

**THE CONCEPT OF SELF
IN
THE NOVELS OF CHINUA ACHEBE**

by

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Certificate

I am satisfied that the thesis presented by Mrs. P.S. Bhargava is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and is a record of the original bonafide research work carried out by her under my guidance and supervision and that the results contained in it have not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree/diploma.

I certify that she has pursued the prescribed course of research.

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Abstract

Keeping in view Achebe's professed aim of presenting the values of traditional African (Ibo) society, an attempt has been made in this dissertation to trace the effect of those values on the 'self' of individual protagonists in Achebe's novels.

Spanning a period of thirty years from 1958 to 1988, Achebe's five novels reflect his own search for meaning in the relationship between an individual and his traditional community. This dissertation shows that Achebe's two novels of traditional life, Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, portray the path leading to self-actualisation as involving a personal confrontation with the community. It is argued that members of the traditional community gain an understanding and recognition of personal self-hood as they experience unity, a communal self-hood with their people through shared cultural tradition. It is further demonstrated that this individual self that identifies with the larger Ibo group also transcends itself - transcends the personal as well as the communal self, and pays heavily for it in the form of emotional collapse.

In the analysis of Achebe's novels depicting urban life, it is observed that the characters move from alienation to

confrontation and resolution. No Longer At Ease and A Man of the People reflect what may be termed general experience of alienation. Characters in these two novels are confused and unable to define their goals. The thesis proposes that these characters are placed in contrast to the presentation of the nurturing experience of the community. A resolution is hinted at in this duality. It is argued that Achebe's next novel Anthills of the Savannah is his novel of 'resolution'.

Anthills of the Savannah depicts alienation but adds a new dimension to it by creating a character who is sadly aware of it himself, but who is nonetheless committed to creating a new way of life. Achebe begins to offer resolutions that go beyond the specifically Ibo experience of life and the cultural past. Here the central character transcends both his individual and communal self, having realised both. It is thus concluded that Anthills of the Savannah develops and resolves the theme ('individual versus community') which characterized the previous four novels.

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