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The impact of Colonization on African Society in Chinua Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart"

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Abstract:

"Things Fall Apart" is a novel written by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe in 1958. The story's main theme concerns pre and post-colonial life in the late 19th century Nigeria. It offers a profound exploration of African identity and cultural collision during the colonial era. The novel is in many ways about the rise and fall of Igbo Society resulting from the impact of colonialism, as well as the impact of the arrival of the white people. This book focuses on how the protagonist, Okonkwo struggles with socio-cultural conflict between the British colonialism and his traditional culture. This article portrays the effect of colonialism on traditional beliefs of African society. Achebe presents a perfect picture of Post-colonial theory where he shows even the socio-political friction between the members of Igbo society and intrusive, overpower British Government with the western belief. This paper discusses how "Things Fall Apart" becomes a perfect example of challenge against the changes established by European and against the western cultures. This research article examines the complexities and the identity crisis that African Society faced every moment only because of the colonial oppression.

Keyword:

Cultural collision, colonialism, post colonial, intrusive, western beliefs, colonial oppression.

Introduction:

Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" explores the theme of post-colonial identity, cultural resilience, colonialism. The novel follows the life of Okonkwo, an Igbo ("Ibo" in the novel) leader and local wrestling champion in the fictional Nigerian village of Umuofia. The work is split into three parts. The first part describes his family, personal history, the customs and society of the Igbo and the second and the third sections introduce the influence of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on the Igbo community. British comes with new rules, new customs, new laws with them. And these changes have a tragic and devastating effect on the life of the protagonist, Okonkwo and Nwoye. This study explores how Igbo confrontation takes place with animist imperialism in the form of British men. The research work reflects the conflict between traditional values and modern norms, impact of Colonialism upon African community, challenge of cultural identity. With the presentation of African culture, Igbo society, strength of Okonkwo, members of Umuofia, Achebe perfectly depicts the challenges of post-colonial identity within Igbo community. This research article focuses on the Nigerian culture and British impact on their life, post-colonial, impact and overall identity crisis of whole Igbo community.

Socio-cultural background:

It is very important to understand the socio-cultural background of the novel "Things Fall Apart" which is mainly set in pre-colonial Nigeria in 1890 s. The novel highlights the clash between colonialism and traditional beliefs. Achebe depicts at the very beginning of

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the book that the people of Umuofia lived with a perfect harmony with other. They have prosperity, rich oral traditions, and communal ethos. They lived a happy life free from violence. They were independent and self-sufficient. But the traditional way of life is changed completely with the arrival of British colonizers who imposed their authority, new laws, customs, rituals, and languages upon the African community. Through his narrative, "Things Fall Apart", Achebe challenges Eurocentric representations of African society (Pansy Evangeline Victor & Pricilla. S, 2018)

Impact of Colonialism:

The novel's protagonist Okonkwo is famous in the surrounding villages for being a wrestling Champion. He is the most powerful tribe among his Igbo community. He is strong, hard working and strives to show no weakness. He earned his fame by his own struggle. This is shown in the line:

"Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. He brought honor to his tribe by throwing Amalinze the cat." (Achebe 3)

Okonkwo always wanted to be a top leader. Once he was selected by the elders to be the guardian of a boy, Ikemefuna. Because. He has been trusted by his community. But things began to go wrong for Okonkwo after the accidental death of the boy. His own people began to reject him. At that crucial moment the European came with the new cultures. Okonkwo, a warrior by nature and adamant about following Umuofian customs and traditions stood as a symbol of African beliefs. Everything changed with the arrival of the colonizer. Because they challenged the traditional beliefs and culture. At the end of the novel, Okonkwo has hanged himself to avoid being tired of cultural conflict and identity crisis.

Destruction of cultural unity:

In "Things Fall Apart" Colonialism acts as an irresistible force that destroys the structured way of life of Igbo society. The arrival of European missionaries introduces Christianity. Here the church played a crucial role. It targets the marginalized and weakening part of the Community. The conversion of the villagers to Christianity breaks local customs. Moreover imposition of Christianity and European culture and education threatens the Igbo culture, customs and beliefs. As a result within the community cultural conflict and division within family take its form with dangerous effect. Even clash exists between father (Okonkwo) and Son (Nwoye). While Okonkwo was fighting for his old tradition; Nwoye, his son, defiance of his God was following the New faith. It had shocked him but he resolves to fight against the New Faith. G.D Killam (1969) comments:

"But the way has been prepared for the inevitable clash between Okonkwo, symbolizing the traditional way of life, and the new order, symbolized by the Christian Church" (P .28)

The Loss of Language:

The arrival of Christian missionaries not only impacted the religious identity but also flourishes the use of western language. As a result the native language had lost under the pressure of missionary impact. When Nwoye had been converted to Christianity he learnt the new language with new faith.

In this way western language became the dominant language and native language lost its existence and became weak. The repression of Igbo language at the end of the novel contributes greatly to the destruction of the culture.

Loss of identity by changing traditional names:

Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" shows how changing the traditional names becomes the powerful symbol of the loss of identity. When Ibo people convert into Christianity, they have to abandon their ancestral heritage, their cultural dress and remove their mask too. The perfect example is Nwoye's transformation into Christianity which highlights the theme of loss of identity. By changing his name to Isaac, Nwoye signals his adaptation of a new Christian identity. The new name Isaac (a biblical figure) represents a total rejection of his past, his old self. Another convert takes a biblical name, Enoch. The name suggests his financial devotion for this new religion, hatred for the traditional beliefs. Thus people who suddenly changed their names for becoming Christians have a sudden change of mind regarding every tradition and beliefs of their previous practices. They suddenly think of their Umuofian culture, traditions, practices as 'bad.' These changes lead to identity crisis. The main reason for this crisis is only because of British colorizers.

Therefore, these changes act as a pivotal moment in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart". Everyone's personal identity is sacrificed due to new religion, new faith. This leads to the destruction of Igbo tradition by colonial imposition.

Psychological impact of Colonialism:

Achebe profoundly explores the psychological impact of colonialism on individuals in his novel. The protagonist, Okonkwo always struggles for his tradition and Igbo values. The colonizers leave Igbo people with cultural anxiety. Though Okonkwo is a perfect masculine figure to maintain his Umuofian custom and tradition, Achebe portrays the consequences of cultural disruption, loss of identity. Okonkwo's life is dominated by fear of failure and for weakness --the fear that he will resemble his father. This happens only because of anxiety which nurtures within. After the accidental killing of Ezeudu's son, Okonkwo's life has been changed. The Incident shatters his mental state as

he feels guilty and saddened by this. He and his family are sent into exile for seven years. After returning he witnesses the complete dismantling of his world he knew. He cannot identify his own society he lives in. It becomes a changed place because of the presence of white men. He with his masculine Power, strength tries to reclaim his native identity by destroying the Christian Church. But it proves to be vein attempt as nothing changes. Unable to adjust with the changing world, he commits suicide. This represents not only his culture's rejection of him, but his rejection of the changes too. He realizes that his Igbo society has been changed completely by the colonialism, by the Christianity. Through the tragic journey of Okonkwo, Achebe exposes the brutality of Colonial imposition. He represents the human suffering and complexity due to cultural loss, identity crisis, and rejection of traditional values. This novel stands as a powerful example of psychological consequences of colonialism (Mrs. Susheel Sharma, 2022)

Resistance and consequences:

The Umuofia society resists and reacts to the colonialist's presence and lordship. Many villagers are enthusiastic and interested regarding the acceptance of new law, faith introduced by the Europeans; Villagers were provided new opportunities by the colonialists. However this European influence threatens the traditional custom, cultural and religion faith and practices. But Okonkwo opposes the colonizers. His resistance is driven by his fear of losing his social position. (Dr. Vimal B Patel, 2025) His mental dilemma in accepting the outside laws actually shatters his life. Because his own community cannot support him. Even his own son, Nwoye accepts Christianity. After hearing Nwoye's plan of converting into Christianity he becomes furious and beats his son. Actually this incident proves his obsession with his Ibo values. He tries to resist trespassing of the colonizers into his own community.

Conclusion:

Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" portrays the Igbo society with its traditional culture and custom. Achebe portrays the complexities and suffering of Ibo people due to the colonizers. The novel shared the displeasure of Okonkwo representing Igbo community. It represents the tragic consequences of colonialism on traditional African cultures. Through the personal journey of Okonkwo Achebe reflects the whole Igbo community. Achebe for the first time reflects the Igbo society in this way. Before "Things Fall Apart", European authors had written most of the novels about Africa, portraying Africans as savage who were in need of western enlightenment. Achebe breaks this tradition. He portrays Igbo society in a sympathetic light. This article examines the effects of European colonialism from a different perspective. This research work illustrates the harmful effect of colonialism. Only because of the colonial

imposition people lose their identity. Achebe shows the reader the impact of colonization on African society in a poignant way. The novel reminds multifaceted consequences of the colonization on African Community, their identity, culture, heritage, socio-political life.

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