

The portrayal of women in things fall apart essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

An image that comes of African women is usually a faceless and a voiceless being. There is always a tendency to look at them more or less than a slave. Chinua Achebe's post-colonial novel, *Things Fall Apart*, do at some points of the novel support the case of the subjugated African women in the course of Okonkwo's life through the practice of polygamy, paying bride price, and the atypical case of Okonkwo beating his wives at slight frustration. In Okonkwo's eyes, women are mere property and the ones that keep a man sane. But, it is also through Okonkwo, we see women - mothers (Ekwefi), wives (Ojiugo), daughters (Ezinma), priestesses (Chielo, Ezeani) and goddesses (Ani) - who are revered and whose stature in the culture is paradoxical in the very idea of the marginalized and dutiful female that Okonkwo tries to rationalize. Achebe illustrates how at times, an Igbo woman is in the background, but at other times, they're in the forefront and they are not painted as inferior, instead they are an essential partner to the male and they are equal and at some occasions superior to the male. Women in different roles play most vital functions in society.

Though they are seen as weakness, it is ironic that they are the refuge for everyone. Ekwefi's and Ezinma's mother to child relationship confirms this. When Okonkwo forbids Ekwefi to leave her hut after Ezinma is carried off by the chief priestess, Ekwefi ignores her husband and risks a beating to follow Chielo and her daughter throughout the night, until she is certain that her daughter will return home safely. But instead of attempting to restrain her, Okonkwo joins the journey, following from a safe distance, also to guarantee the protection of his child. Here, one can both see the strength of a mother and how Okonkwo, instead of giving her a beating, respects her decisions in

following Chielo. It is said that the commonest name given to children is Nneka, "Mother is Supreme". Uchendu explains to Okonkwo how "when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you". Looking at the goddesses, Ani, the earth goddess, holds great power as she is the "source of all fertility".

"She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct." In Umuofia, before any crop is put earth, each person should "sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land." Ani is model of the female force and she is superior to the male. Both the Week of Peace and the New Yam Festival is dedicated to her. When Okonkwo beats Ojiugo, his youngest wife, in the Week of Peace, Ezeani, the priestess of Ani, fined him with "one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries" for the purity of the land. Okonkwo" he respected the priestess even though she was woman and was "rependant" for his actions. To understand Okonkwo and his different interactions with women, one must look at his origins. Due to his father's poverty and his debts, his whole life was to live opposite of him and thus, he was "dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness". After his father's contemptible death, masculinity was a virtue that Okonkwo thrived on. He becomes a great wrestler as well as a warrior; he has a big farm, many wives, and has some of the highest titles in the clan.

He believes he is embodiment of manhood. His fear of being weak outweighs every aspect of his life. He is not blind; he simply lacks the will to overcome his fear so whatever he does he tries not appear weak. His killing blow to <https://assignbuster.com/the-portrayal-of-women-in-things-fall-apart-essay-sample/>

Ikemefuna, the boy who called him “ father”, confirms this since he didn’t want to look weak when his clansmen told him to kill him, but his relationship with Ezinma contradicts as Okonkwo does demonstrate concern for her when he follows her into the forest after she is taken by the Priestess, Chielo. Okonkwo dislikes Nwoye, due to his “ womanish” characteristics like his father. He loves Ezinma because “ she has the right spirit” unlike Nwoye, who as Okonkwo describes has “ too much of his mother in him.” “ Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man”, it’s just that he suffers from a psychological problem, his tragic flaw, which is the irrational fear of being dubbed weak and gutless like his shameful father and this fear which dominates all his actions is what contributes to his tragic fall.

Achebe uses irony and paradox to deflate the male superiority. At first, the irony we see is right after killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo was “ so weak that his legs could hardly carry him” and he asks himself “ When did you become a shivering old woman.” Irony informs the reader of Okonkwo’s unintended murder. The man who prides himself as masculine commits a “ female” crime which exiled him for seven years. His house is destroyed and he seeks refuge in Mbanta, his motherland. The more he fights towards masculinity; the female side comes up to save him. Though every aspect of life was to live opposite of his father who wasn’t properly buried due to his low status in society, Okonkwo ends up hanging himself and in result, he couldn’t be buried as it was an abomination to the earth goddess, Ani. As the male side gets deflated, the female side gets stronger.

For instance, only the priestesses behold the Oracle. Chika, the priestess of Agbala in Unoka’s time, “ was full of the power of her god, and she was <https://assignbuster.com/the-portrayal-of-women-in-things-fall-apart-essay-sample/>

greatly feared.” Power simply does not only come in physical and political form, but also in spiritual ways. Chielo, the priestess of the goddess Agbala, was also a fearless woman when possessed and the people of Umuofia respects her. When it comes to men cultivating yam, it is only through Ani, they get their fertility. Achebe portrays how even though man may have the physical strength, but the spiritual and moral powers come within a female. Through irony and paradox, Achebe deflates this so-called male-superiority and establishes a combined force which includes both physical and spiritual powers, an equilibrium that is essential for the individual and society.