

**A REFLECTION OF MULTI-CULTURALISM IN  
“THINGS FALL APART”**

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**Abstract**

The paper discusses the tradition of Igbo culture and practices followed over times. The colonizers who penetrated the Igbo land put down the traditional culture of Igbo and restrained Igbo's to follow their culture. The paper talks about Igbo's genuine inborn urbanity and the slow retirement in following the rituals of Igbo land.

**Keywords:** colonizers, cultural clash, incarnation, disagreement, fusion.

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe rose by his parents in the Igbo town, rich in traditional African culture (Igbo culture), grew up in the deeply troubled colonization period. The period carried disputes; slowly their native customs were swept away by the colonizers. Igbo's experienced violence, rude authority, restricting freedom and force by the British colonizers. Igbo's are cultured people who inhabited Southern Nigeria. Theirs was an ancient language rich in tradition and culture. Achebe was carried by cultural fusion throughout his childhood; his family pertained as an Igbo tribe. Some Britishers prompted Nigerians to indulge in Christianity and they led his parents to believe in Christ. Achebe then brought up as a Christian, was more interested in the traditional Nigerian beliefs and faith. Cultural clash impacted him and he raised his voice through his writings. With age he showed more respect to his tradition. In 1950 Achebe was one among the founder of Nigerian literary movement and that influenced him to increase his interest over the oral culture of Nigerian indigenous people. Achebe depicts two major aspects in his writings

1. The shame Africans experienced during colonization.
2. The corruption and inefficiency after colonial rule.

The novel *Things fall apart* was published two years before the independence of Nigeria in 1960. Achebe wants to show the richness of his own Igbo culture to his countrymen to contribute to the

development of building their nation. The white colonizers are wise, they arrived and polluted peaceful Igbo environment with their religion and ideologies. Nigerians were so blind that they allowed the whites to stay; with his views he captured the natives' attention. The whites strongly pierced their brotherhood and divided them. "The white man is very clever; he came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (125)

In 1958 much of Africa was still under colonist yoke, less part of Africa already attained independence. Achebe takes priority in informing the world that African people did not hear about culture for the very first time from Europeans, their society was not careless but they often had philosophies in great depth, values and beauty. Africans possessed knowledge about poetry above all they have dignity. It is this dignity they have lost during the colonial period and those they must regain. "African people did not hear about culture for the first time from Europeans; it is this dignity that African people all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain" (Hawker 21). Achebe portrayed pre-colonial Africa and Igbo's civilization in *Things Fall Apart*. When the colonial rule penetrated Africa they firmly established their authority in demolishing the character of the Igbo community, its values and freedom. Europeans altered their culture. The Igbo tribes were so distinct, never mingled with the migrated people of other cultures. The tribes carried their culture to the next generation.

It is known that, culture is a practice, a strong belief, a continuity of knowledge which has been practiced or followed over time. Culture is a group of activities which is formulated by ancient people who lived over years. Culture is a symbol of livelihood, each locality carries unique culture which includes an art, challenge for living, social interactions, behavior, celebrations, manners, civilization etc. In other terms it is a segregation to highlight the richness, the way of living, social communication, celebration, festivals, work place, customs. Culture is a symbol to mark and distinguish attire and body language. People of different cultures worship and follow different gods and goddesses. In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe brings out this difference through these lines, "The week of peace, as Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess, says: we live in peace with our fellows to honor our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow" (Achebe 22).

Achebe states about earth goddess without whom their harvest is impossible. If any individual angers the earth goddess the entire community will face troubles. In Igbo culture Chukwu is the supreme god. According to hierarchy Agbala is the god of future. In each Nigerian village Agbala chooses a priestess who acts as the voice to Agbala. In *Things Fall Apart* Chillo is the priestess. When Agbala spoke everyone listened. Down the hierarchy Chukwu is the pantheon of deities, Amadiora is the god of thunder, Ufiojioku is the god of harvest, Anyanwu is the sun god. The most important god among these deities is Ani, the earth goddess. Humans are instructed to live righteously by submitting their lives to the ethics of the community. If they went against the practice of ritual acts they would be punished for their offence. "If for any reason human beings transgress these rules, they are expected to atone for their offences by performing prescribed ritual acts of expiation" (Isidore 69).

Another aspect referred to in the novel is the funeral practice termed as Akwamozu. The natives believed that they have a life after physical death. Igbo's believe in the existence of evil spirits (Umunadi). The children who died in infancy (Ogbanje) are believed to be born again. The people well lived; liked by all, take a form of incarnation after physical death. Igbo has a rich culture. They show their cultural symbols in art, music, attire, food, death rituals, marriage,

religious beliefs etc. Igbo's were unique in expressing their thoughts, speech and actions. Among the Igbo the art of conversation was regarded very high. Igbo's were very conscious to guard their culture; they mentor their beliefs and customs to their children. They worked hard to keep their culture; men showed their richness by marrying several wives, while a man who marries once is looked as a very poor person. In the novel *Things Fall Apart* Okonkwo had many wives. He is dominant and short tempered man. To show his supremacy he behaves aggressive when he is at home. "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand, his wives especially the youngest lived in perpetual fear" (Achebe 10). Igbo's were very particular in naming their children. They describe a deep meaning to each name which reflected the experience occurred when the child was born. This was very unique.

The novel also talks about cultural clash. Clash of culture is a disagreement between two parties of various beliefs, values and practices. The extent of colonization paved a way for clash of culture. Towards the end Achebe speaks about Okonkwo's son Nwoye (who in the later portion takes the Christian name Issac) joins the Christian religion leaving his family and forgetting his own religion. He practices Christian Culture. Okonkwo's anger helped Nwoye to leave his home. Christian missionaries grabbed Igbo people to follow their religion, and they raised issues in ways of worshipping. Missionaries preached that their views are the real and valid. They discarded the person who tends to disagree Christian culture. This is how missionaries who arrived at Mbanta changed the local people from their native religion. Christian missionaries never gave importance to Igbo's custom and tradition, this created clash between two cultures. Christian missionaries stopped Igbo people from following their funeral practices. Mr. Brown's child is dead, funeral customs were organized to practice. Mr. Smith (missionary) started rebelling that those who so ever practice and believe unworthy things are unworthy to give their presence in the lord's stable. Cultural fusion did not resolve things in *Things Fall Apart*. The rituals of Igbos are followed still, but there are some converts to the Christian religion. The major occupation is farming and trading but there are musicians, hunters, blacksmiths, builders, carvers and to a lesser extent fishermen. Amidst conflicts both Igbo culture and English culture exist apart in *Things Fall Apart*.

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