

Role of women essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Introduction

All the three texts, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Ramayana*, and *The Analects of Confucius*, describe male-female relationships. Their accounts all present these relationships, stressing the inferiority of women in relationship to men. Man is in control of things, while the woman's role is to remain subordinated and take his will for granted. Such societies place great demands upon woman's patience: she has to be a loving wife to her husband even if he is rude to her. Although some exceptions are possible, a woman always remains one step lower than man in society.

Ramayana: Less Than Ideal Marriage

The description of male-female relationships in *Ramayana* is represented mainly by the marriage of the two main characters: Rama and Sita, who are supposed to be in an ideal relationship, although it would hardly seem so to a modern person. The Hindu ideal fits the above description: wife is to obey her husband, grant his every desire, and tolerate his negative sides.

Sita has become dear to all Hindus due to her role as ideal wife. She is set as the role model for Hindu women who want to achieve perfection in family relationships. The role of the woman in male-female relationships is reduced to withstanding the atrocities and injustices inflicted by the husband and remaining a perfect wife, preserving loyalty and devotion.

Sita has little independent role in the family apart from her husband. She has little aspiration to be the decision-maker in the family, and places greatest value on her husband's welfare, reputation, and desires. Sita has never

sought independence: when young, she was in her father's authority; later on, after her father had chosen a husband for her, Rama took over her life. Even so, she has many laudable qualities despite her lack of independence. She is a model of marital fidelity. When captured by a ten-headed demon king named Ravana, she remains loyal to her husband. When Rama is deprived of the kingdom by his father, Sita insists that she has to go into exile with him, delivers an impassioned speech to Rama persuading him to let her share with him all the ordeals of the exile, or else she will die. After her husband's death she commits Sati – ritual suicide prescribed to loyal Hindu widows.

All of the above shows what high requirements the authors of Ramayana imposed on woman. Judging by the deeds of Rama who is taken to be the ideal king, demands for men in male-female relationships are much lower. Rama rescues Sita from the hands of Ravana, only to inform her that his main motive was to save his honor and his pride. Besides, he does not hesitate to tell her that he doubts her purity, in fact, treating her with disrespect. Sita has to put up with her husband's drawbacks. Rama was more focused on his reputation and pride than his family. At the time when his wife was calumniated by his nation, Rama preferred to leave her in the forest rather than argue with his people. All this shows that Ramayana condescendingly treats a man's low deeds and places on the woman's behaviour.

Confucius about Women

The Analects of Confucius concentrate on the description of an ideal society and set guidelines for future generations. The main unit of this society was the family, and the role of the woman was derived from her role in the family. There she was to submit herself to the will of her husband. Man was in control of the family, and the woman's role, however important, was only secondary to that of the man. A woman's subordination is, in Confucius's opinion, the natural order of things. This was the expansion of Confucius's other important idea: reverence for the old on the part of the young. In the family, too, controlling power had to belong to the older family members and to descend from the older members to the younger ones.

However, a woman did have some important role in the family. She was respected as mother and mother-in-law, acquiring power through family relationship. Confucius often mentions women in his *Analects* in the capacity of mothers. Confucius' book is built around the notion of filial piety; respect for mother comes along respect for father, since mother has almost as much authority for the children as the father. This shows how mixed Confucius's attitude towards women was: they were regarded as inferior to their husbands, but superior to their children in terms of power distribution.

Besides, man and woman in Confucian thought are two opposing sexes that complement each other and are inseparable. This idea is not underscored in the other two texts. Confucius recognizes the importance of woman's role in the home where she has to stay and attend to the family matters. The man's task is to go out into the outside world and work for the benefit of society

and his family. Thus, subordinate position of the woman is enhanced through the division of responsibilities.

Women in Things Fall Apart

Things Fall Apart, a novel by Chinua Achebe that depicts the life of the African Igbo society, presents one more image of the social order where women are inferior to men. They have to submit themselves to the mistreatment of their husbands that sometimes reach the scale of heartless cruelty, and have to possess the identity that is virtually non-existent without a man. To differentiate it from the other two descriptions found in *the Ramayana* and *the Analects of Confucius* that granted approval to women who agreed to live up to the expectations, the Igbo society is also characterized by the distinct streak of misogyny.

An ideal woman in Igbo society has to be unnoticeable. This is proved by the fact that female characters play a less important part than male ones in the novel and seldom appear on the pages. Even the mother of the main character, Okonkwo, only emerges once, after Okonkwo murders his ‘adopted’ son Ikemefuna. This scarcity of episodes with women points to the inferior role that was assigned to them in society.

Severe mistreatments of women also pass almost unnoticed. Although an especially outrageous case when Okonkwo beat his second wife is brought before the egwugwu only because he did it at the wrong time – during the Week of Peace. The attitude of the man himself demonstrates that he

considers the case a trifle that should not come up before the local assembly.

The ideals of the tribe emphasize that everything good is associated with man who has to be strong and violent, or else he risks losing his masculine qualities. To become 'womanly' is the greatest infamy for a man. Language reinforces the impression of woman's inferiority, naming yam, the most important crop in Igbo's universe, the symbol of virility, and less desirable cassava crop the symbol of femininity. Even though the woman does have some importance as mother, and the first wife is given some respect, this does not do much to improve an otherwise gloomy picture of women's existence in the Igbo society.

Conclusion

The three societies described in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Ramayana*, and *The Analects of Confucius*, although different in many other aspects, are defined by gender roles that are strictly enforced in many spheres, mainly in family life. A woman is invariably inferior to man and has to subordinate herself to his will. Agreeing on this point, the books are nevertheless difficult in focus. Thus, Achebe and Confucius allow the woman to acquire some significance through motherhood. In the *Ramayana*, the patience and loyalty of the woman is praised and set as a model for imitation by wives striving for perfection. However, these accents do not reduce the prominence of the fact that man in these social orders is more important than the woman.

References

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