



THINGS FALL APART: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

Atulkumar Parmar, Ph. D.

*Asst. Professor in English, Mahadev Desai Gramseva Mahavidyalaya, Gujarat Vidyapith, Randheja,
Gandhinagar, Gujarat.*



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

Colonization is a process of dehumanization. It is always that colonized has represented to the history of colonizer in an adverse way. To prorogate colonizer's point of view, Hayden White wrote in his book *The Content of the Form*,

"Those who do not enter history as makers enter as the victims of the makers."¹

Frantz Fanon has severe problem with White's notion and he worked it in this way:

"It is not the history of the plundered country that they made, but the history of the mother country."²

Achebe quite agrees with Fanon. He says:

"To underline falsity of this version of events Achebe must re-establish the humanity of his Africans, must insist that Africans live in the same world and are not absolutely other".³

The western subversion of African culture played an influential role in perpetuating an abominable and chaotic picture of the African continent in the minds of readers of the modern age. For Achebe now it becomes his duty to present the real picture of his world so he adopts the career of postcolonial writer. Achebe belongs to the decolonizing phase of Africa and he has no direct access to the colonizing period of his country. In order to reconstruct the past, he has to depend on historical research. The writing of history has two components: (1) it depends on verifiable fact and (2) it arranges those facts in a narrative. As a writer with a definite purpose, he could have idealized or romanticized the picture of Africa, which he wrought out of the rubble.

Achebe in his novel attempts to present the pre-colonial state of the Igbo-society with his plain style. The effect of Achebe's plain style is to stress the everyday ordinariness of Ibo life. This world is comprehensible. The transition in the book from pre-colonial Africa to an Africa that felt the European presence is in terms of style, remarkable. It is a society which is

still unsullied by the western cultural civilization. He narrates the story of an Igbo individual who witnesses the emergence of European institutions among the neighboring villages as well as his own while fabricating the personal account of Okonkwo, and while explaining the influence of the cross cultural encounter on him which ultimately leads to his tragic death. Achebe simultaneously portrays the customs and norms of the Ibo society. By emphasizing the highly organized structure of the Ibo community Achebe counters the arguments propagated by the colonizers including Conrad about the chaotic nature of the native African societies.

Europeans considered the alleged lack of language among the Africans as the major sign of the lack of the culture or civilization among the latter. In order to counter argue Achebe gave examples of the Igbo proverbs beautifully woven in to the speech patterns of Okonkwo and others. For example: "As our people say, a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness". This is why; Achebe used native dialect to present Okonkwo's life. For him, languages carry the pride of community. Further, he elaborates the concept of self-pride;

"Self-pride sustains the culture. When self-pride disappears, the culture is eliminated. Afterwards we find only relics of the past."⁴

In demonstrating the imaginative, often formal language of the Igbo, Achebe emphasizes that Africa is not a silent or incomprehensible country that books such as Conrad's Heart of Darkness made it out to be. To emphasize the exclusivity of the two world, Achebe often leaves Igbo words without translation. These foreign races in an English text refer metonymically to a whole world that cannot be adequately translated. Rather by peppering the novel with Igbo words, Achebe shows that the Igbo language is too complex for direct translation into English. Similarly, Igbo culture cannot be understood within the framework of European colonialist values. On a macroscopic level, it is extremely significant that Achebe chose to write Things Fall Apart in English – he already intended it to be read by the weak at least as much, if not more, than by his fellow Nigerians. Through, his inclusion of proverbs, folktales and songs translated from the Igbo language, Achebe manages to capture and convey the rhythms, structures, cadences, and beauty of the Igbo languages:

"Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before, it shines on those who kneel under them. I shall pay my big debts first".⁵

And

"As our people say, a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness".⁶

Achebe has presented not only the positive side of the Igbo culture but he has also exposed the superstitions practiced by Igbo people. The superstitious beliefs that prevail among the Igbo provide the European a chance to split of their communal harmony. The white man takes advantage of this aspect to his maximum benefit.

Selection of three sections for the book works as a trope. He has presented Igbo culture – before colonization, during colonization and after colonization. The brilliance of Achebe's art is that he hasn't used word "colonization". Still *Things Fall Apart* gives us a perfect history of colonization, fictionalized version of history – Moreover, Okonkwo becomes an epitome of Igbo culture, he becomes the nation. All three sections reveal the proper set of Igbo culture. Democratic nature of Igbo tribe is easily understood. They have their own law and order system where no one is allowed to use his / her social status to get rid of the punishment. As we saw in the novel, Okonkwo has been punished twice for his mistake / crime. Thus everyone is equal in Igbo culture while European system has severe punishment like death punishment or life-time imprisonment. European can chop off whole village s single European is killed by Igbo man while in Igbo tribe only few people will die in their war. Thus, they are living in a more human, civilized society in comparison of the white men.

The name of the novel itself is symbolic as well as ironic. In his famous poem, "The second coming" from which Achebe has taken the title of his work, W. B. Yeats mourns the falling apart of Christianity as a cohesive force and the disintegration of the European civilization. Further Yeats writes 'the falcon cannot hear the falconer, Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold'. As a result, the old social order falls apart. However, the irony is that what causes the falling apart is the presence of the Europeans who boast of themselves as the promoters of order.

Achebe through his novel proclaims the ludicrousness of the patronizing attitude taken by imperialists towards the African clans that were quite refined in their culture and heritage.

Thus, Achebe tries to revitalize the African culture through the story of Okonkwo and covers the wider area of colonization and its severe effects. Quite successfully, by present Okonkwo's world which is organized, ordered and civilized, thus is only possible through his narrative strategies. He finds all three eras with one tide-pre-colonization, colonization and post colonization as we find in the three sections of the novel. Thus, the *Things Fall Apart* because a crucial text as far as postcolonial literature is concerned.

Endnotes:

White, Hyden. 1987. *The Content of the Form*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. p.56.

Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin. p. 40.

Kortenaar, Neil ten. 2003. "How the Center Is Made to Hold in Things Fall Apart" in Chinua

Achebe's Things Fall Apart a Case Book. ed. Isidore Okpewho. New York: OUP. p. 124.

Achebe, Chinua. 1996. *Things Fall Apart*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

bid

bid