

Complex role of women in things fall apart english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



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Introduction

Things fall apart is a literature piece of work that that dully portrays Africa, it was first published in 1958, and was directed to the colonialist as a response in the way they used to represent Africa and Africans in literature. This master piece shows the destruction of African culture by the colonialist in regard to the bonds that are between the people and their society. The role of women in pre-colonial Africa is portrayed by Achebe in this work and he extends his teachings through translating Ibo proverbs and myth together with depicting the great deal about the Ibo society. Again Things Fall Apart shows of how Okonkwo from Umuofia, is able to deal with his rise and fall. After accidentally killing a clansman, Okonkwo as a leader was led into banishment from the community, seven years through into tribal Igbo society. This further describes the immediate breakdown of Okonkwo and his rural community. Hence the position of women in native Nigerian societies at this time is viewed to be that of an assistant. In the Ibo society women are generally perceived to be lower in hierarchy than men. Moreover it should be noted that they are still the holders of very significant roles in the Ibo society. Originally women in this society seem to be very weak, those without power hence useless in the society. This is again proved wrong when a bigger significance is revealed about the women's role in the Ibo society as time goes by. It is clear that even though men in the Ibo society beat women and discriminate them in other major ways, women still own very important roles, such as caretakers of their crops, educators of their children and

householders. They also function as spiritual leaders and carry out other very important role in the Ibo society. Role of Women

Allowed Beating

According to the Ibo society, beating of the women was permitted. Two instances are described in the novel; one is when Okonkwo beats his second wife with the mere reason that she had not prepared her his meal. With his anger he actually forgets that it is the week of peace and never forgives his fault hence he should here the wise man say " if man cannot forgive woman with her little bit mistake, he never enjoys her great virtue." The other incident is encountered again when his second wife refers to him as one of those " guns that never shot." Cases of beatings that were brought before the Egwugwu, the wife found favor, leaving the man to wonder why such a trifle would come before the Egwugwu. A woman had no place in terms of justice and hence a higher authority had to be sought. Thus it is argued that " Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. All his wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper (Achebe 2. 12)." this hence explains that women roles in the social environment of Ibo society were basically emphasized in the domestic sector.

Attributed with weakness and failure

Okonkwo was a hero of tragedy whose life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness. His father Unoka embodied the epitome of failure and weakness. Okonkwo was taunted as a child by other children when they called Unoka agbala that could either mean a man who had taken no title or " woman." Okonkwo hated anything weak or frail, and his descriptions of his

tribe and the members of his family show that in Ibo society anything strong was likened to man and anything weak to woman. Nwoye, his son by his first wife, reminds Okonkwo of his father Unoka he describes him as woman-like. It is quoted that " a chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches, I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is much of his mother in him (8, 66)." Nwoye's conversion to the Christians leaves Okonkwo to ponder how he, a flaming fire could have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate. He even wishes that his daughter Ezinma should have been a boy. Hence he is quoted saying that " if Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the spirit. (8. 16)" He favored her most out of all of his children, yet to him, if Ezinma had been a boy she would have been happier. After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo, asks himself why he has become a shivering old woman. i Men in the society look as if they are not going to fight against the intruding missionaries, Okonkwo remembers the days when men were men.

Women are attached to Nature

Okonkwo's returns to his mother's clan after being exiled from the Ibo village, shows how women have been attached to nature. Uchendu reproaches Okwonko for having come to live with his mother's clan. He states that the truth is that " a child belongs to his father, but if the father beats the child, the child seeks refuge in the mother's house (8. 134)." He further says that " a man belong to his father's land when he has a good and sweet life to lead but in times of sorrow, his mother's house is the ideal area of comfort (8. 134)." this brings about the fact that a woman is seen as a

protector in the Ibo society and hence ultimate and superior. Above all Uchenda's words reveal automatically that women in the Ibo society are the basic foundation of the people and the clan. They are the beings that can fully be relied upon in nurturing and taking care of the people, thus they aren't insignificant and powerless individuals. (Achebe 134)

Women are expected to carry out home based duties

In the Igbo community and culture, women had many roles and duties. Women have tasks comparable to those of men but they also engage themselves in making meals, washing clothes, housekeeping, bearing and raising children and agricultural roles altogether. Other responsibilities that women took part in were visiting the markets, worshiping gods and also attending cases in courts. Farms were weeded by women three times at specific periods in the life of the yams, neither earlier nor later. It is hence quoted that " his mother and sister worked very hard enough, but they only grew women's crops, like the coco-yams, beans and cassava. Yam the king of crops was a man's crop (3, 28)." this signifies that men are the sole providers in their families in the Ibo community and that nearly everything there is gendered even crops. This was an important duty as failure to carry it out meant the yam crops would fail. According to Goefe (via sugihastuti, 2000: 37) feminism is explained as a theory about similarity between a man and a woman in the economic, political and social environment. Hence as men consider to ponder on this factor they are of the view that " superior is typical for man and inferior is typical for woman." Men are so convinced that women do not possess a firm attitude and so they cannot become leaders

thus stereotyping. Again during the court ceremonies, " it was very clear that the occasions were meant for men from the way everyone else in the crowd used to stand. Women would come in large numbers but they always followed the proceedings from a far distance like outsiders. Only the very entitled and distinguished men sat on their stools waiting to address and for the trials to begin. (10. 2)" women were thus totally excluded from any participation in the trials even if she was the main complainant in the case to be determine and heard. This kind of treatment shows how the Ibo society used to treat women negatively.

Representation of the earth goddess

Ani is described as a superior part in the life of the people than any other goddess. She was basically observed as the master judge of conduct and morality. Moreover she was seen to be in great connections with the already departed ancestors of the clan whose bodies had already been buried and dedicated to the earth (Achebe 36). It seems rational where a community that views female members as inferior being unable to represent their most powerful represented goddess as being a woman (Arivia 23). It was clear that Ani's power was very important during the harvests and hence members of the society were respected to celebrate the week meant for peace and in return Ani was expected to bless the harvest. This meant that the harvest success was deeply rooted in the significant role that a woman had to play in the society. For any woman to possess such an amazing and important role in the success of the yam crops is a clear indication of the real deep rooted power of the woman in the society. Thus this is evidenced when

Okonkwo breaks the Peace of Ani, immediately Ezeani proclaims, " The evil you have one can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish" (30).

Role in Religion

The women perform the role of priestess. It is stated that during Okonkwo's boyhood, the priestess in those days was woman called Chika. Chika was a god full of power and was greatly feared among the members of the Ibo tribe. In the novel, there is no point where Okwonko is seen as a pleader with any woman, whatever the reason. The fact that Okwonko is threatened by a goddess to give her his daughter is enough to say that women have a priestess power that has allowed them to rule over men and make final decisions. Again it is quoted that for Ekwefi " The only woman with whom they shared with and talked was known as Chielo. She was the main oracle of hills and caves and was the priestess of Agbala. They were so fond of each other that they shared the same place in the market place. Chielo was so fond of Ezinma that she could send her mother some beancakes to take them to her. Hence anyone who would come across Chielo in ordinary life would hardly believe that she was the same person who used to prophesy when the spirit of Agbala was upon her. (6. 17)" in Ibo society Chielo is deemed to be an example of a powerful woman figure the only priestess of the main god. She is an ordinary public figure in this society but when the spirits takes control of her she changes immediately and becomes a figure to be reckoned with. Thus it is automatically proved that it is only when a woman has behind her such kind of supernatural power that she is dully and

readily respected by men. This brings about the fact that despite their unappreciated presence women are still present within the Ibo community.

Conclusion

The role of women in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall* limits largely both their power and authority. It is noted that Okonkwo is a very aggrieved man indeed, " He literally mourned for the Ibo society which in his own perspective viewed it as one that was breaking and falling apart. He also deeply felt for the war like men of Umuofia, who all of a sudden had become soft land tender like the women. (21. 25)". This breaking activity of the Umuofia people was a signal of weakness femininity and weakness. He once regarded his clan with great value as they shown the masculinity aspect of it, but afterwards mourns his clan after it adapts to femininity. It is clear that in the Ibo society, women are viewed to hold very significant roles and tasks as compared to the men; hence they act as nurturers, priestesses and earth goddesses.