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**Impact of Colonialism on African Political Thought**

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African literature is an outburst of the colonial impact on the African continent. African writers did not write the novels to exhibit their literary or artistic talent. But the violent scenario existed after the intrusion of Europeans into the African continent. The Europeans exploitation of the blacks compelled the African writers to write about the pitiable situation of Africans. Initially the entry of colonialists is attributed to the trade but later the activities of trade assumed different proportions. Gradually, the colonialists attempted to exhibit their impact on the Africans in different spheres such as educational institutions, cultural heritage, traditional aspects, political establishments and religious organizations. The present article is an attempt to bring out the impact of colonialism on African Political Thought. The advent of colonialists on African continent brought a radical transformation in the mindset of the black masses. The transformation has become inevitable out of the innocence of African masses. The innocence was up to the extent that neither they protested ways and means of colonialists, nor enquired about their systems.

The colonial impact on political thought began, when the colonialists started the introduction of western education in Africa. Naturally, some of the Africans began bending on towards western education. Their western education whether good or bad magnetized the black masses, which proves that the western education has a substantial impact over the natives. This tendency has been taken as an advantage by the colonialists with which they started establishing their own education institutions of all the aspects one can visualize that there has been a tremendous impact of colonialism on political institutions. Political thought of colonialists started shaking the political ideology and systems of Africans. Their sole intention was to grab the political power from the colonized. Once the political power is gained by the colonialists, they have started their political dominance over the Africans in all the spheres. The colonialists have taken the advantage of innocent black masses and have started their exploitation. The colonists slowly began grabbing their land, their wealth, their women and political power. It suggests that the colonialists have exploited the masses economically, socially, religiously and especially politically.

Political consciousness, awareness and enlightenment began enveloping the minds of the Africans. Thus, the spirit of nationalism began to grow gradually in the thinking of Africans. Their patriotic fervor and feeling enabled them to resort to the violence, movements and agitations. They have resolved to continue their struggle till they are liberated from the clutches of colonialists. Europeans became masters of the situation and they gained the political sovereignty.

The impact of Christianity on the Africans cannot be denied. The colonizers have established churches and missionary institutions in order to propagate Christianity to the every nook and corner of the African continent. In order to hinder and to come out of the impact of colonialism in a different spectra, such as political domination, cultural influence, enslavement, exploitation, traditional upsets, economical fluctuations and above all political freedom for them, they opted for the persistent, potential struggle against the colonizers which alone would solve the problems.

This struggle is suggested by a score of African writers in their writings for the welfare and liberation of the Africans from the dominant clutches of colonialists. Achebe and Ngugi are also among the prominent writers who have attempted to write in this direction.

African political thought is an output of the colonial process. The anti-colonial responses to it by the African political thinkers. The advent of European colonization perhaps is not the basis for African political thought. Because prior to the arrival of colonizers to the African continent, they had their own political thought. It appears that the developmental process of African political thought conceals the testimony and documentation of colonial descent. Richard Sklar (1985:21) opines it :

“The veil of (anti-colonial) radicalism enchants, mystifies, and ultimately deceives the unwary beholder. At this juncture in the development of African political thought, it hides the awful evidence of colonial descent.”

Both African historians and thinkers undermine the role of colonialism in African political thought. But it is questionable phenomenon. Most of the other thinkers neither deny the role of colonialism in African political thought, nor totally concede it. Colonialism was a mere event in African historical experience, as an inadequate notion of the colonial stamp in Africa. It was deliberated in many circles that until the arrival of the Europeans, the Africans had no noteworthy history. They were preliterate and, indeed, were in a ‘dark continent’. African history taught in schools was replete with European ‘discoveries’ of the Africa. It implies that the African historians emerged in the early fifties of twentieth century. African historians assumed that strong anti-colonial sentiments and ideologies had been instrumental in shaping such concepts as ‘Pan Africanism’, ‘Nationalism’, ‘African Personality’ and ‘Negritude’. Historical documents recorded that this period marked the dawn of an emergent Africanism. Africanists made every effort to glorify the African past. It appears that the African history and civilization, including the dawn of new Kingdoms, Empires and centralized authorities was existed prior to colonialism.

Regarding slave trade, it is not usually identified that the trade accounted for the emergence of new power groups in pre-colonial African states. Colonialism in Africa was not a case of total European domination. To this extent, we agree with the opinion of Sklar (1985:01) that :

“at no time..... were the colonial, or pre-colonial European agendas for Africa passively accepted by African leaders without protest, counter-proposals or initiatives intended to enhance the autonomy, power or security of indigenous African people”.

Peter Ekeh gives various conceptions of colonialism. Colonialism would mean the activities of European colonizers in the process of the conquest and rule of Africa. It is nothing but ‘colonization’ rather than ‘colonialism’. Colonialism could mean the reactions of those who were subjected to the European domination i.e. to colonization. This clearly underlines the tone and tenor of Africanists. Peter Ekeh (1983:04) defines that colonialism is:

“the complex of the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, between the elements of European culture and of indigenous culture.”

The western models of democracy, the rule of law, bureaucracy, universities, etc., are the specific characteristics which have developed a unique African feature from colonial times. But it is the fact that these institutions have lost their moral content, which existed in their western forms. It is observed that the spate of corruption and other vices crept into migrated political institutions in Africa. The moral and ethical impetus for self-refinement and expansion was not witnessed in Europeans.

African political thought is essentially African and although colonialism led to some changes, there was a continuous flow of africaness because, as Olisa Awogu argues:



“Continuity relates to the fact that political institutions and thought have, from their inception, retained basically their traditional roots, even though they may appear ‘new’ as a result of their development over the years. On the other hand, ‘change’ represents the ‘new’ in this evolutionary process.” Hodgkin (1957:42).

Most of the ideas in African political thought are found in the colonial milieu. These ideas are generally anti-colonial and possess a replacement syndrome, which is a tendency to replace, as it were, European ideas with authentic African ideas. This is done, firstly, with a view to capture and justifying the anti-colonial mood, a carry-over of the independence movements, and secondly, to justify the claims of the first-order African rulers to come to power. As Ekeh (1978:305-306) puts it, the African ruling class:

“accepts the principles implicit in colonialism but it rejects the foreign personnel that ruled Africa.... In order to replace the colonizer and rule its own people, it has invented a number of self-interest begotten theories to justify that rule.”

It is these ‘theories’ that today form the major substance of African political thought.

During the period the Europeans initiated capturing the land of Africa in a phased manner for the advantage of their political gains. Expansion of economy through opening markets was the main cause behind their political power. Due to the European political gimmicks, at last, Africa had been disintegrated into pieces with which they established their political boundaries. Africa was dwindling in between the native and colonial transformation culturally, economically and politically. In this way the confluence of the two cultures and the power politics were led to many unforeseen problems and misunderstandings. Mannoni (1964:21) suggests:

“The two parties involved in the colonial situation fulfil each other’s primary needs. The African as he emerges from the security of the tribal life which is being destroyed needs someone to depend upon; he finds such a person in the European who is rich, powerful and immune to the local forces of magic. This desire for dependence corresponds exactly to the psychological need of the colonial European. Coming from an aggressive, competitive society and determined to succeed, for a variety of reasons, away from that society, he needs above all else reassurance. The subservience of a dependent is the easiest way of satisfying that need. The problems arise when either the dependability or the subservience breaks down.”

The British ignited political turmoil at the end of the nineteenth century. Gradually, the Britishers captured the whole country and started grabbing the wings of administration in a phased manner under the rule of Lord Lugard in the year 1914. A system of direct rule was imposed in 1900. They disintegrated the country into pieces under the shadow name of control by ‘native courts’ headed by British District Commissioners because British always contemplated that the best policy is ‘Divide and Rule’. In order to shut the tongue of the people some of the selected Igbo members were inducted into the system of administration as warrant chiefs, court clerks and court messengers which were branded as unworthy and puppet posts. This system of local government survived with some minor changes upon the period of independence in 1960. The Nigerian Civil War affected the lives of the people. It was fought for two and half years in Igbo land. Over three decades, Nigeria has witnessed a number of military coups. There were external and internal skirmishes which led to the uncontrollable violence. The chaos embraced the country as there was a lot of commotion. Lives of many people were buried in the graveyards. The economy of the country ruined to the unimaginable and unrecoverable situation. Political instability danced in Nigeria with which the country encountered a number of ups and downs.

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