

An Ecocritical Interpretation of “*Things Fall Apart*”

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Abstract

“Save the earth” was the motto of the 1992 Environmental Conference held in Rio. “Serve the earth” would have been more appropriate. One can perceive “serve the earth” attitude in Chinua Achebe’s sublime work *Things Fall Apart*. This study traces the depiction of nature in the aforesaid novel whether it is anthropocentric (system of beliefs and practices that favours humans over other organisms) or it is enlightened anthropocentric. Deterioration of environment is a primary concern in today’s world. Chinua Achebe brought real people, society, and their universe to the whole world. *Things Fall Apart* articulated a new vision of the Igbo world and gave expression to a new sense of the African experience that was more penetrating than what had been available before its appearance.

Ecocriticism, which has emerged in the 1970s. Ecocriticism gives human beings a better understanding of nature. “*The Ecocriticism Reader*” takes ecocriticism as “the study of the relation between literature and the physical environment”(XVIII). According to Glotfelty, simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (1996: xix). This study will include major themes of ecocriticism such as ‘animism’, ‘dwelling’, ‘nature’ and ‘apocalypse’. ‘Yams’, ‘the silk-cotton tree’, and ‘the moon’ is part of the Ibo society in which humans and nature had a symbiotic relationship. This study explores how Chinua Achebe has portrayed this relationship in his magnum opus.

Key Words: Nature, man, environment, society, ecocriticism, Okonkwo, Africa

INTRODUCTION

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe (Nigeria, 1930-2013), without question can be considered central to the canon of African Literature. The novel presents an image of an African society as a living entity and as a coherent social structure forming the institutional fabric of a universe of meanings and values. ‘Things Fall apart; centre cannot hold’ the lines from *Second Coming* at the beginning of the novel by W.B. Yeats give an inkling into the Ibo society. Armageddon of new order wipes out the Ibo traditions and culture. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, is the epitome of Ibo Society. Okonkwo had risen to fame because of his leadership qualities and he had achieved so much within a short span of time. Achebe depicts

the fragmentation of Ibo society through one man Okonkwo. For it cannot be doubted that the comprehensive scope of Achebe's depiction of a particularised African community engaged in its own social processes, carried on its own terms, with all the internal tensions this entailed, challenged the simplified representation that the West offered itself of Africa as a formless area of life, as "an area of darkness" devoid of human significance (V.S. Naipaul, 1964,1). (Borrowed from Naipaul the sentence 'an area of darkness'; he refers to India.)

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe presents a historical picture of the traditional Ibo society with all its strength and weaknesses. However, it is the protagonist, Okonkwo, who holds together the different strands of the plot and sustains the latter to the very end. Achebe presents Okonkwo as an embodiment of Ibo values, a man who, better than most symbolises his race. His protagonist is a highly motivated success-driven man riding on the back of solid personal achievements. It is quite evident that Achebe wishes to portray Okonkwo as the archetypal African- the man best suited to bring to his readers the harrowing experience of colonialism. Achebe's readers witness the decay of traditional Ibo society through Okonkwo's eyes and sympathise with him. At the same time Okonkwo's life can be seen as the representation of social degeneration that has set in and empathise with him. He is a sort of synecdoche, a part of the whole (a part of the whole).

Ibo society is dependent on farming; 'yam' is the wealth of these people. Ecology is an important aspect of this work. Nature and Man live in symbiotic relationship; they nurture each other. The rise and fall of Umuofia is dependent on nature. Natural world cohabit the landscape of *Things Fall Apart* along with humans. Instances in this novel point to the fact that utmost care was shown towards earth while farming. "Serve the Earth" attitude is apparent in this novel therefore it is pertinent to apply ecocritical approach. This study explores the relationship between nature and Ibo society.

Literary studies in this millennium are showing great concerns towards our environment. Global warming and greenhouse effect are the buzz words of today. Regardless of what name it goes by, most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that humanity have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. Either people change or we the people of this world have to face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse. As historian Donald Worster explains,

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot

do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding”
(Worster, 1993, 17).

As stated in the quote above human beings as a race have to understand the global crisis. Whatever, maladies the world is facing because of the global warming has to be understood and has to be rectified. It has to be a cumulative effort. The world of *Things Fall Apart* shows at the man at the centre, yet nature is an extremely important part of the same. “*Achebe shows the Igbo’s agricultural life, religious beliefs, festivals, their ideas about the world and human life are all intertwined with nature*” (Gitanjali Gogoi, 2014). The idea of exploiting nature for their own benefit is not palatable to the Ibo society. They believed in the sanctity of the earth and refrained from any such activity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is generally agreed that modern environmentalism began with ‘A Fable for Tomorrow’, in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962). This fable portrays at first images of natural beauty and emphasises the harmony of humanity and nature that once existed. The fable portrays pictures of changelessness; however, pastoral peace rapidly gives way to catastrophic destruction.

Ecocriticism, which has emerged in the 1970s is a kind of literary criticism or theory consisting of two parts, “eco” and “criticism”. Eco is a short form of ecology which deals with the study or investigation of the relation between different forms of earthly creatures and objects. Ecocriticism, few theorists name it green studies or environmental criticism, indicates the critical writings which revolve around the relation between literature, environment, and nature. In his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” William Rueckert defines and coins the term ecocriticism as “*the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world*” (William Rueckert,1996:107). Ecocriticism, then attempts to find a common ground between the human and nonhuman to show how they can coexist in various ways, because the environmental issues have become an integral part of our existence. This is one problem that ecocriticism addresses in its attempt to find a more environmentally conscious position in literary studies. To broaden one’s understanding of ecocriticism in terms of environment, Robert Kerridge’s definition is quite important, he says, “*ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis*” (Richard Kerridge, 1998). Man is related to nature and environment in every moment of his life from his birth, during his life and even at the moment of death. Hence, environmental wellbeing is the prime area of concern.

‘**Animism**’, ‘**Dwelling**’, ‘**Nature**’ and ‘**Apocalypse**’ are the major themes of ecocritical approach. *Things Fall Apart* will be analysed according to these themes.

Animism

Animism is a belief that natural objects and phenomena have spirits. Some work of fiction exuberantly reinstates the age old belief that nature is enspirited. Animism at first was an unfashionable term as it derogatorily denoted primitivism. Perhaps, that is why Carolyn Rooney 2012 asserts, “*animism belongs to a repertoire of terms that were that were aimed to distinguish between primitive and modern thought*”. On the other hand, a certain school establishes animism the doctrine of spirits and spiritual beings. The naturalistic polytheism dominates the conscious of Ibo society; forces of nature are revered. Animism undergirds many contemporary tribal societies, just as it did during pre-Christian times. Indeed, the overwhelming evidence suggests the universality of animism in human history. Aforesaid attitude can be seen across the globe in pre-Christian times. J. Baird Callicott claims,

The typical traditional American Indian attitude was to regard all features of the environment as enspirited. These entities possessed a consciousness, reason, and volition, no less intense and complete than human beings. The Earth itself, the sky, the winds, rocks, streams, trees, insects, birds and all other animals therefore had personalities and were thus as fully as other human beings (Callicott, 1983, 243).

Animist belief stems from the world view that nature is inspirited and that ultimate reality is spiritual and not material or physical. Nature is the environment in which humans are enfolded; human must therefore interact with generative forces of nature, out of curiosity and generally as a way of relating to their environment. As Oluseye & Oglulogo et al, (2020) points out

“Animism distinguishes the sustaining relationships between humans and the environment, and grants that relationship an ontological status. It demonstrates how all human life exists and perpetuates itself only within life-world relationships; it also establishes how separated thinking can account for much needless human and environmental suffering and waste” (Oluseye & Olaoluwa et al, 2020).

Animism, features quite prominently in *Things Fall Apart*. Similarly, the ancient Indians personified natural phenomena. In explaining the existential situation in which they found themselves, the ancient Indians personified natural phenomena and bestowed upon them an essence of spirituality.

Dwelling

Literature explores the possibility of coming to dwell on the earth in a relation of duty and responsibility. Everything is linked to everything else and most importantly human beings are linked to the natural environment or ‘dwelling’. The primitive models depict a harmonious dwelling of humans, nature and non-humans. They feel a deep sympathy towards all living forms. They understood the

nature extremely well, and they understand the systematic consequences of their actions. Hence, an enlightened human being believes in the following attitude.

'Dwelling is not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term imbrications of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work' (Garrard, 2004, 108).

The traditional American Indian attitude was to regard all features of environment as enspirited; just like ancient Indians from India. Everything had a consciousness and they respected that. Environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott (1983) claims, "*The Earth itself. The sky, the winds, rocks, streams, trees, insects, birds and all other animals therefore had personalities and were thus as fully persons as other human beings.*" As one can decipher from the previous quote, everything is enspirited. Hence, they respected all creations. In fact, they dwelled in harmony with everything else. Oikos are part of dwelling, the Greek term 'oikos' which means household is a nexus of humans, nature and the spirit beings.

Nature

Environmentalists, today, seek to protect 'nature'. Wind, rain, lightning, and thunder are all aspects of nature. The perfection and harmony of nature is an expression of divinity revealed through beauty. The rain which nourishes the earth is part of the nature. An ecological form of literary theory expands the notion of the world to include the entire biosphere.

As long as we could believe that nature undisturbed was constant, we were provided with a simple standard against which to judge our actions. 'We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot-on earth man made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us' (McKibben, 1990, 54).

Humans are related to nature and environment in all aspects of their life. Even though nature has been forgotten and destroyed by man because of industrialisation, the importance and influence of nature in man's life cannot be ignored. Since the beginning of human's life, man has known and recognised the importance of natural beings or creatures and nonhumans objects. Gitanjali Gogoi (2014) emphasises, "*The present day environmental predicament is a sure result of the age old practice of exploitation of nature and abuse of the environment for the benefit of human civilisation.*" Perhaps, the time is ripe for a change of attitude towards nature, one has to practice enlightened bio-centrism. Human beings have to be mindful towards the protection of nature and should avoid abuse of the same. Nature is one of the most important aspects of Ecocriticism.

Apocalypse

Humans have always held the notion that the world will end one day. The word apocalypse derives from the Greek Apo-calyptein, meaning ‘to un-veil’. There are innumerable examples of apocalyptic literary work. For the past thousands of years, a number of people have believed that the end of the world is imminent. “Historically the idea of Apocalypse began around 1200 BCE, in the thought of Iranian prophet Zoroaster or Zarathustra” (Garrard 2004). The fear of ‘apocalypse’ had brought about so many wars in the past. But similar rhetorical strategies have provided the green movement with some of its most striking successes.

Apocalypticism has been described as a genre born out of crisis, designed to stiffen the resolve of an embattled community by dangling in front of it the vision of a sudden and permanent release from its captivity. It is underground literature, the consolation of the persecuted (Thompson, 1997, 13-14).

Apocalypticism is inevitably bound up with imagination, because it has yet to come into being. In true apocalypse everything on this earth is destroyed, that is what it implies. Apocalyptic scenarios typically contain the idea that catastrophe is some kind of punishment by a divine entity or more secularly nature taking revenge. Buell has argued, “Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (Buell, 1995). Several of the most influential books in the environmentalist tradition make use of this theme.

Analysis of *Things Fall Apart*

The novel *Things Fall Apart* introduces the protagonist Okonkwo immediately as ‘Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat’ (Achebe, 1958, 3). The universe of Ibo society is comprised of these nine villages: Umuofia. The novel begins with a flash back; then informs the reader that this event took place twenty years ago. Achebe has declared, ‘The story of Okonkwo is almost inevitable; if I hadn’t written about him, certainly someone else would have, because it really is the beginning of our story’ (Achebe, 1991, 4). Achebe’s observation concerning his fictional creation draws attention to the allegorical significance that Okonkwo has assumed for the African imagination: he is not merely a character in a novel but the representative figure of African historicity. A determining element of the novel’s structure and development is thus the way in which his story is embedded within an elaborate reconstruction of forms of life in the traditional, pre-colonial culture, specifically, that of Achebe’s own people, the Ibo of South-eastern Nigeria. ‘Okonkwo’s whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness’

(Achebe, 1969,17). Okonkwo hated his father Unoka; who was called *agbala* (another name for a woman; a man without any title).

It is with this background that Achebe props up Okonkwo's character. This fear runs like a thread through Okonkwo's life. It drives him to strive even harder to become one of the lords of the clan. He had already '*taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars*' (Achebe, 1969, 12). But others, especially his family members, do not share this drive and Okonkwo was not a cruel man. His fear of failure leads him to murder Ikemefuna. '*Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak*' (Achebe,1969,59). Apart from this one flaw, Okonkwo comes off as one of the first non-Eurocentric African heroes. Okonkwo also treats the readers to a truly colourful spectacle - the Ibo society at its purest.

The very tenor and warmth of Achebe's presentation of the traditional world, especially in the thirteen chapters that form the first part of the novel, with their elaborate representation of setting, involving in the process an insistence in positive terms upon the cultural context within which his fictional characters have their being, leaves us in no doubt that a polemical intent informs his reconstruction. Lindfors describes the Ibo tribal world quite beautifully,

The Ibo tribal world emerges here in all its specificity, its daily routines and seasonal rituals attuned to the natural rhythms of its living environment. The language of daily intercourse that Achebe lends his characters endows with special force the mobilisation of minds and sensibilities within the society, animating with its poetic resonance its modes of special organisation and cultural expression (Lindfors, 1968, 8).

The narrative of this novel is beautifully woven together; the taut plot structure keeps the reader glued to the novel. A new world was discovered through the novel *Things Fall Apart*, by its mounting action and colourful characters. Though Achebe has not shown any apparent awareness of ecological crisis in *Things Fall Apart*, but this novel shows nature as extremely important. Gitanjali Gogoi says, "*Things Fall Apart bear sufficient proof of the writer addressing the theme of nature and environment*"(Gitanjali Gogoi, 2014). The novel is replete with images of in violate nature.

Animism in *Things Fall Apart*

The natural rhythm of nature is important to Ibo world. As stated before animism is a belief that all natural things and phenomena are alive as they have innate spirit. The novel *Things Fall Apart* contains enumerable examples of animist figuring. Animals were vested with special powers; for example, snake acquires special powers. They were feared by all. The sentence '*When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk*' (Achebe, 1969, 10) shows 'the moon' as a

celestial being and suggests that the healing powers of a full moon could make a handicapped walk. Animism is evident in this line and the healing powers of the full moon too. There is a shade of religiosity to human-nature relations which manifests in primitive cultures, that is worshipping natural elements such as stones, trees, moons and stars which become enspirited.

Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is told by the priestess '.....you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms; you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man' (Achebe, 1969, 16). It is apparent that when the priestess admonishes Unoka perhaps she implies that tilling the same piece of land again and again destroys its fertility. It is a crime against the earth goddess. Earth is bestowed with divine powers one of the powerful examples of animism. Another sentence justifies the same point, the sickness was an abomination to the earth, and so the victim could not be buried in her bowels. Ibo society refrained from polluting earth goddess, an environment friendly attitude.

'The Feast of the New Yam was approaching, and Umuofia was in a festival mood. It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess, and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in life of the people than any other deity' (Achebe, 1969, 33). The passage exemplifies how the Ibo worshipped the earth goddess Ani; and displayed a deep belief in animism. Ani or the earth is shown has having divine powers. Yams symbolized wealth and was the cornerstone of the Ibo society. The yam is the treasure of an Ibo man. Not only were they used to count years, months, and the transition of years, but also as a tool of class and gender domination. 'The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia' (Achebe, 1969, 34). Yams acquired a special place in an Umuofia household. Festivity surrounded its harvest. The defining feature of the tribe is highlighted by the centrality of the yam to the culture, the symbolic value with which it is invested, over and above its utility as a source of nourishment: a feature that provides a graphic illustration of the continuity from material existence to the collective vision of ethos. They vested a special status to yams, an example of animism. 'All non-secular agricultural societies ascribe religious significance to key agricultural practices' (Garrard, 2004, 109). This is the case with Ibo people, they vested extreme importance to yams.

Forests hold special significance in this novel. The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the dead. The forest surrounding the Umuofia is revered, on the other hand the dark forest symbolises evil forces. *'The sickness was an abomination to the earth, and so the victim could not be buried in her bowels. He died and rotted away above the earth and was not given the first or the second burial. Such was Unoka's fate'* (Achebe, 1969, 17). He was left to die in the Evil Forest. Unoka, died of a rare sickness and if buried, priests felt, it will pollute the earth or Goddess Ani. Hence, he was left on the forest floor. Again the

Ibo show great regard for the wellbeing of the earth and the environment.

Umuofia the name itself means “people of the forest”, a great symbolic gesture by Achebe. The forest is natural and pristine to the people of Umuofia, which has the dialectics of good and evil. ‘*The forest holds a special place in the Ibo society. The wrestlers were not there yet, and the drummers held the field. They too sat just in front of the huge spectators, facing the elders. Behind them was the big and ancient silk-cotton tree which was sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree wanting to be born. On ordinary days’ young women who desired children came to sit under its shade*’ (Achebe, 1969, 42). The ‘*silk-cotton tree*’ is sacred for the Ibo. The tree is the symbol of everlasting life from time immemorial. The book of *Genesis* has at its pivot the story of tree of the knowledge. The silk-cotton tree harboured spirits of good children waiting to be born. They vested a deity status to the ‘*silk-cotton tree*’; which was believed to be a divine presence for the young Ibo women. The Ibo regarded all features of environment as inspirited. This is a perfect example of ‘animism’. Hornborg says, “*A core factor in animism is the truism that nature energises the world with its constant flux*” (Hornborg, 2006). The example of the silk cotton tree is embedded in ‘animism’.

Dwelling in *Things Fall Apart*

Dwelling is an important part of the Ibo; they lived in harmony with nature. “*We (North American and Europeans) apparently cannot dwell in working harmony with nature, but perhaps other cultures are able to do so*” (Slater, 1996, 55). Different cultures dwell on this earth differently. Industrialisation and mechanised world did not respect nature. Since the sixteenth century at least people have been represented as dwelling in harmony with nature, sustaining one of the most seductive myths of the non-European other. Planting season in Umuofia was a season of peace and harmony and was observed as the ‘Week of Peace’. Okonkwo violates the peace by beating his second wife. Okonkwo is admonished, ‘*You are not a stranger in Umuofia. You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth, we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessings our crop will not grow. You have committed a great evil*’ (Achebe, 1969, 28). The reverence for the earth is evident in this passage. This instance perhaps confirms that the Ibo lived in harmony with nature and inspirited natural beings. This ecocentric belief stands out in sheer contrast against destructively anthropocentric Euro-American beliefs. The Ibo were overly sensitive towards the wellbeing of their environment.

The ‘*oikos*’, which means household/habitat in Greek, had been the basis of a holistic society in which humans, nature, and the sacred were close-knit. The *oikos* constitute a part of the dwelling. *Things Fall Apart* revolves around the protagonist Okonkwo. The first *oikos* represents Okonkwo, his family, his dwelling,

the spirits of the ancestors and the deity he worships. The next oikos is Umuofia where Okonkwo lives. This approach to the study of oikos, this ecocritical stance is entirely literary. “*This stance examines Literature from the oikic angle.....it is something that integrates specific space and time, nature-cultural elements and human action*’ (Selvamony,2003, 314).” Okonkwo fits into oikic model easily. This shows relationship between animistic beliefs and environmentally sustainable ‘dwelling’. There is no doubt that until devastation, displacement and colonisation supervened, the Ibos thoroughly knew and cherished the places they inhabited.

Nature in *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe shows the relationship between the natural world and the human beings in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. Nature held an important place in the Ibo society. The name of the village is *Umuofia* which means people of the forest. Humans, nonhumans and nature existed peacefully in the Ibo world. *Things Fall Apart* shows images of natural beauty and emphasises the ‘harmony’ with its surroundings. Achebe describes the rains as, ‘*And now the rains had really come, so heavy and persistent that even the village rain-maker no longer claimed to be able to intervene. He could not stop the rain now, just as he would not attempt to start it in the heart of the dry season, without serious danger to his own health...So nature was not interfered with in the middle of the rainy season*’ (Achebe, 1969, 31). Nature is untouched and revered in *Things Fall Apart*. The second part of the novel, devoted entirely to Okonkwo’s life in exile in his mother’s village after his accidental killing of a clansman, can be read as an extended development of this secondary theme that subtends the narrative at its primary level of development. Achebe describes nature dexterously, “*At last the rain came. It was sudden and tremendous. For two or three moons the sun had been gathering strength till it seemed to breathe a breath of fire on the earth. All the grass had long been scorched brown, and the sands felt like live coals to the feet. Evergreen trees wore a dusty coat of brown. The birds were silenced in the forests, and the world lay panting under the live, vibrating heat. And then came the clap of thunder. It was an angry, metallic and thirsty clap, unlike the deep and liquid rumbling of the rainy season. A mighty wind arose and filled the air with dust. Palm trees swayed as the wind combed their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure*” (Achebe, 1969, 118). Achebe’s penmanship adorns the simple natural scene into a surreal happening. ‘Coiffure’ of the palm leaves excites the imagination of the reader. “The non –human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (Buell, 1995, 7-8). Nature is the part of the Ibo society as Mircea Eliade says that everything in nature could be the subject of religious experience. The Ibo looks at rains as the celestial water and hailstorm as the nuts from the heaven. ‘*The earth quickly came to life and the birds in the forests fluttered around and chirped merrily. A vague scent of life and green vegetation was diffused in the air. As the rain began to fall more soberly and in smaller liquid drops, children sought for shelter, and*

all were happy, refreshed and thankful' (Achebe, 1969, 118). Achebe describes the beauty of nature after the first rain as pristine, green, and refreshed. The man is happy at receiving nature's bounty. 'Nature in a state of uncontaminated' (Garrard, 2004, 59), is present in the Ibo world. Mbanta is the new home for Okonkwo in exile. He is living with his mother's clan. For Okonkwo's refusal to reconcile himself to the turn of events that leads to his exile provides an occasion for another reminder of the significance of the female principle, *Can you tell me, Okonkwo, why is that one of the commonest names we give our children in Nneka, or 'Mother is Supreme'? We all know that a man is the head of the family, and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland. And yet we say Nneka- 'Mother is supreme.' Why is that?'* Uchendu asks 'Why is that when a woman dies she is taken home to be buried with her own kinsmen' (Achebe, 1969, 121)? Okonkwo shows his ignorance. Uchendu further explains that it is true that a child belongs to its father. But 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. She is buried there. Uchendu provides an insight into the culture's veneration of the mother as source of life, its association of femininity with the vital principle, enunciated in resolute terms in the dictum 'Nneka' ("Mother is Supreme"). Nature as mother embraces Okonkwo and provides sustenance to his bitter soul. Ecofeminism believes that 'women have been associated with nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular, while men have been associated with culture, the nonmaterial, the rational, and the abstract' (Davion, 1994, 9). But in the case of *Things Fall Apart* mother is shown as a supreme being. This image of Africa was quite unprecedented in literature; it also carried considerable ideological weight in the specific context of the novel's writing and reception. Chinua Achebe opens a new avenue of thought.

Apocalypse in *Things Fall Apart*

For at least three thousand years, a fluctuating proportion of the world's population has believed that the end of the world is imminent. *Things Fall Apart* is a tragedy. 'Tragedy conceives of evil in terms of guilt; its mechanism of redemption is victim age, its plot moves inexorably toward sacrifice and the cult of the kill' (O, Leary, 1994, 68). The Apocalypticism of *Things Fall Apart* is evident in the title; Okonkwo's world crumbles around him. Okonkwo's glum acceptance contrasts with the enthusiasm that accompanies his return to Umuofia, where his loss of social standing soon reveals itself as irreparable, and a tragic fate awaits him. Achebe writes in *Things Fall Apart* 'Seven years was a long time to be away from one's clan. A man's place was not always there, waiting for him. As soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it. The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another. Okonkwo knew these things. He knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan. He had lost

the chance to lead his warlike clan against the new religion, which, he was told, had gained ground' (Achebe, 1969, 155). The death of Ikemefuna is very tragic, it had a great impact on Nwoye (Okonkwo's son). As Keith Booker has remarked, the killing of Ikemefuna represents a pivotal episode in the novel not only as a reflection of Okonkwo's disturbed mental state, but in its reverberation through the novel, as a result of its effect upon his son, Nwoye' (Booker, 1998, 70). It marks the beginning of the boy's disaffection toward his father and ultimately his alienation from the community that Okonkwo has come to represent for him. One hardly need to ponder the cleavage between father and son to realise that it provides the most potent sign of the disintegration of Umuofia society, provoked by the introduction within it of the Christian religion. Over the three years of their companionship in Okonkwo's household, Ikemefuna has come to embody for Nwoye the poetry of the tribal society, which is erased for him forever by the young boy's ritual killing, an act against nature in which his father participates. The fate of Ikemefuna, is stark revelation of the grim underside of the tribal ethos, engenders the emptiness in his heart that drives Nwoye to Christianity.

Okonkwo grieves for his world which is falling apart. Okonkwo represents not only Umuofia but the whole of Africa which was being mauled by colonials. His grief symbolises the grief of the colonised world. *'Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and the mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women'* (Achebe, 1969, 168). The village that Achebe presents as united at the beginning of the novel begins to fall apart. The unity that was present among the clansmen during the council of war with Mbaino is noticeably absent when the clan gathers to discuss the humiliation suffered by Okonkwo and five others at the hands of the white man. The contrast is striking. *'...But we are we all here? A deep murmur reverberated through the crowd. 'They are not', he said. They have broken the clan and gone their several ways. We who are here this morning have remained true to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland....'* (Achebe, 1969, 183). It is this disunity that propels Okonkwo into drastic action and suicide to avoid further humiliation. And when he dies, the village dies too, in one sense. Since Okonkwo is the representative of the old ways of life, his death sounds the knell of the traditional way of life in Umuofia. *'It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming- its own death'* (Achebe, 1969, 172). Okonkwo puts an end to his life. *'Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead'* (Achebe, 1969, 186). It is evident that the clan-based Ibo culture could not withstand the impact of the new culture foisted on them by the alien religion. Obierika pays moving homage to Okonkwo and his world. *'Obierika, who has been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog..."* He could not say any more. His voice trembled

and choked his words' (Achebe, 1969, 187). Achebe's tragic vision of history is presented in these lines. The novel ends with the hero's suicide, but there is no real closure. The novel's elegiac mood culminates in 'apocalypse' of culture. Old order is eradicated forever giving way to imposed culture. Obierika's lament directs the reader to the heart of Achebe's novel: it is an elegy that incorporates a tragic vision of history that *Things Fall Apart* elicits the strongest and deepest response. Achebe presents an 'apocalyptic' vision in *Things Fall Apart*. This novel comes across as the consolation of the persecuted, although it is a tragic novel. Buell has argued that 'Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal' (Buell, 1995, 285). Worlds will come to an end if humans are not careful with nature and environment.

CONCLUSION

Chinua Achebe's attentive recreation of the process of everyday living in the tribal society that he depicts in *Things Fall Apart* has led to the immense popularity of this novel. The culture of Umuofia as depicted by Achebe functions through different plains. 'Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages, and even beyond' (Achebe, 1969, 3). The vagueness with which the narrator indicates the outer limits of Okonkwo's fame reflects the tribe's limited awareness of its location in space, of its specific place in the world. This concurs with the curious indefiniteness of its name, Umuofia, or "people of the forest". "People of the forest" is a name that depicts the novel's locale and shows the Ibo community firmly situated within the natural world.

Barthes considers tragedies as "the aesthetics of defeat". The description applies equally to all great tragedies of world literature, among which *Things Fall Apart* must now be seen to occupy a distinctive place. The deep insight that tragedy provides into the condition may well shake our being with fear and trembling, but it is the illumination and psychic release it generates that enable humanity to keep going. As a necessary component of its exploration of the African experience, *Things Fall apart* embodies this fundamental truth of the imaginative vision.

As evidenced from the examples cited above *Things Fall Apart* shows a 'Serve the Earth' attitude. Umuofia or "People of the Forest" understand their surroundings and environment. They knew how to coexist with nature in harmony.

'Animism' is evident in this novel. The earth itself, the sky, the winds, rocks, streams, trees, insects, birds, and all other animals therefore had personalities and were thus fully personified as other human beings. The forest, the cloud, the rains, and the wind all come alive in this novel; the whole Ibo world is a single entity living in harmony with the man and nature.

'Dwelling' is the central point of *Things Fall Apart*. It is at the centre of Okonkwo's consciousness as Okonkwo could be interpreted as the synecdoche of Umuofia. Farming was central to the Ibo community and the people were portrayed as environment friendly. Their farming practices are exemplary and significant. Umuofia occupies the central place in the narrative of *Things Fall Apart*. The

ecocritical theme of 'dwelling' is very well represented through Umuofia. When the integral part of the oikos goes, when Umuofia falls apart it sends a ripple effect. All old practices cease and leave a great void.

'Nature' keeps Umuofia enchanted, and acquires a significant place in the Ibo society. Natural wealth is treated with care and reverence. Again, an attitude confirming an environment friendly people and society. They negated the colonial attitude of 'anthropocentrism', giving preference to people over nature. The rich natural imagery of *Things Fall Apart* is a rich tribute by Achebe to nature, and environment.

'Apocalypse' or end of the world is the focal point of this tragic novel which keep reader's imagination on the hold. Umuofia, Okonkwo and the Ibo fall apart, and they become tragic spectators of their own calamitous end. The tragic vision of *Things Fall Apart* leaves a deep sense of loss in the reader's mind, which is going to haunt everyone forever. Achebe's craftsmanship is simply splendid. The verisimilitude of this world is akin to so many worlds which fell apart because of colonisation. This novel belongs to underground literature a befitting text to be analysed ecocritically.

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