

Nigerian Society and Culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to deeply analyze about Nigerian society and culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Perhaps, the novel has several characters along with the novel's protagonist Okonkwo a wrestler. Chinua Achebe has presented the Nigerian society and its village in realistic manner, and then the novel further presents Igbo culture in different manner. The society and culture of Nigeria stand alone in a strange way comparing with western and eastern culture. The system of life and lifestyle of Nigeria, their food, their home and their customs are innovative and uniqueness these seem like very old in fashion. People are looking after superstitions and strange African ritual practice with remote ideology that is mingled in their life. Geographically or according to the geographical set up, this country is in high poverty that the novelist has portrayed through the character portrayed through Unkoa the father of Okonkwo, then his son Okonkwo wins that situation from his own effort and brilliancy. The study completes with Western intrusion has mutilated traditional African society. Hence the present study analyses the society and culture of Nigeria in this novel.

Keywords: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo Culture, Nigerian Culture, Society, African Life.

Introduction

Title of the novel is *Things Fall Apart* which is purely taken from W.B yeast' *The Second Coming* by Chinua Achebe,

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
More anarchy is loosed upon the world.”
(W. B Yeasts' *The Second Coming*)

This novel is greatly written by the author about Nigerian life, society and their culture at the end of the nineteenth century. The novel is one of the gifts of Africans to the world and acclaimed a worldwide attention. Achebe supremely wishes and who speaks about Igbo culture throughout the novel. Actually the novel is written in 1958 in English language. The novelist has beautifully focused Africa's spiritual history; the civilized rich life of Igbo culture of African's who is being lived before the arrival of Europeans and the ruinous social impact of imperialism are presented by the author strongly by the European colonization countries. This novel's back drop is set from the African experience with Europeans.

Chinua Achebe, a Magical Writer

“A writer who has no illusions but is not disillusioned, loves the people without necessity for self-hatred and is gloriously gifted with the magic of an ebullient, generous, great talent.”
- Nadinne Gordimer

Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria in 1930. He lived his village of Ogidi, the first center of Anglican missionary work in Easter Nigeria. He graduated in the University College, Ibadan. In 1966, he worked in radio. He was a director of External Broadcasting in Nigeria during the national upheaval that led to the Biafra War. He was a senior research fellow at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and then started lecturing in foreign countries. He was very great professor in Nigerian universities and College.

How far, Chinua Achebe can be a magical writer, that is, he has written over twenty books including novels, short stories, essays and poems. To prove that he is a magical writer, his magical writing which he has shown in *Things Fall Apart* which sold over ten million copies in every corner of the world. It is translated into more than fifty languages around the world. *Arrow of God* in 1964, *Beware, Soul Brother and Other Poems* in 1971 are the winner of commonwealth poetry prize. Then *Anthills of the Savannah* in 1987 was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Achebe sails on a unique river of writing, has received magnanimous name from around the world. He has received Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and letters. He has received honorary doctorates from more than thirty colleges and universities. He has own also Nigerian National Merit Award. Ultimately, he received Man Booker International prize for fiction in 2007. Hence there is no doubt that he is really a magical writer of fiction.

The Igbo Culture

Igbo culture is practiced by Nigerian people. Accordingly to Nigeria, Igbo, which is “Omenalandi” Igbo. This culture is one of the customs, ancestral practices, and tradition of the Igbo people of especially south eastern Nigeria. It consists of archaic practices with new modern concepts which joined into the Igbo culture either by cultural evolution or by outside influence.

The customs and traditions include the Igbo people's visual art, music and dance forms and languages dialects.

The Igbo are the second largest group of people living in southern Nigerians. Their major tribes are consisted in Igbo at Nigeria. They are consisted of many sub-groups then they are diverse from socially and culturally. Today most of the Igbo are Christian. They have a strong and original society and culture with pride. The culture of the Igbo has molded up their thoughts, speech, actions and artifacts of the Igbo who are easily distinguished from other ethnic groups. Hence the Igbo culture portrays its very deep customs, beliefs, war, burial, society and its social norms, religion, racial, social and material traits of the Igbo. Chinua Achebe has showed to the world that how the Igbo people live in Nigeria throughout the novel. The novel illustrates many different aspects of Igbo culture and the society of Nigeria. The novelist presents to his readers the real aspects of religion in Nigeria. They are polytheistic, which means they worship many gods. The gods and goddess of Igbo people are govern different aspects of the world and daily life, such as goddess of earth, Ani.

They are following different types of rituals and customs which go along with each goal. It resembles like the weakness of peace that is observed to honor Ani for blessing the crops. The novelist also seems in non-religious aspects of Igbo culture. For instance, one can see or hear about the different ceremonies and rituals that surround courtship and marriage. Polygamy is the practice of Igbo culture, not monogamy. It shows different cultural aspects of Nigeria. Hence, the novel has a wide array of different aspects of Igbo life and culture of Nigeria.

Nigerian Society and Culture in *Things Fall Apart*

The novelist has taken Nigeria as a central place for his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Nigerians are following Igbo culture. The society and culture of Nigerian people is unique from western and Eastern countries. Village society and culture is portrayed by the author in this novel is very interesting to read it. The whole novel takes place in Umuofia, which is consisted of nine villages on the lower Niger. Okonkwo is a greatest warrior of Nigeria, as well as a leader of Umuofia clan. He is a head and respected man among the village people. People are highly respecting him, because he is a great wrestler as well as bravest man. He has a son namely Nwoye just twelve years old. Even though Okonkwo a great warrior, he is able to control and rule his village people in the little village called Iguedo. That's why he is mostly respected by the village people, because he has beaten Amalinze, the Cat, the undefeated warrior in a wrestling match, when he was so young. When the novel opens:

“Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of 18 he had brought honour to his village by throwing

Amalinze the cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino”. (P.3 Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Modern Classics, Penguin Books, 2001)

According to the society and culture of Nigeria, there is one custom is followed by native men that indulging in fight to prove one’s braveness in high pride and prejudice manner before the village people. The Nigerian culture provided moiré important for art of fight and braveness for ruling village people than knowledge. Igbo culture writes its own pride that Igbo people must speak only bravery things. Okonkwo’s father is an idle man in this story. His name is Unoka. Okonkwo feels sadly that one of his sons Nwoye also similar to Unoka his father. Nigerian people culturally expect brave thing is important than anything in that society. Igbo culture of Nigeria reflects that supposed a boy is cowardice; he will be considered as feminine attitude. Okonkwo is considered as not only a warrior, but also a good farmer. Agriculture is main work in Nigerian society. Okonkwo says: “I sow the yams when the first rain has fallen and stake them when the young tendrils appear. I weed.” (P.14)

In Nigerian society, there is no possible for continues rain fall. It comes very rare. People are using the rare rain fall for their agriculture and to harvest. Not like Unoka, Okonkwo works hard in the fields of agriculture and becomes a very rich man in that village. There is a law which is followed in Nigerian society that beating or attacking woman or wives is crime. But Okonkwo breaks this law once in his life. He beats one of his wives, Ojiugo, because she is too negligent. In Nigeria society animal sacrifice and pay fine for commit sins is followed by people. Again Okonkwo beats his second wife Ekwefi and jointly cook food for their family. There is a festival is followed by village people. Okonkwo avoids participating in that festival. Because he thinks that he is not woman. He becomes full of pent up anger from unemployment.

“The feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers. Every year in Nigerian society, there kind of festivals are held by village people before harvest. Wrestling contest is the supreme thing in this people’s culture. Ekwefi meets with Chielo at the wrestling contest, the priestess of the oracle, and wrestling is considered an essentials part of the culture. In this society, war is unavoidable one. Elders are growing their children in order to tell war stories. Okonkwo often tells stories about wars to the boys. ... So Nwoyo and Ikemefuna would listen to Okonkwo’s stories about tribal wars or how, years ago, he had

stalked his victim, overpowered him and obtained his first human head". (P. 27)

Providing bride-price is the supreme and essential in this culture. Obierika invites Okonkwo to be present when he and another man deal with his daughter's bride price. Achebe clearly portrays Nigerian society and its culture in well manner about the ritual of dealing for a bride price.

"We had not through to go below thirty. But as the dog said, If I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is play. Marriage should be a play and not a fight: so we are falling down again. He then added ten sticks to the fifteen and gave the bundle to Ukegbu. In this way Akueke's bride-price was finally settled at twenty bags of cowries. It was already dusk when the two parties came to this agreement.' (P. 53)

Preparing medicine is a practice of that village. The Nigerian society believes their own traditional medicine rather than English medicine. For an ill of a child, Okonkwo prepares a medicine and tries to heal the child. The society of Nigeria follows betrothal ceremony in all places. Obierika holds Uri, a betrothal ceremony for Obierika's daughter. The ceremony is an enormous celebration, all women help for cooking a gigantic meal for all villagers. All people attend the ceremony interestingly.

Everything will go well and the whole village will be very happy to attend that function. Another funeral will be conducted from Nigerian society and culture that funeral of the old clansman. At the funeral of the old clansman, Ogbuefi Ezeudu once warns Okonkwo about not killing Ikemefuna, but a tragedy happens that he kills him. From that impact, Okonkwo exiles from his village for seven years. Once they leave Iguedo for Mbanta, the native village of Okonkwo's mother, clansmen destroy everything that was related to the ex-leader of the clan in order to cleanse the village of the sin according to their society's culture. According to the culture of Nigerians, the exiled family will be received by relatives of Okonkwo's mother. By the help of the villagers, they start a new life.

"Okonkwo was well received by this mother's kinsmen in Mbanta. The old man received him was his mother's younger brother, who was now the eldest serving member of that family." (P. 95)

Nigerian Igbo cultured people later converted in to Christian culture in this novel. The converters would like to build a church and the villagers offer a piece of land in the Evil Forest

because they think the white men will not accept it. There is a fight between Igbo culture and Christian culture in this novel is seemed. Missionaries are not afraid of the villagers, so they start building the church. In order to slowly destroy the society and culture of Nigeria, the white men church gains more and more converts, they accept the Osu, or rejects of the clan. After seven years, Okonkwo arrives in Iguedo, he has to realize that his village has changed that Christianity has overcome most of the villages.

“Okonkwo knew these things. He knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan. He had lost the chance to lead his warlike clan against the new religion...” (P.125)

Mr. Brown is the pacific leader of the converters and Akunna, a leader of the clan often meet and discuss religious issues in public. Okonkwo comes to meet Mr. Brown and known that Nwoye becomes a teacher. But Okonkwo hates it. Due to Mr. Brown’s sickness, Reverend James Smith takes a leader position. During a traditional ceremony, disguise like an egwugwu and burns Enoch’s house and the new church the next day. Hence district commissioner takes necessary action on crime committers. Okonkwo and others are preparing some other plan for taking revenge against missionaries. But at the end Okonkwo hangs himself in order to kill a messenger. For the commissioner asking, Obierika answers:

“Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo’s body was dangling, and they stopped dead. Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him, said Obierika.” (P. 151)

According to the custom of that people, the native clans should not touch the dead body if committed a suicide. One should die naturally or must be killed in a war or fight. If one suicides, he is an evil. Strangers only can touch and bury him. But village people never touch it anymore. So, Obierika tracks the police men with to touch the body of Okonkwo and asks them to burry. The situation is portraying that the pressure of commissioner has killed the great warrior in simple manner.

Conclusion

Thus, the Nigerian society and culture is entirely destroyed by colonial operation of white men in that village. The brave warrior Okonkwo even hangs himself like cowardice at the end of the novel. The beautiful society of Nigeria has many magnanimous customs like music, Niger songs, food, agricultural ceremonies etc. If Christianity does not arrive at that village, the tradition and culture of Nigeria will be secured. European colony slowly has killed its culture and erected

their culture instead of it. Nigerian society and culture is very best in the world is vanished by colonial operation is true with reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

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