



The Voter: A Poignant Satire on Human Weakness for Power and Money

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Abstract:

It is a common experience for the citizens for any country that their leaders indulge in immense luxury once they get elected. A sensitive writer like Chinua Achebe is bound to be hurt by such an apathetic attitude of the politicians. In this story, he realistically depicts the rampant corruption prevailing in the African political system.

Keywords: *Corruption, Exploitation, Humiliation*

Chinua Achebe (Albert Chinualumogu Achebe), a Nigerian novelist, poet, short story writer, professor at Brown University and critic has been considered to be the most influential African writer of his generation. His popularity rests on his first novel and magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the most widely read book in modern African literature which still enjoys pride of place in world literature and termed a classic. He is best known for his unique portraits of the widespread social, political, and cultural effects that western values have had on traditional African society. His writing has in many ways bridged the gap between the past and the present, between old and new ways of life and contributed to an understanding of what it means to be Nigerian in a modern Africa. In his works, the readers find realistic descriptions of Nigerian life. Chinua Achebe rightly justifies his writing in the following words and urges the writers of the Africa:

The last five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature that presented Africa in a very bad light and now the time has come for Africans to tell their own stories... This is really what I personally want to see-writers from all over Africa contributing to a definition of themselves, writing ourselves and our stories into history... Storytelling is a creative component of human experience and in order to share our experiences with the world, we as Africans need to recognise the importance of our own stories... (qtd. in Tolitasmusings.blogspot)

In his beautiful story, 'The Voter', Chinua Achebe brings out evils of our election system and makes a poignant satire on human weakness for power and money. There is total absence of pure means and it is shamelessly believed that 'Everything is fair in love and politics.' How can one expect a winner to work for the welfare of the people of his constituency, when he is pretty sure that they can be deceived and fooled easily? Elections are nothing but a farce and mockery of democracy. Genuine candidates are losers everywhere and rogues and rascals become representatives of people.

The important characters of the story Marcus Ibe and Maduka stand for all those candidates who are well versed in rules of game. They can go to any level to win an election. They emerge as victorious not because they are liked or loved by the people but because they are capable enough to buy votes and

to create an atmosphere of bright future by giving false promises. In spite of knowing it fully well that these promises are never going to be kept poor, simple-hearted, illiterate voters get entrapped and vote in favour of liars.

The writer begins the story by telling us about Roof—a young man who enjoyed immense popularity in the village Umuofia. The villager respected and trusted him much for his sincerity and innocence. He could have made fortune by staying in the town. He was capable enough to shape his career and live prosperous decent life. But he buried his dreams voluntarily in order to serve his people. This was a big sacrifice. Social service was his priority. Shaye Lockwood writes:

Roof's popularity was because it was the villager's measure of gratitude to an energetic young man who, unlike most of his fellows nowadays had not abandoned the village in order to seek work and any work in the towns.
(tinaneff.edublogs)

A leader like Marcus is always in search of such a person who can act as a link between himself and voters. Roof tried to convince the villagers that Marcus was asset for Umuofia because once he becomes a minister, there will be a transformation in the village. There will be no problems of water, roads, electricity, hospitals, schools etc. as such. This powerful leader would prove to be an angel for them. Past experience forbade the voters to be sympathetic to him. But offer to a few shilling to each voter worked a miracle. They insisted on getting more from his agent and after some hesitation, this request was granted. Money makes a mare go. The only qualification Marcus possessed was that he was financially sound. Election was a business and this temporary investment was sure to fetch him handsome dividend.

The story takes a different and unexpected turn when Marcus fights an election as a candidate of people's Alliance party. He began his career as a mission school teacher and was forced to resign following sexual scandal. He joined politics and within no time rose to be the minister. He minted money and secured his future. He was sure to win this time as well. But his rival candidate from Progressive organisation party was not going to let Marcus win uncontested. He may get a few votes but it will be a first step in his long battle.

A leader of the P.O.P campaign team approached Roof asking him to vote for Maduka an opposition candidate. Roof would get five pounds, if he accepted the proposal. Roof, the buyer of votes turns into the seller of his precious and pious vote. We witness a great mental conflict in his mind. At this stage, he reminds us of Hamlet who is 'prisoner of indecision'. He is torn between his sense of integrity and attraction of money. Bhagwadgita says:

*जानामि धर्मं न च मे प्रवृत्ति ।
जानामि अधर्मं न च मे निवृत्तिः ।।*

(He knows what is right but cannot adhere to it. And also knows, what is immoral yet cannot get rid of it.) Before casting his vote, he tears the ballot paper in two pieces and put one half in each box: Quick as lightening a thought leapt into Roof's mind. He folded the paper, tore it in two along the crease and put one half in each box and confirmed the action verbally: 'I vote for Maduka. (GL 50)

It is very difficult to justify his behaviour. He may get consolation that he has done no injustice to either Marcus or Maduka but it was a futile exercise. Roof finds out lame excuse by forcing himself to believe that Marcus was definitely to win by majority. It will be 'a landslide victory' for him. So it would make little difference if he voted against him. But breach of confidence is a great crime.

The story ends with moral degradation of Roof. We no more have any respect for this young man whom idealism dragged from town to a small village. If Marcus is robber who has amassed wealth by

exploiting poor villagers, Roof is not far behind in this mad race. Being in charge of election campaign, he takes all the chances to fill his pocket.

Chinua Achebe exposes both-the candidate and the voter. The candidate spends huge amount to woo his voters and voters in turn try to extract from him as much as possible. The writer states the obvious. Radical changes are needed to make elections transparent. How can democracy flourish if we choose goons like Marcus with dubious trek record as our representatives? It is indeed a pity that instead of feeling shameful about our greed for money, we justify our lapses. Marcus may not ever come to know about this betrayal, but will Roof be ever able to forgive himself. When there are two options, it is better to follow call of conscience which Roof did not. Roof- the voter defeats Roof-the idealist.

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