

Things Fall Apart: A study on cultural conflict in the Post-colonial context

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe's cult novel things fall apart has to be studied from the view of cultural conflict. The protagonist of the novel Okonkwo's cultural identity is contrary to the non-African readers. Cultural conflict within the tribal groups is natural features which could be understood within their cultural practices .Okonkwo has been remained as a symbol of failed inheritor of Igbo culture which he advocated in his life time and took the decision of committing suicide against his own Igbo cultural belief.Okonkwo's failures are not the failures of African tribal culture, the failure is forced by Christian imperialism. Okonkwo is the victim of this imperialism. His rejection of his father is echoed at the end of the novel from the rejection of his son. African tribal culture has to be understood from anthropological context. Evolution of practices are directly linked with anthropology.

Key Words: Culture, cultural conflict, postcolonialism, imperialism

Introduction:

Chinua Achebe, a remarkable African novelist had achieved fame from the novel things fall apart, his meticulous attempt of decolonizing British cultural legacy on Nigerian society turned the eyes of the world on him. He successfully built the character of Okonkwo from the eyes of Nigerian society, this attempt was very much new to English literary tradition. Colonial influence on reading the text of African writers makes us to read the text without giving much attention to the multiple identities of African culture. Igbo culture is very specific in this novel, though the cultural practices are very easy to read and understand, it prevents our attention towards the conflict of Okonkwo,his conflict is the conflict of post-colonial world. To prorogate colonizer's point of view, Hayden White wrote in his book The Content of the Form, "Those who do not enter history as makers enter as the victims of the makers."

Othering the culture

Okonkwa, a great warrior represents the culture which is considered as uncivilized, native African culture before European civilization as savage, barely clothed being, animalistic, killing their own people for crossing the cultural standards set by the native tribes created a sense of othering which is directly being influenced by colonial reading. The western world has distanced tribal culture without having any roots in ethno-centric studies. This ethnic centered studies help us to read the native African text from the influence of othering other cultural tradition. Frantz Fanon has severe problem with White's notion and he worked it in this way: "It is not the history of the plundered country that they made, but the history of the mother country."

Theme of Things Fall Apart.

Okonkwa, son of Unoka, is a respectable and influential leader within the Igbo community of Umuofia in eastern Nigeria. His father Unoka is weak and lazy, borrowed money from others spending it on palm-wine and merry making with friends. Consequently his wife and children are left with no food. Within the community Unoka was a failure and laughing stock. Unoka ended with shameful death and left behind a numerous debt. Okonkwa kills his adopted child Ikemefuna to show his society that he is unlike his father, and able to carry the legacy of Igbo culture; which he believes it is manly. He beats his wife, works hard to follow the culture, despite the influence of Christian missionaries, he refuses to convert into christianity, but his son is failed to follow him, gets converted to Christianity, shattered the soul of Okonkwo, finally he decides to fight British colonial power which is disguised in the form of Christian faith. Okonkwa's heart wrenching disappointment is evident at the end of the novel, no one is ready to fight with him against Christian missionaries, finally he commits suicide against the belief of his Igbo culture. Further, Conrad elaborates the concept of self-pride; "Self-pride sustains the culture. When self-pride disappears, the culture is eliminated. Afterwards we find only relics of the past." According to Bhabha, such a cultural liminal space is the formative outcome of "hybrid identities", through a complex process named "translation" (Rutherford 210) – as introduced earlier by Benjamin; a process in which a series of signs or symbols are replaced with new sets all standing in a relational position with the discursive controlling force.

Cultural conflict is a colonial creation

There is no cultural conflict in Igbo culture; it is a tradition to be followed. Okonkwa intends to kill his son so as per the order of mistake committed Within Igbo community, he has to show that he is not soft, and has no soft corner towards his adopted son. In order to prove

this he kills Ikemefuna .Perhaps Okonkwo is bit guilty of his act, but his decision of carrying the legacy of Igbo culture hides all his tender emotions. Okonkwo never shows his emotions openly, he believes showing emotions openly is not masculine. Only the anger is always associated with Okonkwo throughout the novel. Okonkwo as a tribal hero is rooted with tribal values very much desired with tribal culture. Rejection of his father has to be studied from colonial point of view, the failure of his father has angered him always. He determined to not to follow the path of his father, this element of the novel is not just related with the value of family, that we come across in the modern age. In order to carry the legacy of his tribe Okonkwo disassociates from his father. He becomes warrior, kills his adopted son, eventhough he doesn't want to kill, he wants to prove before his fellow tribes that he could do carry any kind of cruelty (that is obviously associated with the tribal identity)

Son Nwoye's disassociation from his tribal culture sets another tone of the novel. Okonkwo's efforts and difficulties become futile in front of his son, after killing his adopted son Nwoye might have felt killing Ikemefuna is cruel and the tribal practices are barbaric.Nwoye's conflict is the conflict of colonialism. His character is directly influenced by Christian missionaries. He might have started pointing out at the barbaric practices of African tribes. What is barbaric to Christian missionaries is not barbaric to African tribes, they are just practices to protect the purity or value of tribe. Killing and sacrifices are natural inbuilt practices and evolved within the culture anthropologically. They are pagan culture of worshipping nature, they believe that the nature is around them has life. Mountain, rock, plant,tree etc have a life, they have to be satisfied by offering a life of human being, where there is no conflict in sacrificing the life of their fellow human being. But it is cruel and barbaric for modern world bounded with Christian missionaries, they believe that it is barbaric, cruel, crime, uncivilized. This cultural conflict is purely emerged from the influence of Christian missionaries for Okonkwo. His complaints that his son is not designated with Igbo culture, his disassociation of owning Igbo colure is worrying him. Despite of his effort of bringing up of his son on the line of Igbo culture is failed.Nwoye gets converted to chritianity.Okonkwo is utterly disappointed .His war against Christian imperialism not well received by his fellow tribes, they start get converted to chritianity,didn't join hands with Okonkwo .Finally at the end of the novel Okonkwo commits suicide. The death of Okonkwo is directly linked with cultural transformation of African continent.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper is to point out at the conflict of Christian imperialism than the failure of Okonkwo. Christian missionaries had successfully created a confusion among tribal people, within a short period of time they occupied an influential space in Africa. They created anti-tribal narration across Africa and prepared a land for mass conversion into

Christianity. Cultural practices had been practiced from centuries by Igbo people became a barbaric all of a sudden and distanced its people. It is a conflict for European colonial power not for Okonkwa, a true and passionate tribal character.

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