



# IGBO CULTURE IS BETTER THAN EUROPEAN CULTURE WITH REFERENCE TO *THINGS FALL APART*

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## ABSTRACT

*Things Fall Apart* is authored by Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) who is one of the most outspoken contemporary and internationally recognized African writers and intellectuals. Achebe writes this novel in response to European novels that stated African culture as uncivilized. In his novel Achebe presents his own tradition and culture and also the way are they changed with the arrival of the colonizers. This article attempts to show why Igbo culture is better than the culture of Colonizers. There are variety of beliefs about the matter. Some critics say that the Igbo culture is better because of its rich religious system and their faith towards gods. Some also believe that the harmonious judicial system of the Igbo is better than the individual judicial system of the colonizers. Moreover, many critics claim that Igbo culture is finer because of its communication method, like- using stories and proverbs. However, this paper argues Igbo culture is better because it teaches the Igbo people moral values and to be modest towards other.

## Keywords

European colonizers, Igbo culture, religion, communication, modesty, friendly.

## Introduction

*Things Fall Apart* is written by Chinua Achebe who was a Nigerian author. The title *Things Fall Apart* derives from a line of William Butler Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming". Achebe mainly wrote this novel in English to educate his readers, especially the Europeans about the value of his African culture which were once misinterpreted by European writers. Example can be given of the *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. About Conrad a critic says "Conrad describes Africa as a wild, dark and uncivilized continent" (Sickels, p. 1).

Among the postcolonial authors Achebe was one of the influential one. Postcolonialism is the historical period that represents the aftermath of Western colonialism. In addition, it deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. In addition, the term has been widely used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies. However, the term has a great influence on literature, especially on Commonwealth Literature (Ashcroft et al. 204). So the postcolonial literature is mainly the result of colonialism which mainly expresses opposition or resistance to colonization and the postcolonial writers usually write about how their native cultures were destroyed under the power of imperialism. In *Things Fall Apart* mainly Achebe shows how his native culture fall apart.

The setting of the novel is in a fictional society named Igbo where white missionaries arrived unexpectedly and the people of that society faced a sudden cultural change. The story of this novel is also centered on the life of the protagonist, Okonkwo. The first part of this story shows the lifestyle, culture, beliefs and tradition of Igbo people. The second part based on the protagonist mainly but the arrival of missionaries is also shown. The third part is about the return of Okonkwo from exile to Umuofia where he found missionaries and colonial administrative who had come to rule over the Igbo tribe but their hidden intention was to extend the boundaries of British Empire and to rule over the Igbo tribe with new British regime, which had created great disaster in the Igbo lifestyle, brought social disorder, cultural destructions and religious collapse. In this way the novel highly deals with the impact of colonization and cultural change on the Igbo people. They not only suppressed them but also oppressed them with British colonial administration.

However, *Things Fall Apart* is one of the most influential novel both nationally and internationally. Though Igbo society has some negative sides, it is not as bad as that were represented by the Europeans. Achebe's novel helps to break the stereotypical ideas about Africa that once existed. Though at present many European writers have negative ideas about African culture, most of the people around the world try to show the Igbo culture as better than the European culture. And the discussion is shown in the next section.

## Literature Review

There are many analyses on Igbo culture and many scholars appreciate that it is better than European culture. A critic implies that "Igbo's strong fear on Gods and ancestral keep them away from sins" (Aparna, p. 832). I must say this is a good point because for example, committing suicide is recognize as big sin for the Igbo as it disrespects their ancestral and for this reason in the end Okonkwo loss his respect from his society. Moreover, according to another scholar named Kenalemang who claims that the Igbo culture is far better from the colonizers' culture because of their peaceful judicial system. He says "If two parties are at conflict with each other both parties are given the chance to tell their story before a ruling is taken as opposed to the case of the British courts" (Kenalemang, p. 14). I agree with this saying because at the beginning of the novel we can see, how the Igbo elders give a balanced solution of the conflict between Mbaino and Umuofia (two villages). But later in British court the village leaders are punished without being informed what their faults are. Besides, I really appreciate a critic Alimi who states that the communication

system of Igbo people is richer than European people because their practice of using of stories and proverbs give illustration during conversation which is the primary form of communication (Alimi, p. 124). According to the Igbo people "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe, p. 6). Nonetheless, in the later discussion I will show that Igbo culture is better because it instructs the Igbo people toward morality and humbleness.

## Methodology

This point mainly focuses on the method of this research. The research is mainly based on the question why Igbo culture is better than European culture? The research mainly done on the novel *Things Fall Apart*. All the materials and information were taken from the journals, articles on online. Most of the information that I have found were against the Igbo culture. But for establishing my article I kept search for information and found the suitable data. It took a long time to gather all the important information. After that I analyzed them and tried to discuss them through citation or paraphrasing and adding my ideas. Thus developed the article. Finally, after all these I have come to my own point of view and tried to establish my own argument in the article.

## Results and Discussion

In our Eurocentric world the Europeans recognize them as superior in all the matters because they colonized almost all of the countries around the world. During their settlement in different countries they forced the natives to adopt their culture. But their culture is not superior to all other cultures which is Achebe tried to show in *Things Fall Apart*.

From the earlier discussion it can be seen that Igbo culture is better for many reasons, such as, for well religion system, rich language, etc. But I believe that the Igbo culture is finer because their culture teaches them moral values and to be modest toward others. Their feelings are not as mechanical as the colonizers that is why they cannot understand the wisdom of the colonizers.

The wise Europeans promise the Igbo people to do better for their development. For this reasons, the Igbos believe that the missionaries will do something good for them as the White are technologically more advanced. For example, the bicycle which the Igbo people called the "iron horse" (Achebe, p. 127) because they never introduced with that before in their life as they mainly based on natural resources. But the colonizers' intention is to take the natural resources for their own sake. That is why they set colony in Igbo society and tries to make people believe on them. They appear as friendly but slowly they force the Igbo to adopt their culture which destroy the Igbos' own culture.

Though at first the Igbos' are not shown any interest on the colonizers, later they support them. Because the Christian missionaries able to make them understand of their wrong cultural systems, such as, killing twins, exile "osu" from the village to the Evil Forest and many others. But doing these the colonizers spread their roots in the society. Thus dominant the Igbo. It may appear that all these happen because the Igbo are not educated or unwise. But that is not true because they have the mentality to receive the others as kin. Even though the colonizers torture the Igbos, they maintain politeness. Without Okonkwo and some others, most of the villagers support the missionaries. Even the village elders support the colonizers. But if they protest together against the Europeans, the Europeans cannot stay in their village.

So it can be said, the colonizers always express them as superior and educated but they themselves show savagery. They humiliating the Igbo who let the colonizers to live in their village. For example, James Smith (white missionary who replaced Mr. Brown) who claims the Black as evil (Achebe, p. 162). Even the colonizers are that much wicked that they force the villagers to forget their own culture and follow the European culture. All these behaviors are not the presentation of civilized culture. In contrast, the Igbo

people presents their modesty that they learn from their culture. They learn to believe people for which they have to face cultural degradation.

## Conclusion

In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe mainly wants to show that their society is not savage or barbaric. Rather many good sides are there which could not be understood by the Europeans. For this reason, Achebe wrote this novel in English. The novel mainly represents the values and lifestyle of Igbo society and how it effects by the arrival of the Europeans. Though those colonizers tries to show the society in wrong way many critics later on try to show the Igbo culture is better because of its great religious system and beliefs, harmonious judicial system and rich language which contains stories and proverbs. But in my opinion, Igbo culture is better because it teaches them morality and modesty. Though some of the Igbo people understand that the colonizers are destroying their own entity, most of them accept the colonizers and their culture. They think that the Europeans truly want to civilized them instead of that they colonize them and destroy their culture. After this long discussion I believe that Igbo culture is truly better from the European culture because of many reasons. But the problem that I faced that still today many people cannot understand Achebe's point of view. So they criticize his novel negatively. For this reason, it was difficult for me to establish this paper. But finally I have come to this point that Igbo culture is truly better because of their modesty.

## Acknowledgment

I want to express my gratitude to my family and teachers who always supported me in doing different type of researches. I have done this research alone but without their inspiration my work can't be successful.

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