

STRUGGLE FOR REDEEMING CULTURE FROM EXTINCTION IN CHINUA HEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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Abstract:

This paper aims at introducing the cultural conflict in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* and the struggle for redeeming it from extinction through the novel's protagonist Okonkwo. This exposes how the native Africans oppose the arrival of white men and their imperialism. Achebe's greatness lies in depicting the inner conflict of Okonkwo and how far he strives hard to bring his community as before. The pursuit of survival represents the African culture. But in the end all Okonkwo's efforts goes in vain with his suicide. The second part of the novel shows the experiences of Okonkwo in his mother's village, there he knows about the missionaries who erase their sublime traditions and nurture christianity. This causes the suicide of Okonkwo. This paper attempts to highlight the significance of African culture and the circumstances which fail to redeem the culture from change.

Keywords: Conflict, survival, culture, tradition, imperialism.

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Chinua Achebe was a Nigerian novelist, poet and critic who was regarded as the dominant figure of modern African literature through his magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart*. It is the debut novel of Achebe, first published in 1958. It depicts pre-colonial life in the southeastern part of Nigeria. This paper focuses on the inner struggle of the novel's protagonist Okonkwo, local wrestling champion in the Nigerian clan of Umuofia. He defeats a wrestler nicknamed "Amalinze the Cat (1)". Unlike his father Unoka, he is very diligent and industrious. He has three wives and has many titles.

In the beginning of the novel it is told that Okonkwo has claimed great name and fame amongst his clan members and the nine villages. Achebe states in the very first line that "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond(1)". During Okonkwo's childhood, a playmate told him that his father was an "agbala"(3). Agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. This irritates him much. So he feels averse towards his father. He perseveres hard and earns prosperity by himself.

At Okonkwo's house near the barn there was a shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his God. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine. He did not inherit a barn from his father. He says "I am not afraid of work" (17). Every moment he worships God and nurtures his culture. Often the people of Umuofia celebrate festivals. One such festival is called as "New Yam Festival" (31). For that everyone invites more guests. Since Okonkwo has three wives, his guests usually will be a big crowd. Then Obierika, a friend of Okonkwo, celebrates his own daughter's "Uri". There all Umuofia people gathered and enjoyed the ceremony.

When Ikemefuna, the compensate lad of nearby village comes, Okonkwo treats him as his son. But Umuofia has decided to kill him. "Okonkwo was not the man of thought but of action" (58). So he simply neglects his wife's pleadings and kills Ikemefuna. But after the death of Ikemefuna he did not eat for two days. This clearly depicts that he never questions about his own traditions for its offerings.

Then another misfortune occurs in the life of Okonkwo, which comes in the shape of an old man's death. There Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the deadman's grandson's heart. According to Umuofia it is a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman. The only way before Okonkwo is to flee from the clan. He gladly accepts this too for the sake of his culture. He collected his most valuable belongings and were fleeing to his motherland Mbanta. In Mbanta Okonkwo is welcomed by his mother's kinsmen. He was given a plot of ground. He and his family planted a new farm. In Umuofia, people set fire to Okonkwo's house. It is only Obierika who mourns for his friend's calamity. At first their life goes smoothly in Mbanta but this too is disrupted after the arrival of the White in Mbanta.

Colonialism as defined by OED refers to "The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying with its settlers, and exploiting it economically". Therefore post colonialism is sometimes assumed to refer to "after colonialism" or "after independence" (Ashcroft et al. 12). In Mbanta the church is built and White men rule there. They are harsh and arrogant. Okonkwo cannot believe his eyes that his clan doesn't drive away the White. Instead they render place to them. Gradually it weakens the ties of bond. Many of Okonkwo's clan are now on White men's side. In the beginning White men came to have peace but later on interested Africans thus permitted them to stay.

Some people feel sad with the White men's influence on their community. What is considered as God so far is neglected by the White men as wood. This enrages many of the clansmen. Okonkwo wants his son to become a great man in farming. When he

learns that his son Nwoye is now in a training college for teachers, he threatens him to mend his ways. But unfortunately it goes in vain.

Okonkwo resists the new political and religious orders because he considers that they are not manly if they agree with it. Many of the villagers are excited to adopt new changes that the White men bring. This threatens to extinguish the culture. In the beginning, for survival, farming is indispensable. But the abandonment of their native traditions for the White paves way for the culture eradication. Most of the Mbanta men are now converted. One such convert Enoch dares to disclose an egwugwu during the annual ceremony, which is equivalent to killing an ancestral spirit. So next day the egwugwu burnt Enoch's compound. Throughout the second part Okonkwo tries to establish his own culture and community beliefs.

Before the arrival of the White Mbanta people were very united. But White men's actions instigate the natives to burn all their shrines. Whoever considers as an outcast is gladly welcomed by the White men. "Before God" he said "there is no slave or free. We are all children of God and we must receive these our brothers" (144). This is the reason why the people of Mbanta convert themselves into Christianity discarding their own culture. "God's eyes they are equals to everyone else" (Akers-Rhoads 69).

Howsoever Okonkwo tried to regenerate his own clan and society, people don't give a place for it and they all now believe in White men's God and principles.

Let us not reason like cowards, said Okonkwo. If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. This what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeye says we should pretend not to see. Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia. (139)

These were said by Okonkwo while he was in Mbanta. On the contrary Umuofia people had followed the new culture simply ignoring their own father-like culture.

When Okonkwo returns to his own Umuofia, it had changed much during the seven years. "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another (156)". His eldest son Nwoye has changed his path. It disturbs him a lot. He considers him as a woman or dead. Okonkwo always saw Nwoye as "weak and woman-like" (Strong-Leek 2). He is intolerable of having a son like his father. At Nwoye's age Okonkwo had become popular throughout Umuofia for his wrestling.

Umuofia had indeed changed much. Many low and outcast even worthy man had joined in the Christian missionary. At first Okonkwo couldn't believe his eyes that his war like men had lost their fighting spirit. It is Obierika who said what are the things united Umuofia men is cut into pieces by the White. "Okonkwo was deeply grieved and it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like woman (158)". Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna only for the sake of his clan. But now his clan members are ready to discard their own tradition and culture.

In order to cleanse their village, some of the clansmen wish to destroy the church. They burnt the church. So the White men put handcuff to the Umuofia men including Okonkwo. The court messengers tell the people that they must pay the fine of two hundred and fifty bags of cowries or their leaders will be hanged. So they decide to collect the cowries and pay it. The court released Okonkwo. When he comes back home, his friend and daughter witness the whips on his back. During the night he sleeps a little. The next day he takes out his war dress and thinks of his former glories in battle, his titles and his culture.

Okonkwo again and again ponders over the nature of his man has changed. He can't put up with his own son's sudden change. He simply laments over his fate, the former position of his community and the desecration of the God and the ancestral spirits. Then the next day the commissioner enquires the men the whereabouts of Okonkwo. Obierika leads the commissioner to the bush near the compound, where they discover Okonkwo's body dangling from a tree. He has hanged himself.

According to Umuofia, hanging himself is a sin. So they asked the commissioner to bury Okonkwo's body. They tell the commissioner that only strangers can do the rites because they believe that after committing suicide the body turns into an evil spirit. Fearing of it no one is ready to touch Okonkwo's body. But fairly speaking, the evil spirit is not in Okonkwo's body, it pervades everywhere around Umuofia in the form of the White. It is clearly shown through the character Okonkwo, throughout the second part he tries hard to redeem their culture but all his efforts go futile. He proves to be a peculiar person from his clansmen by hanging himself. He doesn't want to witness the eradication of his culture for which he prefers death eventually.

To conclude, whatever happens one should not give up his own tradition and culture. Here it happens to the people of Umuofia and Mbanta. Aware of this, Achebe said, - "in an interview that the conflict that existed between these two cultures created sparks in his imagination" (Sickels 1). People have simply lost their lifelong possessions for someone else's sake. Knowing that he couldn't do anything for his clan, Okonkwo felt so vexed. As a result he hangs himself which clearly shows that nothing is in the hands of him now. Everything goes beyond irreplaceable. So this paper portrays the struggle of a man for establishing his culture over the change.

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