



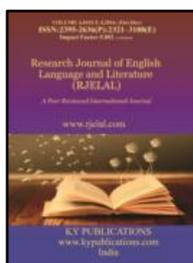
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

## THINGS FALL APART: EXPLORING THE IMPERFECTIONS AS WELL AS STRENGTH OF IGBO CULTURE

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### ABSTRACT

Different people follow different culture all over the world. Culture reflects their life style, their belief, food habit, language, way of life, religion, morality, social system, justice etc. Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) explores the life, value system and culture of Nigeria and Africa particularly Igbo society through his one of the best novels *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. Achebe wrote his novel in response to the European Colonial masters who think Africans are as savage and their culture is mean culture. Therefore, they needed to be educated. With this aim in mind the colonial masters begin to convert them in Christianity and teach them their own language. Language reflects culture. It plays pivotal role in man's life. Europeans boast of their culture and they think they are superior and the Igbo culture as inferior and their language also. So they needed to be enlightened. In *Things Fall Apart* Chinua Achebe depicts the imperfections as well as strength of Igbo culture. As his fore fathers followed Igbo culture, now he is easily able to delve deep in to the mind set of Igbo tribe and their culture. He throws light in to their life, Igbo festivals, their gods whom they worship, and their practice in their various ceremonies; they sacrifice children, their wife beating etc. This novel also records the changing of Igbo culture with the arrival of Europeans; the colonial effect. It captures the pre and post colonial effect on Igbo culture and its changing pattern.

**Key words:** culture, explore, colonial, strengths, imperfections.

### Introduction

Chinua Achebe was born in Ogidi, in Eastern Nigeria in 1930. His father, a man who followed Igbo culture, later embraced Christianity. He was an evangelist and teacher in the Church Missionary Society's Village School. Chinua Achebe started learning English at the age of eight in his father's school, went to Government collage in 1944 and in 1946 he entered university college with the aim of study medicine and graduated their in 1953. He attended various jobs which took him on long journeys about Nigeria. He then was busy with the reviewing of their history, culture, religion, language

and there he gathered life long experience with his classical bends of mind. Now he fathered four much read and world famous novel the first of which is *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and the rest three are *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *The Arrow of God* (1964) and probably the last one is *A Man of People* (1966). He witnessed the massacre of Igbo in northern Nigeria in 1966, the beginning of Nigerian trouble, Civil Work, which he recorded in his several essays. His short story collection *Girls at War* (1971) records the effects of war

The story of the novel starts in the outskirts of Nigeria, Umuofia, a small fictional village. Then

the white missionaries arrive in to their virgin land. The villagers forget to react at their unexpected entry in to their land. They do not know whether to accept their cultural changes that the Europeans brought in to their land. They threaten their very existence, their root and the Igbo culture. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the European begin to dominate nearly the whole world. They established colonies in Africa, Asia, China, America, wherever they could reach with their language, religion, and culture and obviously with the intention of rulings the native people. Nigeria, the worst affected nation, received the visitors who were on a secret mission, imposing their language, religion and culture. The Igbo culture got shaken and threatened by this unexpected change.

Achebe intends to record the history of the culture of Igbo people and educate his readers with an insight of Igbo Society right before the arrival of their European counter part. He tends to revive the suppressed and oppressed Igbo culture by their colonial master. He compares pre and post colonial changing pattern with classical mind and sharp insight. As he was an Igbo in his DNA (though his father converted to Christianity and learned English), he easily grabs the Igbo psyche in his novel. He is an insider outsider and again insider due to his work among the Igbo society. He represents the subaltern and he makes the subaltern speak in to their mind. He makes them voice their demand, express their agony, suppression, torture at the hand of their colonial master and let the world to know their rich culture. This has shortcomings also. Here in this regard I want to ask that which cultures have no defections and shortcomings. The answer is that, yes it is there, was there and will be there. The people one day will understand their faults in their culture and will correct them. Even in modern day in the name of the religion and culture people follow destructive tradition like polygamy. The Muslim community follows "triple talaq" the worst ever culture to dominate and suppress the woman folk forever. But it is changing now. Many Muslim countries banned it. India is going too banned now. The Igbo culture has polygamy, wife beating, child sacrifice etc. But when it comes in the care of religious belief they follow the predictions of their

gods and goddess. Their superior gods are female and priests' are female also. So there is a mix of respecting and disrespecting of women. The binary of good and bad. Achebe tries to explore the basic patten of their culture, he tries to highlight that their society is not mindless but has philosophy of great depth and Values and beauty. He want that 'subaltern' must speak, glorifies their culture mending their defections and short comings.

Before the arrival of Chinua Achebe with his path breaking and history making novel, people were forced to read native people's history through the eyes of colonial writer. Race and language do matter. White people are egocentric and they tend to describe the native people through their Eurocentric point of view. There is a probability of biasness. But Achebe changed everything with his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Europeans novel depict Africans as savage, barbaric, uncivilised, uneducated persons living in Jungle. So the white people have burden to educated them civilised them and they also think they are responsible .In his much read novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Joseph Conrad described Africa as "dark, wild and uncivilised continent " (sickles 1) . Joyce Cary wrote, *Mister Johson* (1952), a popular novel after *Heart of Darkness* (1899). According to Sickles the novel describes Mr. Johson, the protagonist of the novel as a "Childish, semi educated African who reinforces colonialist stereotypes about Africa" (1). Their descriptions were full of biasness, misinterpretations, misrepresentations of history and culture. It is Achebe who through his vision and depth insight brings back the glories of Igbo culture and the world is now began to appreciate Africa and its people and their culture as much as they have respect for their own culture. His descriptions prove the value and importance of Igbo culture to the Europeans we also witness the emergence of Nigerian writer in that time like Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri who are responsible to bring this legacy forward and explore the richness of Igbo culture. The Igbo society is male dominated society like other societies in the world. The suppression and oppression of women is there. The polygamy practice is there in Igbo society. Okonkwo, the main protagonist, was a very hard working man; he

became one of the influential leaders of his community. He detested idleness and considered it as sin. He did not follow his father, he hated him as he had soft corner, idle and he did not get any little. So he forebodes his son Nwoye not to follow his own father Unoka. Oknowkow became a prominent wrestler and leader to his community, married three women, earned two titles. An idle, lazy and monogamy man was considered as an agbala or a woman. What seems in appropriate, and unacceptable, to the Europeans seems very appropriate and acceptable in traditional Igbo culture. To prove his manhood man has to marry two a more wives. They consider women as their property. Sometimes the first wife suggest to her husband to look for a young wife. The young wife has respect for the first wife they live together in "peace" with their husband. The white missionaries are against such culture based on some scriptures (for example, Malachi 2:16) found in *The New Testament* that forbid Christians against such act. Woman are punished in Igbo culture, they are brutally beaten for not complying patriarchal orders.

Margaret Cavendish complained about the wretched condition of woman in her work *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655):

"we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our house, not suffered to fly abroad ..... we are shut out of all power and authority, by reasons we are not employed either in civil matters or marital affairs, our counsels are despised and laughed at, the best of our actions are trodden down with scorn, by the overweening conceit men have of themselves and through the despisement of us".

Killing of children and persons considered as normal practice along the line of their religious belief. Igbo religion professes for the killing of twins as they are a sign of the work of devil. Small boys should be sacrificed to the gods as a sign of peace offering and so forth. These things are bad. The colonial masters tried to mend these. But they need to understand the cultural differences. There is the enunciatory disorder of the colonial present, the telling of cultural difference. It lies in the stating of the

colonial signifier in the narrative uncertainty of culture's in-between: between sign and signifier, neither one nor the other, neither sexuality nor race, neither simply memory nor desire of the person concerned. It is well described in Derrida's placing or spacing of the hymen. In the context of the strange play of cultural memory and colonial desire in the Marabar caves:

It is neither desire nor pleasure but between the two. Neither future nor present, but between the two. It is the hymen that desire dreams of piercing, of bursting in an act of violence that is (at the same time or somewhere between) love and murder. If either one did take place, there would be no hyme.... It is an operation that both sows confusion between opposites and stands between the opposites at once. (Derrida, 212-13)

It arises from a certain culturalist substitution that Derrida describes as anti-ethnocentrism thinking itself as ethnocentrism while "silently imposing its standard concepts of speech and writing." (The violence of the Letter, 16). The colonial masters silently imposed their concepts, culture, language and religion on the black people. In the epistemological language of cultural description, the object of culture comes to be inscribed in a process that Richard Rotry describes as that of confusion between justification and explanation. The colonial masters mistakenly justified and explained it. They did not understand what they did. They wanted to turn everything "white". In disavowing the culturally differentiated condition of the colonial world- in demanding "turn white or disappear"- the colonizer is himself caught in the ambivalence of paranoiac identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution. This turned into tyrannical histories of domination and misrecognition. What Homi k. Bhabha thinks in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) is apt, when he says cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self of the Other. This is not because of some humanistic nostrum that beyond individual cultures we all belong to the human culture of neither mankind; nor it is because of an ethical relativism which suggests that in our

culture capacity to speak of and judge others we necessarily place ourselves in their position in a kind of relativism. Achebe highlights the culture of Igbo though there are defections. He has rewritten history of native people. He assured the black people that –you are part of a dialogue that may not, at first, be heard or herald- you may be ignored but your personhood and culture cannot be denied.

Chinua Achebe adopted the title for his novel *Things Fall Apart* from William Butler Yeats poem *The Second Coming* (1921):

Turning and turning in the widening gyre.  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart: the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.  
The blood-dimmed the tide is loosed, and  
every where  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best talk all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity. (Yeats: 1921)

The poet here talks about the fall of humanity around the world. Here Achebe talks about a particular race and their culture. The novel *Things Fall Apart* delineates the fall of the life of the main protagonist Okonkwo. As the novel develops he accidentally kills a man and was punished in exile. During that time the white missionaries arrive in Umuofia and there was a sudden change, things have fallen down. At the also Okonkwo commits suicide. Igbo is a society that also appears sceptical about its cultural change. The white missionaries forced the Igbo people to change their culture and belief. They are helpless at the hand of their colonial masters. Things Fall Apart centre cannot hold indeed in exact way. Things Fall Apart (1921) is a novel of “collapse, breaking into pieces, chaos, and contusion”(Alimi 21) of the traditional Igbo culture that suffers at the hand of white colonial masters’ arrival in Umuofia. The Igbo culture has imperfections, shortcomings but it has also its strength, richness in its own way and you cannot change it forcefully.

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