



## THE CLASH BETWEEN TRADITIONAL IBO CULTURE AND BRITISH COLONIAL POWERS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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### Abstract

African Literature deals with the themes of colonialism, liberation, nationalism, tradition, and displacement. Chinua Achebe's main aim of writing the novels were to evoke the black consciousness and depicted how the blacks dominated by the whites. The customs, beliefs, and festivities were all collapsed. As a result of this, the Igbo people lived as refugees in their own country and their culture marginalized by the arrival of strange culture. Through the novel he showed the decline of his culture and tradition in the name of civilization. And also he aimed to re-educate, regenerate, and rejuvenate the Nigerian society. Here, he dealt with the clash between the traditional Ibo culture and British colonial rule.

Keywords: colonial powers, impact, exploitation, Ibo culture

### Introduction

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, most European countries came to Africa and other continents in the name of colonialism. They were colonizers and made the countries colonized. Nigeria was one among them. It could not bear up a new religion and culture imposed by the Christian missionaries. They thought that their culture was immensely threatened by it. In 1890s, the British colonialism was first introduced into the tribal Organization of Africa by the white missionaries.

Colonialism was a painful process. The white invaders brought a new god, a new culture, and new ways and created unintended consequences. Colonialism means a country controls over the other and exploits by making use of its resources. By 1900, most of the countries were subjugated by European colonialism. The white men looked the non-whites as one of a groups rather than an individual. The

colonizers were caused a great fear in the minds of the colonized. The word 'imperialism' explains the domination of weak people by strong people accompanied with malice. Africa experienced the violent trauma of colonialism like a sense of deep injury, threat etc...

Chinua Achebe condemned the colonizers who imposed an alien religion into their traditional Ibo culture. Through the novel *Things Fall Apart*, he depicted the impact of British colonialism and caused tensions within the society. An arrival of a new culture destroyed the identity and self – reference of Ibo society.

Colonialism refers to imperialist expansion over the other countries. The Europeans thought that they were superiors and considered non-Europeans to be inferiors. It is a forcing action of taking over the land and economy of innocent weak people. In the name of civilizing the non Europeans,

the colonizers actually exploited the people. Education and religion were their main tools. Indeed, the colonizer arrived with the Bible in one hand and a sword in the other hand.

The colonial discourse could be compared with Satan who came into the Garden of Eden under the guise of Serpent and exploited Eve by made her to taste the fruit of forbidden. Likewise the Europeans entered into Igbo culture. Either forcibly or coercively they made them to taste the fruit of knowledge with intelligence mixed with shrewdness and rebel against the God of culture and tradition.

Things fall apart is a tragic story that tells the fall of a tribal hero Okonkwo of Umuofia. He states that the white man put his knife on the things that held them together and they had fallen apart.

The Igbo community is one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa. Around fifteen million people are living there and another million are living in other parts of the world. The Igbo people are called 'Ibo'.

The Ibos are considered to be the most imitative and emulative people of the whole of western Africa. They always possess a desire of superiority and make attempts. Igbo people thought that the white missionaries created a bad atmosphere. Achebe called the converted Ibos as the people of nothing. The Christian missionaries suppressed Igbo religion and tribes through a new religion. Umuofia from Things Fall Apart was divided into two groups caused by the arrival of white missionaries. It provides the readers an insight of Igbo society right before the white missionaries' invasion. Achebe blames the white missionaries' invasion on their land.

A White missionary arrived and the elders of the village consulted the oracle for guidance. The oracle told them that the alien men will come and destroy the culture and clan. In order to escape from that, they murdered a missionary and tied his bicycle with a tree. Then, the bicycle was found and became main evidence. They killed the inhabitants in Abame and gave a pathetic picture of this massacre like the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre of Amritsar.

In the beginning, the white men had come peacefully as missionary. Then they slowly introduced their religion. Then gradually, the church and the government joined and tried to pacify Umuofia clan through doomed efforts. The white man looks the non-white as one of the groups rather than an individual. The colonizers caused fear in the minds of the colonized. Okonkwo hated everything that his father loved. He was opposite to his father. His father loved two things namely 'gentleness' and 'idleness' and refused to follow his paths. Rather, he chose to be active, restless, and impatient. During his exile, he lived a prosperous life at M'banta. But his wish was to live in his father's village Umuofia. There he heard some disturbing news about the activities of Christian missionaries. They started to convert the local people to Christianity.

Christian missionaries arrived into M'banta and built a church on a piece of land where the people buried and died from evil diseases. Okonkwo's son also adopted the alien religion which caused humiliation to him. At last, he returned to his fatherland where he could see a lot of people converted into Christianity and built a church which was demolished by one of the converts.

Obierika, one of the Igbo men, felt that after his friend Okonkwo's exile, the total environment was not as a happiest one as it was like before. "Umuofia had indeed changed during the seven years Okonkwo had been in exile. The church had come and led many astray". (AT.123) The strangers had won a handful of converts and already sent evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages. It caused a great fever to the leaders of the clan. He had described as "our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the strangers. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government". (AT.124)

Okonkwo worried much about his loss of culture and religion. It was not a personal grief and mourned for the clan's loss of identity. His return was not as a memorable one as he had expected. He considered it as a massive change. Anyhow the new religion, government, and the trading stores were not liked by some of them remained in a high fury.

As a result, the village elders were arrested. Okonkwo was one of them. A meeting was conducted by Okonkwo in order to avenge for the humiliation. He thought that his traditional values were supreme. Suddenly five messengers of the administration came with the intention to stop the meeting. Okonkwo, in a high fury, chopped off the head of the leading messenger. The situation turned into a riot. Okonkwo hanged himself while the district commissioner attempted to arrest him. Such was the impact of colonialism and even people like Okonkwo was compelled to commit suicide for the loss of dignity.

### **Conclusion**

Achebe depicted the African Society and how their tradition and culture slowly declined by the British colonial exercises through the novel. He depicted a typical African Society of Ibo, highly conscious of their tradition and culture. The loss of culture, identity, national spirit, and social values were analyzed in the novel by Achebe. The European writings described Africans as uncivilized and uneducated and they were more civilized than them. So, they helped them to enter from the old era to modern era.

In it, he described the history of Igbo and also the perfections and imperfections of their culture and tradition. The novel described the introduction of new religion as well as its destructiveness in society. Achebe's main aim of writing the novels was to educate the readers about the value of their own culture.

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