarding house, is "the warmth, wit, coping power, and humanity of the folk tradition as it survives in a modern industrial city." Moreover, "she is the integration of the bitter past with the present"³⁹ She has come from the South and thus retains the pre-industrial familial relationships with the other blacks. She is the fictive aunt of the black community of her place and a mother earth figure unlike Trueblood, she is not merged with the main American culture.

Another black character from the Negro past is Brother Tarp who spends nineteen years on chain gang as a punishment for opposing the white imposition and is now a run away convict. He is meant to serve as reminder of roots of the American blacks who even today are not free from the shackles of slavery. The handing over of the chain is ritualistic. The invisibleman feels the weight of his ancestral past when he receives it. Ellison compares it with the passing on of an old fashioned time-piece by a father to his son. Tarp thus, becomes both his spiritual father and brother.⁴⁰ Both of them try to get rid of slavery, physical and mental.

39. George E. Kent, p. 164-65.

40. Thomas A. Vagler, "Invisible Man : Somebody's Protest Novel", 20th-Century Views, p. 146.

The other folk-lorist elements that Ellison incorporates in Invisible Man are, the singing of blues and spirituals; and a rhetorical use of folk rhymes in his prose (A detailed discussion of this and other structural devices of the novel is given elsewhere in this dissertation). Jazz, however, needs a special mention here because it is a live link between the Negro past and his present predicament. Basically, jazz, is a group improvisation. But the most impressive effects are achieved only when the individual is given his due in the performance. Though the individual acts as a member of the collectivity, he has some freedom and some limitations too. Moreover, "no jazzman is free to repudiate the past. The jam session, where he must display a knowledge of traditional techniques, will see to that."⁴¹ Like a jazzman, Ellison in Invisible Man captures the past of his people through the folk characters and other folk lorist elements, perfects them and adapts them to his literary aims, in order to make the novel an *Odyssey* of the American blacks. Comparing it with Homer's epic, John Stark argues that the hero of this novel is a representative of his people : "In fact, the invisibleman lives through the stages of Black American history... His ontogeny quite accurately recapitulates his race's phylogeny."⁴² This history of the Negroes

41. Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the uses of the Imagination" 20th Century Views, p.98

42. John Stark, "Invisible Man : Ellison's Black *Odyssey*" Black American Literature Forum, Vol.7, No.2, (Summer, 1973), p.60.

in America starts with the prologue itself where the hero listening to a Louis Armstrong record-dream of a slave woman who has poisoned her white master. The novel proper opens with the hero's grandfather of the Reconstruction Days and his famous advice of grinning to the whiteman. From these two events of the slavery and Reconstruction, we come to Booker T. Washington days of the Invisibleman at the Southern college, where the personal advancement theory of Washington is being practised. But the invisibleman cannot accept this role so he is pushed to North to the liberty Pains and Lucius Broockway who symbolises America's dependence on unacknowledged skills and sacrifices of Negro labour.

Thus we reach the days of Depression when the whites thought that one solution to the then economic crisis was to face the Negro problem squarely by annihilating them, as is symbolically suggested by a white Doctor who gives electric shocks to the hero, "It would be more scientific to define the case. It has been developing some three hundred years..." It is here that the invisibleman remembers some of the old songs and folk tales his grandmother used to tell him. His identification with these folk elements give him necessary self-confidence.

Marxist flirtation with the Negro problem during the Depression Era is represented through Brotherhood. Ellison thus spans the history of the black Americans through the character of the Indivibleman from Slavery to the present day. But this history is beautifully woven into the fabric of the story through folk elements.

Unlike Ellison, Richard Wright has no patience with the past of his people. He therefore does not explore the folk tradition of the Negroes in his fiction. In fact, he explores ~~no~~ tradition for that matter. He stands outside all tradition, ~~white~~ American, Black American or African and creates an existential world governed by its own laws. His heroes, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, are existential monsters and not normal human beings. Rootlessness is the root cause of their monstrosity: "they are dispossessed" and "disinherited." Their condition is summed up by Sam in The Long Dream, after a long debate about their ~~xxxxxxxx~~ roots between Fishbelly, the hero and his friends: "you niggers ain't nowhere. You ain't in Africa, 'cause the whiteman took you out. And you ain't in America, 'cause if you was you'd act like Americans -you ain't no American! you live Jim Crow...you can't live like no American, 'cause you ain't no American! And you ain't African neither! So what is you? Nothing! just nothing!"⁴³

A typical Wright hero (Thomas Bigger, Cross Damon, Fishbelly, or 'Blackboy') is a rootless outsider. He has no connection, physical, emotional or spiritual with his ancestral land in Africa. "If one tries to find an accurate term to define Wright's position vis-a-vis Africa, one might call him an 'outeast'"⁴⁴. He

43. Richard Wright, The Long Dream

(New York, 1958, p.29 ff) Quoted in Berghahn, p.156

44. Marion Berghahn, p. 164.

was both attracted towards and repulsed by Africa. His love for Africa was rather transitory in nature which could not satisfy him emotionally. Even his visit to Ghana and active participation in Pan Africanism was not much helpful. He examined Africa by Western standards. His categories of judgement were also those of a radical individualist. His Marxist and existential background and association was another important reason for rejecting all tradition. And Africa, thus stood rejected because of its feudalism and tribalism. Collective consciousness, group solidarity and many other virtues of black Americans which link them to their African ancestors, simply had no place in Wright's scale of values which were out and out Western. Similarly the folk elements which figure rather prominently in Ellison's fiction have almost no place in his fiction. Moreover, his obsession with the 'outsider philosophy too did not allow him to look at Africa sympathetically, as the continent has a different type of social set up in which the individualism of the West has no place.

Richard Wright looks at the black American culture too from the 'outsider' angle. In his opinion the American social structure has dehumanised and uprooted the black Americans through continued oppression, segregation and discrimination. This has given a 'negative identity' to the Negro. The Negroes are ashamed to their black predicament and pedigree, which generates self hatred. Self hatred coupled with powerlessness makes them lapse into inner crisis and makes them 'outsiders'. The outsider status gives them power, though of a criminal nature, over the people. This is what happens to Thomas Bigger, Cross Damon, Fishbelley and other

outsiders in his novels. They also claim to have gained deeper insight into the human psychology.

Wright's outsider experience can be ascribed to three factors: failure of the black community to accommodate its youngmen; American individualism; and the Black urban experience of poverty, powerlessness, segregation and economic discrimination of the Depression Era. Thomas Bigger under the influence of all these forces goes on stripping away the claims of his immediate community and then of society at large in order to become a complete outsider. "His immediate community does none of the positive things which communities do."⁴⁵ Being a colonized society, it does not provide him status, security and protection and consequently no 'positive identity' either. Bigger is not assigned by his family and black friends any role in society which should assure him self worth. But the glare and attractions of individualism fed in him through the white majority culture impel him to usurp the functions his community is expected to serve. He acquired this power by becoming an outsider, by projecting himself as cosmic self, a self beyond all culture, white or black; colonial or colonized.

Cross Damon in The Outsider, puts on a philosophical mask to explain his alienation. He sees himself as a rootless intellectual who is his own creator. His system of values too is new and personal which emphasises the autonomy of the individual. As

45. Donald B. Gibson, "Individualism and Community in Black History and Fiction" Black American Literature Forum, 11,4 (Winter, 1977) p.123-129.

pointed out in the preceding chapter, Damon claims to have reached the existential vortex by cutting all human connections and withdrawing himself completely from all human contact, as if he were a 'free-floating outsider'. But on closer examination we find that it is not so : "Neither Cross nor any of Wright's other characters can be called free-floating outsiders. They all have a fixation about the white world for which they opt... by emulating its outward standards."⁴⁶ They are in one way or the other part of the 'American dream'. They want to make money and live in the style of their white bosses : "I don't want to read nothing about Africa. I want to make some goddam money." (p.178) remarks Fishbelly in The Long Dream. Similarly, Bigger is exposed to the temptations of the white world. He plays, what he calls, "white", a game of emulating the ways of the white folk. In the first part of the game, he orders Gus, another playmate, to send the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Regiments to attack Germans. Playing the role of the President of the United States, he informs Gus : "Well, you see, the nigger is raising sand all over the country", Bigger said... 'We've got to do something with these black folks." (p.57) The mock imitation scene ends in a very serious pronouncement by Bigger analysing his predicament.

Unlike Ellison and later Baldwin, Wright does not attach positive values to the black family life. Bigger's system of

46. Marion Berghahn, p.160.

values is pre-eminently white. He accepts his inferiority, "the crime of being black" (p.319) to the hilt by defining his identity in a negative way as also by denying his pedigree. For Bigger, and also for Ellison, 'black' retains its evil and menacing quality. White, on the other hand is equated with freedom, which has the highest rating in his scale of values. Wright does not indulge in any transvaluation of colours, unlike Baldwin in If Beale Street Could Talk where 'black' is beautiful and stands for the superiority of Afro-American way of life, to that of the white Americans.

But, in the final analysis Wright has no sympathy with either white or black. Both are repulsive. His characters, therefore, live in a 'no-man's land'. They respect no traditions and proclaim to have no past, no pedigree.

James Baldwin's characters, on the other hand acknowledge a past but no pedigree. They also recognise the fact that they are the products of socio-historical forces. But the past they recognise serves no useful purpose. Being colonized, it provides them with no identity symbols and no reference points. "In the case of the Negro" asserts Baldwin, "the past was taken from him whether he would or no"⁴⁷ Instead, he was given a "shameful history" of slavery. It was shameful and doubly ^{so} because Negro was both "heathen" and "black".

Transplanted on the American soil and ruled by the white colonizer, the Negro with his black skin became a son of Ham, the Ur-father of all the black Africans. Having been denied access to

47. James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son

(London, Corgi Books, 1965) p.22.

any tradition, social, cultural or religious, Black Calvinist church identified the Negro with Noah's curse and all that went with it : Shame, inferiority, sin etc. John, in Go Tell it on the Mountain having looked at his father's back, feels that heavy weight of Noah's curse. The ironic voice, which he hears, reminds him that "all niggers had been cursed...all niggers had come from this most undutiful of Noah's sons." John debates the question of curse in his mind but finds no answer "for he was in the moment, and out of time" (p.197) He is out of time because he has no history. Bastards do not acknowledge their past, as it is not worth acknowledging. John here represents the Negro American who is a bastard son of Western civilisation, as Baldwin remarks about his own past : "I am also...the despised bastard of the Western house..."⁴⁸

Bastardisation, real or metaphoric, then defines the predicament of the black American characters in Baldwin's fiction. John Grimes in Go Tell it on the Mountain, for example, is a bastard who is living with his step father, Gabriel Grimes. His natural father Richard, committed suicide when he could do nothing against his white oppressors. Gabriel Grimes fathers a bastard, Royal, through Esther whom he does not marry. Esther and Royal die without fixing any responsibility on Gabriel. John Grimes in the novel tries to wash his sins, one of them being bastardisation. He works day and night for his salvation. But can he really be saved? The bastards are denied the kingdom of heaven : "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even

48. James Baldwin, A Rap on Race, & Margret Mead (London : Corgi Books, p.103).

of their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23 : 2)" John is technically a bastard, yet John's salvation is the great hope of the novel"⁴⁹. Here lies the basic contradiction of the novel. Similarly ~~the~~ Gabriel of the Bible is an angel who brings the good news of Elizabeth's prayer for the birth of a son being answered by God. John, her son in the Bible spreads the message of the Lord. But in the terms of the novel, Elizabeth gets a John who is a bastard and is therefore incapable of his own salvation, not to talk of the salvation of others. Moreover, he is not filled with the spirit of the Holy Ghost ; instead he has inherited terror from his father, Gabriel.

John, Gabriel, Elizabeth and all the other characters are living in hell. They are all trying to climb the mountain of salvation. No one is rewarded with success. They all suffer demnation. John is told by his father that "his face was the face of Satan." (p.27). No one remembers his birth day and his job is to clean the house even on his birthday. His father's family provides him no love. He feels neglected. He wants to run away from his father's house. He tells his baby sister : "Now, you let your big brother tell you something, baby. Just as soon as you's able to stand on your feet, you run away from this house, run far away." (p.43).

49. Roger Rosenblatt, Black Fiction

(Massachusetts : Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), p.38

Gabriel is no angel. If anything, he is terror incarnate for his family. He is a typical colonized father who feels powerless vis-a-vis the white colonizer. Family acts both as a refuge and a defence mechanism against the all powerful white colonizer. When he cannot do anything against the white racialists who stab Roy, he slaps Elizabeth for not keeping Roy's activities under control. Roy, though wounded calls his father a "black bastard", (p.48). Gabriel thus enraged beats wounded Roy mercilessly. It is Florence, Roy's aunt, who summarises Gabriel's character ; "you was born wild, and you's going to die wild....you can't change nothing, Gabbriel"... (p.49)

No one in the novel can change anything. They are all damned. Their present is as dark as the past and holds no hope for future. Thus, Go Tell it on the Mountain, is a story of "cyclical Damnation" of "fathers and sons".⁵⁰ Black church holds no solution, except it is "a kind of temporary palliative"⁵¹

Religion helps in ritualising the dominant passions of their lives through group worship. Being the religion of the colonized and oppressed, it offers no liberating experiences. Instead, it objectifies their misery momentarily by providing a community of suffering. The "prayers of the saints" are not answered because they are the prayers of the colonized and oppressed, who have nothing but suffering as their fate. They are the wretched of

50. Roger Rosenblatt, p.36.

51. Edward Margolies, Native Sons : a Critical Study of Twentieth-Century Negro American Authors. (New York : J.B. Lippincott Company, 1968), p.109.

the earth and are therefore not entitled to any inheritance on the testimony of Frantz Fanon.

The Grimes family has no past. The only reminders of the past are some photographs : "These photographs were the true antiques of the family, which seemed to feel that a photograph should commemorate only the most distant past" (p.28) (emphasis added) and the 'most distant past' in terms of the novel are hardly fifteen years as depicted by one of the photographs of baby John.

The character who is really worried about his pedigree in this novel is Richard. He gets excited on looking at the African Statuettes in a museum. These African antiques give him "a kind of bitter nourishment, and that the secrets they held for him were a matter of his life and death" (p.166). But, these objects frighten his wife Elizabeth, who simply cannot connect herself with them in any way. Richard as we learn is a Romantic idealist who is incapable of facing reality. African pedigree, therefore, is a Romantic ideal which has no relevance to the blacks in America. Richard's suicide is symbolic of the failure of black nationalism.

Another character reminiscent of the Harlem Renaissance is Ida in Another Country. She is black and beautiful. Vivaldo, her brother is fascinated by her beauty : "Ages and ages ago, Ida had not been merely the descendant of slaves. Watching her dark face in the sunlight, softened and shadowed by the glorious shawl, it

could be seen that she had once been a monarch." (p.5). Eric loves Ida "Wearing all her beauty as a great queen wears her robes." (p.195). This image of the black beauty instils necessary confidence in Ida, whose morale even in calamities is very high. While Vivaldo collapses under the weight of racial pressures, Ida survives these shocks because of the self image that the 'black is beautiful' concept has helped her to evolve for herself. It acts as an antidote to the poison of self hatred from which Vivaldo suffers. Thus in her case, the past serves the traditional role of morale boosting and image building to self and others.

Baldwin has an ambivalent attitude towards his past in Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone. Here, Leo Proudhammer, black the protagonist is completely oriented towards the whites. Colour to him as to many other characters is unimportant. Being artists they transcend the colour line through theatre, which makes them realise their identities fully. Leo looks at his father with an ironic eye : "For our father - how shall I describe our father? Was a ruined Barbados peasant, exiled in a Harlem which he loathed, where he never saw the sun or the sky he remembered... he brought with him from Barbados only black rum and blacker pride, and magic incantations which neither healed nor saved..." (p.18). The ironic narrative tone gets satirical when he discusses his pedigree : "If our father was of royal blood and we were royal children, our father was certainly the only person in the world who knew it." (p.19) Leo's father like the other colonized fathers is frustrated at his powerlessness vis-a-vis the white colonizer. All that he does is

to dream about his imaginary past and also to talk about it to his sons and wife, who take no interest in it. Leo expresses his disenchantment with his father's obsession with Africa in a telling phrase when he tells us that with father's African identity they "felt more awkward than in the second-hand shoes we wore" (p.19) Because the school books made no reference whatsoever to those so called African kingdoms; and moreover, because Africa had nothing to offer them.

Though Leo has a completely white orientation, Baldwin wants to make us believe that at the time of a heart attack Leo remembers Africa : "I remembered that Africans believed that death was a return to one's ancestors, a reunion with those one loved.." (p.17). Similarly, Leo sings a blues to a white girl at an exclusively white party. This singing he informs us, helps him to keep in touch with himself. These efforts at re-creating a Negro past are not well integrated in the fabric of the novel. They, like the story of the Black Christopher add to the contemporaneous element in the novel. We are told that Black Christopher was black in many ways and he looked like a black sun. He has 'big black face', and 'big black hands' etc. His blackness is over done. Christopher is a character from Black Nationalism of 1960s, but has not been fully realised in fictional terms. He is the 'New Negro' of the cultural Revolution of 1960s.

It is only in If Beale Street Could Talk that Baldwin could fully realise the implications of this cultural revolution in

fictional terms. In a review, Johnny McClusky calls it *a* very satisfying novel because it works "Within the framework of the blues" and is "the most completely articulated record of Black male-female love and sexual relationships."⁵² Here Baldwin concerns himself with the lives of two black families - Hunts and Rivers and their heroic struggle to fight collectively the white oppressor. Though they belong to two different churches (the Rivers are Baptists while the Hunts belong to the sanctified church), they transcend their religious affiliations and work together for the liberation of Fonny who has been imprisoned on the false charge of having raped a white woman. "The Rivers are blues people - loving, demanding, endearing, not maddlin angels, or dreary victims, or super-folk. They accept the condition of their being black and oppressed and still try to fight injustice. Mrs. Hunt and her daughters, on the other hand, do not face reality. They have surrendered their black identities and have accepted the value system of the larger community. Mrs. Hunt, Fonny's mother defines Tish's love in strictly religious terms : "I guess that you call your lustful action love. I don't ...you have demon in you." (p.68) she tells Tish Mrs.Hunt is a "Holy Roller" (p.70) for her husband, who has no regard for

52. John McClusky, "A Review of If Beale Street Could Talk," Black World, Dec., 1974, p.91.

her Hunt women are typically colonised good niggers. Fonny, to them is a 'bad nigger', as he refuses to accept the identity offered to his pseudospecies. He has the ambition of becoming an architect or a sculptor.

It is in If Beale Street Could Talk that Baldwin creates a black community with a durable net work and value system. Unlike his other novels, the problems that the main characters face here are taken up by the whole community as a strategy for survival. The individual voice here, as in a blues, works within the context of the whole group. Though the novel has the first person narrative point of view of Tish, it non-the-less concentrates on the communal channel of relief provided by the two black families. Like a blues again, the novel performs a cathartic function of a shared experience of suffering, pain and purification. Unlike the father and the son in Go Tell it on the Mountain, here, no effort is made at 'saving' the souls, but it is made at converting them :

"I ain't here to try to save your soul,
Just want to teach you how to save your good Jelly Roll
Sing 'em, Sing 'em, Sing them blues
Let me convert your soul" 53.

claims Bessie Smith in her 'Preachin' the Blues, where she attempts to sacralize the secular element of the blues. Baldwin

53. Quoted by Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness (New York : Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p.236.

also gives, almost the same importance to the black family and community that he gives to the black Church in Go Tell it on the Mountain.

Thus by lending the framework of the blues to If the Beale Street Could Talk, Baldwin, introduces the folk element to capture the black consciousness and black culture. Moreover, the novel has an archetypal situation of the oppressed Negro as its plot. By pooling together all the resources of the blacks to fight an injustice, again, the characters in the novel bring out the best in the Negro survival culture. In a characteristic passage Tish describes her childhood.

"These were great days and we always very happy - but that was because of our father, not because of the city. It was because we knew our father loved us. Now, I can say, because I certainly know it now, the city didn't. They looked at us as though we were zebras - and, you know, some people like zebras and some people don't. But nobody ever asks the zebras." (p.9).

The Negro's living in the U.S. like the Zebras is both reminiscent of his African past as also of the animal status that he has in the U.S. It also indicates the segregational attitude of the white Americans towards their Negro counterparts. But in spite of all these odds, Tish and Fonny survive in order to bring up their child mainly because of the efforts of the two fathers, who for the first time in Baldwin fiction are attributed with positive

traits of the Negro survival culture. Tish, here, is an enlarged version of Ida's pride in her blackness. She has no shame for being black; if anything she has pride : "And I'm not ashamed of Fonny. If anything, I'm proud" (p.7). Her racial pride, of course, is not located somewhere in Africa. It has its roots in America. Her African past forms the collective unconscious mind of her people. She compares her love making with a "tribal rite" and describes it like a ritual. She participates in these scenes with almost a religious fervour. By contrast, Mrs. Hunt, a sanctified woman, calls on Jesus when Frank, her husband, makes love to her rather violently. Thus by contrasting the two sex scenes, we can compare the christian and the African (or Afro-American) attitudes to sex. For Christians (and by implication the white Americans) too much indulgence in sex is sinful while for the Afro-American it is a celebration of life. Thus, here again Baldwin tries to recreate the African value system.

From John Grimes to Fonny and Gabriel to Frank, Baldwin's development towards Black Nationalism is complete. While John is a bastard son of the American culture, Fonny is a natural son of Black Nationalism. Gabriel, obsessed with sin and damnation, tries to free himself from Noah's curse; Frank by cutting himself from the church has no fear. Like his Negro ancestors who sang the spirituals and the blues, he too suffers bravely in order to survive. Leo Proudhammer's ambivalent attitude to his past forms the mid-way between the two extremes of an outcast and

of general acceptance.

Except Hailey, no other black American novelist shows much interest in finding his real roots in Africa. They are however, concerned with recreating a usable past of their people. Ellison in Invisible Man and Baldwin in If Beale Street Could Talk have realised their racial pasts in artistic terms fully by modelling these novels on blues and presenting archetypal situations of the sufferings of the Negroes in America.

The Indian novelist on the other hand does not have to discover his past. If anything, his past hangs heavily on him. Having been born in one of the most ancient civilizations, which could not be destroyed by colonisers, the Indian novelist is an heir to a hoary past. As examined in an earlier chapter the Hindu ethos has suffered little dislocation through the colonial impact. No foreign invader could wipe out the Indian tradition completely. Whenever it was attacked, it tried to absorb innumerable elements from the invading culture : "Indian tradition has managed to accommodate itself while still maintaining a recognizable continuity."⁵⁴ The integration of the foreign elements into Indian tradition is done by "legitimation" of change into something old. It is through this built-in-adaptive mechanism for accepting change, asserts Miller, that has helped India absorb the shocks of invading cultures. Indian traditionalists in fact try to

54. Stephen Miller, "Passages to India : Hindu Culture and Western minds," The American Scholar, XI,9,(Aug/Sept 1978),p.4-14.

find evidence in their sacred texts of scientific inventions and discoveries. Discovering nuclear fission and fusion in the Vedas, for example, is one such effort. By finding evidence in the old texts, the Indian traditionalists give a "local habitation and name" to new ideas which thus become acceptable to the whole society.

Traditional India, therefore, is flexible to accept modernisation. By turning new into old, the present into the past, Indian traditionalism gets revitalised to go on for ever. The thin dividing line between the two sometimes disappears altogether, as it happens with Ramaswamy when he goes to perform some religious rites for his dead father at Benaras in The Serpent and the Rope. There on the banks of the Ganges Ramaswamy meets some Brahmins who, like the African 'griots,' trace his family seven generations backward. The sky itself is filled up with the dead ancestors, he tells us : "you could almost see them layer on layer, on the night of a moon-eclipse, fair and pale and tall and decrepit, fathers, grand-fathers, great-grandfathers...all, all they accumulate in the Benares air and you can see them." (p.10). His philosophical mind, in fact, makes no difference between the dead&the living because both belong to the eternal cycle of births and deaths: "Death is a prelude to a new form of life which is governed by the laws of the "Kalchakra", the wheel of time having a cyclical movement without a known beginning and a definite end. The notion expressing this amorphous state of life can be understood through the

principle of simultaneity of the Upanishadic philosophy discussed in an earlier chapter. In the Brahminic India of The Serpent and the Rope, the past is "an ever-brooding presence."⁵⁵ Ancestors walk in unobtrusively. Even the opening sentence talks about them : "But how many of my legendary and Upanishadic ancestors have really known the Truth excepting the sage Madhava" - (p.5).

Rama himself tells us : "Whereas I was born to India, where the past and the present are for ever knit into one whole experience." He further clarifies his stand, "and so for me time and space had very relative importance." (p.19) Rama's vedantic worldview, thus, does not differentiate between the time past and the time present or the time future as they all are extensions of the time past, which helps him like his Brahminic ancestors in realigning himself with the spirit of the timelessness of the Indian mode of existence. Another method by which Raja Rao achieves timelessness by mythologising contemporary reality in his fiction. Ramaswamy while talking to Savithri about the impersonal principle of the kingship tells her how the ruling King George VI (in the year 1951) succeeded to the throne of England only after his brother Edward VIII had abdicated his claim. This reminds Ramaswamy of a parallel case from the Indian mythology when Bharatha substituted Rama's kingship during the latter's exile : "And England, put in his place a noble Bharatha who apologized every time he spoke,... And he ruled the land with the devotion of a

55. S. Nagarajan, "An Indian Novel", Considerations (ed.).p.84-89

Bharatha, worshipping the sandal of his loved brother placed on the throne." (p.204). Here the two incidents of exile belonging to two different times and cultures get fused into one and create an effect of timelessness. By breaking the barriers of time and place Raja Rao mythologises the present and creates an atmosphere of timelessness. Similarly Savithri in the novel merges into the archetypal Radha of the Mahabharata and the Puranas : Her relation with Ramaswamy "is an archetypal relation-between the seeker and the sought, the woman and her beloved, that has been used in India thousands of times in devotional songs, in Vaishnava love-lyrics, in novels of sentimental love, and more recently in popular films."⁵⁶ By washing Ramaswamy's feet and anointing them and then performing 'arathi' three times and finally placing her head on his feet in a London Hotel room, Savithri becomes one with the timeless spirit of the Indian tradition. This ritualistic surrender gives her emotional satisfaction : "I have known my Lord for a thousand lives, from 'Janam' to 'Janam' have I known my Krishna"-(p.212) she tells Ramaswamy.

Raja Rao concerns himself with the timelessness of the Indian tradition even in Comrade Kirillov. Here the ex-patriate hero, Padmanabha Iyer, now Comrade Kirillov, is deeply in love with the timeless India of Kalidasa and Sankara, whose verses he is enthralled to recite at a moment's notice. Though, "Smitten with dialectical despair," Kirillov loves India "with a noble delicate unreasoned

56. Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction
(New Delhi : Heinemann, 1971), p.148.

love." (p.86) His love, again, is further restricted to Sanskrit poetry : "To hear him recite Sanscrit verse was like listening to a Pandita from Tanjore." (p.87).

But Kirillov has no patience with contemporary India which is poor, corrupt and capitalistic. For him the Hindus are reactionaries and decadent. Kirillov hates Hinduism because of its caste system, the theory of Karma and an obsession with purity of food of:XXXX "He (Hindu) and his metaphysical myths, his Karma and his caste, his I - will-not-eat this, and I-will-not touch that, his superior feelings and his importance - his decadence is the foulest our earth has to bear." (p.83). He maintains that Kalidasa and Bharthihari are perfect, but they offer no solution to the contemporary problems of India.

Like Ramaswamy's India, Kirillov's India is ancient, Brahminic, hoary and cultured. It is timeless because it is an area in the mind of the hero. While Ramaswamy's spiritual India has no contradictions once we accept his 'Advaitic' philosophy, Kirillov's India has no such capacity and is therefore full of contradictions. Even his Czech wife, Irene, writes in her diary that he "is an inverted Brahmin" (p.119). She is particularly critical of his attitude to Muslims whom he both likes and hates at the same time. Kirillov being both a Brahmin and a Marxist, is pulled by opposite drives and is therefore incapable of attaining a balance. His personality is explained enigmatically by Irene : "There is a certain honesty of mind that is grossest dishonesty of being" (p.119).

Rama, the narrator of Comrade Kirillov is a South Indian Brahmin deeply entrenched in the Indian tradition. He takes Kamal, Kirillov's son to Kanya-Kumari and tells him the story of goddess Paravati's arrival over there. Though the tale revokes Indian mythology, it does not add anything to the plot of the novel. At best it provides a digression from the main plot. Raja Rao's failure to connect it with the plot explains his position vis-a-vis Indian past. The small tale is introduced to evoke a sense of awe for Hindu gods in the mind of Kamal. But it fails to click. Kamal does not seem to be interested in the story. He says, "Uncle, will you show me diamonds and rubies and precious stones in the sands?" (p.127) He is more interested in carrying the stones to his father than in the mythological past of India. He in fact takes more interest in the Western world than in India, present or past. The story of Paravati thus remains at best a digression from the plot proving that Raja Rao's attitude of spiritual superiority of India over the West is a state of tension, which produces characters like Ramaswamy and Kirillov, the expatriates who are out to prove their love for the Indian past at a moment's notice with the result that the past becomes an ever brooding presence and characters are prone to contradictions.

Raja Rao's characters living in India suffer no such contradictions, however. They are at peace with themselves and their Indian past. There is no dividing line between the past and the present. The Indian tradition for them is a continuous process of legitimisation of change. They interpret the new in terms of the old and thus revitalise themselves. 'Harikatha' in Kanthapura is a point in illustration. The village bard telling tales from

Hindu mythology is conscious of his role. He stands at a point at which tradition and modernity get fused into each other in order to sustain and continue the social set up. He interprets the present in terms of the past. Here the past serves both a reservoir of the traditional values of the Hindus as also a source of inspiration for revitalisation of the present colonial situation. Jayaramachar the village bard in Kanthapura tells the tale of Gandhiji's birth in a fascinating way fusing myth and reality. Gandhiji, in his story, becomes a re-incarnation of Lord Siva and thus stands for all that is good and pure in the Indian tradition. Moreover, he re-interprets the mythological past in contemporary terms : "Today," he says, 'it will be the story of Siva and Parvati.' And Parvati in penance becomes the country and Siva becomes heaven knows what'." Similarly another tale is told : "Siva is the three-eyed," he says' and Swaraj too is three-eyed : Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddar." (p.20), These tales are not added decoratively to prove a spiritual or a mythical point, but are well integrated into the plot.

Thus we see that Raja Rao's expatriate Indian characters are nostalgic, about their past. They in fact are aggressive in asserting their past as a defence mechanism against the colonial situation which has fallen to their lot. But their counterparts living in India have no such traits, because they live within a continuing tradition. They too are proud of their ancient surviving culture that inspires them to fight against the colonial forces, but do not have the aggressively proclamatory tone of their expatriate counterparts.

Like Raja Rao's villagers in Kanthapura, Narayan's characters are deeply rooted in the Indian tradition. They are ordinary humanbeings living ordinary lives. They do not have the intellectual capacities of a Ramaswamy or a Kirillov and have never been abroad or even away from Malgudi for a long time. They have their roots in Hindu religion and Indian tradition. Colonialism for them is an external fact that does not touch them directly. Unlike Raja Rao's expatriate Indians, they do not encounter the West directly and therefore do not flaunt their Indianness in a proclamatory tone. Their lives are completely regulated by the Hindu code of conduct like the first - person narrating hero of The Man Eater of Malgudi who tells us : "My day started before four in the morning. The streets would be quite dark when I set out to the river for my ablutions... All along the way I had my well-defined encounters." (p.4). He bathes in the cold water of the river and feels elated. He recites "a prayer to the sun to illumine my mind." (p.5) For Krishna's mother in The English Teacher housekeeping is a religious affair : "unless I have cleaned the house. I can't go and bathe. After bathing I've to worship, and only after that I can go near the cows..." (p.29). Her life is completely regulated by these chores which she performs with religious fervour. The blind landlord of Krishna's house reveres him : "I revere college teachers, our 'Gurus.' Meritorious deeds in previous births make them gurus in this life." (p.25) and he readily rents out the house to him. He thus relies heavily on the theory of 'Karma'. The Sweet Vendor opens with a religious discourse by Jagan : "Conquer taste, and you

will have conquered the self' said Jagan to his listeners, who asked, 'Why conquer the self?' Jagan said, 'I do not know, but all our sages advise us so'. (p.7) And Jagan unquestioningly follows the advice of the sages in all matters, be they religious or mundane. He follows the Hindu 'Varna - Ashram' system rather in a ridiculously obscurantist way. ^{He} ~~He~~ objects to Mali's marriage with Grace on the ground that she is a 'casteless' girl and how can a Brahmin marry a casteless girl. At sixty he withdraws himself from the world because "At sixty, one is reborn and enters a new 'Janma' " (p.165) and became a 'Vanprastha', a recluse in order to realise God. But the problem with him is that he "is a man of mixed motives and ridiculous obscurantism to boot."⁵⁷ Even while he ~~discourses~~ on Gita, he keeps his eye on the cash receipts. He is as much regular in counting his "free cash" (as it is not to be accounted for in the income tax returns) as in offering his prayers to goddess Laxmi. But then his Hinduism and Gandhism do not have any rulings against his "free cash" policy. He therefore can strive for a "Saatvik" temper, in spite of all these contradictions.

"Saatvik" Temper then, is something that goes into the making of a peculiar brahminic sensibility of a typical Narayan character. "It is a temper wrought by self-discipline and principled avoidance of excess in indulging the senses"⁵⁸ Acquisition of this kind of temper, again, is something that binds these characters with their

57. A.N. Kaul, "R.K. Narayan and the East-West Theme," Considerations, Meenakshi Mukherjee, (ed.) (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1977), p.61.

58. Raji Narasimhan, Sensibility Under Stress, (New Delhi ; Ashajanak Publications, n.d.), p.77.

ancestors and makes them devout Hindus.

Worshipping Hindu gods and goddesses is an important function of their lives. Srinivas, the hero of Mr. Sampath carries a Nataraja image with him wherever he goes : "This was one of the possessions he had valued most for years. It seemed to be a refuge from the oppression of time." (p.19). The image was presented to him by his grandmother, who in turn had received it from her father. It is thus both reminder of his ancestral past and also a symbol of the continuity of tradition. Jagan, the sweet Vendor, similarly conducts all his business under the framed picture of goddess Laxmi hanging on the wall. The first thing that he does early in the morning is to place a string of jasmine on top of the frame, light an incense stick and offer his prayers to the goddess. Nataraj, the hero of The Man Eater of Malgudi, too has hung up a framed picture of Goddess Laxmi in whose benign presence he feels safe and secure. Sastri also performs 'pujas' every now and then. By participating in these religious rituals all these characters establish their links with their ancestral pasts. Being devout Hindus, they follow their 'Dharma', the duty assigned to them by their caste, creed and ancestors. They in fact pride in following the path set out for them by their ancestors.

Even contemporary reality is interpreted in the mythological terms by these characters. Sastri, in The Man Eater of Malgudi compares Vasu with a 'rakshasa', or a demonic creature. He goes on quoting from the Puranas to prove that all demons carry the seeds of destruction within themselves. Even Ravana, the

protagonist in Ramayana came to a sad end. It is however, the story of Bhasmasura that fits Vasu's cap. Like Bhasmasura Vasu possess enormous physical strength, evil genius, and strange powers over other humanbeings. Again, like the demonic creature Vasu knows no restraint, and no laws, not even his own. He creates terror among humanbeings and animals alike. He defiles Natraj's press and neighbourhood by collecting the dead animals and bringing prostitutes. He thinks he is invincible, but finally like Bhasmasura is destroyed by himself while killing a mosquito. As a contrast with the 'Saatvik' temper of Natraj, Vasu represents the 'Tamasic' temper of the 'Asuras' - the demons.

"Narayan provides here a symbolism which has roots deep in India's past. Not only is Vasu a rakshasa-devoted to goals of individual achievement...but those goals are given concrete symbolic form by the very nature of Vasu's activity : taxidermy."⁵⁹ Vasu surrogates creation by stuffing animals and acts as a rival to nature. He challenges the forces of nature itself. When Natraj points out that one of the birds that Vasu has stuffed is 'garuda' the sacred carrier of Lord Vishnu, he retorts : "I want to try and make Vishnu use his feet now and then" (p.64) Nataraj shivers at this idea, but simply cannot do anything.

This pattern of 'Saatvik' and 'Taamsik' tempers ~~recurs~~ ^{is} in The Financial Expert where Margayya obsessed with the idea of acquiring wealth is guided by Dr. Pal, who is symbolic of the 'Taamsic'

59. Edwin Gerow, "The Quintessential Narayan", Meenakshi Mukherjee (ed.), Considerations, p.70.

temper. Margayya does not know how to save his son from the evil influence of Dr. Pal : "He was torn between caution and an impossible rage. God knew where it would lead if he alienated Pal's sympathies : the fellow might do anything." (p.172) Jagan has a similar fear of his 'taamasic' son, Mali. He simply fails to understand Mali's intentions : "Reading a sense into Mali's actions was fatiguing like the attempt to spell out a message in a half-familiar script." (p.165).

As discussed in the preceding chapter, 'taamasic' characters are outsiders to the otherwise peaceful and stable world of Malgudi. Like the 'asuras' they disturb this placid world and create chaos by their intrusion. Being men of demonic dimension, they dominate the action of the novel for sometime. The order is finally restored when these characters disappear from the scene.

Narayan follows a clear mythical design of order - dislocation of order - restoration of order through a conflict of the Saatvik and the Taamsic characters of the type of the Puranas and other Sanskrit classics. In The Man Eater of Malgudi the use of myth is structural as it arises from the plot and is not incidental. Narayan uses myth as a digressional technique in other novels too.

Mulk Raj Anand too uses the ancient Indian myth of Sita as a structural parallel in Gauri. Gauti, the meek and submissive heroine of this novel suffers like Sita, the heroine of Ramayana. But Panchi, her husband is no Rama. Neither are the other characters in the novel comparable to the characters of the Hindu epic.

These villagers are ignorant, illiterate, tradition bound and poor. They are being exploited by money lenders, priests and policemen.

Gauri is blamed to have brought bad luck to Kesro, Panchi and everybody in the village. She is supposed to be responsible for drought and ~~xxxx~~ famine, even. The root cause of trouble with Kesro, however, is that she has been losing her control over Panchi ever since he is married to Gauri. Finally when the joint family is broken and Panchi goes to live in the barn of Rafique Chacha, Kesro once again tries her old tricks. But this time she finds a changed Gauri, not the docile dumb driven cow that she earlier was. She has transformed herself from the mythical Sita to the mythical Kali, the goddess who destroys the evil in order to recreate an ordered universe. She pushes Kesro out of her house shouting : "Get out of my house, witch! Get out. You oppressed me enough when I first came as a bride..." (p.87). She is thus free from the clutches of the mother-in-law, but not from the collective consciousness of the village whose guardian Kesro is and consequently Gauri too is turned out of her house. Gauri, the Kali, once again turns herself into the meek, submissive Sita. Like the mythical heroine, she is separated from her husband and sold away to a lachorous money lender in the city of Hoshiarpur.

Like Sita, again, she is restored to her husband by Dr. Mahindra

but is not acceptable to the villagers till she proves her purity. But now Gauri has undergone a big change. She has acquired an individuality and "is no longer the quite shy gentle cow that she had been" (p.233). When accused of disloyalty, she tells Panchi, "Acha if I am a curse upon you, I will go away" (p.243) and again "I am not Sita that the earth will open up and swallow me. I shall just go out and be forgotten of him." (p.244) Though the earth does not open for her, Dr. Mahindra's clinic can provide asylum.

Mulk Raj Anand, thus pursues the Sita myth to a point and then finally reverses it. "This contains an implicit comment on the values of the past and reveals Anand's rejection of the ideal represented in the particular myth."⁶⁰ By putting this myth to a negative use, Anand, rejects the time honoured virtues of patience, and submission in a woman. Again, by not opting for the Kali ethos either, Anand rejects the trans-sexual, divine, redemptive and order restoring role of a woman.

Anand, therefore, looks critically at the past. Unlike Raja Rao and Narayan who write within the Desi-Marga classical Indian tradition, Anand, being a social realist, writes in the Western tradition. For him most of the Indian past therefore is oppressive. He has no sympathy even with the recent Indian past. Like Aluko's His Worshipful Majesty, Anand satirizes the feudal Indian past in

60. Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction,

his Private Life of an Indian Prince.

Thus we can conclude that the colonial novelist tries to re-create a usable past in his fiction. As the value system of the African traditional life has suffered a far greater dislocation through the colonial impact than the Hindu ethos, the search of Achebe and Ngugi for a pedigree is more deliberate than that of Raja Rao and Narayan. The disruption being the greatest in the case of the black Americans, the search for a pedigree therefore becomes arduous in Haley's Roots. Moreover, the black Americans use the past for recreating a black image.

The colonial writers evolve some fictional strategies for this purpose, 2222

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