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DEPICTION OF CULTURAL REPLICA IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Culture serves to give an identity to a group, ensures survival and enhances the feeling of the belonging. Cultural identity consists of values, meanings, customs and beliefs used to relate to the world. The novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is centered on Igbo culture- its crest and the valley. It is a replication of Igbo culture. The use of core symbols that involves the expressions of a group's cultural beliefs, names, labels, norms that a cultural community share are excerpts of the Igbo people's culture in the novel. The affective, cognitive and behavioural aspect of identity in the novel refers to emotionally attached cultural replica and identity in particular situations, resulting in scourge. This attachment in certain practices had led to the crisis where they face a clash between their own culture and the introduced British culture and norms. Survival of a culture depends on the people's capacity to learn and transmit it to the succeeding generations. The Igbo clan in the novel has their cultural replica but fails to transmit it to the succeeding generations and this has led them to their crisis in the end, where they are unable to accept the fact that their culture is in the stage of destruction.

Key Words: Igbo culture, identity, replica, crisis.

Depiction of Cultural Replica

One is fenced by traditions and culture even in this modern world. Within certain culture and tradition one feels balanced and secured. Culture of a particular organization or group consists of the habits of the people in it and the way they generally behave and which they consider to be important for the development of civilization and of people's minds. It serves to give an identity to a group, ensures survival and enhances the feeling of belonging. Cultural identity acts as a lens and the frame of reference for the culture. It is not just defined by ethnic group. It consists of values, meanings, customs and beliefs used to relate to the world. According to the cultural identity theory, culture is one of the many identities expressed in

communication encounters. Cultural identity becomes evident through social comparison.

The Igbo are one of the three major tribes in Nigeria. Igbo culture involves various customs, practices and traditions of the people. It comprises ancient practices as well as modern concepts added into the Igbo culture through evolution or outside influences. These customs involve Igbo people's visual art, religious beliefs, birth, marriage and death rituals, use of language, music and dance forms as well as their attire, cuisine and language dialects. The novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is centered around Igbo culture- its crest and the valley. It is a replication of Igbo culture. Each major event in the novel, stresses cultural identity within the Igbo culture and its crisis. Aborigines of Igbo

culture follow their culture but as the novel proceeds, one can observe the fact that the culture which they praised as well as feared turned out to be a crisis where in certain cases they consider their own culture and tradition to be deceptive and follow the western culture and tradition.

According to Jane Collier and Milt Thomas the modes of expression is one of the properties of cultural identity and this is prevalent in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. The use of core symbols that involves the expressions of a group's cultural beliefs, names, labels, norms that a cultural community share and follow in order to show that they belong to a particular group, demonstrates shared identity. In the novel Chinua Achebe has presented the Igbo people, in the clan of Umuofia, that give importance to the title that they earn as honor. This criterion is mainly based upon their physical strength. Okonkwo even at the age of eighteen is respected by everyone in the clan because threw the great wrestler called as Cat. His fame rose high in air in a very short period. The clan gave more importance to the physical strength which they considered as a manly power and a needed quality for a man in their clan. This is the reason that they claim for a virgin and a lad from the nearby clan and the nearby clan didn't refuse it because they considered Umuofia clan to be superior to them in physical strength. Igbo people gave titles to their men and the one without the title was considered to possess feminine qualities.

"Without looking at the man Okonkwo said: 'This meeting is for men'. The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That is why he had called him a woman." (20)

Igbo Cultural Beliefs

Polygamy was prevalent among them. The Igbo's cultural beliefs include their faith on Oracle of the Hills, Agbala. They believed in the words of the Oracle and their custom of Yam festival and the Week of Peace. They had a great zeal in it, when even Okonkwo failed to follow the week of peace they punished him. This shows their strong faith in the word of Chukwu (their over Lord). The New Yam festival hints similar incident, where he is ordered by

Chukwu to kill Ikemefuna with his own hands. Though, Okonkwo considers Ikemefuna as his child, he is unable to outlaw the words of their overlord. This shows their cultural faith. At this point, Okonkwo is struck between his own insight and the cultural faith. Igbo people's respect to Ani, Goddess of earth and to their ancestors conveys their religious identity. They consider physical work to be sign of their cultural manliness.

"They cross rivers to make their farms- you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man." (14)

They had a belief in Obgbanjie- a challenging child who repeatedly dies and returns to its mother to be reborn. It is almost impossible to bring up an obgbanje child without it dying, unless its iya-uwa (a special kind of stone which forms a link between obgbanje and the spirit world). The evil forest which they considered to be a dwelling place of many spirits and they threw away the bodies who committed suicide as they believed it to be unholy to bury it. The food such as Kola nut, Yam, palm-oil are their cultural identity. At every occasion they give much importance to Kola nut and palm-oil. They consider it to be a respect to the Ani and to their ancestors. Music and language determine a culture of a community. Chinua Achebe has made use of these identities in the novel. The language of Igbo people -'egwugwu', 'il', 'nyaga', 'eze-agadinwayi iyi-uwa', 'kotma'; their musical instruments - 'ekwe', 'ogene', 'udu', and the titles - 'Agbala', 'efukfu', 'oye', 'ozo', which they give as an honor stresses their culture.

Individual and relational identity is one of the properties of cultural identity. Individual refers to how an individual interprets his cultural identity based on his experiences. Relational refers to how individuals interact with one and another. The main characters in the novel mainly Okonkwo and Obeieka speak high about their culture regarding marriage. They feel high on their own custom.

"All their customs are upside-down. They do not decide bride-price as we do, with sticks. They haggle and bargain as if they

were buying a goat or a cow in the market.”
(53)

Art in a community is also one of the cultural identities. The clan in the novel draws paintings; lines on their bodies during celebrations. Everyone in the clan followed all their cultural, rituals beliefs that prevailed in the community. None raise question against their beliefs. This can also be viewed on other side as a crisis in their life. Prominence in the novel is influenced by the extent of similarity and the differences between Okonkwo and Obeieka in their notion about the words from Oracle .Chinua Achebe has pointed out the positive and strength of an Igbo clan in the first half of the novel, where everyone seem to follow their culture and practices firmly. Okonkwo, the most arrogant man in household obey to the elder’s words and follow it. Though he urges to come back to Umuofia during exile period, he was surrounded by the customs. The Affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects of identity in the novel refers to emotionally attached cultural replica and identity in particular situations, resulting in scourge. This attachment has led to their crisis where they face a clash between their own culture and the introduced British culture and norms. Okonkwo listens to the words of Siyalo, and kills Ikemefuna, eventhough it was against his will. The Igbo believed in their farming practices, title and physical strength. This led Okonkwo to lead a stern life with title and honor, unlike his father. He disrespected his own father Unoka because he did not hold any title.

Projection of Cultural Phenomenon

There is discrimination between men and women. Okonkwo strictly follows to these beliefs. He ruled his household with heavy hand. He insisted his three wives to cook and take care of the households and never to interfere in any of his works. He ill-treated his three wives. They considered Yam as the King of Crops and man’s crop, only men cultivated it. Whereas, coco-yams, beans, maize, melons were considered to be women’s crop and only women cultivated these crops. People respected their culture more than anything and so they exiled even Okonkwo, the most respected person in the clan, he was sent to Mbanto, the land

of his motherhood. This also shows a kind of discrimination in the culture where a man is exiled to the land of his motherhood but allowed to lead a prosperous life in the land of father. As the novel proceeds to the second half one can observe that Chinua Achebe had projected the culture, to which they gave importance, was slowly destructed by the advent of the British people. Many of the people in clan were slowly getting converted to Christianity. Mr. Brown, Mr. Smith, the district commissioner and many missionaries started to offer them education and jobs. They converted even Nwoywe, Okonkwo’s elder son into Christianity. Enoch, the son of the snake-priest killed and ate the sacred python. He unmasked the Ekwugwu (the ancestors of the clan who had been committed to the Mother Earth at their death emerged again as Ekwugwu through tiny holes). Enoch fell upon him and tore off his mask. Women and children gazed at the Ekwugwu which was considered against their cultural belief. This incident created anger among the clan but even the great leaders were imprisoned and were tormented for their agitation. The Ekwugwu, which the clan believed to possess great spirits, could not win in front of the British. The clan that boasted and identified them with their own culture could not stand up to fight for their own. The culture which they respected and worshipped was getting diminished. The beliefs in their own physical strength, chi, Agbala, did not help them out to bring back their customs. Their customs failed in front of the new customs. The culture in which Igbo people identified themselves had led to their crisis. “They are strangers”, he said, “and they are ignorant. But let that pass”. (138)

The clan in Umuofia with their culture has now become a stranger to other clans. Avowal and ascription are evident here. The British felt them to be ignorant but Okonkwo proves their culture strength still retains in him by shooting one of the British messengers. The plight lies at the incident where Okonkwo hangs himself, but, Obeieka contradicts it. Obeieka’s words asking British to clear Okonkwo’s body, stresses the fact that they still hold their culture in their heart.

Conclusion

Survival of a culture depends on the people's capacity to learn and transmit to the succeeding generations. The Igbo culture in the novel expressed it, in their customs, beliefs, war, birth, social norms, religion, burial and death, racial, social and material traits. They have identified themselves within all these factors but the novel also presents the cultural crisis where there is discrimination between men and women, certain practices and the clash between their own culture with the introduced British culture and norms. Their cultural beliefs are in stage of destruction causing crisis but the murder of British messenger, death of Okonkwo and Oberika's words to bury Okonkwo's body marks the fact that even till the last minute of their life they have identified them within their own Igbo culture. And thus, the Igbo clan in the novel has their cultural replica but fails to transmit it to the succeeding generations and this has led them to their crisis in the end, where they are unable to accept the fact that their culture is in the stage of destruction.

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