
UNIT 16 THE AFRICAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH: AN INTRODUCTION

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16.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to survey briefly the tradition of creative writing in different regions of Africa since the pre-colonial era. While we would like to examine the nature and forms of literature composed before the arrival of Europeans, our primary focus would be on the development of the novel as a form of literature in Africa. This will help us place **Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*** in a proper literary perspective and it will also help us in evaluating it in relation to other similar texts.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

To state that there was no literature in various parts of Africa before the advent of Europeans is as false as the statement that Africa had no history and no past before the arrival of the Europeans. And yet both these statements have been made by many responsible European scholars and unfortunately many Europeans have believed them to be true as well.

The misconception about the lack of any literary achievements on the part of Africa could have arisen because of the fact that a large number of African languages lacked the tradition of a script or a writing system. In fact out of seven hundred odd languages spoken in Africa, there are no more than forty-four, which have been used for written literary expression. The literate western societies equated literature with literacy and the absence of literacy in a number of African societies was interpreted as their having no literary tradition at all.

It is said that story telling is as old as man himself. If this is true, story telling must also have originated in Africa because, as stated in Unit 15, the origin of man can be traced to Africa. In the following sections, we shall look at the content and form of literary efforts in different parts of Africa through the ages.

16.2 AFRICAN WRITINGS: THE BEGINNINGS

16.2.1 The Beginnings: Oral Literature

Telling stories and singing songs are amongst the oldest forms of literary activity and have existed in human societies since most primitive times. This is true of not only Africa but of centres of human development in other parts of the world as well. Accumulated over a period of time these songs and stories became a part of the

African Novel In English An Introduction

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