

The role of men and women in 'Things Fall Apart'

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In 'Things Fall Apart' Chinua Achebe intervenes the topic concerning the relationships between men and women in the Igbo society. He emphasizes the different association of femininity and masculinity, reinforcing the fact that women never played as major role in Igbo as men did. Right in the first chapter we are introduced the protagonists of the novel, Okonkwo, who is given a name of a great warrior and the one who once brought the honor to his village. His whole life is contributed by the fear of weakness and failure. The only feature he values is the manliness which he considers as the most important trait out of all presented in a casual family man. Unoka, Okonkwo's father died titleless, and was called Agbala, meaning 'woman' which for man counted as a cruel offending. Okonkwo encounters with troubles while bringing up his sons; in his understanding, the man should be a fighter, physically strong, strict and articulate; the one who would never show any love and care toward his wives or children because this would mean a female behavior. That's why Okonkwo felt superior and satisfied when his son Nwoye started 'grumbling about women' since his manners evidenced that he would be 'able to control his women-folks'. In Igbo society anything strong was related to a man and anything weak was related to a woman. Even though Nwoye followed Okonkwo and tried to satisfy him in any way he 'preferred the stories his mother used to tell' because they warmed him from inside. On Okonkwo's example Achebe divulges polygamy in Igbo's society. Okonkwo himself has three wives which live in the separate huts with all the necessary supplies where they cook for their husband. While reading the novel our concentration gets focused on the relationships of Okonkwo with his wives and children, especially the way he treats his

women. Achebe represents Okonkwo as a tough, rude, strong and improvident man. He is revered by the clan members and is valued as a heavy-handed man. According to these traits of his character Achebe reveals the clear comprehension of all the commotion in his family, including the day when Okonkwo tried to shoot his wife, but fortunately for her missed, leaving her 'shaken and frightened but quiet unhurt'. As we discover throughout the novel, in Igbo society, wives' beating was also allowed. Each of his wives was given a duty to prepare his dinner and deliver it to his obi every day. We become the witnesses of the situation when his second wife, Ezinma, goes to braid her hair and consequently gets beaten up severely only for the reason of not coming home to prepare a dinner. Okonkwo is punished for his unreasonable action, but only because it happened during the 'Week of Peace'. Behind that, Achebe emphasized the importance of women in Igbo. He writes about the bride-price and women painting the 'egwugwu' houses which is a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village. On one hand, the way we see the roles of women in the novel creates a connection with slavery, while on the other hand, Achebe represents them as deity's envoys.