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**CULTURAL ROOTS, TRADITIONAL VALUES AND JUSTICE OF IGBO COMMUNITY IN
PRE-COLONIZED NIGERIA WITH REFERENCE TO CHINUA ACHEBE'S
“THINGS FALL APART”**

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Abstract

In Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' we can witness a realistic presentation of the Igbo Society throughout the Novel. Prior to the pre-colonial era in Nigeria Igbo, the community was functioning under the consultative assembly of the elders who belong to the same clan. Their lifestyle was dominated by the cultural heritage of Igbo longevity and there is no doubt that it was one of the most outstanding features of the Igbo clan. The society maintained a kinship institution that stood a long-standing in its long run of existence. Since the importation of colonization and interference of western civilization into Igbo culture and lost its identity gradually. Achebe depicted the very traditional life and valuable customs of the Igbo people in this Magna Opus. Some European Novelists depicted Africans as uncivilized barbaric savages in their works. Through this Novel 'Things fall Apart' Achebe gave a clean death blow answer to those writers by picturizing the whole cultural aspects a proving point that African Igbo clans are not primitive even before the pre-colonial era. Achebe is interested only in indigenous native African culture. Fed up with a repeated reading of white men's idea of accounting African's as socially backward, primitive barbarians without either an organized language or society. He vigorously voiced out the glory of the exploited colonial subjects through his beautiful language to the world that was under-estimated and under-represented by the European writers for a long time. This paper aims to show in what perspective Achebe has presented the objectives of his stance by depicting the pre-colonized Igbo society in terms of several cultural and social mechanisms in this novel *Things Fall Apart*.

Keywords: Africa – Cultural Heritage, Igbo Clan, Social Mechanism, Authority, Justice, Tradition, Ancestors

INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe in this Novel 'Things Fall Apart' challenged the stereotypical representations of the European writers about the Africans and their culture through his use of language and the way of presenting the lives, culture and tradition through the practices of Igbo clans. The readers are introduced to the complex law and customs of the Umuofia clan and its commitment to amicable relations. Sharing of the pal-wine and kola nuts are fewer examples of their everyday practices in their life that we can see throughout the novel. Their customs regulate social relationships to spotlight their public interests, customs, traditions and culture, promulgating possible anxiety. The situations of easing the debts of the neighbors on a sharing basis show their commitment towards their bondage which remains as a part of their tradition. Through these representations, Achebe emphasizes the consistency and intricacy of Igbo society. He also strongly condemns the stereotypical European writers' representations of African's as savages through his excellent language throughout this novel. His portrayal of the Igbo clan in this novel is to maintain his objective of dealing with the various social and cultural issues among the Igbo society. As a keen observer, he exhibited all these issues in this novel without any prejudice or bias.

METHODOLOGY

INVESTIGATION

The pre-colonized Africa and its subjects are considered as primitives, uncivilized and savages. This illusionary image was created by the white missionaries who colonized Africa initially. Originally speaking, a country's history and cultural heritage are supposed to be imprinted and depicted as it is to the readers based on the realistic concrete structure so that the same remains in the pages of history ever. At this juncture, the contributions of the writers, play a vital role in preserving the identity of a particular set of people. Apart from exhibiting reality the writer's responsibility is to picture both the brighter and darker side of a community or their tradition and culture. It is unprofessional and non-ethical to hide the original identity of any heritage by a writer. It is evident that majority of European

writers have drawn a picture of Africans as primitive barbarians.

With the sudden existence of colonization and the arrival of missionaries in their motherland, the native clans struggled and found it hard to adapt to the newly introduced cultural trends by the missionaries. The main motive of the missionaries is to convert the natives to Christianity and to destroy their cultural identity. So, the primary purpose of investigation of this is to make the readers understand the value of the African culture, tradition and justice practiced and followed by the natives in pre-colonized Africa.

Chinua Achebe is a standout amongst the most prominent African novelist and remains specifically read. The depiction of the life of the Igbo clans by Achebe proves that he has maintained a standpoint within the objective of dealing with socio cultural issues in Nigeria. The content of his work always carries the positive side and traditional values of the Nigerian People and Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

THE PORTRAYAL OF IGBO CLANS

In this Novel, Achebe shows up the impressive lifestyle and fair practices among the community. In simple terms, we can say that this novel remains representative of the African democratic society where it portrayed the very life of the society as it is. The law is adequate to all and every individual is treated as same under the law. There is no biased judgement in the least favoring someone. Achebe made us understand clearly that the law and order are respected by everyone in society and they strictly follow them without partiality or corrupting their nature.

According to Anthonia C Kalu (2008): The oral tradition is the backbone of African arts and letters. It contains verbal and nonverbal forms such as poetry, oral narratives, riddles, proverbs, songs, festival drama, music and dance, sculpture, and different kinds of artwork made from various materials. (p. 2).

The members of the clan stood with each other and support them whenever they face any

difficulties or crises. The Igbo clans in this novel speak the IBO language. Though this novel is originally written in English, we are able to find Achebe using many IBO words throughout this novel and it is understood that these unique words are employed by them which from generation to generation. The Igbo society follows the social norms and is conversant in the culture that has possessed from their ancestors. They follow and practice Orature. As an organic society, the feature and the structure of their society that they inherited from their ancestors work together in a well-balanced way. They work together on a complex situation to sort out the issues with their web of actions. They believe in working together since they realize that they depend upon each other to survive. The clans also strongly believe in fraternity and communal harmony in order to maintain a bond between themselves.

Stable governance is the inevitable ingredient of the clans to make sure that the community functions run smoothly. Their policy is to stand on their own feet. The society themselves has a peculiar behavior and definite identity in which the members are identified with the same. They have a shared vision of life that is later strengthened by wisdom and experience.

Obi is one among the human-made structure which indicates their notions of identity. It represents the social ideology of achievement and leadership based on the social, political and economic principles that are placed in the center of the family compound.

Ofo is the symbol of authority among the Igbo community. He is considered as the staff of traditional influence which is the symbol of truth and justice. This title is entitled to the oldest person of the community or to the family which holds the *Ofa*, which is possessed and passed from one generation to another.

WORSHIPING OF GODS AND PRACTICING OF TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL VALUES

Heritage is the most important legacy of a community in any culture where they withhold and preserve their uniqueness and identity throughout

the ages. These legacies are bequeathed by natural resources to the human community along with the production of the natural environment. Many writers have appreciated and celebrated nature in their work and they also represented nature in the cultural identity. Thus, these natural heritages are inherited and possessed by generation after generation and passed on to the descendants.

In this novel, Achebe demonstrates the various aspects of Igbo culture. Igbo's are polytheistic, which means they believe in multiple God worships. The God and Goddess they worship in their daily life govern different aspects of the world. They follow up with the different rituals and customs along with each individual God they worship. Say for example they celebrate the week of peace to honor ANI, who is the God of crops so that they will get the blessings for their crops and fields from her. In this novel, we can see the two festivals 'week of peace' and 'The feast of New Yam' representing the main idea of the clan's existence and showing their gratitude towards the power of Gods.

They believe that they can rejuvenate through the 'week of peace'. Negativity disappears, families get united ignoring differences and a friendly atmosphere is created. Maintaining peace is the core idea of the clans. Their celebrations are made for only getting united to restore the very essence of their idea. Another predominant aspect of Igbo society is believing in oracles. They believe that it is the very voice of God who speaks through their voice to the clans and instructs what they are supposed to do later. Their occupation is farming and they are almost farmers whose lives revolve around cultivation crops. Their staple food is yams for where the men are the only responsible person to take care of it while the women are supposed to grow various kinds of plants like melons and beans.

On the whole, the Igbo culture deals with the influence of political and moral life activities they practice. Igbo cosmic and traditional religious practices picture and reform the world-view, the moral code and the ethical quality of characters in this Novel 'Things fall Apart'. To know about the good and positive sides of African life practices which consists of rituals, festivals and religious

ceremonies Achebe, presented various activities in which Igbo's engage themselves to celebrate it. The people of Umofia and Mbanta strictly follow the collective social norms and customs that they retrieved from their cultural values that is why they are capable of running an informal smooth political and administrative authority. Those people share both advantages and disadvantages among themselves.

They practice all the values in their day to day life they believe that they can hand over their experiences to the next generation under the inherited basis for their actions in the future on Nature and their Self. As a traditional practice and cultural aspect they respect and obey their elders. It is believed and told that the youngers who listen to the words of the elders' will flourish in their life and listening to the elders is like consulting an Oracle. Elders are considered as teachers and mentors of young people.

When 'Okonkwo' asked for 400 Yam seeds to 'Nwakibie' an old man, he offered him 800 Yam seeds believing in Okonwo's hardworking and willpower. So, to show his respect towards him he calls 'Nwakibie' as 'our father' as a sign of honour. Even after the death of their ancestors, they maintain seniority. Being an African writer, through this novel, Achebe reveals the diverse and rich culture and social practices of the Igbo society to the westerners who underestimated the potentiality of African people.

SOCIAL MECHANISMS

A Social Mechanism is nothing but a set of social events, which carry three aspects that structures a complete visible system of social actions under

1. The actions of individual personality
2. A cultural system built based on their actions
3. The social system

Achievements of individuals are highly valued and appreciated in Igbo society. Their process of socialization is based on personal achievement. This type of individual achievement decides the social status among the society where they live. They raise

their children by preaching good and ethical values to not fall in their practical and personal lives. The Igbo's always aim to enhance their status in society.

An Igbo proverb saying goes – 'No one knows the womb that bears the chief' (uchendu,1965, p. 20, cited in Stevenson, 1985, p.14) through the character of Okonkwo, the protagonist of this novel, Achebe shows that personal achievements are highly valued among the Igbo clans and the society also appreciates acquiring titles. According to them a man who is entitled to a title is recognized and identified as a powerful and prestigious man in society. An individual who is not entitled to a title is called 'Agbala' or 'woman' and he is not even honoured when buried. In simple terms, Achebe depicts the standard, quality and mentality of Igbo clans in which they value and expect only a life full of victory, glory and achievements.

Their craving is only to obtain the title for where Achebe strongly imprints how ambitious and worldly the Igbo's are. Whomever among them committing mistakes is punished without prejudices to retain justice and we can see through Okonkwo's character when he was punished and asked to leave his own land for seven years. The punishment is not to destroy the life of the accused instead it is to revive and renew. One significant thing is to be shared is, in Igbo society, there is no prison system to send the accused for punishment. The prison system was introduced only during the period of colonization by the westerners. The Igbo's followed strict practices to make gatherings for any discussions or final judgements making.

RESTORING JUSTICE

There is no way found of practicing centralized authority in Igbo land. It lacks political structure. Generally, the world believes that without the scope of authority the tribal natives of Igboland remain as cannibals who live their lives as they wish. But Achebe proved that it is totally a wrong belief. Because in these uncivilized countries their severe laws which act as unwritten law and rules in each walks of their lives to be followed up with.

Kinship is totally absent in pre-colonized Africa. Though they don't have any political law, they are strictly attached to their tradition and cultural roots inherited from their ancestors to lead a happy and peaceful life which is evident through their very lives before the influence of Europeans in Igbo land. Social control among the society is done informally but it remains effective. There is no police or political system followed in pre-colonized Africa that we can say in modern ways. When the missionaries asked the clans who is their king they answered very proudly that there is no king in their land but they had only men with high titles, elders and priests as chief. The Igbo society live its life by following traditional laws, rules and regulations. It doesn't mean that they don't do crimes or evil things. There are people who commit crimes for where they are punished by socio-cultural rules. That's why we don't see any prevailing political system there before the existence of colonization.

The Igbo justice aims only at restoring rights and justice. In the final rituals of Ezeudu, Okonkwo's gun unexpectedly exploded towards the dead man's sixteen-year-old son and unfortunately, he was killed in that situation. But it is intentional killing, though it is unintentional, he has to accept the punishment given to the accused is to restore justice in nature. Homicide is strictly prohibited in pre-colonized Igboland, if murder is attempted in that time, a particular age-group people will take possession of the murderer's property and burn their house as a penalty. The festivals celebrated in this novel bestow the development of the themes of rewarding justice.

CONCLUSION

The early European writers distorted opinion about Africa and its culture has nothing good to show or say. In their opinion, Africans are barbarians, uncivilized and animal-like. They think that they don't have any proper and perfect culture, religion or a well-organized society to live in. Through their prejudice, the white men in colonized Africa treated the natives as savages and animals. But through his first novel and magnum opus, Achebe as a representative of African tradition proved and showed the world, especially to the

European writers as the African clans are not primitive, even before colonization they have their own way of following self-governing ideas, unbiased law and helping each other in difficult times. Moreover, they practiced hierarchy, respecting elders and their preaching that is passed from one generation to another. Finally, the world understood the cultural aspects and traditional values that was practiced by the natives in pre-colonial African landscape through Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"

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