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The Colonized Fall Apart: A Postcolonial Analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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ABSTRACT

Things Fall Apart simultaneously portrays Okonkwo, the protagonist, and Igbo society's misfortunes. Okonkwo's misfortune is primarily due to forces like fate and colonial authority, with some influence coming from his own whim. Once more, society disintegrates because it disregards the universal appeal of humanity and reason. The encroachment of white people and their culture resulted in many social and psychological upheavals in African society. Colonization in a way becomes responsible for the destruction of the Igbo society. *Things Fall Apart* presents the divergence involving the individual and the society and its consequences in colonial society. Okonkwo's character, which is irrational, inconsiderate, and resistant to change, is the main cause of his demise. The culture also appears steadfastly unwilling to reevaluate its traditions and practices, despite the reality they run directly against common sense and humanity. To be able to accomplish their aims, Christian missionaries use colonists to exploit the society's flaws and gaps. Ultimately, they are successful in wiping off the ancient Igbo.

Keywords: Okonkwo's, Colonial power, Igbo society, Cultural conflict, and Falling apart.

INTRODUCTION:

Tragic literature can be categorized under the term "tragedy." It can refer to "any serious and honorable play that depicts a confrontation between the protagonist and a greater power (destiny, chance, society, god), and that culminates in a somber resolution that inspires pity and terror in the spectator." The idea of tragedy, which is founded on the notion that a person can be destroyed precisely because they tried to be decent and were far better than most people, but not perfect, derives from this genre. A confrontation between human goodness and reality is implied by tragedy. Many people believe that there cannot be a tragedy if God rewards righteousness, either here on earth or in heaven. Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depicts the highs and lows of the existence

of Okonkwo, the main character, and of the Igbo community to which he belongs to be able to convey this melancholy viewpoint. Okonkwo eventually experiences a tragic fall and an ignoble death after having begun his life from scratch and become a hero. In the same manner, the Igbo society, which has a long history of tradition and culture, likewise disintegrates. Then what is the probable cause of the downfall is an issue of concern for the present study. Besides, the underlying causes of such a reversal and Okonkwo's personality traits are also connected to this breakdown.

The impact of colonialism is susceptible enough for these. The goal of the present study is to examine these concerns. The protagonist Okonkwo, who looked to be a historic wrestler defeating the famous Amalinze the Cat unbroken for seven years 'from Umoufia to Mba-

ino,' is described as having heroic proportions at the beginning of the book. The novel's opening sentences give readers a lofty sense of the hero's physical shape and the necessary sternness of language that goes along with it. "He was very tall and had an incredibly stern appearance with bushy eyebrows and a big nose" (Achebe, 1996). He is also a significant individual. Being in a very important position, he enjoys great respect from both his own tribe and the clans surrounding him. But how did he do it? Does he have blue blood, perhaps? Is it possible that he inherited a sizable sum from his ancestors? Readers are well aware that nothing is forced upon him; rather, it is his steadfast resolve and perseverance that enables him to turn the tables on chance. "His success was founded on a strong personal record" (Achebe, 1996). The basics of his reputational motivation, then, seem to be his unwavering will and sincere devotion to his life and society. Okonkwo's success in life is a direct result of his own effort; it is not the result of a kind gift or a stroke of good fortune. He does constantly rely on his own strength. Again, nothing originates with his father, who was in fact a failure, or with anybody else. T S Varadharajan and Dr. K. Ramesh (p. 152) write: "The development of Okonkwo in Umuofia is reminiscent of a fable, in which his "chi" seems to support all of his activities." Okonkwo has spent his entire life pursuing wealth, achievement, celebrity, reputation, and hero treatment. Throughout his life, he pursues all these issues sincerely. "If ever a person merited his achievement, Okonkwo was that person. He had become well-known as the best wrestler in the country at a young age. The most that could be said is that it wasn't luck; his chi or personal god was excellent. However, the Igbo have a saying that goes, "When someone says yes, his chi says yes too. Okonkwo heartily agreed, and his chi followed suit. Additionally, because a man was assessed by the labor of his hands, his clan was just as important as his chi" (Achebe, 1996). Thus, Okonkwo's all-out effort turns out to be the core of his all attainments. His wealth is created by him alone. Patrick C. Nnoromele (p. 149) mentions- "The elders and people of Umuofia respected and honored Okonkwo for his achievements there. He overcame Amalinze the Cat and was hailed as Umuofia and Mbaino's finest wrestler as a result. He distinguished himself as a warrior of the tribe by

returning with five heads from inter-tribal battles." Patrick C. Nnoromele (p. 149) also says "Achebe portrayed Okonkwo as an individual with "incredible prowess" and passion to conquer and subdue his enemies.

Actually, Okonkwo has been driven to succeed ever since he was a little child. Success is his one deity, whom he reveres and worships. He has fought throughout his life to uphold integrity and dignity because he is unwavering in his conviction that these qualities can only be attained via an honest effort. He himself cannot conceive of failing. Again, he cannot abide the failure and the unworthy. Even his father is not exempt from this viewpoint. It is discovered that he has bitter feelings against his father, who preferred music and celebration to toil at and earn the respect of his peers. In his perspective, his father is the definition of failure since he was unsuccessful in acquiring wealth and real estate. Okonkwo solely possesses wealth and the associated social reputation, which are the only elements of success. He is constrained by the prevailing conception of success. His mind is so preoccupied with that success viewpoint that he is unable to think creatively. Evidently, even being kind and nice is intolerable to him. In truth, he has never come to understand the advantages of living a caring and sensible life. He seemed destined to uphold traditions despite their horrible harshness and potential catastrophe. He doesn't seem to be able to take into account different opinions on success. Achebe writes - "He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had had no patience with his father" (Achebe, 1996). T S Varadharajan and Dr. K. Ramesh (p. 152) echo the same thing, "Okonkwo's fixation with achievement in life stems from his father Unoka's failure. Unoka was "lazy and imprudent and was completely incapable of thinking for tomorrow," in contrast to his son Okonkwo". "Okonkwo's main priority seems to be overcoming any stigma attached to his father's name. The first obstacle Okonkwo was supposed to face was his father's reputation, which in this case was nonexistent, according to Achebe. He was aware that among his people, a man was evaluated according to his father's merit, thus he was resolved to achieve in whatever area his father had failed" (Achebe, 1996; Faysal and Rahman, 2021).

Along with his unbending willpower for economic and social acceptance, he seems to be hot, insolent, and

egoist. Why is this? How has his mentality been shaped this way? Are these the impacts of his economic independence & consequent social recognition? Okonkwo has already confidence in himself. Now he has both economic freedom and social acknowledgement.

All these things are probably juxtaposed together to make him overconfident and to some extent arrogant. Once more, Okonkwo's personality exhibits each of these attributes in such a way that it seems inborn and inseparable. He was very much pleased and proud of his entitlements, which he has earned through his unfaltering determination and untiring diligence. He seems to be fulfilled with his titles and position. He once reprimanded a man in a very arrogant tone for expressing an opinion about anything. Okonkwo says- "This meeting is for men" (Achebe, 1996). As the man had no title, "he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit" (Achebe, 1996). He does, in fact, cultivate a strong feeling of self-respect and dignity from a young age. He appears to be terribly inflicted when his playmates call his father 'Agbala' (women or unsuccessful man). Thus, he is disturbed by his father's no reputation. Not only that he is afraid of himself "...lest it is discovered that he resembles his father" (Achebe, 1996).

As a result, Okonkwo develops a complete hatred for his father and his unmanly way of living. He grows up with the promise not to fail in life. He always feels ashamed of being an unsuccessful man. In fact, the only ruling passion for Okonkwo is to avert things, which his father, who was totally a disappointment to his eyes and those of society, preferred. "Okonkwo was therefore driven by a single passion: hatred of all that his father Unoka had adored. Gentleness and laziness were two of those things" (Achebe, 1996). Such resentment towards indolence & gentility makes Okonkwo a slave of egocentricity and toughness. However, he receives a great deal of respect and admiration from the young, aged, and female members of society. He frequently gets picked for dangerous as well as noble acts of the entire clan because of his love of action and violence. Therefore, he is dispatched to decide whether the offending villages would go to war over the incident or they will pay Umoufia, one youngster, and one maiden as recompense after a member of the neighboring clan "Mbanio" murders a lady from Umoufia.

He has really been able to improve his standing in society to the point where he is practically necessary for finding solutions to problems that call for bravery and confidence. In the negotiation, he plays the most significant role; on his return, the elders make him the guardian of the male hostage, Ikemefuna, for Okonkwo's respect and status. Surely, he has some animalism in his character as, we see, the sight of the bloodshedding of the opponents stirs his wild spirit and velour. "He was a warrior and an active man. He brought the first human head home from Umoufia's most recent battle" (Achebe, 1996).

So, when Okonkwo began to receive considerable prominence and honor in society, he steadily strengthened his position as a man of rank and profile in society. Besides, there are some other factors, which have also made him a success. He is an owner of some barns of yams indicating riches and ultimate independence. He has three wives and nine children. Despite having such a large family, he has enough money to sustain and feed everyone properly throughout the year. All these things definitely refer to his masculinity, which was a long-cherished dream of Okonkwo. Again, these are indeed the criteria of manliness in Igbo society. But because of his strong drive and perseverance, he has reached both society's pinnacle and the pinnacle of achievement. But his own success as a self-made man makes him irritable with people who are not as successful as he himself is. He never cares about another's feelings. He never shows any sensibility towards others' emotions, passion or liking, and disliking. To him softness means weakness. He is just misled by his perception of success. His riches and physical vigor never inspire him to be soft rather he has become more ferocious and definitely more intolerant of others. Even gods are not spared from the list let alone human beings. During a week of peace, an annual celebration where using violence is prohibited; he beats one of his wives for neglecting her duty. Despite the appeal of the other two wives, he does not stop beating. "He had forgotten that it was the week of peace while enraged. His first two wives begged him to go because it was the holy week they hurried out in great terror. However, Okonkwo was not the type of person to quit hitting someone in the middle of it, not even out of dread of a goddess" (Achebe, 1996; Yeasmin, 2022).

Okonkwo also participates in Ikemefuna's murder, the male hostage, who called him father despite being asked by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest man in the tribe, not to participate in the killing of the boy as he called him father. He ignored the suggestion, nevertheless.

Now the question is what forced Okonkwo to do so? Is it the animalism living inside him? Is it the phobia of being called a coward by his kinsmen? Is it his haughtiness and subsequent inability to judge the implications of the murder deeply? In the article 'The Story of a Man and His people' Ernest A. Champion (p. 274) rightly observes that Ezeudu's suggestion "presents to Okonkwo a dilemma which he is incapable of rationalizing." In actuality, Okonkwo considers acts of bravery and cruelty to be the most valuable things in the universe. He has indeed been confounded by his excessive zeal for name and fame. The father-son relationship, which is always considered supreme and viewed as a gift of God in all customs and society, appears to him very silly in comparison to the so-called power and honor. Ikemefuna was pleading for aid, but Okonkwo was unaffected by his cries; instead, he cut the youngster with his machete out of fear of being perceived as effeminate. "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak (Achebe, 1996).

Thus, none of the advice of the wise old man and the boy's cry for mercy had any effect on Okonkwo's preconceived mind. Immediately after the horrible incident of killing the innocent boy Okonkwo temporarily lost his zeal for life. He almost starved for a couple of days. The memories of the boy haunted him every moment. The more he wanted to forget the boy the more the boy came to his mind. He felt weak and tired but could not sleep. "He did not sleep at night. He tried not to think about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried, the more he thought about him. He once rose from his bed and explored his property. But he was so weak that his legs could hardly carry him. He walked like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito. Now and then a cold shiver descended on his head and spread down his body" (Achebe, 1996). Thus, the slaying of the seemingly small and insignificant boy terribly trembles Okonkwo's whole world. "When did you become a shivering old woman?" Okonkwo asked him-

self, "You are renowned for your bravery in battle throughout the nine villages. How can a guy fall to pieces at the addition of a youngster to his group of soldiers when he has already murdered five men in battle? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed" (Achebe, 1996). Thus, Okonkwo falls into a big dilemma and goes through an acute inner predicament, which seems to drain him slowly. His natural world is tremendously shaken and about to collapse. Probably, Okonkwo never conceived that such a small killing might tell him so much. He regarded it as a divine mandate that must be carried out at all costs, regardless of who was to carry it out. Such a rash step implies his incapability of thinking something sagaciously. Here lies his weakness. When Okonkwo's close friend Obierika, a guy with less money and reputation, expresses a strong opinion regarding such delicate subjects, Okonkwo gives the wrong impression of his morality and decency. In a conversation between them, while Okonkwo tries to justify his role in the murder of Ikemefuna, Obierika says: "You know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood; and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling lie. And let me you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the type of behavior that the goddess destroys entire families for" (Achebe, 1996). In this case, Obierika indeed represents most of the villagers who are also against pride and haughtiness. Akers Rhoads (p. 67) observes, "Most villagers... Despite admiring industry and achievement, Okonkwo should not treat other guys with such brusqueness due to his arrogance."

The tragedy, which puts Okonkwo and his family in a bad situation, reverses the total achievement of his life and forces him to start his life from zero again, is another murder though accidental. In fact, at the funeral of Ezeudu, the head of the Oybuafu, there was much dancing and firing of crackers and guns. Okonkwo was doing the same but it exploded and fragments of metal killed Ezeudu's own son. Though it was an accident, Okonkwo had to compensate for this incident, as, according to Igbo culture, it was unpardonable and heinous to kill one's kinsman. The only option available to him was to spend seven years in exile with his mother's tribe. "The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan: To kill a clansman

was to commit a crime against the soil goddess, and a man who committed it must flee from the land” (Achebe, 1996). Thus, he, unfortunately, falls into the den of despair and unworthiness from the peak of success. The irony of fate is that the wealth he has worked so hard to build will soon go, not as a result of his error in judgment but rather due to an action for which he is not wholly accountable.

After the tenure was over when he came back to his own clan, he found everything strange and unfriendly. Nothing remained as he expected. In actuality, everything had altered because of the missionaries and white men’s presence. Individuals started being influenced by new ideas and propaganda. People started questioning the rightness of their age-old customs and practices openly. They felt that previous theories were incorrect and deceptive. Values for which they were ready to sacrifice even their lives seemed to them mere inhumane. Obierika reports to Okonkwo “The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, our clans can no longer act like one. We have fallen apart because he cut the glue holding us together” (Achebe, 1996). Igbo civilization was in fact seriously threatened by this. It always becomes a big concern when own people turn away and start undermining the existing systems.

Perceiving all those changes, Okonkwo feels appallingly shocked and starts planning what to do. Even his own kid Noye, who has already committed to Christianity, doesn’t pay heed to him. Things have already fallen apart. Despite all these odds Okonkwo still remains unchanged. He doesn’t waver in the slightest from his viewpoint or conviction. Rather he plans how to uphold the Igbo values and traditions. But finally, he kills himself, an unmanly step, apparently to avoid disgrace about which he was intolerant throughout his lifetime. In fact, after the murder of a white man, Okonkwo was scheduled to undergo torture before being hung.

The issue is, are all of this conceit, haughtiness, whim, and misfortune the sole causes of Okonkwo’s downfall? Certainly, not as the readers also come to know that there are some other inevitable causes behind the

collapse. In fact, there are two ways to look at the reasons behind Okonkwo’s and the Igbo society’s disasters. The first is the weakness of the ancient system, which finally undermines the society itself. The emergence of colonialism and Christian missionaries, which exploit pre-existing societal flaws, is the second.

We can observe that the strange and cruel practice of throwing away twins and the complete humiliation of twin moms are two big flaws in Igbo society. These atrocities not only jolt the conscience of those who live within the society but also of those who are outside of it. Foley, A. (p. 42) writes- “Of course, it is true that the Umuofian clan tradition has defects and paradoxes that cause internal strife and alienate certain members of the community. These include particular cases like the discarding of twins, the absurd taboo of the “osu” or outcasts, as well as occasionally the illogical gods and oracle, which cause terror and instability in society rather than stability.”

The majority of people undoubtedly never voiced concern about it, but the system was a tremendous mystery to the intelligent. Both Obierika, an Okonkwo acquaintance, and Nwoye, his little son, are perplexed and bewildered. The murder of Ikemefuna in the name of the so-called oracle and society also violently shocks Nwoye’s conscience. His young heart is tormented by “the twins’ wailing in the woods question and the Ikemefuna who was slain question” (Achebe, 1996). We already know that even Okonkwo, the icon of extremity and toughness, is tremendously traumatized though inwardly. We are aware that Ikemefuna’s murder turns his peaceful environment into an unbalanced one. When he thinks about the boy he simply starts trembling. “His mind went back to Ikemefuna and he shivered” (Achebe, 1996).

But Okonkwo is completely helpless. His thoughts and actions are constrained by personal, social, and religious prejudice and superstitions. In truth, Okonkwo was trained to act in this way by the Igbo social structure because there, human emotion is devalued and viewed as a sign of weakness. Feelings and passions are something, which should go with women only, certainly not with men. As a result, it is not just Okonkwo’s responsibility but also a social flaw. Naturally, both Okonkwo and society will have to compensate for this.

The cause, for which Okonkwo is forced to go into exile, also appears to Obierika as inhumane and irrational. His rational mind finds no logical and consolatory answer to such issues. Obierika asks himself: "Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offense he had committed inadvertently" (Achebe, 1996). But what to do? Surely not. They are just the puppets acting as society wants. The basis of the clans has already been eroded by these flaws and the intricate structures of the Igbo culture. Here, Nwoye and Obierika are the representatives of the considerate folks of their society. Indeed, the concerns they have expressed are those of the most thinking members of the entire tribe. The victims of such rules have expected a radical change though not openly. Actually, they do not feel courageous enough to break the conventions of their ancestors. There isn't an alternative they can choose from. Now, Christian missionaries are stepping up to provide the humiliated and tormented people who take the chance an honorable and healthy life. Very soon the Igbo world starts crumbling. The Christian missionaries observe an increase in population and influence on a daily basis. The eager converts start off by exhibiting the utmost hatred and scorn for their previous faith and culture. The traditional Igbo civilization, on the other hand, is progressively succumbing to rot and death. Robert Fraser (p.112) notes, "Due to British involvement, Igbo society has been thrown into anarchy. In this new world of slipping realities, the villagers have lost their bearings. Okonkwo, in some ways their most typical hero, is completely at a loss to explain the change." Nevertheless, despite his uncertainty, Okonkwo, the devoted follower of Igbo tradition, rushes to the scene to save the clan's thousand year's old customs from collapsing, albeit ultimately he fails. The Igbo people are actually demoralized and unable to confront the British government's well-equipped armed force with their antiquated weapons.

Even though Okonkwo is a victim of society's outdated, absurd, and inhumane system, he makes an effort to follow its ideals. He vows to keep his ancestor's religion alive and goes to defend the advent of Christianity. He calls for a meeting to decide how to protect the clans and their old orders. When the white men try to stop the meeting, he kills one of them. He is also shocked to discover that none of his fellow guys

had shown up to oppose the white males. Because of the murder, he was charged with death. But without submitting to the British Army he commits suicide. What was it that ultimately drove him to commit suicide? Was the only goal to avoid the embarrassment of being captured? Gerald Moore (p. 64) says "Okonkwo finds it difficult to accept the willful paralysis he observes all around him." But Arthur Ravenscroft (p. 18) gives a slightly different observation: "he hangs himself, not to avoid arrest but out of despair for the future of the people." But with this occurrence, not only does the Okonkwo chapter come to an end, but the Igbo culture and tradition are also at last in danger of quickly dying out. The tragedy for Okonkwo is that he must pay with his life for a murder that was not really his fault. Nnoromele, Patrick C. (p. 147) notes: "Okonkwo's downfall is not necessarily due to weaknesses in character or departed African glories but rather is a function of heroism in the cultural belief system of the Igbos." In Okhamafe's writing, the same statement is repeated, I. (p. 134): "long before a European colonialist missionary culture makes an appearance, the nine-village Umuofia clan starts to split apart."

CONCLUSION:

Okonkwo, who had a resolute hunger to become a hero, was not afraid of the forces that surrounded him. However, he was so overwhelmed by the cumulative effects of his experiences on the road to heroism that he felt the only thing left to do was to commit suicide. This deep yet conflicted act's reality is expressed in the following Igbo proverb: "The thought that led a man to truncate his own existence was not conceived in a day." It was not just one single thing or event that forced Okonkwo to kill him. In his unwavering ambition to become a hero and at the same time in his refusal to accept the socio-cultural changes throughout the colonial era, his suicidal act is the culmination of the compound consequences of his personal experiences. The author of the novel allowed Okonkwo to stumble and fall; Achebe did not cause the hero's downfall. He was not responsible for Okonkwo's tragedy. Achebe saw his role as that of a neutral narrator. Thus, he presented, in a non-committal fashion, the tensions and conflicts between traditional values and alien culture, the "private self" and "public man" and

their attendant consequences in pre-colonial society. Thus, the flaws of Okonkwo and his civilization are both shown in *Things Fall Apart*. It says how he has entangled himself with his ego, mistakes, and defects. At the same time, it draws attention to the flaws and issues of Igbo culture, which serves as some sort of motivation for him to make mistakes. Again, society's fatal flaws are a result of its inherent deficiencies. As a result, the tragedy of Okonkwo and his society are both explained in *Things Fall Apart*.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The author declares no conflict of interest connecting to this research.

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