

A Tragic Hero in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* - A Critical Study

Dr. B. Thriveni, M A., Ph D

Assistant Professor of English

Government Arts College (A)

Ananatapuramu, Andhra Pradesh, India – 515 001

Nigerian Literature is basically in oral tradition in the form of folklore, proverbs and fire time stories. Nigerian woman has a great role in storytelling. This tradition has continued until the Europeans arrival into the African Continent. Nigeria has become a colony in the process of colonization and missionaries played a vital role in educating the native's through English language. The Nigerians have acquired the white men language as a weapon and shown the world, the hidden wounds on them through their creative writings. Nigeria has produced a good number of literary crafts men like Totuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Achebe, Gabriel Okara, J.P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Abubakar Gimba, Helon Habila, Zainab Alkali, Ahmed Maiwada, his Mu'azuMaiwada, and Audi Tanim Giwa. Nigerian literature attracted the attention of the world through Chinua Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart" in 1958.

Chinua Achebe was known for his strong traditional roots of Ibo culture. Though his parents were converted Christians, Achebe adopted both Nigerian traditions and European modern techniques. He was well aware of things in his country and the outer world. He started his career as a writer at the undergraduate level. He understood that in the literary world African countries were represented in a negative way. Through his writings he tried to convey that, Africa has its history, culture and heritage. Africa doesn't need any outer support to enlighten. His works very artistically projected how the colonial power has destroyed the traditional societies of Africa. The African societies were under a great torment and unbearable conditions.

Things Fall Apart is a story of Okonkwo a great warrior of Ibo clan. It is divided into three parts, the first part is about Okonkwo's rise from utter poverty to the lord of the clan. The author clearly narrates about the customs and traditions of Ibo society. The second part is about the exile life of Okonkwo's and the advent of White in their society. Readers are slowly understood that how missionaries attracted suffers of the society. The third and last part of the novel explores the return of the warrior to Umuofia and tries to establish his earlier position in the clan. Okonkwo notices that, a tremendous change in his own society. He tries to control the new rule and to retain their traditional society. He is defeated in his attempts and sacrifices his remaining life at the end of the novel.

The novel opens with a giant like figure of Okonkwo. He is a famous warrior of the Ibo clan of the nine villages of Umuofia, "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages

and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat.”(1)

His father, Unoka proves himself as an unsuccessful man in life. But Okonkwo is very ambitious. He inherits nothing from his father neither moral nor physical support, his fame rests purely on solid personal achievements, “...a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.”(7)

Okonkwo is backbone of his family from his young age. After a wrestling match at the age of eighteen, he becomes an undefeated hero in all aspects of life. He is a great warrior of Unuofa. In his latest war he is the first biped to bring a

human head. It is a symbol of victory in Ibo clan. He brings five human heads to his native. “He was a man of action, a man of war.”(10)

He is a successful farmer in the society. Though he faces cruel famine conditions at young age, he never fears about it and its saddest impact. In a terrible harvest month his father Unoka says to him,

“Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride.”(23)

Okonkwo is very prosperous and marries thrice. He blesses with a number of children. He becomes rich in his own clan, owing a huge compound within it; he constructs obi’s (hut) for each wife, for barren, for his personal God and special one for himself. Okonkwo raises heights of glory by his own hard work with confidence. He becomes one of the lords of the clan very soon, “...an old man was talking about Okonkwo who had risen so suddenly from great poverty and misfortune to be one of the lords of the clan.”(24)

At an early age he has gained fame, it was not luck. But Okonkwo’s *chi* or personal God is in favour of him. Ibo people believe that, if a man says ‘yes’ his personal God says ‘yes’. May be Okonkwo with a strong determination said ‘yes’; so his personal God said ‘yes’. The surrounding of nine villages and Umuofia they treat Okonkwo like a king.

But, Okonkwo is not free, throughout his life he suffer from fear, ‘fear of being thought weak’, “Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it is the emotion of anger. To show affection was sign of weakness...” (26)He doesn’t like his father. He hates intentionally his father belongings.

Okonkwo’s son Nwoye inherits the characteristics of his dead grandfather Unoks. The boy hates the harsh and violence behavior of his father. In Ibo society after attaining certain age, boys must sit with their father and they have to learn that how to command the household and man role in society. But Nwoye prefers to sit with his mother and likes to listen fire time stories.

This kind of feminine behaviour in Nwoye irritates Okonkwo. He is satisfied with Ikemefuna. The boy comes from a neighbouring village Mabaino, as a compensation to Umuofia. He has been living with Okonkwo's family and becomes a family member very soon. The boy addresses Okonkwo as father, "...Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy-inwardly..."(47) Ikemefuna is very much afraid of Okonkwo in the beginning days. In due course, Ikemefuna has good command on Okonkwo's children and like an elder brother he shows his responsibilities over them. Nwoye maintains an inseparable relationship with Ikemefuna. Oracle of Hill and Caves orders the natives to sacrifice Ikemefuna. An elderly man warns Okonkwo to stay away from sacrifice. The boy's death makes Okonkwo restless, "Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night..."(57) It shows clearly that Okonkwo has deeper emotions inside.

Umuofia is busy with the New Yam Festival, no one remembers what happens to Ikemefuna except Okonkwo's family, and especially Nwoye is maintaining distance from his father. Okonkwo's friend Oberik's daughter marriage is going to celebrate. In the marriage for the first time the natives came to know about the White. As a proverb says "good times are followed by through bad times." It is aptly connect to the life of Okonkwo. The clan lost a great warrior Ezeudu, in the funeral ceremony Okonkwo's gun is misfired. The dead man's son lost his life. According to the Ibo tradition the innocent should not be punished. It is an unfortunate incident but the culprit must receive the punishment. Okonkwo is to flee from the clan along with his family for a period of seven years. He and his family have to live an exile life at his mother's homeland Mbanta.

The second part of the novel is a testing period in the life of Okonkwo. His life ambition is collapsed with an unexpected incident in Umuofia, "His life had been ruled by a great passion—to become one of the lords of the clan."(119) Okonkwo appears in a defeated state for some in exile. Uchendu is Okonkwo's maternal uncle gives welcome speech and shares his own odd experiences in life. It gives a kind of encouragement to Okonkwo to face the life and his place for future.

In Umuofia unwanted changes are stated by the advent of the White. His close friend Oberika visits him in exile and informs him about the settlers in their native. At the same time in Mbanta Mr. Brown arrives and starts winning a couple of converts. Mr Brown immediately starts to construct a church and begins Christianizing and civilizing the natives. The church becomes a great protecting shelter for the Osu caste. It attracts diseased people and the mother of twins who were looked down in society. The next category to join the church is young people like Nwoye. They are not warriors; they cannot gain titles in clan. Nwoye joins the missionary without any fear of his father. The actions of Nwoye is a great blow on Okonkwo, he immediately disowns his son. At the end of his seven years of exile life he calls his entire mother's people together for a great feast. He expresses his gratitude for their love and concern on him and his family members.

The third and last part of the novel depicts Okonkwo's plans to achieve his lost position as one of the important men of the clan. His absence from clan is not a short period,

“Seven years was a long time to be away from one's clan. A man's place was not always there, waiting for him. As soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it. The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another.”(115)

He is aware of his position after his return from Mbants. He lost his place among the nine masked spirits of clan. He comes to know that now it is difficult to lead his warrior's clan against new religion. In spite of all these things he has a burning zeal to raise again and retain his warrior stature in clan.

Okonkwo notices remarkable changes in Umuofia, the church, court of law, and missionary school. The Umuofa refuses to send their children to school, but the surrounding villages are ready to attend it. Those attending school started reading and writing in White's language. It is a great attraction in nine villages. Another noticeable change is trade, the natives are unaware of these things, and money has flowed like water in the pockets of mediators. A sudden transformation in Umuofians, many worth men are joining Christianity. Okonkwo is most unhappy over the changes in Umuofia. He mourns for the clan and loss of man like attitude. He is unable to understand why Ibo clan defeated in the hands of White. He discusses with his close friend Oberika regarding the cowardice behavior of clan people. Oberika explains him that, there is no unity among us; the Whites are very clever to achieve their goal. Ibo society is degrading from the norm and custom of their own. It indicates the beginning of the end of their culture. Okonkwo stops thinking of his own personal concerns and his mind now occupies with the thoughts of saving his people and culture from destruction.

In meanwhile a converted Christian unmakes one of the nine spirits of the Umuofia. It is a crime according to their tradition, to punish the culprit; the clan people wear war dresses and destroyed the church.

Okonkwo feels happy about the clan's decision. But the District Commissioner describes a plan to bring the elders of the clan to his office for arrest them. Finally the Commissioner succeeds in his plan. The elders of the clan imprisoned for five days and brutally humiliated. The White officers collect huge amount for release and shave their heads. Okonkwo is completely defeated in the hands of White and he plans to take revenge against them. Umuofia calls for a public meeting after the releasing of Okonkwo and others. The meeting is about to start the District Commissioner sends messenger to issue summons. Okonkwo is in a fit of anger kills the messenger. He thinks that the clan supports his action. But the clan has shown its back to him. He takes a decision on his own future. On the next day he wears the traditional attire of warrior and found hanging on a tree in his back yard. He tries to conclude that, it is better to die an abdominal death rather than a savage life in the hands of White.

The District Commissioner follows to see the formalities. The commissioner knows the fact of the death of Okonkwo. He raises some doubts in the death ceremonies of the dead man. Oberika is watching his close friends' body desperately and turn towards the Commissioner said ferociously, "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and he will be buried like a dog...." (187) the commissioner orders to the chief messenger to get down the body and bring all the elders of the clan to the court.

According to G K Kallam, a renowned critic of Achebe, in his perspective analysis, compares Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to Aristotelian tragedy.

1. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, the protagonist becomes a leader and an important man in Umuofia. When he is found dead his importance is on the wane due to the external factor of the advent of the White man on the imposition of an alien religion on Okonkwo's society. His death according to the Ibo culture is a crime.
2. In the classical tragedy the hero is disclosed to the audience at the height of his prosperity and power as we see in *Things Fall Apart* Okonkwo already reached the heights of his status and commended the respect of his clan.
3. Okonkwo was exiled due to his misfortune of exhibiting of his manliness. He advertently shoots a young man and he was banished. As a man of resilient spirit he prospers even in difficult times.
4. Okonkwo suffers exile and banishment due to his own pride which is Hubris. In his assertive nature and fears individuality he killed akins man although he did not intend it.
5. Okonkwo is every ready to take upon himself the burden of his society's guilt, shame, or short comings.
6. Okonkwo fights the impending fate and does not wish to join others and compromise with the ongoing events. As the result of his futile struggle with fate, he became grander and nobler.

Things Fall Apart is theme of serious and complete in its action. It contains a theme of great magnitude. It is not only a story of an Ibo warrior but also a representative of the native societies of this part of Africa. It clearly pictures what happen to those cultures in the course of history.

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