

A Comparative study of Cultural History in *Things Fall Apart* and *Death and the King's Horseman*

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Abstract

Each tribe is identified by its culture. Culture differs according to the natural setting. According to culture history is perfectly identified through novels. Nowadays culture studies play a vital role in giving significant ideas to future generation, because modern society has destructed culture. Each culture has certain norms and specialities. These elements are explored through the history. Africa has a peculiar culture. This paper analyses the culture of different tribes Igbo and Yoruba with regard to their customs, rituals, marriage, funeral with special reference to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. Facts of the cultural history is a gate way of process to know more about culture.

Key words: Culture, Customs, Tribe, Rituals, Tradition.

Culture is following the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular ethnic group of people in different places, which has a significant value in ceremonial ornaments, costume and artefacts. Constantly culture is rapidly identified by the people. Culture is constructed by society; so society could not function without cultural norms. History is the study of past events as relates to a particular people, country, period, etc. Historical data contains information of how people and societies lived and behaved in the past. Contemporary novels, poems, newspapers, books depict the historical facts on time.

Chinua Achebe belongs to Nigeria and he explores Igbo culture. He has written many novels based on the Igbo culture. Geographically, Igbo homeland is divided into two unequal sections by the Niger River. One is eastern and the other is western section. The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa.

Things Fall Apart is based on customs, tradition, celebrations, rituals and hospitality of the Igbo clan. An Igbo person of South-eastern Nigeria follows Igbo culture. Achebe depicts the conversion of the Igbo people into Christianity and the decline of the Igbo culture.

Okonkwo, who is the protagonist of the novel, is a great warrior as well as a follower of culture. He is an important man in the Igbo tribe. The author describes the Igbo people's attitude in two ways such as pre – colonialism and post – colonialism. Before colonialism people followed their own culture, later on after colonialism they changed attitude, modified their surroundings and followed the new western tradition.

Okonkwo, the protagonist followed the Igbo culture until his end. He is a greatest warrior and a wealthy man in Umuofia clan and a respected person. Obierika, Okonkwo's friend was celebrating his daughter's Uri.

Everybody had been invited men, women and children. But it was really a woman's ceremony and the central figures were bride and her mother. As soon as day broke, breakfast was hastily eaten and women and children began to gather at Obierika's compound to help the bride's mother in her difficult but happy task of cooking for a whole village. (Achebe 156-57).

Through this betrothal ceremony people's unity, helping tendency and hospitality is seen.

Mostly Igbo people followed their traditional work farming. Entire Igbo men are farmers. During the feast of the New Yam, Umuofia is in a festival mood. "It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani the earth goddess and source of all fertility" (51). The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honour the earth goddess and ancestral spirits of the clan. All cooking pots, calabashes and wooden bowls are thoroughly washed especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded. "Yam foo-foo and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration." (52). The Yam festival is part of their tradition.

According to Igbo culture, Death in old age is accepted as blessing, after the death the person is clothed in the finest garments. The corpse is placed on a stool in a sitting position. Old friends and relatives visit and pay their last respect. Young men wrap the corpse in grass mats, carry it out to the burial grounds and bury it. Ezeudu is an important man in the society so people celebrated his funeral grandly. Canons and riffles are used in the funeral ceremony. While gun shooting Okonkwo used his gun unexpectedly as a result Ezeudu's son was killed. So Okonkwo was exiled from the village for seven years.

During this time Christianity entered into the Igbo society and the colonizers started to rule the Igbo land. British rule brought about changes in culture. Through colonisation, Christianity was introduced into Umuofia society. Igbo culture moved on to new cultural aspects. Two years later Obierika informed about the white colonisation and the conversion of many to Christianity. Even his son Nwoye became a Christian. Aspects of Igbo culture such as construction of houses, education and religion changed during colonialism. According to Igbo tradition, they built houses of mud with thatched roofs. Due to the impacts of colonialism people constructed house with cements blocks and zinc roofs.

During colonialism people converted to Christianity. Initially missionaries stayed in the Evil forest. People did not to allow them in their village, Mbanta. The village people had a wrong opinion about Evil Forest, they believed that anyone who passes through the evil forest will be dead. The colonizer stayed in the evil forest.

The next morning the crazy men actually began to clear a part of the forest and build their house. The inhabitants of Mbanta expected them all to be dead with in four days. The first day passed and the second and third and fourth, and none of them died. Everyone was puzzled and then it became known that the white man's fetish had unbelievable power. (206-07)

Nneka is excluded from the family and tribe as her children died. Later on she meets the Mr. Kiaga, the leader of missionary to accept her and convert her to Christianity. Mr. Brown with his kind speeches, lovable character easily binds the people to convert them to Christian. He built many schools, hospitals, etc., through this people believed them and praises the western culture.

Like the Igbo culture, Yoruba culture is followed by a large group of African people. The Yoruba dominate the western part of the country, most Yoruba live in Nigeria. Their language belongs to the congo-kordofanian language family like Tonal language. The Yoruba society has different ethnic communities such as Muslims and Christians, yet Yoruba still follow the traditional religion of their ancestors.

Wole Soyinka's entire works represent Yoruba culture. *Death of the King's Horse Man*, is a play based on the real incident of the Yoruba society.

Death and the King's Horse Man shows the traditional events as well as the colonizer's impact on the society. This play represents the tradition of western African ritual death and civilization. According to the Yoruba culture, the ritual death should be followed by the death of king, when the king dies the king's horseman, king's dog and horse all should accompany the king by the traditional way. The horse man's spirit is essential to helping the chief's spirit ascend to the afterlife. Otherwise, the king's spirit will wander in the Earth and bring harm to the Yoruba people. This event is portrayed in the play by Soyinka.

Yoruba people are ready to celebrate the ritual suicide of Elesin, who is the king's horseman. The whole day singers praise him and enthusiastically celebrate his ritual death. Pilkings, the colonizer is against the events because it is an immature action. According to law it is a crime, but Yoruba people strongly stand for their ritual and tradition.

Elesin's eldest son, who studies medicine in England is against his father's wish in prolonging the ritual death. Informed of the king's death, he comes home to bury his father and asks Pilkings not to interfere. While he seems to hear distant drums to announce his father's death, he leaves to see his dead body. Elesin is brought in alive and in handcuffs. Elesin feels ashamed, falls on his son's feet, but Olunde refuses to recognize him.

The last scene takes place in Elesin's improvised prison. Pilkings gives him a message from Olunde, who regrets his reaction and would like to have his father's blessing before going back to England. Soon afterwards, on Olunde's written demand, Elesin's people are let in with a burden, a courier by which Elesin should send the waiting king a message to tell him that he may set out on the journey alone, without him.

When Elesin asks to see the courier, the face of Olunde, dead, is disclosed. The whites are shocked and Elesin, by one quick movement, strangles himself. His young wife, who accompanied him to prison, closes his eyes.

Cultural history is found through novels, plays and poems of the contemporary days. The novel *Things Fall Apart* and the play *Death and the King's Horseman* portray the culture and tradition values of the Igbo and Yoruba people.

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