

CULTURALL DISINTEGRATION WITH SPECIAL REEFERENCE TO CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

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Chinua Achebe's novels helped to develop what is known as African literature today;. He has written novels exploring his tradition and culture, while still staying true to his roots. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, is the tragic outcome of the European encounter with African civilization. The deals with the social and psychological conflicts created by the incursion of the white man and his culture into the hitherto self-contained world of African society, and the dismay of the African consciousness. The foremost theme is the colonization of Africa by the British and the changes that brought about in the lives of the African tribes. Along with colonization was the arrival of the missionaries whose main aspire was to spreads the message of Christianity and to convert people to their religion. These missionaries in due course establish a strong foothold in the tribe which then allows a government as well as law court for administering justice to become part of the meanness and false notion that prevails in the tribe, and even shows that it was this element that opened the way for the disintegration of the tribe and their "falling apart." This theme is best shown in the rise and fall of Okonkwo, who represents the best and the worst of this culture. Thus, Okonkwo himself symbolizes the representation of the is integration of the culture. The present paper explores the cross cultural disintegration in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

In a tribal society, the most imperative factor is the unity of the members of the tribe and their absolute compliance to the ruling of the elders as well as the gods and goddesses. This has gone astray when some of them acknowledge the values brought to them by the missionaries. This leads to an increasing outspokenness to Western thought and religion and allows for the ultimate exploitation and assimilation. Okonkwo is one of few who refuse to go along with and he ends up his life at the end of the novel. His repudiation is a form of confrontation to conforming to the ways of the white man as well as a denunciation of his own culture as he has made an appalling transgression in committing suicide and will not be buried in the warrior style that he deserved. In this way Okonkwo rejects his own tribe members for their weakness and lack of support. This tragedy is one that is shared by the entire tribe, with has "fallen apart." Thus the novel may be termed as a double tragedy, due to the flaw and fault of the hero, but also the weakness of the tribe, who despite their influence among the local clans, cannot defy the colonizing effort.

Chinua Achebe's inspiration in writing *Things Fall Apart* was predominantly to refute the harmful images or representations of Africa of Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Joyce Cary's *Saved* (1932) and Mister Johnson (1939), and H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887). In all these stories, "Africa" may be said to be no more than only an environment to the testing of the personality or heroism of their individualized white protagonists under various kinds of strain, to their sense of achieved, success or, alternatively, breakdown in a "hostile," "alien" or unfamiliar environment. The local or aboriginal characters existed in these stories either as tassel, marginalized, lurking vague figures or as empty-headed, complaisant servant while the scenery was only recorded in its "alien" detail, as it contrasted completely with the "familiar" and "naturalized"; realism of the west. It is worthwhile to quote Joseph Conrad's words:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, these would be a glimpse of rushing walls, of peaked grass-roofs a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage (5-6).

Achebe's annoyance with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* partly stems from the fact that Conrad's book is prescribed reading in universities across the world and it is therefore likely to prescribe people's views: it presents a wrong "image of Africa," even for the 1890s. Achebe's novels is written partly to offer a counteractive to Conrad's of *Cry's* images of Africa. At the same time it shows the Africa of the 1890s from a different point of view, to be a place where the local tribal lived in close synchronization with nature and not only that; the African had also, over the centuries, evolved a highly multifaceted social organization that responded to both his/her material and spiritual needs. And hence Achebe's prime task in *Things Fall Apart* is to be a "writer," "historian" or "teacher":

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I have set in the past) did no more than teach my [African] readers that their past – with all their imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans, acting on God's behalf, delivered them. (45).

The title of Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, owes to William Butler Yeats's poem *The Sound Coming*. Thing is made absolutely obvious also by the epigraph, taken from Yeats's poem, the Achebe epigraph to his novel. This epigraph, whose words are taken from the first four lines of *The Second Coming*, runs like this

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the Falconer

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Yeats's poem speaks of the break-down of the "old" order and its dislocation by a "new" order. Achebe's novel, too, is about the fragment of an "older" and established order. However, the image of the "rough beast" that "slouches towards Bethlehem" to "be born" springs from the *Spiritus Mundi*. Here Yeats speaks that Jesus Christ to be born again to bring back the society to a normal order. On the other hand, Achebe is perhaps not so much taken as Yeats is with the "new" order. Rather, he is preoccupied with *Things Fall(ing) Apart*, the collapse of the "old" order under the relentless ambush of the "new" order. It is Achebe's task in, *Things Fall Apart*, to objectively and dispassionately assess and examine the various reasons for the disintegration of the older, and settled, way of life. This intention is achieved through his tragic story of a man, Okonkwo, and his relationships, both with his community and his family.

The novel, though, outwardly deals with Okonkwo's tragic descend in meticulous and that of Igbo society in general; his rationale in writing the novel was to depict the self-motivated nature of the Igbo society. While depicting the native civilization, he presents them with their weaknesses with open mind. The Igbo society has its own weaknesses, its problems, infightings, decisive situations. But all these contribute to the society to reverberate with existence of new life. The tribal men try to reconcile the problems; when time comes, they are ready to inter old and clumsy customs. What Achebe portrays is that the Igbo society has a kind of dynamic nature, which is evolving with the time; but he also presents that when Christian missionaries come with their new-fangled faith and make an effort to expand their space in Igbo society, clashes embark on and disintegration of Igbo society starts happening.

Disintegration of Igbo society starts after the onslaught of Christianity. The idea of disintegration, on both an individual and social level, is one of the novel's central themes. The Christians arrive and bring division to the Igbo culture. The onset of white man is discussed by Obierika and Okonkwo in the chapter sixteen: During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan "An albino," suggested Okonkwo. According to his words:

“He was not an albino. He was white different.” He sipped his wine. “And he was riding an iron horse. The first people who saw away, but the stood beckoning to them. In the end the fearless ones went near and even touched him. The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them” (138).

It is in the sixteenth chapter that Achebe clearly presents the resolution of missionaries with an apparent reason in Umuofia. He writes: “The missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there, won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages”.(p143)

Further he writes about the ripples caused by the appearance of missionaries in following words: “The arrival of the missionaries had caused a considerable stir in the village of Mbanta. There were six of them and one was a white man. Every man and woman came out to see the white man”. (p 144). When all the people gather together, the white man starts speaking with the people of Mbanta. He has an interpreter with him, who is an Igbo man. Here Chinua Achebe presents the war of words that takes place between the white man and the Mbanta people. When the interpreter speaks about the son of God whose name is “Jesu Kristi,” derisive war of words breaks out. “You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must have a wife, then.” The crowd agreed. “I did not say He had a wife,” said the interpreter, somewhat lamely. (p 147)

The real clash begins when Okonkwo’s son is fascinated to Christianity. The new faith divides father from son, and the Christians seek to attack the very heart of Igbo belief. The white man pollutes the mind of the people that they are worshipping false gods, gods of wood and stones which are of nothing. He also tells them that their gods arte the gods of treachery who educate them to kill their own Kith and kins and obliterate innocent children. There is only one true God and He has the earth. the sky, them and him and all of them. While such talk is going on Okonkwo carefully listens everything and thinks that convinces himself that the man is crazy and goes to tap his palm-wine. In the beginning people of the village don’t take the missionaries seriously.

After the passing of some days, the missionaries request for a plot of land to construct their church. The village elders call upon a meeting and the matter is discussed and they make a decision to proffer the missionaries a portion of the Evil Forest. It was a place where all those who die of evil diseases like leprosy and smallpox are buried. It is also the burial ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they die. It is considered alive with ominous forces and powers of darkness. The plot is given to them and the people thought that everyone may be dead within four days. Days pass but not a soul dies. Everyone is bewildered. So they automatically thought that the white man has unbelievable power. Very soon they won the hearts of the African people and the people started converting into their culture one by one.

Mr. Kiaga is the in charge of the Mbanta church. Very soon Nwoye joins Christians and wants to read and write in a missionary school set up at Umofia. Mr. Kiaga's joy is very great. "Blessed is he who forsakes his father and mother for my sake," he intones. "Those that hear my words are my father and my mother." (p 151). Okonkwo is very enraged over all this. He is in his hut. A sudden vehemence rises within him. He has a great aspiration to take up his matchet and go to the church and swab out the entire vile and troublemaker gang.

Three converts has gone into the village and has boasted that all the gods are dead and powerless and that they are equipped to confront them by flaming all their shrines. And a minor clash ensues: "Go and burn your mothers' genitals," said one of the priests. The men were sized and beaten until they streamed with blood. After that nothing happened for a long time between the church and the clan". (pp 154-155.)

We might conclude then with the observation that what cultural memory delivers in Achebe's first novel is not so much a revalued past, recollected in a spirit of untroubled celebration, as ultimately, the opening out of the African consciousness to the possibility of its transcendence, to the historic chance of new collective being and existential project. He sense of the tragic clings nevertheless to this awareness, for Achebe is conscious that this historic chance, if real, is at best restricted and fragile. His vision is probably best expressed by the voice of the "Oracle" in his poem "Dereliction" (in the volume *Beware soul Brother*) inviting his question worshippers to a form of action, perhaps a collective affirmation, in the precarious space constituted by the strip of dry land between sea and shore at the ebbing of the tide:

Let them try the land Where the sea retreats
Let them try the land Where the sea retreats

Achebe's tragic vision of history is presented in these lines in apprehension with his utopianism. But to invoke the tragic dimension of Achebe's first novel is not merely to seek to uncover the scope of its statement of the colonial encounter in Africa, but also to reach for its contemplative character, the sense it contains of the general human condition As a necessary component of its exploration of the African experience, *Things Fall Apart* embodies this fundaments truth of the imaginative vision.

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