

Things Fall Apart as a Reflection of Colonialism in 20th Century Africa

V. NANMOZHI

*I M.A. English, Department of English
PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore*

K. ANUPAMA

*I M.A. English, Department of English
Vivekananda College for Women, Unjanai, Thiruchengode*

Abstract

This paper aims to produce how Things Fall Apart novel reflected the colonization in Africa during 1890s. Things Fall Apart is a classic novel which covers how whites colonized the minds of native in the name of religion, culture and colour. This novel is the mirror reflecting how Igbo community changed during colonization. After publication of this novel it created a huge impact on readers, also changed the perspective about African Culture and People.

Keywords: *Colonization, Post-Colonial Literature, Misrepresentation, Fragmentation etc.*

Introduction

Things Fall Apart (1958) is the bestselling novel written by the famous African writer Chinua Achebe. His debut novel made him the Father of modern African Literature. Things Fall Apart is a novel written against the humiliating images created by stereotypical Europeans during colonization. During overturning Achebe wrote back to center and corrected the misrepresentation of African Culture and People.

Things Fall Apart is novel about the intrusion of white missionaries and colonial government into Igbo society. The main character, Okonkwo, is an angry young man who is a successful farmer with large barns. He is a powerful leader of the community who is respected by his clan men. His aim is rule his tribe and want to have number of titles. However, one day Okonkwo accidentally kills clansman, so that according to his tradition he got banished from the village for seven years. During his exile Okonkwo becomes stranger to his own village and also there is new British missionary church brought into his village. The village people offered Evil forest to build the church, hoping they will die in four days. But they got survived; people believed that they have magical powers. Meanwhile Okonkwo hopes to regain his power but due to this intrusion of whites, clan men slowly got converted to this new religion. In the process, Okonkwo is unwilling to change and

become set apart from his community. His life ends tragically with suicide.

Colonial reflection in Things Fall Apart

Post-Colonial Literature is important because it talked about the sufferings of Colonized people in the hands of Colonizer. In 20th century writers decided to write about the fragmentation and chaos in the mind of the people. They started to trace back their identity and culture. This led Chinua Achebe to produce this famous work which showed the Pre and Post Colonization of Igbo community in Africa. To express his view points and to correct the misrepresentations of African people he chose the universal language English as medium. He also introduced the Igbo language terms in English, later it was created as new dialect. Achebe aims to expose his native traditions to the world is achieved only through English language.

From first chapter Chinua Achebe along with Igbo culture and traditions introduces this man Okonkwo, who is obsessed with manliness, belonged to the village Umuofia. The festival of New yam, wrestling match, symbols and honors, Legends and traditions are spoken. The native people believed in God Chukwu, creator of man and Uni, the mother earth. They strongly believed in *Chi*, which meant soul.

'When a man says yes, his Chi says yes also.'

Before colonization African people had their own civilization and judiciary system. The proper judgment can be seen in the family dispute of Mgbafo and Uzowulu which solved by Egwugwu. The native people also outcasted some people and also left twins in Evil forest as a sign of respecting their God. The outcasts are called as Osu.

But later in chapter eight, the reflection of colonization was recorded. During the meeting of native people they discuss about white man with 'iron horse'. The natives are curious about the colour of his skin. Initially it was comical but later in Chapter fifteen it became serious one. White men cleared the whole Mbaino village for killing three whites. Through violence and religion they slowly entered into Igbo community villages like Mbanta, Umuofia. Through Obierika, Okonkwo learns that missionaries came into villages and started converting the clan men into Christians. Through their joyful hymns and love, they admired the natives. When outcast Osu neglected by their people, churchmen accepted them. Through their evangelist hymns and kind words they slowly converted the native people and said there is only one god. They also told native men that:

Native: If we leave our Gods and follow your God... who will protect us from the anger of our neglected Gods and ancestors?

White: Your Gods are not alive and cannot do any harm...they are pieces of wood and stone.

Through colonizer sympathetic tone and bible stories they separated native community and families. As a result Okonkwo got separated from his son Nwoye. Nwoye told that 'he is not my father' and he found answers to his questions in this new religion. So, he has forgotten his native tradition and culture. Thus, white used the name of religion and God to colonize the natives. For example, the Christian hymn touches the 'silent and dusty chords in the heart of Igbo man.' It is worthy to mention Desmond Tutu,

'When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said "Let us pray." We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.'

Africa is a wealthy agrarian land, white used religion to colonize them and to control their land. Slowly White made trade with Africa by exporting Palm oil. Whites made

native men to rely on them in terms of economy. Later, they formed their own Government and laws. They built court. Through 'divide and conquer' the foreigners divided the native families by making the doubts on their traditions as favorable one for them. Whites conquered native men through law by making natives as their court messengers. This brilliant move made natives to leave agriculture and started to work for white government. Okonkwo is the only man opposed colonization to secure his culture but later he commits suicide. Through cultural hegemony Whites controlled Africa and established their form of Government. Later in the twenty fifth chapter District Commissioner thinks of writing a book about his experiences in civilizing the people of Nigeria in the title 'Pacification of the tribes of the Lower Niger.' Chinua Achebe turns in by telling before colonization they had their own systems. But in terms of Civilization whites colonized the minds of native, it created fragmentation. Thus, Chinua Achebe beautifully portrayed how colonization took place in his motherland.

Things Fall Apart is a first work which gave voice that is previously unheard. This book inspired a lot of writers and also made changes in the minds of people. World acquired different perspective about African people despite the negative portrayal of them in novel like 'Heart of Darkness'. After Achebe there is a change in writers subject, writers like Noble Laureate Toni Morrison and the author of novel Half of a Yellow Sun Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie got inspired by this book. Chimamanda stated that

'Chinua Achebe will always be important to me because of his work influenced not so much my style as my writing philosophy: reading him emboldened me, gave me permission to write about the things I knew well.'

Conclusion

His writing style and his work created an impact on the society and also it reflects how whites colonized the native's mind and land. It clearly reflected how traditions and culture of Igbo people fall apart during Colonization.

Reference

1. Achebe, Chinua.2006. Things Fall Apart. London: Penguin Books.