

# The Hero's Fall Indicates the Cultural Fall

**Witharana Pathirannehelage Chamila Jeewanthi**

Trincomalee Campus of Eastern University

*Chami5612@gmail.com*

"If you are not prepared to use force defend civilization than be prepared to accept barbarism"

-Sowell-

The quote by Thomas Sowell, a well known American author describes perfectly one of the reflecting themes in Chinua Achebe's novel 'Things Fall Apart' from the perspectives of both Europeans and Umuofians like main character Okonkwo. Chinua Achebe is a great Nigerian novelist, essayist, poet, short story writer and children's writer. He starts the novel within great opening stanza.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer:

Things fall apart: the center cannot hold:

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."

-W.B.Yeats "The second coming"-

The statement of the 'Hero's fall indicates the cultural fall' can be proved with the reference to Achebe's great novel 'Things Fall Apart.'

This is the story about Okonkwo, A great man of the village Umuofia in Nigeria. He is very mulish to his emotions and feelings. He is a leading character, main protagonist who symbolizes the many Nigerians or Africans who struggle against the white missionaries. He signifies as the core of Igbo tribe and its people believe Okonkwo as representative of the god. Totally the novel expresses literary nativism in African literature. The author describes about the traditional Igbo culture and about the leading character Okonkwo, within first half of the novel. In the later part, he describes about the cultural breakdown of their tribe. Further Achebe tries to highlight, things

indeed start to fall apart due to the absence of the tribe's most honored man Okonkwo.

"A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people"

-Mahatma Gandhi-

As a self-made, well-respected leading member of the Umuofian clan, each and every time Okonkwo tries to protect their culture for the survival of his clan. But during his exiling period, Europeans try to convert Igbo people to Christianity. As a clan people; they have many kinds of traditional values of their culture. Their beliefs include polygamy, polytheism and patriarchy of rule by men. Their religious beliefs dictate many customs and rituals including communal ceremonies. Traditional Igbo culture bases on an earth goddess and a creator god. Their culture represents the identity of its people's values. As a representative of all those things, Okonkwo tries to protect his culture for the survival of their clan. When he rules his clan as a leader, there is no any obstacle, threat for the survival of their culture. But with the exiling of Okonkwo, the white settlers make the people of Umuofia very comfortable with the new laws.

"The arrival of the missionaries has caused a considerable stir in the village of Mbanta."

(Achebe pg.138)

Christian missionaries begin to invade Umuofia and surrounding villages, but people who live in the village don't know how to respond or what to believe anymore. Here Okonkwo also caught between two conflicting cultures. When Enoch, one of the converters unmasks an Egwungu, it is the starting point of destruction of their Igbo culture. It symbolically expresses the main falling point of Okonkwo's culture. With this main circumstance, it starts to fall down the culture of Igbo clan.

The traditional changes affect personally to the Okonkwo's character. The Igbo people caught between resisting and adhering to the change. Okonkwo is an inflexible worrier of their clan. He does many things to show his disapproval of the western people taking over his home place. Such as burning the church and killing the messenger. He says,

"The earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger" Okonkwo said. "A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts in to its palm"

(Okonkwo pg.58)

Okonkwo believes the Igbo people should join together to forcefully remove the western people. But after a village meeting, the villagers react negatively.

"He knew that Umuofia wouldn't go to war. They had broken in to tumult instead of action"

(Achebe 205)

Through this line, we can understand how far Okonkwo becomes with confusion, hopeless regarding his Igbo clan. Each and every time he wants to save his tribes from the Christianity. But finally he realizes that it is a useless one. At the end, he loses everything. There are certain events, things both internally and externally that eventually lead things to fall apart.

As an individual man he fights against the missionaries, not for himself, he fights till his last moment for the survival of Igbo culture. If he tries to save his tribe from Europeans, at least he couldn't have saved his own son Nwoye from their culture. Continually he tries to fight the changes within Igbo society, but the clan doesn't assist him.

His final act of suicide is the ultimate illustrations of things falling apart. Because it is the first and only time that Okonkwo purposefully breaks a law of the clan. He continually fights until his last moment, chooses to live and die on his own terms rather than submit to the white man. He knows that Christianity and the white people win and they are more powerful than his culture. Okonkwo tries to explain his people,

"He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."

(Achebe pg.176)

If how far Okonkwo tries to protect the laws, traditions, values of their culture during his lifetime, in the final moment he breaks down their one custom. Commits suicide is a greatest sin as their custom. But he tends to do like that; sometime he may think self-sacrifice is better than submit to the Europeans.

There is a cultural clash between Okonkwo and new generation. The main reason for the cultural clash is lack of social interaction and understanding between the cultures. Within the final moment, Obierika says,

"The man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia, you drove him to kill himself: and how he will be buried like a dog..." he couldn't say anymore. His voice trembled and choked his words."

Okonkwo is the only spiritual force who leads to save their culture. His fall symbolically indicates the cultural fall of Igbo people. However Okonkwo begins to fall out of favor with the clans and decent signals the crumbling of traditional Umuofian society.

Culture represents us an identity we as person, but what will occur when someone or something comes and makes we leave all of our customs, traditions behind and make us as new ones? The same context particularly happens to the considerable figure Okonkwo, things fall apart.

The novel *Things Fall Apart* labeled as a "Ethnographic novel" Okonkwo is a tragic hero, in the classical sense, although he is a superior leading character of the novel. With the Okonkwo's death, Umuofian culture burials forever. As a spiritual leading power of Umuofia, Okonkwo's fall symbolically indicates the entire destruction and fall down of Umuofian culture.

"Sometimes good things fall apart. So

Better things can fall together."

-Marilyn Monroe-

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