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## The impressions of Gandhi Ji on major African writers: A study of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah

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### Abstract

When we think of Gandhi Ji, we have some abstract qualities in our mind like Satyagrah, Truth, Morality, Non-Violence, and Passive Resistance. Gandhi Ji was inspired by many philosophers and intellectuals like Tolstoy, John Ruskin, P.B. Shelley, Gopal Krishan Gokhale, Socrates and Mohammad and much influenced by Buddhism and Jainism as well as Bhagavad-Gita, Upanishads and Bible. South Africa was the first laboratory for Gandhi Ji to experiment his ideology and Principles. Gandhi Ji went to Africa in April 1893 and spent 21 years there. During this long span of time, he faced many challenges and led many campaigns and movement there with his principles of satyagrah and truth. Gandhi Ji himself said, "He was born in India but he was made in Africa". Africa writers and intellectuals could not do away with the influence of Gandhi Ji directly or indirectly.

**Keywords:** Truth, morality, non-violence, satyagrah and Gandhian impressions, African writers

### Introduction

Africa has also been under colonial rule and Africans also have suffered and struggled to get freedom as Indians have done. Major African writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Armah and Ekwensi depicted the plight and fight of Africans during and after colonial rule there. In their depiction these writers show the glimpses of Gandhi ji's values and principles in their work.

Chinua Achebe strongly reacts against colonial rule. He present before us the core feeling of the laity in the colonial and post-colonial Nigeria: their psychological battle in security and bewilderment. Achebe tries to rectify the image of Africa and Africans that had been prevailing for a long time in Africa. These are, in a way, glimpses of Gandhi ji's impression. In his first novel Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe has portrayed the protagonist Okonkwo as fighter to prove his manliness but when he commits a mistake and kills Ogbuefi accidentally and unintentionally, he was punished to live in exile for seven years. Though Okonkwo's friend Obierika puts a question on this severe punishment for an unintentional mistake yet Okonkwo accepts the punishment without any opposition. It shows Gandhian impact and this punishment acts like a purgation to Okonkwo. The acceptance of this punishment also shows his belief in traditional unity of his community and he tries earnestly to save the traditional values and culture of his clan.

Obierika voices Achebe's Gandhian thought on colonialism. He is upset to see his clan converting to Christianity and abandoning their own religion. He raises questions:

"Does the white man understands our custom about land?"

"How can he when he does not speak our tongue?" But he says that our customs are bad and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. He has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart".

In the second novel 'No Loners at Ease', Obi goes to England for higher studies, comes back and is given a European post. In the office he opposes bribery and his colonial English post. Obi is stuck in the battle between morality and immorality.

He gives into bribery under adverse circumstances but soon realizes his guilt. Obi met and fell in love with Clara who is an outcast. Despite strong resistance on the basis of caste, Obi keeps loving her. Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu in the novel 'The Arrow of God' favors truth even though he knows that that he will lose support of his clan. Another example of Gandhi ji's impression is that when Ezeulu is called by the British administrator to become his representative "white man's chief", he clearly declines this offer and spends several nights in jail. Ezeulu sends his son Oduche to the missionary school at church so that he may keep an eye on their learnings and practices. He passively tries to resist invasion of British power on his clan. Mosses Unachuku, An African converted to Christianity, warns his clansman, "I can tell you that there is escape from the white man... when sufferings knocks at your door and you say there is no seat for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool. The white man is like that." He further says, "As day light chases away darkness so will the white man will drive away all our customs"

Ayi Kwei Armah was born in Takoradi, a sea port on Ghana's coast. His land was the first to gain the sovereignty in 1957. Armah is concerned with the political and moral decay in post independent Ghana. Armah is in his novels Longs for Ghanain society after independence from colonial rule. He wanted moral amendment in the people of Ghana.

The protagonist in the novel 'The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born' is not given a particular name rather he is referred to as "the Man". He is the common man of Ghana. He is embodiment of honesty and truth. His wife condemns him because his classmate Koomson has made money and gone to the heights by unfair means but the Man sticks to his simplicity and honesty. His wife calls him "chichidodo". Chichidodo is a bird that hates human excrement but feeds on maggots. It symbolizes the man working in the corrupt system without liking it but still gaining from it directly or indirectly. The Teacher, another character in the novel, is the symbol of morality, purity and honesty. He has become recluse in the corrupt world of the post-colonial Ghana. The Teacher plays the role of guru, counselor and provides rational guidance to the Man. The Man wants to avoid the corrupt ways and suffers in the world that does not belong to him and exclaims

"They will destroy me, Teacher".

"Or make you a good man". Says the Teacher.

The Teacher exhibits Armah's anger on the colonial influence on the people living in the city. The Man symbolizes hope, morality, urban poverty and social obscurity. The Man is gifted with the sharpness of mind and acute observation. His perception helps him choose between good and bad. The Teacher's notion of freedom is: "It (freedom) makes no difference. If we can't consume ourselves for something we believe in, freedom makes no difference at all. You see, I am free to do what I want but there is nothing happening now that I want to join.

In the novel why are We So Blest? Armah deals with the impact of colonialism in the society and more specifically with the exploited ones. As Gandhi Ji was in deep concerned with the oppressed ones. Armah in Two Thousand Seasons.

The Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, is one of the most prolific writers who contributed to the betterment of human

kind through his writing. Soyinka proclaims a strength of mind in tune with religion with nature. He declares that the tiger does not proclaim his tigertude! It shows his adherence to the African convention and traditions to correct the distorted ways of people. Soyinka is not in favor to look upon any other religion, traditions and customs to enlighten African. It is noticeable that African people lived in the immediate vicinity of nature and they followed natural gods. This is a little peep at Gandhian philosophy. Soyinka was against negritude movement because he does not want to defend their identity as Africans have had their own historical identity, ethics, principles, religion and customs. The novel Season of Anomy traces Soyinka's experience of being in prison. It shows how an individual can become an agent of social transformation. In the novel Season of Anomy, There are two societies in conflict, one representing the traditional Nigerian society and the other one is the modern society given into the western lifestyle. Soyinka cautions against the upshots of greed, lust for power and gluttony, corruption in the system, immortality in society.

Thus we can say Gandhi was ultimate inspirational personality who influenced almost all modern scholars of India and Africa and other colonized countries in the world. Gandhi Ji was a humanitarian and advocated for the rights of all. When Gandhi addressed a meeting at the London School of Economics on November 10, 1931, an African student asked him: "You love an Englishman as much as an Indian and yet you dislike British Government. Now British people make up the Government". Gandhi replied: "Man is superior to his method. A man's method may be vile, and yet you may not apply the adjective to the man himself...".

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