

**DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S
*THINGS FALL APART***

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The decade 1950s is mainly recognized as a decade of liberation. It was a golden period for third world nations. After all they were getting free from a long suppressive colonial rule. Chiefly African and Asian countries were the victims of this cruel colonization. Indian sub-continent also had to suffer a lot by the hands of British rulers. Similarly Nigeria and Ghana African countries also suffered a lot by the imperial forces. The literature of 1960s known as post-colonial literature brilliantly represents the pains of this oppression. Third world literature or post-colonial literature can be defined as a literature which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship and offers a reshaping or rewriting of the dominant meanings pertaining to race, authority, space and identity prevalent under colonial and decolonizing conditions. Mainly post-colonial writing sets out to resist and challenge colonialist perspectives. The chief aim of this literature is seems to awake cultural and political nationalism. It describes popular revolts against colonial rule and exposes the real suppressed condition of the natives which was described in colonial perspective long ago in imperial writings.

Post- colonial writings bring fore the neglected groups which were written out by the groups at centre. The marginalized communities, their myths, legends and culture is given space in this writing. In order to overcome experiences of alienation under colonialism writers try to recapture the lost history and cultural heritage by reviving local languages and cultures. Post-colonial writers are trying to establish their own identity and culture in their native languages. Homi Bhabha opines that identities in the colonial encounter are never stable or fixed. Colonial encounters are transactions between the colonizer and the colonized. The author tries to subvert the colonial authority from the inside; by the colonial or by the natives. Finally we can say that world literature presents the dimensions of conflict. The natural areas of conflict are identity crisis, culture crisis and language crisis. I would like to focus on some spheres of conflict in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

The novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a post-colonial novel written by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. It has gain a wide fame as a unique piece of writing in world literature. The title of the novel comes from a line in W. B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming". At first sight it seems a simple story of the life of Okonkwo, an Ibo leader and local wrestling champion of a small Nigerian village Umuofia. The novel is not just about describing his family, personal history, the customs and society of the Igbo. At second glance we find that the novel widely describes the influence of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on the Igbo community. The novel *Things Fall Apart* is set in Pre-colonial Nigeria in the 1890s. It highlights the fight between colonialism and traditional societies. As we know that post-colonial literature

exposes the protest and resistance of the natives or colonized; *Things Fall Apart* also depicts various conflicts.

The protagonist Okonkwo is a famous wrestler in the surrounding villages; at the very beginning he defeats a wrestler nick-named 'the cat' who was supposed to be unconquerable. Okonkwo is strong, hard-working, and ambitious young man. He wants to dispel his father Unoka's tainted legacy of being effeminate (he borrowed and lost money, and neglected his wife and children) and cowardly. Here, we see a conflict between richness and poverty as well as between masculine and feminine virtues. Okonkwo hates the way of life lived by his father. He wants to be famous and wealthy. He works to build his wealth entirely on his own, as Unoka died a shameful death and left many unpaid debts. He is also obsessed with his masculinity, and any slight compromise on this masculinity is swiftly destroyed.

Okonkwo has three wives and eight children. He has a complete authority over them. He punishes them for their faults. Here we see the conflict between patriarchal and matriarchal dominance. He violates the Week of Peace when he beats his youngest wife, Ojiugo, because she went to braid her hair at a friend's house and forgot to prepare the afternoon meal and feed her children. As depicted:

Okonkwo knew she was not speaking the truth. He walked back to his obi to await Ojiugo's return. And when she returned he beat her very heavily. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace. His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess. (Achebe 31)

Later, he severely beats and shoots a gun at his second wife, Ekwefi, because she took leaves from his banana plant. He beats his son Nwoye also who leaves his house and converts himself in Cristian religion at the end. They are obliged to follow his strict rules. He is wealthy, courageous, and powerful among the people of his village.

There is a fight between Umuofia and Mbaino villages. Okonkwo fights on the behalf of his villagers and wins. Later on there is an agreement for peace settlement. Because Okonkwo is a leader of his community, he is asked to care for a young boy named Ikemefuna, who is given to the village as a peace offering by neighbouring village Mbaino to avoid war with Umuofia. Ikemefuna befriends Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, and Okonkwo becomes inwardly fond of the boy.

Then we have a universal conflict of tradition v/s modernity and rationality v/s emotions. People of Umofia village are too much superstitious. Here we find a condition too much similar with Indian culture. Each person has his/her particular *Chi* (personal god). This *Chi* is responsible for all the good and bad happenings with the person. Ikemefuna's death opens a Pandora's Box for Okonkwo. His bad time starts just after the death of Ikemefuna. It was thought that the gods are angry and there will be no harvest. The coming of locusts was taken to be as an auspicious sign. After the coming of the locusts, Ogbuefi Ezeuder, the oldest man in the village, relays to Okonkwo a message from the Oracle. The Oracle says that Ikemefuna must be killed as part of the retribution for the Umuofian woman killed three years earlier in Mbaino. He tells Okonkwo not to involve in the murder, but Okonkwo doesn't listen. He feels that not participating would be a sign of weakness. Consequently, Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna with his machete.

Okonkwo becomes depressed after killing Ikemefuna, so he tells the whole incident to his best friend, Obierika, who criticizes his act of Ikemefuna's killing. Obierika says that Okonkwo's act will upset the Earth and the earth goddess will seek revenge. Soon after we see that a public

trial is held on the village commons. Nine clan leaders, including Okonkwo, represent the spirits of their ancestors. The nine clan leaders, or Egwugwu, also represent the nine villages of Umuofia. This jury orders the women's brother to send her again to her husband in spite of the fact that he beats her daily. Here we see female suppression at the hands of patriarchy.

Again we come across the age old superstitions of Ibo culture when Chielo tells Ekwefi (Okonkwo's second wife) that Agbala (the Oracle of the Hills and Caves) needs to see Ezinma. Although Okonkwo and Ekwefi protest, Chielo takes a terrified Ezinma on her back and forbids anyone to follow. Chielo carries Ezinma to all nine villages and then enters the Oracle's cave. Ekwefi follows secretly, in spite of Chielo's admonitions, and waits at the entrance of the Oracle. In Ibo culture nearly every person has the power to hear his personal spirits who governs their destiny and actions. This whole concept is contrary to educated European people.

The long list of the unique rules of Ibo culture extends when Ogbuefi Ezeudu dies. During the large funeral, Okonkwo gives him a tribute by firing his gun but his gun goes off, and Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son is killed accidentally. Though it was totally accidental Okonkwo didn't have any such intention of killing an innocent child. But the accidental killing of a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess, Okonkwo and his family were exiled from Umuofia for seven years. The family moves to Okonkwo's mother's native village, Mbanta. After they depart Umuofia, a group of village men destroy Okonkwo's compound and kill his animals to cleanse the village of Okonkwo's sin. Obierika stores Okonkwo's yams in his barn and wonders about the old traditions of the Igbo culture. Here we find the conflict between destiny and ambition. Okonkwo wants to be famous but his acts leads him towards defame. He has to live a life in exile. The concept of sin and punishment is universal in all culture. As Okonkwo has committed a sin by killing a clansman he has to receive punishment. Okonkwo is depressed, and he blames his *chi*(personal spirit) for his failure to achieve lasting greatness.

Till now, we have seen conflict within Ibo culture; in the second part of the novel we see the major conflict; European and Nigerian confrontation (intercultural conflict), white v/s black: - culture, religion and language clash. The protest of colonized against colonizers. During Okonkwo's second year in exile Obierika comes and recounts sad news about the village of Abame: the very act of killing a white man by the villagers as their oracle told them that he was a threat for the freedom of their clan and culture. It is a beginning of resistance. The native's dislikes the intruders on their land. The white man criticizes Ibo culture, gods and customs publicly. "He told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of woods and stone... the true god lived on high and that all men when they died went before Him for judgement. Evil man and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm oil." (Achebe 149) It infuriates the natives and they kill him.

Later on six missionaries arrive in Mbanta. The white man speaks to the people about Christianity. Okonkwo believes that the man speaks nonsense, but his son, Nwoye, is captivated and becomes a convert of Christianity. The Christian missionaries build a church on land given to them by the village leaders. However, the land is a part of the Evil Forest, and according to tradition, the villagers believe that the missionaries will die because they built their church on cursed land. But when nothing happens to the missionaries, the people of Mbanta conclude that the missionaries possess extraordinary power and magic. The first recruits of the missionaries are *efulefu*, the weak and worthless men of the village. Other villagers, including a woman, soon convert to Christianity. The missionaries then go to Umuofia and start a school.

Meanwhile Okonkwo's exile is over, so his family returns to Umuofia. He finds that the village has changed during his absence. Many men have renounced their titles and have

converted to Christianity. The white men have built a prison; they have established a government court of law, where people are tried for breaking the white man's laws; and they also employ natives of Umuofia. Okonkwo wonders why the Umuofians have not incited violence to rid the village of the white man's church and oppressive government. He decides to take revenge of the damage of his Ibo culture. He addresses his people:

Let us not reason like cowards," said Okonkwo. "If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see." Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia. (Achebe 165)

Violent actions occurred after Enoch, an overzealous convert to Christianity, unmasks an egwugwu. In retaliation, the egwugwu burn Enoch's compound and then destroy the Christian church because the missionaries have caused the Igbo people many problems. When the District Commissioner learns about the destruction of the church and asks six leaders of the village, including Okonkwo to meet him in his office. They are imprisoned until they pay a fine of two hundred and fifty bags of cowries. The people of Umuofia collect the money and pay the fine, and the men are set free.

There was a big gathering next day at a meeting for clansmen. From the British District Officer, five court messengers arrive to stop the gathering of the Ibo group. Suddenly, Okonkwo jumps forward in front of white messengers. In a moment of frustration and anger he kills the head of the messengers; he beheads the man with his machete. Okonkwo was unable to gain the support of his people. When none of the other clansmen attempt to stop the messengers who escape, Okonkwo realizes that they will never go to war and that Umuofia will surrender. His final attempt to defend his Igbo world and to regain his lost honour among his people remains unfulfilled. Everything has fallen apart for Okonkwo; he shatters to the heart. He commits suicide by hanging himself. Again he loses the right to be buried by his clansman as according to the Ibo culture it was a sin against mother earth to commit suicide. His clansman leave his dead body on the decision of the white authorities.

In conclusion it can be stated that though Okonkwo did not succeed in winning his lost honour and mother earth but he had started a slight protest against colonial rule. He was a forerunner to regain his Ibo culture and country which was uncaptured by the Europeans. The worldwide clash of racialization also emerges from his struggle which is still demanding for equality and has achieved at some extent.

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