

Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Post Colonialism

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe, the contemporary Nigerian novelist, is considered as the father of modern African Literature. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) has acquired the status of a classic for various causes. One of these is his indignation at European representations of Africans in fiction. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is also known as the key progenitor of an African literary tradition. Through this novel Achebe presents a counter discourse which explains his position based on interiority of original local contexts. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a literary preserver of the African socio-cultural and historical values. The study reveals how so called modern Christianity displaced the primitive Igbo religion, its history, tradition and how it is affected by the process of pacification. The present study attempts to analyse *Things Fall Apart* from the perspective of the various issues of a post colonial text. The Igbo thought to protect their way of life, tradition could not do mostly for the pacification of the colonizers, but their inner drawbacks also help to meet their falling apart. This study also attempts to show how the novel reflects the discursive features which have provided the ground for constructing a pathological reading and an alternative to the colonial discourse. Some key terms introduced by Homi Bhabha such as 'Hybridity', 'otherness' are also explained in this study with the reference of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This study attempts to show readers to understand better the pre and post colonialism on Igbo society.

KEYWORDS: discourse, post colonialism, Igbo religion, pacification, hybridity etc.

Introduction:

The setting of the novel, *Things Fall Apart* written by Chinua Achebe, is in the outskirts of Nigeria in a small fictional village, Umuofia just before the arrival of white missionaries in to their land. Achebe's primary purpose of writing the novel is because he wants to educate his readers about the value of his culture as an African. He educates readers extensively about Igbo (Ibo) society 's myths and proverbs. *Things Fall Apart* provides readers with an insight of Igbo society right before the white missionaries' invasion on their land. Towards the end of the 19th century most European states migrated to Africa and other parts of the world where they established colonies. Nigeria was amongst other African nations that received visitors who were on a colonising mission. *Things Fall Apart* shows how the unexpected arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia threatens the villagers' culture, i.e. Igbo culture from religion, traditional gender roles and relations, family structure to trade. Gikandi (1996) notes that though this novel is not the first African novel, " it was probably the first work in which the author set out to represent the African experience in a narrative that sought, self- consciously, to be different from the colonial novel". Achebe rewrites the oral tradition of Africa and

presents a new insight to the readers that his native culture and tradition is worthy of being displayed to the world and praiseworthy.

Post colonialism:

Post colonialism is the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focussing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. On a deeper level, postcolonialism examines the social and political power relationships that sustained colonialism and neo colonialism, including the social, political and cultural narratives surrounding the colonizer and the colonized. The matters that constitute the post colonial identity of a decolonized people, which drives from:

I) the colonizer's generation of cultural knowledge about the colonized people; and

ii) how that western cultural knowledge was applied to subjugate a non- European mother country, which, after initial invasion, was effected by means of the cultural identities of 'colonizer' and 'colonized' .

Post colonialism is aimed at destabilizing the theories (intellectual and linguistic, social and economic) by means of which colonialists ' perceive', ' understand', and 'know' the world. It establishes intellectual spaces for subaltern peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices , and thus produce cultural discourses of philosophy, language, society and economy, balancing the imbalanced us-and-them binary power relationship between the colonist and the colonial subjects.

Post colonialism literatures are primarily concerned with ' writing back to the centre' , by active engagement' in a process of questioning and travestyng ' colonial discourses. It aims at entering their inner sanctum and bringing in to picture their cries of loss and proclamations of birth. It shows their confused Sense of belonging. The post colonial writers bring in to the light the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2003,p.2) pertinently assert:

" All post colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo - colonial domination, and independence has not solve this problem. The development of new elites within independent societies, often buttressed by neo colonial institutions; the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler / invader societies - all these testify to the fact that post colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstructions".

In the context of a heterogeneous society, where the colonized often live with their former colonizers, post colonial writers try to reassign new ethnic and cultural meanings to marginalized groups. Literature attempts to construct new identities against the outwardly imposed borders.

Discussion:

Chinua Achebe, a native of Africa, examines the root cause of the problems of his native fellow beings in to the new African world of literariness. The major themes of this novel are the conflict between past and present, the changes brought by Europeans imperialism and the erosion traditions, tribes and religion, conflict between old and new socio-economic values, old and new order of life , political corruption, opportunism etc. The central character of *Things Fall Apart* is Okonkwo, a respected leader whose inability to resist against the cultural, social and historical changes enforced by the white man brings about his tragedy. Okonkwo's trouble starts when he kills a young mother of his tribe by accident. He gets exile from the clan for seven years as a punishment. After returning from exile, he discovers that the British missionaries have already started to change the people. Okonkwo and a few older members of his tribe try to resist the changes that the white men enforce and are sent to jail. After this Okonkwo bursts in anger and kills a messenger from British authorities. Then Okonkwo commits suicide, a crime in Igbo culture and ends the novel in a tragedy . *Things Fall Apart* depicts a world which is shedding nostalgic tears of the lost identity, a world which finds itself on the verge of getting sealed in the dusted files of a forgotten history. Achebe picks up the situations from a transitional phase of the history.

Achebe tries to prove, the fact that Africans have their own traditional and historical background and cultural identity. That is why, their literary existence is also , to large extent, their own and worth mentioning. One can freely learn and adopt a language like English, but not the tradition .Thus African heroes and characters are representatives of their own land, people, culture and tradition and each individual is a paradigm of the society. Okonkwo is the hero of the story whose fame

"is rested on solid personal achievement. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten , from Umuofia to Mbaina . He was called the cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight".(*Things Fall Apart* p.2065)

This is how Achebe glorifies their past with all heroic deeds and imperfections. Okonkwo is the true representative of his people and society. He is a man of action and a vigorous rebel. When the white man objected to the

" Ibo's false gods , and it's replacement with the true God and his son Christ. Okonkwo, who only stayed in the hope that it might come to chasing the white man out of the village said : you told us with your own mouth that there was only one God . Now you talk about his son . He must have a wife ,then". (pp.2127-8)

Okonkwo fights ironically against colonial influences and changed modes and codes of religious and socio historic values that are transformed from their original and traditional meaning within passage of time under the colonial influence and new order of life dominated in the wake of science and technology, and his death is a suicidal fragmentation of the whole Igbo society. Hence, the fall of Okonkwo is about all loss of identity in the historical situation and primordial past.

Things Fall Apart , says Lawrence , " is the best novel written deeply out of the West African dilemma , the battle between the old and new gods." That is between the church missionaries and the native gods like, " the sacred python, the dangerous Ani and Amadiora and above all the most blessing Idemili and Ogwugwa".(p.2128)

Things Fall Apart clearly depicts the conflict between individual society on two levels : internal and external, that individuals own's relations to his surroundings that are undergoing socio economic change and his reactions against external influence that affect his society. These also destroy old order and create new values and meanings for each and every custom and convention. That is the real tragedy of Okonkwo, says Brown," Okonkwo's death dramatizes the dominant impulses of his life ; it is the culmination of a self destructive pride, but it is also demoralising effects of the new order". Not only this , but the disappearance of the old order and the emergence of new one is based on socio economic profits, and this is not only the tragedy of an individual but of the whole civilization .

The colonialism, Okonkwo asserts , " come quietly and peacefully with his religion .we were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers , and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.(p.2139)

Things Fall Apart foregrounds Achebe's sense of Africanisation in a post colonial clash of European and African cultures- with African struggling to empower itself superior to that of its counterpart. Much of Achebe's novel is given to the description of religious beliefs and practices, not only because these are so significant part of community life , but also because it is these beliefs that are later to be shown as being challenging and breaking down. Such as missionaries' building church on the evil or traditionally forbidden forest and their inhabitation there. It crushes the taboos and has its symbolic appeal. This convinced the Ibo native that there is a special power in the white man's religion. Furthermore , "one of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an egwugwu in public or to say or do anything which might reduce its immoral prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated".(Things Fall Apart p.2134)

Okodo (2012) points to the relationship between the cultural performance and religion of the Igbo. He says , " If the dramatic performances of Greek classical culture originated from ritual performances in honour of gods , Dionysus and Apollos, why would the ritual performances of Igbo gods ,nay all the gods in Africa , be rejected." Fakrul Alam(2012) is the opinion, " one of Chinua Achebe's goals in writing Things Fall Apart was to correct a whole history of misrepresentations of his people and country in Occidental discourse". However the social and cultural identities are invaded by missionaries and are the means of destroying Ibo societies acceptance of racial and cultural inferiority.

Post colonial literature is a consequence of colonialism. Through literature we understand the primary focus of Achebe's Things Fall Apart; a novel written by an individual who grow up under colonial rule in response to the effects of colonialism on his culture. Achebe writes back at the writings of European writers and the misrepresentations of Africa in their writings. A colonized individual is usually forced to follow the culture of

their colony regardless if they are against it or not. Post colonial writers usually write about how their rich native cultures were destroyed under the power of imperialism.

Things Fall Apart is a response to earlier accounts of Africa. So Achebe's choice of language is political . Some later African authors choose to revive native languages as a form of resistance to colonial culture. But Achebe wants to achieve cultural revitalization through English . He is capable of capturing the rhythm of the Igbo language. Achebe uses folktales, proverbs, vocabulary in the novel. By using native contents Achebe makes the English language go through the process of appropriation.

The novel immensely shows the third key issue in a post colonial text , i.e., the impacts of colonialism, stated by O' Reilly . European colonialism has totally destroyed the culture and tradition of the Igbo people who in turn destroy their identity. To illustrate colonial effects shown in Achebe's Things Fall Apart , Cesaire states that Bourgeois Europe has destroyed ' the root of diversity'. Before the coming of colonialism African societies were culturally diverse. Colonialism has trampled the diversity under feet. He also maintains that the Negro world has been ' disqualified' and ' mighty voices stilled forever ' as a result of colonial oppression. About the effects of colonialism in Africa , Cesaire says

" I am talking about societies drained of their essence , cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religious smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed , extraordinary possibilities wiped out".

In Achebe's Things Fall Apart , we see 'hybridity' , the term coined by Homi Bhaba to refer to the subjects who found a balance between eastern and western cultural attributes. The mimicry of the native often encodes - a facile , obedience and obsequiousness ; and a deeper disobedience and mockery. This dual state is one of the direct result of fractured nature of colonial discourse what is Bhaba termed as ' hybridity' . We see this dualism in the peoples of Igbo society . Their position of ' inbetweenness' , the space between the ' adopted' Englishness' and ' original' Africanness . It creates a third space, a space of relations (between colonizers and colonized) . This is a state where the native identity and colonial identity meet and often contests. There is a split and a negotiation within colonial discourse. Mockery and mimicry occur. The colonial discourse is both subversive and assertive. There is difference and deference . This ' third' space is the space where subjects articulate resistance. Thus the colonial subject is the decentered, split, unstable and resistant one . All these traits are evidencely shown in the Igbo society in their confused Sense of belonging. The third space or 'inbetweenness' emerges and hybridization is shown as the Igbo people adopt or transforms themselves in to a new cultural identities.

Conclusion:

Metonymically , Okonkwo stands as Africa, and his tale becomes Africa's history. Hence, through Okonkwo 's death , Achebe points out the idea that ' the suicide is collective suicide of Umuofia ". Achebe documented the social, political, cultural norms, codes, traditions, customs, conventions with a diligent detail and their hemiplegic transformation crossing a phase of history in colonial set and gives it uniqueness and universality.

Achebe in this novel rewrites the lost traditions and cultures of Igbo by differentiating the pre colonial and post colonial scenario of Igbo society.

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