

Things Fall Apart

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Achebe, Chinua. (1987). **Things Fall Apart**. London: Heinemann.

In the wake of Post-colonialism, Chinua Achebe has shone as one of the best African writers who employ the language of the conquerors to capture the unsung consciousness of the conquered. His first novel, **Things Fall Apart** (1958), together with two subsequent books, demonstrates a sense of dignity the African people have long lost as an impact of the European colonialism. The African society which was based on rudimentary farming is depicted with a nostalgic sense of loss. Although the story is about African people, the non-African reader might find it appealing and edifying, as it reveals the struggle humanity has ceaselessly confronted against the power and inevitable conquest in the name of progress and civilization.

The title of the book aptly divulges the novel's theme. As the story develops, the reader gradually pictures the small world of an Ibo tribe disintegrating. **Things Fall Apart** is the story of a proud African soul at the verge of deterioration by European invasion. The main character, Okonkwo, is the village's hero who is feared and respected by his kinsmen and others. As a hero in his own right, the reader unhurriedly learns of his convictions, his achievements and finally his downfall. Okonkwo's way of life is threatened by the coming of the Europeans, who introduce a new and "civilized" world, with values and understandings that conflict with the tradition of farming he has known. Okonkwo can never understand why his ancestors' tradition-the one that had long been cherished-had to be replaced by a group of people he had never met before. This new pressure was too overwhelming for him and perhaps for the reader too.

Achebe's choice of diction and his narrative proves to be ingenious. In his own words, he explained: "I feel the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new surroundings." (**Transition**: 30)

His "new English" captures the forlorn sentiment not only felt by the main character but also grasped by the reader. The language in this novel is simple yet noble. Okonkwo is straightforwardly introduced to the reader in the first sentence of the story: "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond" (**Things Fall Apart**: 3). The reader later

learns more about his village and the Ibo's myth of creation. The tale is put in an unadorned but sincere manner: "[t]he nine villages of Umuofia had grown out of nine sons of the first father of the clan" (63). The village is illustrated with the use of few words as "powerful in war and in magic" (8) and its neighbors "would not go to war against it without first trying a peaceful settlement" (9). The reader is allowed to relish the status of the villagers with no further explanation. The respect of the Ibo for the force of nature is clearly illustrated in simple words, giving the reader the impression of pastoral life. In one scene, for example, the depiction of the end of heavy rain is simple yet evocative: "the rains became lighter and less frequent, and the earth and sky once again became separate" (25). With no more than a few words, a fruitless harvest is compared to a sad funeral, instigating a downhearted sentiment in the reader.

Achebe's description of the farming society, where people paid highest respect to their ancestors in another world beyond their knowledge, the society in which the living was strictly guided by the morals of the dead is not inconceivable for Thai readers in particular. Villages like those of Umuofia are a familiar sight we can still find in very remote areas of Thailand. There are haystacks standing in the burning sun, barns to keep the grain, the field where men work, the women in command of the kitchen, and children playing in the background. Also, as it is portrayed in the book, the villagers live and work closely together sharing the same convictions and beliefs. The Ibo values have been vividly portrayed through different scenes of ceremonies, festivals, farming and harvesting rituals, and worshipping of their deities and ancestral spirits. The earth goddess is worshipped and any crime considered an act against this goddess must be cleansed to ensure prosperity and peace of the whole clan.

Things Fall Apart is not just a novel about African people and their customs that were banished in favor of a new era of the white dominion. It is a nostalgic view of long lost traditions we all have felt but were unable to identify and describe in words. While we are welcoming a new way of living in the technological era, we are inadvertently abandoning fine values and customs our ancestors have accumulated generation after generation. Reading this book is a reminder of what we have left behind in exchange of becoming modern men and women.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. (1965). English and the African Writer. **Transition**. 4.(18): 27-50.
