

Ethnic Reinterpretation, A Feminist Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to debate Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from the perception of reading as a woman. This reading is a genuine attempt to inquire all kind of patriarchal establishment that restrain the autonomy of woman and confines them as merely second sex. The experience of women characters in the novel communicates their own discernment for a life of choice. Analyzing *Things Fall Apart* from a female point of view this research paper attempts to consider the male characters and their connections with the women in the novel.

Key Words: Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender issues, culture

Things Fall Apart is a significant novel as it discusses the cultural issues of the African people and their attempts at resisting the colonial masters. The women here are doubly marginalized. As the tradition of society everywhere, the Nigerian culture is also masculine. African women were conventionally subordinated to chauvinist cultural customs. Colonial rule purely provoked the condition by introducing unbalanced situation. Achebe's women are unspoken and are insignificant. Patriarchy intrudes into every realm of life in the world of *Things Fall Apart* very tyrannically. It is an andocentric world where the man is everything and woman is only a second sex.

The society that Achebe portrayed is an agrarian one where the major crop cultivated is the Yam which is associated with virility and stands for manliness. Ironically women folk constitute the work force for farming, child rearing etc. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel believes that women belong to home. The women are imprisoned by the dogma of womanhood, the ideal of angel in the house. The women are prevented from narrating their experiences as body. These impediments will loom over them until and unless they are set free from the shackles that are binding them back.

A feminist reading of *Things Fall Apart* should investigate appraisals which imply Okonkwo is the only major figure in the novel, and alternatively consider the motivations of key female characters that are developed within the work. It is rather difficult to read as woman after being conditioned to read as man. In order to read as a woman a new tactic is to be formed a new line of reading by filing gaps and correcting distortions in the male centered reading. For centuries African women languished on the periphery of their cosmos as deserted, subjugated and indeed made to feel like outsiders.

Achebe's exhibits unapologetic chauvinist approach throughout the novel. Unoko Okonkwo's father is considered feminine. Agricultural produces having smaller size and lesser value are regarded female. The protagonist deems that the qualities such as wilderness, violence, strength and masculinity are undertones of his male characters. Such highlighting creates an imbalance a consequential erosion of female principle. This disparagement fetches Okonkwo to spoil just as much as it foreshadows the demise of his society's way of life. The novel is stinking with violent conflicts instanced by the utter lack of a sensible female influence. One instance of this nonexistence can be found in Achebe's employment of the folktale recounting the clash between Earth representing the fruitfulness, the female principle and Sky representing the male. The struggle between the earth and sky symbolize the clash between masculine and feminine authorities and codes. The existence of female principle could have maintained sanity. The modern day Nigeria is still in the same swamp as Umuofia of old because of a parallel scale of machismo.

Though the female characters in Achebe's fiction tend to speak softly, what they actually speak and represent is noteworthy, hence they are interesting too. What these female characters stand for is the key thing which the male oriented society does not even consider. In this novel the troubles faced by the protagonist from the opening till the conclusion originate from the unfair rapport connecting masculine and feminine codes. "Female self" is a cultural idea propagated by male authors and their examination of literature and culture posits female theorists. The worries and qualms of men were represented through female characters. For them texts are models of power. In this revisionist reading as an opposing reader of patriarchal mores the focal point is on the blueprints of authority and submission. Usually the female characters are distorted by their male counterpart

Female self is a cultural idea circulated by the male authors for the feminist critics and their investigation of literature and culture concerted on how male's worries and uncertainties were exposed through feminine temperament. In this revisionist reading as a defying reader the focus of attention is on the prototype of authority and compliance. The male characters bend females by combining them with deviance. Any woman identifies the interior colonization of women by men. It is more scrupulous than any other forms of segregation. The novel envisages woman as mere procreators. The toxic relationship of Ekwefi and Okonkwo is a testimony for the patriarchal perspective of women. The sufferings endured by Ojiugo, Okonkwo's youngest wife is yet

another example of patriarchal dominance. The solidarity with patriarchy is the sole primacy of the Igbo community rather than the safety of its women.

In this novel we find many women who are cast away from power and are muted in myriad ways. Those women who are portrayed as having some kind of power are displayed tyrannical. This reading as a feminist reader one focuses in designs of dominance and submission. The male characters misrepresent females by grouping them with nonconformity. As a woman one can witness the interior colonization of women by men. It is laborious than any other forms of exclusion. Achebe's female characters are generally marginalized individuals. Feminist critics concentrated on how male's fears and anxieties were portrayed through female characters. They saw texts as models of power. In the *Second Sex* Simon De Beauvoir asks a question. What is woman?. How is she constructed differently from men? She analyses that "she is constructed by men

Women are conditioned to become caretakers and men to rule. The feminist reading of this novel attempts to enact a part constructed on woman's identity, which is a societal hypothesis. Women in Achebe's novels are obviously left out from his community of readers. As writers they have commenced the task of countering Achebe of presenting a different view of African society and colonization, one which challenges Achebe's primary assumption that things could not fall apart for women because they never had been and never would be together

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