

# Diasporic Authors' Reactionary Interpretation Of Africa And South Asia

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## Abstract

The current analysis looks at the reactionary readings of South Asia and Africa made by diasporic authors. It shows how the West perceives former colonial cultures and traditions, as well as how they intend to preserve their own cultural traditions. Things Fall Apart (1958) and The Unchosen (1990) are thus selected to analyse intransigent interpretations of Africa and South Asia by postcolonial authors. The chief objective of the study is to refute the claims of the colonizers about the colonized. The paper also compares Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) with Hesse's Journey to the East (1932). The study argues that South Asia and Africa are civilised places and that the claims of the conquerors are false. The study is examined in the context of Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory. The investigation is exploratory. It also looked at the historical occurrence of prejudice in Western and European literature toward eastern societies and cultures. The research revealed that colonisers attempted to alter the religious and cultural practises of the colonised peoples, which caused unrest and instability among the Indians.

## Background of the study

“Does the white man understand our custom about land?” (Achebe, 1958, p: 124)

Every person's face is fascinating, and every culture is superior in the eyes of its citizens. Western and European authors have always seen the cultures of the East and of Africa through the lenses of colonisers. It is crucial to contest these claims and highlight the positive features of African and Asian civilizations. Further, the colonisers made an effort to change the customs

and religious beliefs of the conquered peoples. The selected novels have therefore been taken to uncover the colonists' misconceptions and misunderstandings about African and South-Asian traditions. The study also seeks to counterbalance Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) and Hesse's Journey to the East (1932). A comparison has been drawn between Chinua Achebe and Joseph Conrad to understand the two different notions about Africa on one hand; whereas, Hermann Hesse and Riaz Hassan's point of view has been judged to understand the land and culture of South Asia on the other hand.

The four writers belong to opposite races and backgrounds. Being a European by origin Conrad presents the colonizer's point of view; while, Achebe presents the African's (colonized) viewpoint as a counter-discourse. The same is the case with Hesse and Hassan.

Basically, Achebe has two main purposes. One is to tell the world that African culture is rich and glorious in its origin. Secondly, he wants to convey how colonizers destroyed natives' cultures and social norms, and traditions. The title of the novel is derived from W. B. Yeats's poem *The Second Coming* (1919) refers to the situation caused as a result of colonial rule. The whole society presented in the novel falls apart as a result of the colonial intervention.

*The Unchosen* (2002) by Riaz Hassan is also a reactionary representation of South Asia where he negates the picture presented by the West (especially the image created by Hermann Hesse in his novel *Journey to the East*). He totally negates the orientalist's point of view. The writer presents the rich culture of the natives. According to the writer the fertility of the land is directly connected with the fertility of the minds of the natives. The colonial people were very much inclined toward science and technology. They have urged to develop their own weaponry system Britain and Russia. Hassan negates the notion of Hesse that all the Eastern natives are living in the medieval ages in postmodern times.

Hassan directly negates the concept of chosen and unchosen by presenting the rich culture of South Asia in his novel *The Unchosen* (2002). He claims that the whole universe is the mosque of God and it is Muslim's responsibility to govern over the whole universe. His characters reflect modernity and modern thinking. It is not wrong to say that Hassan presents the responsibility of Muslim civilization to civilize other nations.

### **Statement of the problem**

It is known that colonial powers have long dominated a significant portion of the planet to increase and spread their influence. Another continent ruled by British and other European forces since the beginning of their imperial occupations is Africa. The most significant feature of colonial governance by European or other imperial powers has been influencing the culture of the conquered people. In view of this context, this study therefore reveals why this strategy is undesirable. Achebe, who is African, wrote the bestselling book *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was written to provide a western perspective on events in the Congo. Because everything, he encounters there, is very dissimilar from European culture and lifestyle, he labels the place a primitive society; whereas Riaz Hassan, in his reactionary depiction of South Asia in *The Unchosen* (2002), challenges the Western world's view of the region, especially the image created by Hermann Hesse in his novel *Journey to the East*. He completely refutes the argument put forth by orientalist. The author highlights the inhabitants' rich culture. The study is viewed through the lens of Franz Fanon's (1961) postcolonial perspective, which highlights the colonizer's negative attitude toward the colonized.

### **Literature Review**

The prejudiced approach towards African and Eastern cultures and people has been criticized by different writers and critics in their works. Edward W. Said emphasizes this issue in his revolutionary works *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) where he clearly exposes the intentions of the European and Western imperialists by declaring them self-praising. The writer has invented two terms; Westerners' perception of Eastern is known as orientalism and Eastern perception of Westerns is known as Occidentalism. Orient means eastern and Occident means western. Orientalism is the way of western powers treat and thinks about the

eastern people. They consider that orientals are inferior and culturally poor. In *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'* Achebe emphasizes that an outsider cannot conclude about the nature and reality of a society and culture partially. He terms his view and presentation of African culture by Conrad as Eurocentric.

C. L. Innes declares *Things Fall Apart* a good presentation of the effects of colonialism on African culture in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (2007). He argues, "Achebe's novel narrates how the coming of Christianity and European culture causes a particular African society to fall apart and lose its central and shared values (43)". Aime Césaire in his revolutionary text *Discourse on Colonialism* (2001) elaborately exposes the nature and effects of colonialism. We can take his concepts about colonialism into consideration to illustrate the colonial effects shown in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Césaire states that Bourgeois Europe has destroyed 'the root of diversity' (76). Before the coming of colonialism, African societies were culturally diverse. Colonialism has trampled the diversity under feet.

Franz Fanon (1961) is a prominent postcolonial writer who talks about the negative approach of the colonizer toward the African land and culture in his writings. He comments in the essay *On National Culture* in this book while exposing the thinking of colonizers for colonized. He narrates that colonizers are of the view that Africa is a continent of savages, where the natives believe in superstitious things. Moreover, it is the county where social evil exists. Throughout this work, he emphasizes the importance of African culture.

Md. Mahbul Alam declares *Things Fall Apart* (1958) as a counter-discourse against *Heart of Darkness* in his article *Reading Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart from the Postcolonial Perspective*. He states conclusively, "Achebe's

novel shatters the stereotypical European portraits about the native Africans. By unfolding the devastating effects of colonialism on the life of the Igbo people in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe has successfully made a comprehensible demarcation between the pre-colonial and the colonial Igbo land" (4).

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative research methodology based on the comparative study of postcolonial novels is adopted for this work. It is the textual, contextual, and comparative analysis of various colonial and postcolonial texts. This analysis is carried out from a postcolonial perspective. As counter-discourse is the most significant aspect of postcolonial literature, *Things Fall Apart* is analyzed as a counter-discourse of *Heart of Darkness*. Specifically, the researcher has applied postcolonial intertextuality to find out how African culture is presented differently in the novels and how Achebe responds to *Heart of Darkness* in *Things Fall Apart*, on one hand, and Riaz Hassan responds to *Journey to East* on the other.

Textual analysis is the most significant research tool, for the purpose of the present study. This type of analysis completely focuses on the content of the text rather than the grammatical structure of the text. The researcher tries to think that how other people make sense of the text. Moreover, such a type of analysis is used in historical research. The text can be understood through written words of the text.

The method is totally based on the perspective of the writers about the text. The research and text are two major components of such type of research. Some scholars are of the view that this method provides original research. The textual analysis includes the purpose of writing text, historical background, and audience. It is also mandatory for the researcher to use a theoretical framework to analyze data. A researcher must use

a positivist framework where perception should be the basic source of knowledge.

### **Theoretical framework of the study**

The study is supported by Fanon's theory of post-colonialism. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explores the impact of colonial civilizations and the colonizers' perversion of the colonised native culture. He demonstrates how culture functions as a tool for normalizing the social construction of race as a system of hierarchical power relations. Through the cultural sector, he began to profoundly associate pigmentation with hierarchy. This system of signification developed into a power structure that supported white supremacy in the colonial world. The colonists' goal was to supplant native histories and cultures with ones that they had created themselves (Fanon, 1967, 83). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon states: "It is the wrath of all whose cultures, knowledge systems, and ways of being are mocked, demonized, labeled inferior and irrational, and, in certain circumstances, extinguished." This is not merely general rage. It is the unrelenting rage against oppression in general and Western civilization's dominance in particular that permeates the entire world (85).

Fanon explains how this undertaking was accomplished. The religious establishments used racist propaganda to legitimize the racial domination of the colonies by associating darkness with evil. Incorporated into a number of institutional locations (schools, government, and criminal justice) the phenomenon would eventually take over society and hegemonize it while mediating the polarized, radicalized economic systems of colonial cultures. The transfer and internalization of racial meanings into the psyches and structures of society are most significant. Through the language's cultural aspect, Fanon is especially interested in examining how racism spreads through culture, especially language. Speaking entails being able

to utilise a specific syntax and understanding the morphology of a particular language, but it also involves assuming a culture.

### **Data Analysis**

Achebe sees the African Culture through an African eye, not through that of the colonizers. He adopts a positive approach and strongly condemns the dehumanization of the African people and culture Conrad. As he is a postcolonial writer, he brings to attention the calamities caused by the colonial interventions in his area. A postcolonial perspective focuses on the atrocities brought about by the colonizers in a non-European land resulting in a complete change in order; while on the other hand, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) has been written from a Western or colonizer perspective. Conrad sees things in Congo from the western perspective. Whatever he experiences there, is quite different from the European culture and lifestyle; therefore, he calls it a primitive society.

*Things Fall Apart* (1958) is the presentation of the real African culture along with its esteem. It is full of the richness of Igbo culture and traditions and its downfall occurs due to the imperial intervention of the European forces. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, is an enthusiastic follower of the traditions and he works really hard to fulfil the practices based on the norms and values of Igbo society. Achebe illustrates the Igbo culture as a sacred one and a symbol of unity for the tribesmen. It comprises a lot of brave warriors and a number of religious persons. Like all the civilized societies of the world, they have their social norms and values that are highly respected and considered holy.

The story of Achebe's novel (1958) is based upon the pre-colonial and post-colonial experiences of Okonkwo. He tells about the natives' culture before colonization and after colonization. Achebe focuses on the life of Okonkwo. It is also the fact that the novelist provides an inner picture of all the characters. He

has also pictured other minor charters in a very beautiful way such as Ikemefuna, Nwoye, Obierika, and Ekwefi. On the other hand, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) presents the British colonizers' journey toward Africa. The narrator of the story is Marlow who represents white men's visit to Africa.

In *Heart of Darkness* (1899) the presentation of Africans shows a lack of knowledge of Conrad about Africans. He has only presented the colonizers' angle of the story. While in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) the natives and their culture have been presented through Achebe's lenses which seems original representation. African people have qualities and abilities along with some weaknesses. Conrad without knowing the natives' culture represents it with prejudice and shows the Africans to be animalistic; but as a native, Achebe has a better understanding of African culture and social norms and traditions. He has captured an original picture of Africa.

This is the case with Achebe's political fiction. Being a patriotic African he cannot bear the text which is written to dehumanize the African people and culture. As *Heart of Darkness* is the colonial discourse, Achebe uses intertextuality to counter that discourse and composes *Things Fall Apart*. In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad presents a dark and gloomy picture of Congo. He declares the African people voiceless and depicts their plight as worse than the animals. This is a completely biased approach of an intellectual when he uses the words like "beasts", "brutes" and "savages" for normal human beings. Achebe argues that Conrad's depiction of Congo is what basically Europe thinks about the Africans. On the other hand, Achebe himself being an African knows better about the African culture and people. He presents the African culture as what it really is.

Conrad has focused western side of African cultures and religions and the slavery of the natives, but on the other hand, Achebe has

presented the simplicity and modernity of the natives. Conrad portrays African land as primitive and underdeveloped. He has discussed that African people are savages and criminals. They do not have any culture or religion and lived in the medieval ages. *Things Fall Apart* reflects a quite different picture and it is a reactionary representation of African culture and social norms and traditions. This novel has discredited the idea of *Heart of Darkness* by showing the image of Africa before colonialism came into existence. Achebe claims that the image of Africa which is portrayed in *Heart of Darkness* is not because of African people's lack of awareness and knowledge but it is a result of colonialism.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the novelist has consciously presented a new and modern Africa. The text has challenged the colonial and racial politics in literature. In Achebe's postcolonial account of the white man's journey into Africa, the imperialist standpoint is represented by the District Commissioner, who is writing a book titled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, a typical colonial text that rationalizes the imperialist venture as the containment of savagery through the civilizing influence of the west. Achebe has presented African culture and religion in such a way that it becomes a bone of contention between the orientalist and Occidentalism.

*Things Fall Apart* negates the presentation of Africans in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe has portrayed pre-colonial Africans' cultural and religious stories in an indigenous way. He is of the view that the colonizers have polluted the natives' culture. The narration shows that African society has a very complex belief system, a calendar which is based on seasons of harvesting, as well as rules of how the society should be run. Achebe is pointing out that the indigenous people of Africa have a set of systems and beliefs that create a way of life that works for them. And to take his writing even

further to suggest that what made the people of Africa underdeveloped and primitive was the colonizers.

Achebe presents the African culture in *Things Fall Apart* very differently than that of Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. His presentation is the real one and it is the reaction to Conrad's presentation that is based on misconception and less understanding of the area and its people. The main difference between Achebe and Conrad is that they depict African society and culture as per their own origin. One creates the text based on the viewpoint of colonizers and the other intertexts it to illustrate the real picture of colonized. This is the main contention and hypothesis of this research.

The title of the novel "Unchosen" is very symbolic for postcolonial writers and readers because it negates the "White Man's Burden Theory". It represents that the unchosen are also chosen according to their own culture and social norms and traditions. They have modern minds and thinking. Moreover, the colonizers played an important role in declaring the inferiority of the natives.

Riaz Hassan looked at and observed South-Asian culture very minutely. He is of the view that the natives are very capable of transforming themselves in the right direction as they are very enthusiastic about science and technology. They got a very rich culture and inheritance. The writer declares the earth as God's Mosque. Indirectly he wants to convey that the Muslims have right to govern the whole world. He totally negates the philosophy presented by Hermann Hesse in his book *A Journey to the East*.

"We not only wandered through space but also through Time. We moved toward the East, but we also traveled into Middle Ages and the Golden age; we roamed through Italy or

Switzerland, but at times we also spent the night in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and dwelt with the patriarchs or the fairies. During the time I remained alone, I often found again the places and people of my own past." (*The Journey to the East*; 1956)

Hassan is of the view that every generation has its own challenges, problems, skills, and solutions; the same is the case with us. The natives have versatile cultures and religions on one hand and the urge to progress in science and technology in another hand. They are well aware of their responsibilities as they consider the whole universe as a god's mosque. They want to upgrade their weaponry system in the footsteps of the Russians and British.

The novelist has presented a complete picture of the family system in South Asia where the elder ones are considered an authority. The natives have their own tribe system. Hassan has constructed a complete picture of South-Asian culture. The sons are always obedient to their father but the hybridization of the western culture has changed things. Consciously or unconsciously the writer declares that colonizers deliberately changed the eastern cultures and social norms and traditions. The natives were very happy before colonization.

### **Conclusion**

The Postcolonial writers have tried to counterbalance the cultural and religious misrepresentation of the natives. They have highlighted the modern aspects of pre-colonial cultures and religions through academic writings. The analysis of *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *The Unchosen* (2002) shows that the colonial writers were not only unaware of native culture but they were biased at the same time. Postcolonial writers

have tried to protect their cultures and social norms and traditions through academic writing.

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