

Portraying the Relationship between Cultural Fall and the Hero's fall in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

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Abstract: This study itself deals with the novel “*Things fall apart*” which is a creation by a well-known Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe to see the portraying of the relationship between cultural devastation and the hero's destruction. The entire novel portrays Igbo society with specificity and sympathy and it examines the effects of European colonialism from an African perspective. The objective of this study is to identify the way that the author has made the link between the major themes and the characters of the text. There it has worked on to see the relationship between the hero's fall and the cultural fall in the text. Further this study reveals a link which creates a sound bond about the social set up a particular set of people while donating hiding value of a cultural reveal.

Key words: Culture, Colonialism, Themes and Characters, Destruction

I. INTRODUCTION

Literary pieces always stand in the side of human beings to be available for the reference while making the people to be more human than they are expecting to be. Among the Nigerian writers even among the authors around the world, some writers can grab the attention of the readers through the way they are capable of handling the subject matter. With accompanying the aforesaid notion, Chinua Achebe talks about the respect of the people for their tribes and how they do sacrifices on the survival of the clan.

This story creates a picture of an ideal leader who does more than his capacity to keep and save the clan with its originality with the tradition. The entire novel portrays Igbo society with specificity and sympathy and it examines the effects of European colonialism from an African perspective. He wants to publish his own story about Africa to visualize the complexity and sophistication of African society before the arrival of the Europeans and to manifest the deep wounds of colonization and its influences upon social, cultural and political aspects of the country. For this purpose, he uses a story with a hero who faces a tragic end at the end of the story. According to the writer, the protagonist is known as “Okonkwo” and “was well-known throughout the nine villages and even beyond” (The novel “*Things Fall Apart*, chapter one, page 03) At the final half of the story the hero hangs himself because he can't bear the dying of his culture and the tradition. The whole story shows very clearly how the

relationship between the death of the protagonist and the culture.

II. DISCUSSION

Relationship between Hero and the Culture

Okonkwo is the predominant figure of the story who always connects with the culture, tradition and the society

In the novel for the first time the writer shows the protagonist's great respect towards the culture, tradition and the customs of the society. In Chapter Four the writer describes about the peace week of their clan and his respect towards it. His being unable to protect the peace during the peace week makes him to pay a large amount of money and goods for the priest of the earth goddess. He pays them without saying any word because it is evident for him that he must listen and conform for his culture of the clan. If he is against with the culture, he can do that easily because he is a big figure of that society. But Okonkwo is the man who wants to protect the culture and the traditions of his clan except three or four people in the clan. According to the writer

“You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one-she goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries”

“Okonkwo did as the priest said. He also took with him a pot of palm wine”

(The novel “*Things Fall Apart*”, Chapter Four, Page 28)

In addition to this situation, there are many situations which he gives his full contribution for the protection of the culture without thinking about even his own happiness. We can see such a happening with Ikemefuna who lives for three years in Okonkwo's own hut. Ikemefuna is a young boy given by a neighboring clan as a gift with a young virgin to avoid the war with Umuofia. Though Okonkwo does not show any affection and compassion towards Ikemefuna in surface, Okonkwo likes him very much and this affection is increased with Ikemefuna's addressing Okonkwo as “my father”. There is another reason for his affection towards Ikemefuna. Because of Nwoye's association with Ikemefuna makes Nwoye more masculine than earlier. But unfortunately, Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna because he doesn't like to show his weakness in front of his clansmen.

“Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it.....”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Seven, Page 51)

While some people refuse to join for the journey to the jungle like Obierika to kill Ikemefuna, Okonkwo joins himself to the journey without concerning his feelings and emotions.

“my father, they have killed me!” as he ran toward him”

“Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Seven, Page 55)

According to the text, his sufferings can be seen very clearly after the death of Ikemefuna. But he does all these things because he wants to give the prominence for his culture, tradition and the clan. An Oracle is the leading figure in that society and all the people should concern about his predictions, because an Oracle is a main aspect of their culture and the society.

“Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm wine from morning till night.....”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Eight, Page 57)

There is another incident that reveals Okonkwo’s unbreakable bondage with his clan and its culture. Accidently, at the cremation of OgbuefiEzeudu, Okonkwo’s gun explodes a piece of iron and it kills Ezeudu’s sixteen years old son. According to their beliefs, killing a man in the same clan is a great sin and the criminal must flee from the clan for seven years. Okonkwo makes his mind to flee from his clan and hopes to return his place after seven years. Though he flees from the clan to respect his customs and traditions, there is a man known as Obierika, a close friend of Okonkwo, who thinks in different way and apparently it is completely oppose to their culture and traditions.

“Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend’s calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently?”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Thirteen, Page 113)

But forgetting all the things in his birth place, he goes to his mother’s village calls Mbanta and occupies as a cultivator. It clearly shows his great sacrifice for his clan and the culture. He is a reputed and wealthy man in his clan with two barns, an animal farm and three wives with three houses. He knows well that after their departure from their clan, all the things destroy by the members of the clan. But without any desire or sad feeling about his material things, he leaves the clan collecting most essential belongings with his wives and children. The only thing which we can see in his mind is the notion to return his clan after seven years.

“Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Thirteen, Page 113)

In this way throughout the novel it shows his notion as very strong to return his clan after seven years, because he is very much bound for his clan and the culture.

From the beginning of the story up to Chapter Fourteen, that cannot see any incident which occurs to change the life of the protagonist towards the disastrous fate. But in the Chapter fifteen the writer says that the root cause of his ill fate is going to be originated. In Chapter fifteen, for the first time Okonkwo gets to know about the arrival of the white people from Obierika.

“During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan.”

“The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them.”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Fifteen, Page 125)

With these statements of Obierika, Okonkwo begins to think about white people considering about the Oracle’s advices and he thinks about them as dangerous animals that come to destroy their clan, culture and the society. Thinking about white people, he always becomes careful not to close with white people and to flee them from their society. Okonkwo is a person who always tries to protect his clan and the culture. During this period missionary come to Umuofia and make some converts for them. The son of Okonkwo also can be seen among those converts.

“What moved Obierika to visit Okonkwo was the sudden appearance of the latter’s son, Nwoye, among the missionaries in Umuofia” (The novel “Things Fall apart”, Chapter Sixteen, page 130)

“And so Obierika went to Mbanta to see his friend. And he found that Okonkwo did not wish to speak about Nwoye”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Sixteen, Page 131)

It is clearly evident from these lines of the novel “Things Fall Apart”, the sacrifice of the protagonist is to protect his clan and the culture. Normally animals also have a great affection for their kids. But in the novel Okonkwo removes his son from his family, because he loves his clan and the culture more than other things. He wants to preserve his identity of the clan. His culture and clan have a value for him than his own blood. This shows his unbreakable relationship between culture and the society. Though we can see many characters who speak about their clan, we cannot see such a character like Okonkwo who sacrifices his whole soul on behalf of his clan and the culture.

In Chapter Twenty, it shows the arrival of Okonkwo for his place in Umuofia after seven years. When he comes there all

the things have changed and he feels sorry about his clan and its members. But still he has some ideas to restart his clan and the culture. But he is the only man who wants to re-establish his clan and the culture. Except Okonkwo and a few clansmen, most of the people have converted as Christians and like to embrace the new culture introduced by white people.

“What is it that has happened to our people? We must fight with these people and drive them from the land”

“It is already too late, said Obierika sadly. Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the strangers”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Twenty, Page 159)

“Does the white man understand our custom about land?”

“How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Twenty, Page 160)

From this type of conversation between Obierika and Okonkwo, it is possible to understand the current situation of Umuofia and the courage of the people to establish their clan, culture and tradition of their society again. It shows that most of the people have given up their ideas to rebuild their culture and the clan. But Okonkwo still wants to collect the values of his culture and the clan.

At the final half of the story, that can see there is an annual worship for the earth goddess and it is held on Sundays. The people who are going to worship earth goddess make masks in their faces by using beautiful colors. They don't remove these masks until the ceremony is over. During this period a person calls Enoch unmask a person. Enoch is the son of snake-priest who is believed to have killed and eaten the secret Python (snake) and he is a converter of missionaries. Because of these reasons men of Umuofia burn the hut of Enoch and the church of Reverend James Smith. This is depicted the anger of the clan because they concern it as same to destroy their culture and the tradition.

Because of this happening the leaders of Umuofia keep in prison by the District Commissioner and they have to face many difficulties which are coming from the white people at the prison.

“The six men ate nothing throughout that day and the next. They were not even given any water to drink and they could not go out to urinate or go in to the bush when they were pressed. At night the messengers came into taunt them and to knock their shaven heads together.”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Twenty three, page 173/74)

In this way at the beginning of the rebellion, though Okonkwo can find out the people to fight against white people and their church, he cannot continue his effort beyond that. After the arrival of the leaders from the prison, Umuofia held a meeting in the market place. In that situation five court

messengers come to the market place and Okonkwo kills the head of the messengers and other four messengers escape with the help of the clansmen.

“In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Four, Page 184)

In this situation the protagonist gets aware that though he wants to avoid the changes that are going to happen, others don't want to evade them. He understands that though he wants to preserve their culture without pointing outsiders' hands into their clan, others don't want to do such sacrifice for the safety of their clan. So he becomes aware that most of the people are like to embrace new culture and the tradition which introduces by missionaries.

“He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken in to tumult instead of action. He heard voices asking “why did he do it?”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Twenty Four, Page 184)

Finally as a result of his distress he hangs himself in a tree in his compound. So at the end of the novel we can see this tragic end of the protagonist. Now we can get a clear understanding about how the writer indicates the dying of the culture through the death of the protagonist of the novel. Okonkwo is the only man of Umuofia who wants to fight for the protection of culture, clan and its tradition. Throughout the journey of his life, he makes many attempts to protect the clan. He makes many sacrifices and even he gives up his own son also. Finally he understands the reality that he cannot do this alone without others help and he commits suicide.

At the final half of the novel the writer depicts how Okonkwo's body hangs on a tree without any concerning of the people. The people don't pay any special attention to offer him respect or a good burial. According to the District commissioner, Okonkwo who tries his best to protect the clan and the culture receives treatments like a dog.

“That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself, and he will be buried like a dog...”

(The novel “Things Fall Apart”, Chapter Twenty-Five, Page 187)

This symbolizes that anyone of the clan does not care about the culture of the society anymore. After the death of Okonkwo, there is no another man in Umuofia who wants to fight with missionaries to preserve their culture and their clan. Therefore, it is able to say that “the hero's fall indicates the culture's fall” in the novel Things Fall Apart.

III. CONCLUSION

Throughout the novel, the writer creates his own pictures about the hero and the sacrifices of the hero to protect the tradition and the culture for his own community. The evidence that the author has provided are much sound enough to come up with the point which discussed above. In the field of English literature, it stands as a sound text which keeps the identity of the nation as it is. Throughout this study, it has provided details about how the said concept has depicted. However, all these ideas have made with the view point of the researcher and as a whole the study provides enough learning support for the people who are doing further studies on the said topic.

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