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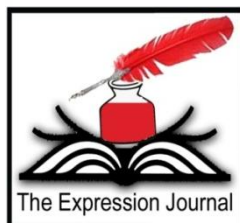
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THE FLAVOUR OF TRIBAL LIFE IN *THINGS FALL APART*

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Abstract

Things Fall Apart is divided into three parts and twenty-five chapters. The first part of the novel describes how Okonkwo was able to go up in life through sheer hard work although his father had the reputation of being both physically weak and lazy. It also describes the circumstances under which a boy from one of the neighbouring villages comes to Umuofia and is assigned to stay in Okonkwo's house. It also describes how Ikemefuna was finally killed by the villagers of Umuofia as a revenge for one of their own women having been killed by a person from the villages to which Ikemefuna belonged. The closing chapter of part one also describes how Okonkwo had to flee from his village and clan because he had killed a boy from the village accidentally. Part two of the novel describes primarily Okonkwo's life in Mbanta during his exile for seven years. It also describes how during those years the white man – first the missionaries and later the administrators had come and entrenched themselves in Umuofia and its neighbouring village. The Flavour of Tribal Life begins with the summary of the novel. It also describes in detail the life style of Igbo people, their customs religious and superstitious beliefs, eating habits, agriculture culture pattern, festivals, marriage and funeral rites and also the use of proverbs, folk tales and folk songs as a pattern of their language.

Abbreviations: TFA: *Things Fall Apart*

Keywords

Tribal life – first part – rituals – Superstitious beliefs – religion.

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Chinua Achebe is the best-known novelist not only from Nigeria but from the entire continent of Africa. He is perhaps the first African writer whose books have been prescribed as a part of the Curriculum in Africa, although his earlier writings were definitely aimed at foreign audiences in Europe and America. As the first black novelist from Africa not only has he got an appreciative global readership but also an acclaim which is richly deserved. He is now not only one of the most widely translated Novelists in the world but is also one of the most universally respected.

Each of Achebe's novels sheds light on a different era in the recent history of Nigeria. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is set in a traditional Ibo village community at the turn of the century when the first European missionaries and administrative officials were beginning to penetrate inland.

The novel is set during the late 1800s/early 1900s in a small village called Umuofia situated in the southeastern part of Nigeria. The time period is important, as it was a period in colonial history when the British were expanding their influence in Africa, economically, culturally, and politically. Umuofia is an Igbo village with very well defined traditions. It is a village that is respected by those around it as being powerful and rich. Each person has a hut or *obi* that is located in the center of a compound. Each of the wives has a separate *obi* with a shed for goats and an attached chicken coop. The main occupation of the men is sowing and growing yams since yams are considered as king of crops

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The last part of the novel describes how Okonkwo, disappointed at his not being able to earn the highest title of the land through a quirk of fate, decides to show his personal valour and courage by confronting the white man's administration. Finding himself isolated after he had killed the white man's messenger, Okonkwo commits suicide. In the Ibo codes of ethics committing suicide is so abdominal a sin that he cannot get even a proper burial. Thus ends the tragic tale of an individual who at one time was the most respected individual in Umuofia but who had been defeat by his temperament as well the changed, circumstances.

Igbo society is not seen as a collection of individual each with his own rights and liberties in an atomistic manner but rather as collection of individual in groups that systematically and progressively became enlarged. The structure can be linked to concentric circles that expand outwardly in a systematic manner, the large circles and yet allowing them to maintain their identities and structures at the same time using the identities and structures of the smaller circles to maintain the integrity and strength of larger circles in a rather symbolic manner.

A religion that is both mysterious and homely is revealed. Its vitality calls upon the sincerity of its followers who support it with a lot of conviction. Achebe also informs the reader about the life of the tribe, its customs, and manners, its government, and its administration of justice, its religious rites and beliefs etc. The town crier informs the residents of Umuofia to gather at the market place the following day. Okonkwo discerned a distinct tragic note in the voice of the crier and wondered as to what could have happened. The next morning nearly ten thousand gathered at the market place to listen to Ezeugo, a powerful orator. Ezeugo explains "Those sons of wild animals have dared to murder a daughter of Umuofia" (TFA 11). He informs the audience that a woman of Umuofia, the wife of Ogbuefi Udo, has been murdered by residents of Mbaino, a neighbouring cluster of villages. It is decided to serve an ultimatum to Mbaino that they choose between a compensation of virgin and a young man in the onslaught of war with it. So Mbaino decided to pay the compensation on the girl was replaced the murdered wife of Udo while the boys fate would be decided by the residents of Umuofia later.

Certain superstitious and religious beliefs like importance of the Oracle of the hills and caves are also highlighted. The central image of their culture is contained in the concept of chi, which occurs throughout the novel. A personal 'chi' is their destiny, his inner self, "you wouldn't challenge your chi" (TFA 58) to a wrestling match, as did Okonkwo when he assisted in the killing of Ikemefuna. Whom he loved and who called him father. Okonkwo sins not only against the earth Goddess, protector of family relations, but also against his inner most feeling or his 'chi'. If any bad luck that occurs people of this culture would say that 'you have a bad chi'.

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The Ibo people believe in the spirits of the ancestors as well as an almighty Oracle or God whom, they consult in times of need. Worshipping the ancestral spirits is considered as important religious custom. Okonkwo has the wooden symbols of his personal God, and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nuts, food and palm-wine and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself his three wives and eight children (TFA 13).

Another superstitious belief among the Ibo is their belief about sacred silk cotton tree. "There is an ancient tree near the play ground on ancient silk-cotton tree that is sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young woman who desired children came to sit under its shade" (TFA 42).

The Feast of the New Yam in Umuofia is held just before the harvesting begins, and it also coincides with the beginning of the New Year. Achebe depicts the Locusts that descend upon the village in highly allegorical terms that prefigure the arrival of the white settlers, who will feast on and exploit the resources of Igbo. The fact that the Igbo eat these Locusts highlight show innocuous they take them to be similarly those who convert to Christianity fail to realise the damage that the culture of the colonizer does to the culture to the colonised.

Social customs such as marriage ceremonies, funeral arrangements, and gaining of titles are described in great detail to give the reader a glimpse of the way of life of Igbo, especially that of clan members of Umuofia. Igbo is a society in which people are respected and publicity honoured for physical strength. It is a society in which people judges a person on his or her own performance and not on the basis of the status of the parents. It is a society in which a person's wealth can be judges from the number of political titles he possesses or the number of wives he has because for acquiring both titles as well as for a wife a person has to pay a substantial amount of money.

The death of Ezeudu provides the author with an opportunity to describe a common event in the life of clan; a Funeral. The Funeral also permits the narrator to express the philosophy that under lies all of the clan's activities and beliefs; from birth to death he says a man's life is a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors. Many folk – tales are related in the novel like the story of the tortoise, the story of mosquito etc. The story of tortoise reveals the strange nuances of their society and culture as well as the importance of their stories and the value. Morals and values are described through these seemingly simple tales of animals.

Art is and always was at the service of man. Ancestors created their myths and told their stories for human purpose. (Achebe Chinua 43). "Achebe uses the folk stories as a literary technique to make subtle and indirect comments on the behavior of characters to make authorial observations on particular events and episodes and to create some comic relief after a tense moment." (Kala Ogbaa 54).

Chinua Achebe gives a powerful insight into a fabric of Igbo tribe in *Things Fall Apart*. The novel reinforce the knowledge and understanding of Igbo culture to the world. He also gives a kaleidoscopic view of the Igbo religion and ceremonies.

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