

# Representation Of Igbo Community In Chinua Achebe's *The Things Fall Apart*

Naba Moni Saikia

Assistant Professor, Dept. Of English, Majuli College, Assam

**Abstract:** *Igbo community of Africa is represented wholly in Chinua Achebe's *The Things Fall Apart*. In this novel we find a very interesting, attractive, pleasurable and picturesque description of the community life of IGBO. The beliefs, life styles, rituals, superstitions etc. all were represented in a very sound manner. Through the character of Okonkwo and the people of his family cum clan, Achebe is able to portray a whole picture of that community. In this research paper an attempt has been made to examine the portrayal of Igbo community in Chinua Achebe's *The Things Fall Apart*.*

**Keywords:** *Heroism, tragedy and ethnography.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Community representation in literature is not a new trend and many writers have already tried their hands successfully in these kinds of writings. Chinua Achebe's *The Things Fall Apart* is a masterpiece in this regard and a literary piece of high standard not only in case of community representation, but also in other literary merits. Among all the creations of Achebe or within the realm of world literature, *The Things Fall Apart* has a place of its own. It brings some new ideas not only to African but also to world literature and the fact that it has been translated to more than 45 languages proves its immense popularity amongst the readers. Achebe was very successful in the picturesque presentation of the story of Okonkwo, the people of his clan and controls our mind with a majestic literary power.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this paper is to examine the portrayal of the community life of igbo people in Achebe's masterpiece *The Things Fall Apart*.

## III. METHODOLOGY

In this research paper, materials from the secondary sources have been used. The text of the novel is used as the main source of this paper while some other texts and journals have been used to discuss the points.

## IV. ANALYSIS

Before going to discuss the portrayal of community life in *The Things Fall Apart*, it is better to have a fair knowledge of the story of this novel.

The story of this novel, begins with Okonkwo, twenty years after the fabled encounter with Amalinze, the cat. Okonkwo is a titled man, thirty eight years old, a living legend in the clan of nine villages of which Umuofia, a village in the hinterlands of the Igbo nation, is a stellar member. Okonkwo has three wives, eight children and two barns. He is a renowned warrior; he has five human heads hanging on the walls of his hut to attest to his bravery. Even by the high standards of Umuofia and the clan, Okonkwo is truly an unusual man. He was tall and huge and bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look and he breathes heavily. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get out his words out

quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with the unsuccessful men and he cannot dream to be like his father.

Okonkwo is the main character of this novel and mainly through his character; Achebe portrayed the whole picture of the community. The character of Okonkwo qualifies for the title of tragic hero. The classical concept of tragic hero is mainly propagated by Aristotle, which is widely accepted by the critics. Aristotle said that a tragic hero is a character who is basically a good person, but who had one tragic flaw that undermined their goodness and led them down the path of tragedy. There is one 'hamartia' (tragic flaw) in his character or activities that ultimately becomes the reason for his fall. If we apply this idea to Okonkwo in this brilliant novel, then we can see that the major flaw in Okonkwo is his fear of being associated himself with his father, the lazy and profligate Unoka. In the third chapter of this book, the writer says, "But in spite of these disadvantages, he had begun even in his father's lifetime to lay the foundation of a prosperous future. It was slow and painful, but he threw himself into it like one possessed. And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death."

The word ethnography means the scientific description of people and culture with their customs, habits and mutual differences. Through the character of Okonkwo, we can get a beautiful view of various rituals and customs of the Igbo society.

In that Igbo society warriors have great respect among the people and at the war between the two villages or clans, a warrior's strength is judged by how many human heads he has cut at that war. Okonkwo was a great warrior and he had cut five human heads which he hung on the walls of the hut. This reveals his chivalry. In some festive occasions he drinks by using those human heads. It was a ritual of that society by which Okonkwo shows respect to the dead man.

In Igbo society, conversation was considered a great art and proverbs are used abundantly. And not only through Okonkwo's but also through other characters these proverbs were used which reveals the true character of the rich literary conversation of that society.

Igbo society was mainly depends on agriculture and therefore in that society men are allowed to do one marriage as a big family is always helpful for agricultural work. Okonkwo himself had three wives and eight children. Then, Igbo society has the ritual of title taking and it denotes the strength and fame of a person. Everybody wants to hold those titles, Okonkwo has two of them.

In the marriage system of Igbo society, grooms family has to pay the price of bride before the marriage. This price is decided by the bride's family. And when Okonkwo's friend arrange the marriage for his daughter and wanted to set the price through the negotiation with grooms family, Okonkwo also was invited and played an important role in that programme.

Superstition was dominant in Igbo society. They cannot ignore the command of various oracle because they think that the result of it will be very devastating. When the priests of oracle of hills come to take his daughter of by his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, he let the priests to take her even at the midnight without asking anything. Because of the order of the oracle, Okonkwo kills

Ikemefuna whom he loves so dearly and who calls him his father.

In Igbo society, when someone kills a man of his own clan, he has to leave his clan along with his family for seven years and all his huts and farms are being burned. Once, Okonkwo also unfortunately killed a man of his own clan. So by obeying the rules of the society he had to leave his clan with his family and went to his uncle's house.

Even Okonkwo's death also signifies a very important custom of Igbo society. Okonkwo's failure to save his self respect leads him to kill the man of district commissioner. But his village men blame him for this and at last he decided to commit suicide. But in Igbo society, no one wants to touch such body and bury because that is against the rule of their society or custom. So, ultimately Okonkwo receives an unrespectful and very hateful death that even the villagers hate to touch and bury his body.

Okonkwo is so concerned about doing everything, he possibly can, to be seen as a man, that he commits actions when he really shouldn't have committed, such as participating in the death of Ikemefuna. It is his overriding desire to be seen as a man and his determination to never let others consider him weak that results in his brusque and thoughtless acts of violence and results in his exile and again, finally in his suicide.

Through the tragedy of Okonkwo, the tragedy of whole colonial people is reflected. The colonial people have their own rituals, customs, gods etc. But suddenly, one day, the missionaries enter to the colonial world and tell them to leave those traditions and call them as backwards. The colonial people become the slave of whites in their own territory. Tragedy of Okonkwo reflects this psychological transition of the colonial, from independent to slavery.

Okonkwo is actually a tragic hero whose character flaw is responsible for his final tragic downfall. In the last side of the novel, a few tragic incidents happened in Okonkwo's life. The greatest tragedy in Okonkwo's life is that, at last, he also received almost the same death that his father had. He always hates his father because of his laziness and he received an unrespectful death. But at last, Okonkwo also commits suicide and the members of his community even don't want to touch his body, as they didn't want to touch his father's body earlier. Then, Okonkwo, in his whole life preserved the customs and the traditions of his community and also advise others to preserve them but towards the end of the novel, his own son disobeyed him, left him and joined the missionaries. For the community and the society he sacrifices everything, even in the respect of the society he murdered Ikemefuna, whom he loved dearly. But when he wanted a war against the district commissioner to take the revenge of his neglect, they don't co-operate him and even when he killed the man of district commissioner they blamed Okonkwo for his deed.

Though Okonkwo's character is fit for the title of tragic hero but there are some other features of his character that prevents us to call him so. The errors of his character can be termed as the tragic flaw of his character. These errors have turned the way of his life and also compel him to take the decision of suicide.

Though he is the central character of the novel but we cannot call him a hero in the true sense of the term. Sometimes

we feel that Okonkwo lacks the quality of a good man or a hero. First, he murdered Ikemefuna in a very crude manner, who calls him as his father but when his life was in danger instead of saving him Okonkwo slaughtered him. Then he always wanted to build his sons great warriors but he never teaches them anything in a good manner. He used to beat them very badly and so they revolted against him and instead of supporting him his eldest son Nwoke joined in the missionaries. His way of looking towards women is also cannot be called the quality of a hero or good man. He doesn't give much importance to the women and considered them as the lower section of the society. Even in the sacred week of the religion he beats his second wife very badly and even he tries to shot her. Then he was a conservative. He doesn't want to change himself and like to live among the past rituals.

Though he has so many demerits in his character he has also some positive and good qualities which make him the central character of the novel. He was the great warrior and wrestler of Umevia and the neighbouring villages. He was regarded as the hero and always fights for the betterment and glory of his community and his place.

#### V. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we may conclude that, despite some errors Okonkwo can be termed as the central character of the story as the whole story mainly revolves around him. As a member of an illiterate race/community, he was sometimes right in his perspectives. He was a hard working man, whose hobby is doing work only. He can even forget the greatest

things (as murder) of the world through his work. We cannot condemn him for his view towards women because all the knowledge that he earned is traditional knowledge. So, the attitude that he adopted towards the women come from his traditional teachings. Then, he established himself in the society by doing very hard work and by crossing many great difficulties. His interest towards works, his power of concentration and his courage is a lesson to us. He was a warrior in the true sense as he established his reputation by his own efforts and never depends on the others. And through this chief character of Okonkwo, story related to his life and of that society, Achebe was successful in giving us a picturesque description of that Igbo community.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*, Penguin UK, 2001.
- [2] Criswell, Stephen. "Okonkwo As Yeatsian Hero: The Influence of WB Yeats on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." *The Literary Criticism* 30.4:1-14. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffery W Hunter. Vol. 127. Detroit: Gale Group, 2000. Literature Resource Centre. Web. 8 Apr. 2010.
- [3] Friesen, Alan R. "Okonkwo's Suicide as an Affirmative Act: Do Things Really Fall Apart?" *Postcolonial Text* 2.4 (2006): 1-11. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffery W. Hunter. Vol 278. Detroit: Gale, 2010. Literature Resource Center. Web. 8 Apr. 2010.
- [4] Ravenscroft, A. Chinua Achebe. Great Britain: Longmans, Green & CO LTD, 1969 (print).