CHAPTER- II

THINGS FALL APART

Chinua Achebe’s first novel *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958. It deals with a specific microcosm of Ibo society immediately before and during the effective and merciless occupation of Nigeria by the British in the second half of the nineteenth century. This occupation was a disaster in human and social terms for the Africans as it caused conflict and confrontation between their own culture and the Western. It was for them a traumatic experience. The impact was so great that it shattered Africa’s religious, cultural and social fabric. The wreckage was so complete that the Africans themselves seemed to have lost their cultural pride and moorings and developed inferiority complex. Besides them, Western missionaries, explorers and writers portrayed a distorted picture of Africa’s past which contributed to their cultural denigration. Prof. Trevor Roper observes:

> History meant the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not the subject of history.

In such a background, Chinua Achebe, who looks upon writers like himself as teachers, initiated to capture their past heritage in fictional terms to infuse in his people some measure of confidence and to teach them “that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather, that palm-tree is a fit subject for poetry.” It was essentially a process for redeeming their self-
respect. He felt it is his duty to "re-educate and regenerate" his society about their past and its philosophies. He stated:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.\(^4\)

In another place, he declares:

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse, to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word.\(^5\)

It is with this objective in mind that Achebe began writing his classic novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe was also aware about the superficial representation, and, many a time, misrepresentation of Africa in the fictional works of Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary; and so he decided that the story "we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intentioned."\(^6\)

The novel is, thus, the story of the rationale and passions of a living people set in Igbo land in Eastern Nigeria between 1850 and 1900. Here Achebe reveals the earliest contact between the Western and traditional African cultures. His choice of a pre-colonial background is significant. He presents an impressive picture of the Umuofian society as dignified, proud, unified, self-content and stable. The society is governed by a unified system
of customs and traditions, from birth through marriage to death. It had its rich myths, stories, folklores, folk-tales, proverbs, maxims, religions, rituals, faiths and histories. The tragic fall of such a composite and healthy world is best reflected in the very title of the novel which is taken from W.B. Yeats’ famous poem “The Second Coming”. A reading of the first few lines of the poem will show that there is a crisis in the civilization as it is in the process of degeneration:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the World.
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.⁷

Thus, the poem deals with the issues related to the struggle and fall of a civilized way of life and the novel Things Fall Apart can be seen as a dramatization of the fall and the subsequent crisis of the pre-colonial African society. In this respect, The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English has noted:

Achebe’s indignation at European representations of Africans in fiction prompted him to write his first novel, now an African Classic, Things Fall Apart (1958), an evocation of the civilized values of pre-colonial African society and of a proud clansman’s tragic downfall when the British colonialism fractured that society.⁸
While depicting Igbo life, culture and tradition in the novel, Achebe took the stand of an insider, an Igbo and an African to get the position of "a judicious viewer (who) may take (a backward step) in order to see a canvas steadily and fully." In an interview with Lewis Nkosi he clarified his position as an insider:

I know around '51,'52, I was quite certain that I was going to try my hand at writing, and one of the things that set me thinking was Joyce Cary's novel set in Nigeria, *Mister Johnson*, which was praised so much and it was clear to me that it was a most superficial picture—not only of the country---but even, of the Nigerian character, and so I thought if this was famous, then perhaps some one ought to try and look at this from the inside.10

Thus, Achebe evaluates African life, culture, society, tradition and world with African value systems. He uses African proverbs, tales, folklores, stories to evaluate their way of life, and proves how the whites err in evaluating and representing African culture. In his essay "Chi in Igbo Cosmology", he has clarified why one has to be an insider and go through the oral traditions in order to create an authentic African world:

Since Igbo people did not construct a rigid and closely argued system of thought to explain the universe and the place of man in it, preferring the metaphor of myth and poetry, any one seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own way. Some of these ways are folk-tales, proverbs, proper names, rituals and festivals.11

So Achebe had successfully used, among other things, these ways to depict a fictitious Igbo world to show that Africa had a civilization even
before its encounter with the West and that they did not pass a long night of savagery. In doing so he was neither boastful nor simplistic; rather, he delves deep into the issues involved and gives the picture of an early African society which has a sense of order, perspective and cohesion; thus its subsequent destruction is all the more poignant. His stand as a trustworthy witness of such a past is beyond question. He advocates that other writers should be trustworthy as well:

The question is how does a writer re-create this past? Quite clearly there is a strong temptation to idealize it—to extol its good points and pretend that bad never existed. This is where the writer's integrity comes in. Will he be strong enough to overcome the temptation to select only those facts which flatter him? If he succumbs he will have branded himself as an untrustworthy witness. But it is not only his personal integrity as an artist which is involved. The credibility of the world he is attempting to recreate will be called to question and he will defeat his own purpose if he is suspected of glossing over inconvenient facts. We cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolour idyll. We have to admit that like other people's pasts, ours had its good as well as its bad sides.¹²

Thus, his novels, particularly Things Fall Apart, the first part of which is exclusively devoted to depicting the pre-colonial African society, do not degenerate into a partisan analysis of the society. He also depicts the various inherent weaknesses and inhuman practices of Igbo society, which culminated in its tragic fall. While exploring the tragic phenomenon in the novel, Madhusudan Prasad expresses the view that:
*Things Fall Apart* is indisputably a deeply moving tragic novel, and the tragedy depicted is not as much of an individual as of the whole Ibo society.\(^\text{13}\)

If the rise and fall of Okonkwo takes place because of his blind adherence to a limited number of values of the society, the disintegration and the fragmentation of the African traditional society takes place again primarily for its partial acceptance of the wisdom and knowledge of their cultural heritage found in the form of oral literature.

Okonkwo is the hero of the novel, and it depicts his birth, rise and fall. He inherited nothing but achieved something substantial in his life in that traditional society and became one of the elders of the clan. He was rigid and very hard working. He was exiled for seven years to Mbanta for an inadvertent crime. He returned home and tried to recreate his clan which had been broken by the white man. But in the process, he killed a Whiteman’s messenger and hanged himself tragically.

Thus the story of the novel revolves round him. His life-story is used to analyze and probe the changes which arise due to the imposition of an alien culture, which time and again thwarted the traditional values; eventually the traditional society fell apart. But the society was self-sufficient with knowledge and wisdom, inherently coherent and secured. It was a composite society. Beauty and dignity were a part of its existence. A society where there was an easy and meaningful communion between the
mundane and spiritual, the individual and society, past and present. People like Okonkwo would have lived and died peacefully within the framework of exactly such a traditional society. It is the confrontation with European culture that leads to his suffering and eventual ruin. Okonkwo acquires an extra dimension in the novel and becomes the epitome of protest against the imposition of the alien culture. While analysing the character of Okonkwo, David Cook states:

Okonkwo is a hero in that he shows exceptional bravery, firmness, even greatness of soul. A hero is by definition an exceptional figure and so he does not simply embody the average virtues of his society in a fairly typical form; he is very far from being an Everyman.¹₄

Thus, the character of Okonkwo is to a large extent important for the understanding of his society. It also plays a central role in determining the destiny of his society.

From the very outset, Okonkwo is presented as possessing exceptional courage, physical strength and firmness of mind. The only flaw in his nature was that he was stern, uncompromising and inflexible. He was ambitious and refused to accept mediocrity. He despised everything his father, Unoka, represented. His father was poor, lazy, improvident and a debtor. And Okonkwo’s “life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness...it was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father.”¹⁵ As a
psychological reaction, since his childhood, Okonkwo did everything possible to excel in every sphere. He achieved material prosperity and possessed a large area of land, besides acquiring status in the form of the various titles which were cherished high in his society.

But there was a streak of violence in his character which got even more pronounced because of the impulsiveness which was inherent in his nature. This rage and uncontrollable temper led him into acts which were frowned upon by the traditional Igbo society. The incident which first dramatized his self-assertion was the breaking of the Week of Peace, which was an offence against the earth goddess, Ani, who was supposed to be the source of all fertility and the ultimate judge of all morality and conduct. Since he was cast in a traditional mould and was aware of the penance which he must undertake to purge his sin, he willingly paid the price for his trespasses. The killing of the boy Ikemefuna, who had been earlier taken as a hostage from a neighbouring clan and put in Okonkwo’s household, was another act of violence, which was contrary to the accepted tradition. That act of Okonkwo could also be viewed as a reaction against the fear which constantly tormented him; that nobody should consider him weak and cowardly. Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest man of Okonkwo’s quarter of Umuofia, requested him not to participate in the killing:

That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death.\textsuperscript{16}
And Obierika, his greatest friend, reacted against him thus:

What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families.\textsuperscript{17}

The retribution of Ani, the earth goddess, came in the form of Okonkwo’s inadvertent killing of Ezeulu’s son. This resulted in his banishment from his cherished land for seven years.

Okonkwo has been portrayed to be a man of iron will. However, he continued to suffer one disgrace after another. Each act in this tragic drama is the result of his extremist stand. Instead of working with ideology he preferred muscle power, and lost his battle against Christianity. The humiliation Okonkwo had to suffer in the whiteman’s court infuriated him. In his mind, he was quite clear that if Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they chose to be cowards, he would go out and avenge himself. The final tragedy which culminated in his death arose out of Okonkwo’s limited perception which did not enable him to comprehend the enormity of the power he was up against.

*Things Fall Apart* is the first novel of Chinua Achebe’s fictional works where Africa came into contact with the West for the first time. In fact, the very purpose of the novel is to depict the pre-colonial African society with every minute detail and the consequences that Africa would start to face in its encounter with the West. Thus, the later novels can be
studied as the gradual magnification of what Achebe has already introduced in his first novel. In this regard, C. Vijayasree Ravichandra states:

A reading of the four novels of Achebe in conjunction reveals how the traditional society of Africa has undergone a process of disintegration through its exposure to and subjugation by an alien force.\(^{18}\)

Through the title itself Achebe seems to suggest that the change and the subsequent disintegration of the African society that took place was inevitable. Yeats believed in change and development in human civilizations. His philosophy and vision of a civilization has been explained by P. Varalakshmi:

According to Yeats no civilization can either remain static or evolve forever towards a more inclusive perfection. It must both collapse from within and be overwhelmed from without, and what replaces it will appear most opposite to itself, being built from all that it overlooked or undervalued.\(^{19}\)

Thus while depicting the pre-colonial era, he has honestly portrayed the evils inherent within the traditional society in the form of various faiths, taboos, individuals and traditional practices and at the same time shown how the colonial machinery with all its organized religion, political and legal organizations, and superior technology had come together to squash that society. Consequently both the forces—from inside and outside—came to determine the destiny of the African traditional society. Vivid descriptions of the irrational taboos are epitomized in the abandoning of twins in the Evil
Forest and the maltreatment of Osu. Phobia related to darkness is expressed in these lines:

Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string.20

Achebe's depiction of the 'evil forest' represents, to a large extent, the darker side of African culture. In fact it is this weakness and seamy side of Africa that opened the door for the West to enter the African world. Achebe elucidates:

Every clan and village had its 'evil forest'. In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and small pox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died. An 'evil forest' was therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness. It was such a forest that the rulers of Mbanta gave to the missionaries...21

The strength of the missionaries grew fast when they got Osus among them. The description of Osu in pre-colonial Africa is very poignant and shows one of the root cause of the disintegration of that society:

He was a person dedicated to a God, a thing set apart—a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Whereever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden caste, long, tangled and dirty hair. A razor was taboo to him. An Osu could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not take any of the four titles of the clan and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest.22
Okonkwo played a great role in the disintegration of his society, although the root cause of the formation of his character can be traced back to his society again. He was given birth in a society which deprived his father Unoka from any status as he was not a hard working person. Although Unoka was a great musician and a cultured person yet he could not get any respect and died as a ‘woman’. So, Okonkwo committed himself to become one of the successful people of his society ever since he was a child:

Even as little boy he had resented his father’s failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was ‘agbala’. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that ‘agbala’ was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness.\(^{23}\)

Thus from a very early age he started working hard to shed off the shame of his father. His struggle was also intensified as in the society, “a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father”\(^{24}\). But unfortunately, his acceptance of the values of the society was partial and culminated in his lop sided tendency towards manliness and violence. It was this tendency that had deprived him from perceiving and learning the value of the other aspects of society. K. Indrasena Reddy analysed this aspect of his character:
Okonkwo is all brown lacking in thinking faculty to reason out things and evolve a strategy for the community against the white intruder. The heroic streak in him, however, is a life of action, industry, adventure and achievement. He suppresses emotion, sentiment and every affection regarding these as unmanly and effeminate.  

From this evasive adherence to manliness, he started his journey of life. On the way he committed a series of crimes by violating the rules and conducts laid down by society, and in the process, frightening and alienating various characters even from their traditional way of life. The alienation that took place in the hearts of Nwoye, and to some extent Obierika, is the result of his clinging passionately to certain values of the society, which, in the exaggerated form, turned the virtue into weakness. Abiola Irele has analyzed the consequence of Okonkwo’s stand:

Outside factors afford the accessories of this tragic movement. As a result of his own mental attitude, Okonkwo’s relationship with other people is thrown off balance. His own rigidity towards himself is reflected in his impatience with others, and in particular with his son Nwoye.

Prema Kumari Dheram has analyzed the scenario:

If Okonkwo’s personal values are influenced by his timid father, Nwoye’s are moulded in reaction to his father’s bravery which he considers a manifestation of cruelty. He can never appreciate the stories of war and bloodshed his father tells him. The community’s practices involving brutal force and violence also make the adolescent despise the native customs.

Nwoye’s reaction against his father was strongest when he came to know that it was in fact his father that had killed Ikemefuna. Okonkwo had
deliberately not heeded the warning and advice of his friends and had violated the code of conduct of the society in killing the boy to prove his manliness. This brutal act instigated others in the society to rethink about their way of life. Nwoye got the strongest blow:

As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a lightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp. He had the same kind of feeling not long ago, during the last harvest season... They were returning home with baskets of yams from a distant farm across the stream when they had heard the voice of an infant crying in the thick forest. A sudden hush had fallen on the women, who had been talking and they had quickened their steps. Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthen ware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had never yet come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in that night after killing Ikemefuna.  

Okonkwo, since blinded by the passion of showing his manliness, did not agree with Obierika and could not see other truths existed in that society. The result is that he was not ready to listen to the suggestions of other people of the clan and did not even learn from his own mistakes which were taking place time and again. He was headstrong and followed his own individual way because of his subjective perception of the clan; in course of time, this rigid path was responsible for his own fate; he had carved his own destiny so to say by remaining extremely conservative.
Since it was clear from the comment of Ekwefi and that of the narrative voice that Okonkwo was not an expert in handling guns even when hunting. This was supported by the example of his failure at shooting Ekwefi. Okonkwo should have known his weakness, and should have been more careful in handling the gun at the funeral of Ezeudu. He again fumbled and committed a heinous crime inadvertently. He killed the sixteen years old son of Ezeudu and was subsequently punished. He was exiled for seven years from his fatherland Umuofia.

It was during this period of exile that the whiteman got entrenched in Umuofia and fractured the clan. While he obeyed the rule of the clan and went to his motherland Mbanta to face the rigours of the punitive measure, the whiteman broke all the rules of the clan laid down since time immemorial. It was his delay in returning from Mbanta that seems to be the root cause of the disintegration as Okonkwo tells Obierika:

Perhaps I have been away too long

This interpretation can find its justification in Igbo cosmology as Achebe interpreted the phenomenon:

As we have seen the Igbo believe that when a man says yes his ‘chi’ will also agree; but not always. Sometimes a man may struggle with all his power and say yes most emphatically and yet nothing he attempts will succeed. Quite simply the Igbo say of such a man: ‘Chie ekwero, his ‘Chi’ does not agree. Now, this could mean one of two things: either the man has a particularly intransigent ‘Chi’ or else it is the man himself attempting too late to alter that primordial bargain he had
willingly struck with his ‘Chi’, saying yes now when his first
unalterable word had been no, forgetting that ‘the first word
gets to Chukwu’s house.’

when Okonkwo had first seen and heard the whiteman preaching at Mbanta,

he had ignored him:

At the end of it Okonkwo was fully convinced that the man was
mad. He shrugged his shoulders and went away to tap his
afternoon palm-wine.

If the exile of Okonkwo had left the world of Umuofia free for the
entrance of the whiteman, it had also thrown his greatest friend Obierika into
confusion:

Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of
the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned
his friend’s calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously
for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he
thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led
into greater complexities. He remembered his wife’s twin
children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they
committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on
the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact
punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath
was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the
elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others.

So it did not take much time and hard work for the missionary to
break such an inwardly broken clan. Soon, people who were already
suffering started getting converted to Christianity to be saved from their
plight; Osus and pregnant women were among them. Nmeka the wife of
Amadi was one such who took refuge in Christianity because in her four previous childbirths, she got twins who were immediately thrown away as abominations.

The disintegration occurred very rapidly because of all those evil customs which thwarted the individual's freedom to live in peace and harmony; they were pushed forward to substitute the native religion with Christianity which made hay out of the crisis by providing a ready solution for it. But it was not always the myths and God of Christianity that fascinated the natives, for example, Nwoye was fascinated by the song which was imperative to the existence of Igbo life:

But there was a young lad who had been captivated... It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow.\(^3\)

Achebe made it clear through his fictional work that the disintegration that took place in African society was not because of the religious factor alone. There were other forces at work, both inside and outside the African society, which had rocked the very foundations of society. Achebe protested against all those dehumanizing forces which destroyed the beauty and harmony of African life. Chaman Nahal explained the stand of Achebe in depicting such a crossroad of African culture:

The protest in Achebe and Ekwensi is as much against their own past as the whiteman's civilization. While the native myths
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The protest in Achebe and Ekwensi is as much against their own past as the whiteman's civilization. While the native myths
are glorified, there is also a criticism of those myths. The need
for change is imperative both in Achebe and Ekwensi.\textsuperscript{34}

When Okonkwo returned from Mbanta, he found his clan had
undergone a great change, and had already started disintegrating. The unity,
the oneness, their myths, legends, beliefs, customs, religions, proverbs,
taboo, rites, fables, and all those things that made the clan stable, were
losing their value gradually; and people were not much concerned about ‘the
warrior’s return’:

The new religion and government and the trading stores were
very much in the people’s eyes and minds. There were still
many who saw these new institutions as evil, but even they
talked and thought about little else, and certainly not about
Okonkwo’s return.\textsuperscript{35}

The Christian missionary Mr. Brown soon realized that the religious
concepts of the Igbo people were not so weak as to be broken easily through
a frontal attack.

\[\ldots\] so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He
went from family to family begging people to send their
children to his school...\textsuperscript{36}

The result was that people of Umuofia were ideologically motivated
from the inside towards Christianity. Thus the ideological and repressive
state apparatus went hand in hand:

Apart from the church, the white men had also brought a
government. They had built a court where the District
Commissioner Judged cases in ignorance.\textsuperscript{37}
The killing of the people of Abame and hanging of Aneto played a great role in breaking the will of the clan against any attempts of resistance. Material values generated from whiteman’s trading system and his medicine had also twisted the thinking of individuals of Umuofia and drawn their attention.

Language played another important role in creating chaos in society. The whiteman did not know Igbo, and the interpreters twisted facts before him by taking bribes from the natives. Many a time the beauty and harmony of the natives had unnecessarily been destroyed because of the misrepresentations of it in an alien language. Lloyd W. Brown has interpreted the resulting crisis:

...language is not merely a technique. It is the embodiment of its civilization and therefore represents or dramatizes modes of perception within its cultural grouping. Accordingly, the whiteman’s failure to understand African customs in *Things Fall Apart* is bound up with his ignorance of the Africa’s language. In other words, Achebe seizes upon the perceptual values represented by an alien European culture and its language, then exploits these criteria to portray external conflicts between the African and the white colonialist, or to project the internal crisis of African society.38

Thus, though there was a communication gap between cultures, generating conflict between them, the whiteman was victorious not because of his ideological and cultural superiority but because of the technological
know-how at his command. Besides the Africans were too rigid in their ways. Harish Narang has identified the problem:

Okonkwo and the Umuofian people with their obstinacy and a rigid way of life as their besetting flaws are as much responsible for the tragic going of their society as are the white colonialists with their superior technology.\(^{39}\)

While depicting Africa at its crossroads with Europe, Achebe played the role of a silent spectator. He asserted his position in 1972 in an interview with Ernest and Pat Emenyonu:

There were certain faults in the Igbo system that were depicted in *Things Fall Apart*. There is no reason, for instance, for twins to be thrown away. But if, you take a position for or against, then you find yourself defending the throwing away of twins, or else you say that Africa is barbarism...\(^{40}\)

Thus, Chinua Achebe has depicted the beginning of the era of disintegration in African society in minute detail in his first novel. In his later novels too, he continued to deal with these themes, but from the point of view of transformation. Abiola Irele has rightly elucidated his role as a novelist in dealing with such a theme:

Achebe has justly been called a chronicler, for in the last resort he is not dealing simply with the collapse of African society but with its transformation. He is examining from the inside the historical evolution of African society at its moments of crisis, and the inevitable tensions attendant upon this process. In the final analysis, his novels reveal the intimate circumstances of the African Becoming.\(^{41}\)
Thus, Achebe's greatness in depicting the world of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart* arises not out of his indifference but from the analytical manner in which he portrays the historical situation in flux. This story is not a lamentation for a lost past but is a depiction of the process of change in the historic context. Although Achebe depicts his society objectively, yet he is a committed author. He has a clear vision and a duty that he will have to discharge towards his society. In this sense he is a revolutionary as he creates his own vision of order and purpose. He has read and reinterpreted African knowledge and wisdom for an African destiny. At the same time, in his fiction, he provides a meaningful appraisal of the distortions which have been brought about in West Africa by the colonizing culture, and he himself undertook the task to portray in an authentic manner the failings and weaknesses of the society. In doing so, he also presented African wisdom and knowledge in the form of proverbs and folk-tales to grow out of the problems. In *Things Fall Apart* alone, he has presented as many as thirty-nine proverbs and maxims. Each of them has wisdom and solutions of various socio-cultural problems. They carry the norms and codes, values and conduct in which the individual and the collective society find the meaning and significance of their existence. They regulate their lives in a proper fashion and educate them for even a better human destiny. Any violation of such customs may degenerate an individual or even a whole social structure.
They maintain cordial relations among individuals, society, ancestral spirits, and gods. A quick look at some of the proverbs and maxims of the Igbo oral society as found in the novel will show their vital role in generating their wisdom. They are generally addressed to all the members of the Umuofian society to educate them how to live with prudence and caution, avoiding extremes, knowing one's place, being respectful to superiors and cautious to inferiors. Here one thing must be clarified that as proverbs deliver the knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another down the ages, one may think that African society does not change and remains stagnant. The answer can be found in the proverbs themselves as there are two kinds of proverbs and myths in African oral society: One advocates flexibility and change, and the other rigidity and continuity.

The myths and proverbs which advocate rigidity and continuity relate to the anxiety about the existence of the Igbo society, especially about its security and preservation. The anxiety of coherence and continuity is central to them. As a result the voices of Nwoye and Obierika regarding various doubts and questionings are suppressed. Such proverbs and maxims serve a purpose in bringing the degenerating and disintegrating community together teaching them how to preserve themselves. On the other hand, myths and proverbs which advocate flexibility and change always appear with another tendency that considers rationality of argument, impersonal evidence and
verification to be of prime importance. They advocate objectivity, tolerance, respect for the individual, change in codes and norms, to mention but a few. In the society of the Igbo World, both kinds of myths and proverbs were pervading, hence there was change as well as continuity. In the very beginning of the novel, Achebe suggests the great role that proverbs played in the Igbo society:

Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.\(^{42}\)

Thus it implies that the society has an oral culture, literature and tradition, and they serve as a vital source of education for all the members of that society. A quick survey of some of the proverbs, maxims and sayings will be illuminating in understanding various aspects and dimensions of the African world, its rich cultural heritage and civilization.

The proverb "He who brings kola brings life"\(^{43}\) is very important for understanding Igbo life as it is essentially a unified one. Their way of life is neither purely material nor spiritual. There is a remarkable synthesis between the two and Kola is the central synthesizer and generative force in their society. It is presented to guests, ancestral spirits and gods; there is always a spiritual experience about it. In the novel, the entire clan is, thus, presented with the image of Kola, the life giving entity. When Obierika told
Okonkwo about the breaking of the clan, the imagery referred to the
breaking of a Kola, separation or division of the two lobes:

The whiteman is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably
with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and
allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan
can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that
held us together and we have fallen apart. 44

Thus with the breaking of the clan, a civilization with a life and
culture comes to an end. Any picture of the later phases of that Igbo world
and culture will not be a composite one as it has been disintegrated,
dismantled and fractured. In this respect, like W.B. Yeats's poem "The
resembles it best in portraying exactly such a broken world:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief.
> And the dry stone no sound of water. 45

The spirit of adventure, and the strength and integrity of a personality
was appreciated in the Igbo culture as the saying suggests, "Our elders say
that the sun will shine on those who stand before it, before it shines on those
who kneel under them." 46

If an osu gets its hereditary caste in the society down the ages, there is
another side of the society where "a man was judged according to his worth
and not according to the worth of his father" The society opens the door of
greatness for each and every individual of the community. That is the reason why Okonkwo succeeded in becoming one of the lords of the clan and won respect through his own individual effort.

There was no corruption in the pre-colonial African society and material prosperity was always associated with spiritual maturity and honesty. Thus, no corrupt person could become the lord of the clan. In such a society, depriving an osu of his social status only because of his forefather's role may be part of that tradition but it was essentially against the law of the land. It was because of the violation of such a law that the clan ultimately disintegrated, losing its unity and strength as osus forsook the African traditions for Christianity.

The status of an individual being is again confirmed when his achievement is revered irrespective of his age and material prosperity. It is the quality of the achievement which makes the difference and being appreciated:

Age was respected among his (Okonkwo's) people, but achievement was revered.47

It is because of this civilized value of the clan that Okonkwo's fame had grown. In Igbo culture and worldview, an individual could thus rise to his utmost zenith without any social obstructions. His relation to the
metaphysical forces could also be favourable if his wish was strong as the code suggested:

When a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm.48

Thus the rise and fall of an individual depended on an individual’s effort and hard work. There is another saying, “When a man says yes, his chi (Personal god) says yes also”49. Thus along with depending on gods and ancestral spirit for their favours, one would have to do hard work for his prosperity:

Sometimes a man may struggle with all his power and say yes most emphatically and yet nothing he attempts will succeed. Quite simply the Igbo say of such a man: ‘Chie ekwero; his chi does not agree. Now, this could mean one of two things: either the man has a particularly intransigent Chi or else it is the man himself attempting too late to alter that primordial bargain he had willingly struck with his chi, saying yes now when his first unalterable word had been no, forgetting that ‘the first word gets to Chukwu’s house’. 50

Thus Achebe clarified that success or failure in this Igbo world has nothing to do with the character of a person. A man of strong character and personality like Okonkwo may succeed in becoming a lord of Umuofia in agreement with his ‘Chi’ and again may fail in controlling his own son, Nwoye, and resisting the whiteman. He suggests, “Chi is therefore concerned with success and failure than with righteousness and wickedness”51. Thus, in Igbo cosmology, an individual is basically free from
any coercive forces whether they are social or metaphysical. Achebe stated in the same essay:

The idea of individualism is sometimes traced to the Christian principle that God created all men and consequently every one of them is presumed worthy in His sight. The Igbo do better than that. They postulate the concept of every man as both a unique creation and the work of a unique creator. Which is as far as individualism and uniqueness can possibly go! And we should naturally expect such a cosmogony to have far reaching consequences in the psychology and institutions of the people... all this might lead one to think that among the Igbo the individual would be supreme, totally free and existentially alone. But the Igbo are unlikely to concede to the individual an absolutism they deny even to Chi. The obvious curtailment of a man’s power to walk alone and do as he will is provided by another potent force—the will of his community. For wherever something stands no matter what, something Else will stand beside it. No man however great can win judgement against all the people.52

So when Okonkwo, acknowledged as one of the greatest men in Umuofia, humiliated Osugo for contradicting him at the kindred meeting of calling him a ‘woman’ for not having any title, ‘Everybody at the kindred meeting took sides with Osugo... The oldest man present said sternly that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble”53. Okonkwo apologized and the meeting continued. Thus in that cohesive society there was no room for a tyrant. The community and the religion would thwart any such deviation of the rules and misadventures in society.
The reason why they felt that they belonged to one community was their common myth regarding their origin and development. They believed that each and every individual of the community had descended from one father, and creation of one God, Chukwu. Therefore, there was one life and one voice among all of them. This is visible in the very first few lines of the novel. “As a young man of eighteen he (Okonkwo) had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat.”

The bond among members of the community in sorrows and happiness, in sufferings and joys was of supreme value in the society. In Umuofia, Nwakibie, a wealthy man of Okonkwo’s village, received Kola nut from him with the prayer:

We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the egret perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break.

The prayer suggests the unity and harmony of the individuals, of the society in spite of their differences; this was the central and the ultimate meaning of their existence. In the same rhythm, Uchendu, the oldest man of Mbanta, prayed:

...We do not pray to have more money but to have more Kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him.
And one of the oldest men of Mbanta, preached in the same congregation and expressed his anxiety as follows:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving....We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. You may ask why I am saying all this. I say it because I fear for the younger generation...You do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice...

Thus the maintenance of the value of unity and integrity among all the individuals was the most important function of these proverbs and stories of rigidity. So, when Okonkwo violates the Week of Peace by beating his wife Ojiugo, people interpreted his behaviour with "the little bird nze who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his Chi". It implied that he should understand his position in society and live with caution. After Okonkwo’s inadvertent crime followed by the calamity, when Obierika started thinking about various philosophical and metaphysical issues related to the throwing away of twins and the killing of Ikemefuna, he could not reach any conclusion. He thought and resorted to myth and proverb. The suppression of the individual’s voice and freedom by the myths and proverbs of unity can best be understood when Ekwefi started telling Chielo about Okonkwo’s beating of her with the statement.

I cannot yet find a mouth with which to tell the story.
On the other hand, myths stories and proverbs of flexibility always teach the individual values and morality, necessary for change in the rules and customs of the society and for the creation of new values and codes.

When the younger generation became lazy in cultivation, the elders concluded that there was no gain in helping them by granting seed yams as “they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds”\(^60\). So Nwakibie, to whom Okonkwo had gone for assistance learnt not to grant any seed yams to any youngman. He had learned how to tackle the new situations which were not prevalent earlier. He had used the wisdom of a proverb from the oral tradition to justify his new policy: “Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching”\(^61\). But this new policy is not to be applied to all in general. The elder has his own capability to see each individual case and judge whether he can be trusted as their fathers said, you “can tell a ripe corn by its look”\(^62\). Thus the society changed and adapted its values to meet every new situation and yet kept the door open for people like Okonkwo who deserved favour.

Laws and customs in African culture were not always rigid and stagnant. They tended to change in course of time to suit new needs and demands: the punishment for violating the Week of Peace used to be very
rigorous and fierce in earlier times but it became very mild later. Ogbuefi Ezeudu said:

My father told me that he had been told that in the past a man who broke the peace was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. But after a while this custom was stopped because it spoilt the peace which it was meant to preserve.\(^{63}\)

Thus the African society did not cling to any custom blindly and for good. True, their understanding about a particular custom or ritual might be typical to their worldview, but they tried to understand things and change them if they were no longer feasible or appeared contradictory. Among the Obodoni, dying during the Peace Week was considered an abomination, and the person was not given a proper burial. Ogbuefi Ezeudu was critical of the custom and explained the reason for his objection:

...If a man dies at this time he is not buried but cast into the Evil Forest. It is a bad custom which these people observe because they lack understanding. They throw away large numbers of men and women without burial. And what is the result? Their clan is full of the evil spirits of these unburied dead, hungry to do harm to the living.\(^{64}\)

They were broadminded enough to understand that customs could vary in different parts of the world. They believed that “There is no story that is not true. The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others”\(^{65}\). Even though they were confined within their socio-cultural and geographical milieu, they believed in the immense
possibilities, in this world, in terms of visions and wisdoms. This culture had an open outlook which celebrated the co-existence of various philosophies and ways of life.

They did not just plunge into inter-tribal wars. They first tried to settle things through dialogue for peace and harmony, and explored other possibilities through diplomacy before finally going to war. In the case of the killing of the wife of Ogbuefi Udo by the people of Mbaino, for instance, the elders of Umuofia “decided to follow the normal course of action. An ultimatum was immediately dispatched to Mbaino asking them to choose between the war on the one hand, and on the other the offer of a young man and a virgin as compensation”.

The African justice system was found in order within their vision of life which decides whether the clan should go for war or not. Achebe portrays the scenario as follows:

...in fairness to Unuofia it should be recorded that it never went to war unless its case was clear and just and was accepted as such by its Oracle—the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. And there were indeed occasions when the Oracle had forbidden Umuofia to wage a war. If the clan had disobeyed the Oracle they would surely be beaten, because their dreaded agadi-nwayi would never fight what the Ibo call ‘a fight of blame’.

Their degree of tolerance could be seen at its best when Ajofia said to Mr. Smith, whose Shrine had ‘bred untold abominations’ in the clan:
You stay with us if you like our ways. You can worship your own god. It is good that a man should worship the gods and the spirits of his fathers...\(^68\)

It meant that they did not blindly follow some customs and rituals believing that was the only way of life. Their respect for other ways of life could be seen more clearly once again from the statement of Ajofia when he said to Mr. Smith:

We cannot leave the matter in his (Mr. Smith's) hands because he does not understand our customs, just as we do not understand his. We say he is foolish because he does not know our ways, and perhaps he says we are foolish because we do not know his.\(^69\)

There was also inter-clan brotherhood, friendship and understanding among them which degenerated at the time of the coming of the whiteman.

Uchendu said to Obierika:

I knew your father, Iweka. He was a greatman. He had many friends here and came to see them quite often. Those were good days when a man had friends in distant clans. Your generation does not know that. You stay at home, afraid of your next-door neighbour. Even a man's motherland is strange to him now-a-days.\(^70\)

Thus, Uchendu played a crucial role in re-educating and regenerating his tribesmen. As an elder and teacher he was an embodiment of traditional wisdom in society. Uchendu stated:
... I want all of you to note what I am going to say. I am an oldman and you are all children. I know more about the world than any of you.\(^1\)

He was a repository of knowledge. He knew the names of the gods, their genealogy and their dealings with men; the names of the friends and kings of distant clans and the tribal legends, meanings and significance of various proper names and the names of gods; their roles in human society, the stories of battles won and enemies conquered, the popular wisdoms of proverbs, folk lore, folktales and the esoteric wisdom of oracles, the calendar and the seasons, the right method of sacrifice, appropriate prayers, and formulas for greeting strangers. That was the reason why like a friend, philosopher and guide, he consolated Okonkwo in distress and condemned the killing of the whiteman in Abame.

When Okonkwo yielded to despair in his motherland, Mbanta, Uchendu, his uncle, consoled him. He felt sorry for him and called all his sons and daughters together along with Okonkwo. He educated them about the value of mother and motherland in the society. He taught them the significance of the proper name Nneka or 'Mother is Supreme' to analyse the status of mother in social relation. Although Igbo society was patriarchal, but from another perspective, mother, was considered supreme because she stood by in distress, in sorrows and in sufferings. In the same way, when people were well, “things are good and life is sweet”\(^2\), they lived in their
fatherland, but when there was sorrow and bitterness, they took refuge in their motherland. That was the reason why the status of Mother and the motherland was always greater than any other thing in that society.

Uchendu interpreted the murder of the whiteman in the light of his own collective desired wisdom from popular oral literature. He referred to the story of Mother Kite who refused to receive the duckling whose mother kept quiet and said nothing. That was an ominous sign of impending danger. So, as the whiteman of Abame did not say anything, they should not have killed him.

Had they drawn a lesson from the story they would not have been destroyed. The same thing happened to Okonkwo who had not learned any lesson from the story of the Snake-lizard that first killed its mother because she realized that the vegetables she had cooked were less in quantity only after having cooked them; later he killed himself for the same reason. Thus Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna himself against the warning of Ezeudu to show his manliness and conformity to the values of the clan. When the clan started falling into the hands of the whiteman, he killed himself. Thus, Achebe has shown that the society had enough wisdom in its oral literature to guide the people provided that they were willing to learn.

In this way the Igbo world that Achebe depicted was oriented on the basis of an even scale. But its central protagonist tilted the balance which
should not have been the case with an individual of the Igbo society. Achebe stated:

For every proverb you produce I can give you one that says the opposite. This is the way it seems to me that the world is made to run.\(^{73}\)

Again when he depicted the white people’s culture along with the native way of life, he was neither blinded by the western way of life nor prejudiced against the native African way of life. In this respect David Cook expressed his belief:

I do not myself believe that *Things Fall Apart* is concerned to pass judgement on social systems, nor to assert dogmatically that one is better or worse than another. What it does, in a largely objectively, in controvertible manner, is to demonstrate that every society depends on a fairly rigid set of conventions which can only be lived as a whole and can therefore only be evaluated as a whole—ideally from the inside.\(^{74}\)

In the novel, the sequence of events is split into three phases. Achebe, in the first part, delineated the way of life of an Igbo village. In a skilful and economic manner, using highly selective details, he portrayed the religious ceremonies, social festivals, traditional customs, tribal rituals and political structure of the society. In the fabric of the novel Igbo religious life is presented with dignity and respect. Achebe depicts the two principles that dominate Umuofian life: spiritualism mingled with mysticism, and practical wisdom based on materialism. Music was an integral part of the life of the
people. In that society, collectivism took precedence over individual honour. Religious observance and ceremony permeated every part of life as the people, famous for their industry, carried on their normal business of farming. Thus, a graphic representation of pre-colonial Africa has been made in minute detail. Achebe asserted in an interview with Bernth Lindfors:

One big message of the many that I try to put across, is that Africa was not a vacuum, before the coming of Europe, that, culture was not unknown in Africa, that culture was not brought to Africa by the white world. You would have thought it was obvious that everybody had a past, but there were people who came to Africa and said, "you have no history, you have no civilization, you have no culture, you have no religion. You are lucky we are here. Now you are hearing about these things from us for the first time". Well, you know, we did not just drop from the sky. We, too, had our own history, traditions, cultures, civilizations. It is not possible for one culture to come to another and say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; there is nothing else but me". If you say this, you are guilty of irreverence or arrogance. You are also stupid. And this is really my concern.  

Besides, resisting Europe's pejorative view of Africa and its representation in fictional work, Achebe tried to educate his society and the world about the true history of pre-colonial Africa. He stated:

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity.  

Thus in the first part of the novel, which depicts pre-colonial African society, along with the growth and development of the novel's hero
Okonkwo, the novel gives equal emphasis in portraying each and every aspect of the society, its individual life, family life, social life, cultural life, political organizations and their formations; justice system, agricultural methods and systems, medicine system, sports, music and poetry; art of conversation; ways of receiving guests, ways of taking meals; beliefs, customs, rituals, sacrifices, traditions; Religious festivals, agricultural festivals, marriage ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, oral literature and even seasons and the weather cycle.

Thus the novel interweaves the twin themes of the rise and fall of its hero Okonkwo, one of the greatest men in Umuofia, and the disintegration and destruction of the Igbo society. Professor Eustace Palmer has critically analysed the relation in this passage:

...in *Things Fall Apart* the presentation of the sociological goes hand in hand with the development of Okonkwo’s character. In the very deepest sense of the words *Things Fall Apart* is a novel which shows the interrelationship of environment and character, one of Achebe’s main aims being to demonstrate the way in which Okonkwo’s character has been moulded by his environment.\(^77\)

The very first chapter of the novel brings into light the very atmosphere of African culture. It minutely delineates the society with all its realities. It introduces its hero as follows:

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.\(^78\)
Here the narrative voice was not different from the African world. It was a voice emerging from within the society. Okonkwo was evaluated in the world of Umuefia with its parameters. Thus his defeating of Amalinze the Cat was celebrated throughout the nine villages and he became their hero. Since that time, he had continuously grown to become one of the leaders of Umuofia on his solid personal achievement. The novel depicts its hero in this way:

...Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan. He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their out-houses could hear him breathe. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had no patience with his father.79

Unoka, the father of Okonkwo, died ten years before the story began. He loved wine and music. “Eat, drink and be marry” was the philosophy of his life. He was a great musician. The society had inter-village relationships in terms of music; hence Unoka was in great demand:

Sometimes another village would ask Unoka's band and their dancing egwugwu to come and stay with them and teach them their tunes.80
But he was poor and had barely enough to eat and so depended on borrowing money from others.

The way Okoye was treated by Unoka exhibited the hospitality shown to guests in that society. Unoka received his guest with "Kolanut, some alligator pepper and a lump of white chalk"\textsuperscript{81}. Both Unoka and Okoye performed the reception ceremony. Unoka broke the Kola with appropriate prayer and Okoye drew some lines with the chalk. Unoka’s prayer unfolded two essential values of their society: life and its health, and their protection against their enemies.

Although Unoka was a great musician, yet he had no status in the society as he was unable to do any hard work or fighting in a war. In contrast to him, Okoye was not a failure because he had two large barns full of yams, three wives, and he was going to take his third highest title, ‘idemili’. Those were the three basic norms to evaluate a man’s greatness in that society.

Since Unoka died without taking any title and was heavily in debt, his son, Okonkwo was ashamed of him. But it was a good system that “a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father”\textsuperscript{82}. So the way for Okonkwo’s greatness was left open. He started working hard from the very beginning to become a prosperous man:

With a father like Unoka, Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men had. He neither inherited a barn nor a title, nor even a young wife. But in spite of these disadvantages, he had begun even in his father’s lifetime to lay the foundations
of a prosperous future. It was slow and painful. But he threw himself into it like one possessed. And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death.  

Thus Okonkwo started building his career and soon became one of the lords of the clan.

Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered.  

This shows that Okonkwo had fulfilled all the norms of the society to become a leader. It depended on one's personal courage and achievement. The society welcomed any individual who wanted to rise and there was no corruption or obstacle in his way.

Okonkwo's character was further highlighted to show how under the pressure of values and norms, society had rejected his father and deprived him of his due status. This affected Okonkwo's fiery temper and aggravated it. His father, an artist in his own right, was not accepted by society as a greatman because he was unable to earn wealth by his musical performances and had not been bestowed with any title. This made Okonkwo ashamed of his father. He tried to amend the losses caused by his father. He was
depressed and thought of starting a new life rejecting all his father’s values so that he would not be found to resemble him. He tried to project fire and anger as the basic elements of his personality:

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives especially the youngest lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children.  

But this was a mere façade; his true identity is exposed not much later:

Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw Okonkwo’s fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father’s failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbala. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion— to hate everything that his father Unoka loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness.

This made him take another extreme stand one opposed with a vengeance to his father. Unfortunately for him, when he rejected the values of his father, he rejected some of the finest values of his culture. Hence there was a disproportion in the formation of his character, and its impact was visible in his interactions and reactions to various people and events of the
clan. There were differences of opinion between him and Ezeudu, him and Obierika regarding his participation in the killing of Ikemefuna; between him and Uchendu in their comments regarding the role played by the people of Abame in their dealings with the whiteman. So, although, some critics argue that Okonkwo is the epitome of African culture with all its values, one will notice that his selection of native values was partial.

When a conflict arose between Umuofia and Mbaino regarding the killing of the wife of Ogbuefi Udo, the novelist introduced their political organizations, bringing into focus how even their judgement was under the supervision of the religious institutions of the clan, to make sure that no humanism or justice was violated. Achebe went back to the history of African culture to show that its roots were there from the very beginning of the clan:

Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours. It was powerful in magic, and its priests and medicine-men were feared in all the surrounding country. Its most potent war-medicine was as old as the clan itself. Nobody knew how old....in fairness to Umuofia it should be recorded that it never went to war unless its case was clear and just and was accepted as such by its oracle—the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. And there were indeed occasions when the Oracle had forbidden Umuofia to wage a war. If the clan had disobeyed the oracle they would surely have been beaten, because their dreaded agadi-nwayi would never fight what the Ibo call ‘a fight of blame’.87

This shows the democratic system of their policy in inter-tribal relations. They did not fight for nothing or for the sake of fighting. They had
their own ways of evaluating a crisis and saw the justification reasonably; before going to war, they used to send an emissary to their enemy clan to choose between war and peace which was a ‘normal course of action’.

Their religious institutions also handled various domestic problems, socio-cultural or economic, and maintained harmony and unity among the individuals, society, religious organizations, gods and ancestral beings. All of them together constituted their world. The oracle of the Hills and the Caves played the role of a mediator among them. It was such an Oracle that Unoka consulted when he was dogged with a miserable harvest:

The oracle was called Agbala, and people came from far and near to consult it. They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbours. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers.88

Unoka was advised by the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, Chika, to ‘work like a man’, which was the right diagnosis for him. This well-knit religious fabric could not be comprehended by the jaundiced eye of the West, leading Albert Schweitzer to comment:

The African is my brother but a junior brother. His religion was some kind of ‘mumbo-jumbo’. His was a truly dark continent.89

After his father’s death Okonkwo went to Nwokibie’s house for his first seed yams with a pot of palm-wine and a cock. Achebe depicted the discipline and aesthetics of a scene of family life in minute detail:
...Everybody thanked Okonkwo and the neighbours brought out their drinking horns from the goatskin bags they carried. Nwokibie brought down his own horn, which was fastened to the rafters. The younger of his sons, who was also the youngest man in the group, moved to the centre, raised the pot on his left knee and began to pour out the wine. The first went to Okonkwo, who must taste his wine before anyone else. Then the group drank, beginning with the eldest man. When everyone had drunk two or three horns, Nwakibie sent for his wives. Some of them were not at home and only four came in.

"Is Anasi not in?" he asked them. They said she was coming. Anasi was the first wife and the others could not drink before her, and so they stood waiting. Anasi was a middle-aged woman, tall and strongly built. There was authority in her bearing and she looked every inch the ruler of the womenfolk in a large and prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her husband's titles, which the first wife alone could wear. She walked up to her husband and accepted the horn from him. She then went down on one knee, drank a little and handed back the horn. She rose, called him by his name and went back to her hut. The other wives drank in the same way, in their proper order and went away.90

When Okonkwo requested him for seed yams, Nwakibie, convinced of his confidence and hardwork, gave him "twice four hundred yams". But that year the climate was so bad that like every other farmer, Okonkwo’s harvest too was destroyed by the scorching sun; things were so bad that one farmer even committed suicide. But Okonkwo endured that sad and miserable year. He always said, "since I survived that year, I shall survive anything"91. It proved his mettle and added a heroic dimension to his personality; subsequently, he emerged as a successful man, a hero and a champion of the society in the true sense. He had suffered and survived; he had not committed suicide like the man whose name Achebe did not think
necessary to mention. However, he could not face the final crisis and broke. Thus, he championed his society, and lived and died for it. Okonkwo's greatness was recognized in the society from the very early age:

If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say that his Chi or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his chi says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his chi agreed. And not only his chi but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands.\(^{92}\)

So Okonkwo soon became one of the lords of the clan. When the elders decided that he should take care of Ikemefuna on behalf of the clan, he took him to his house and ruled him along with other members of the family. Ikemefuna soon developed normalcy. As he was a lively boy by nature. Every body loved him and Okonkwo was not an exception:

Even Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy, inwardly of course. Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength. He therefore treated Ikemefuna as he treated everybody else—with a heavy hand. But there was no doubt that he liked the boy.\(^{93}\)

It was this sense of pride in doing things in extreme and with a heavy hand, to become a man, that led him to beat his wife Ojiugo in anger, forgetting the Week of Peace:

In his anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace'. His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to
stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a
goddess.\textsuperscript{94}

Again even when he felt repentant, and atoned by making the sacrifice
suggested by the priest, he kept it a secret so that his sense of pride in
manliness was not violated. He soon became the subject of criticism in
society:

People said he had no respect for the gods of the clan. His
enemies said his good fortune had gone to his head. They called
him the little bird nza so far forgot himself after a heavy meal
that he challenged his \textit{chi}.\textsuperscript{95}

In taking an aggressive stance and being led by passion, he tried to
suppress his real self, which was not the true identity of an African male. It
was his tragic flaw that he could not understand the true values of his
society. In imbibing the values of the clan, he was lopsided. And so there
was a serious contradiction between his outlook and of his clan. But he took
his values for granted and obstinately and uncompromisingly followed his
own idiosyncratic way of life. This aspect of Okonkwo’s character was
particularly portrayed in the socio-cultural festivals of Umuofia. When all
the people of the village were in a heightened festival mood for celebrating
The Feast of the New Yam before Ani, the Earth Goddess, Okonkwo was a
bit reluctant, as the celebration of the joy and happiness did not resemble
masculine values of ‘violence and bloodshed’. The difference in his attitude
and that of his clansmen is thus brought out:
But somehow Okonkwo could never become as enthusiastic over feasts as most people. He was a good eater and he could drink one or two fairly big gourds of palm-wine. But he was always uncomfortable sitting around for days waiting for a feast or getting over it. He would be very much happier working on his farm.

When he saw that a few leaves of a banana tree were cut, his ‘suppressed anger’ found an outlet; he beat her wife Ekwefi. When he was again humiliated over his gun, he shot at her, but she was saved. These two incidents further highlighted the degree of his extremism and how passionate he could be when he wanted to assert his masculine identity. However, his cold response did not make any difference to the celebration of The Feast of the New Yam that year:

Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival because it began the season of plenty—the new year.97

The day had a special significance in the Igbo cosmology because it unified individuals, their ancestors and goddess. People showed their gratitude to Ani and she wrote their destiny for the forthcoming year:

Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth.98

Thus the community made an elaborate preparation for the ceremony and Achebe depicted it through the family of Okonkwo:

Okonkwo’s wives had scrubbed the walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light. They had then drawn patterns on
them in white, yellow and dark green. They then set about painting themselves with cam wood and drawing beautiful black patterns on their stomachs and on their backs. The children were also decorated, especially their hair, which was shaved in beautiful patterns.

The depiction of that pre-colonial society, particularly the minute details of the celebration of a festival like the New Yam have a far-reaching impact, in that the readers are able to appreciate and evaluate a bygone era, rich in its cultural heritage.

Achebe also demonstrated the important role of sports, music and poetry in the traditional Igbo society. Drums and music were the part of every socio-cultural gathering. The beating of drums played a great role in moving the audience and in heightening the degree of their participation. On the second day of the New Yam Festival, it became one with the clan:

The drums were still beating, persistent and unchanging. Their sound was no longer a separate thing from the living village. It was like the pulsation of its hearts. It throbbed in the air, in the sunshine, and even in the trees, and filled the village with excitement.

The second day of the New Yam Festival was the day for the wrestling match between Okonkwo’s village and their neighbours. The entire village was in festive mood:

It was difficult to say which the people enjoyed more—the feasting and fellowship of the first day or the wrestling contest of the second.
Okonkwo’s family also made preparations for attending the Wrestling match in the ‘ilo’, which was a significant part of the topography from the point of view of Igbo cultural life:

Every village had its own ilo which was as old as the village itself and where all the great ceremonies and dances took place.\(^{102}\)

The massive participation of the society in each social gathering was a sign of their cultural maturity:

The whole village turned out on the ilo, men, women and children.\(^{103}\)

The final game of wrestling took place between the leaders of the teams who became the best wrestlers in all the nine villages of Umuofia. When Okafo won the match his supporters eulogized his victory with a song full of hyperboles:

Who will wrestle for our village?  
Okafo will wrestle for our village.  
Has he thrown a hundredmen?  
He has thrown four hundredmen.  
Has he thrown a hundred cats?  
He has thrown four hundred cats?  
Then send him word to fight for us.\(^{104}\)

In Igbo traditional society, if they had festivals and celebrations, they also had war and violence, rituals and sacrifices. Even in this sphere of life, the psychology of the children was moulded in such a way that they thought it was right to be masculine and violent. And oral literature, particularly folk-lore and folk-tale played a great role in it. Thus their worldview became
confined to their culture alone and they tried to explore morality and justice within its purview. So, even when they did something wrong, it was as if they were automatic robots, programmed to do one thing or the other; their hearts remaining untouched by the ferocity of the act. It has been particularly made clear when the narrative voice classified the role played by those who had destroyed the house of Okonkwo when he committed in an inadvertent crime of a female ochu:

As soon as the day broke, a large crowed of men from Ezeudu’s quarter stormed Okonkwo’s compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend Obierika was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman.\(^{105}\)

Success in such a society was achieved through manliness and industry and through the conformity to the values of the clan. The quality of manliness kept the clan safe from any enemy, and the quality of industry boosted agriculture. Conformity to values and beliefs of the clan also had its effect on society, both positive and negative, but kept things moving.

When Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a great and fearless warrior, told Okonkwo about the death sentence of Ikemefuna, it was clear that they were none to determine the fate of the boy. It was faith in the religious institutions like the Oracles of the Hills and Caves merely led them to obey the decision, and go
for the sacrifice of an innocent child. They had the fear of being destroyed for disobedience so they had to conform. After all, through a proverb, their psyche had been programmed to accept the collective wisdom:

If one finger brought oil it soiled the others.\(^{106}\)

They had no animosity against a mere child and Okonkwo had learned to love him because he was so unlike his own son Nwoye whom he considered effeminate:

I am worried about Nwoye. A bowl of pounded yams can throw him in a wrestling match... I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him.\(^{107}\)

Moreover, Okonkwo’s family too had accepted the boy. There was no rivelry or jealousy between him and Nwoye; rather, the latter was fond of him and looked up to him because he could do things which he could not:

He was by nature a very lively boy and he gradually became popular in Okonkwo’s household, especially with the children. Okonkwo’s son, Nwoye, who was two years younger, became quite inseparable from him because he seemed to know everything. He could fashion out flutes from bamboo stems and even from the elephant grass. He knew the names of all the birds and could set clever traps for the little bush rodents. And he knew which trees made the strongest bows.\(^{108}\)

Thus, a lovely companionship had developed between Ikemefuna and Okonkwo’s family; the child had made a place for himself in the Okonkwo’s household. That was the reason why elders warned Okonkwo not to participate in the dreadful act.
It implied that the clan had a humanitarian spirit but had become merely the victim of an established system of religion and its codes of conduct. They could not violate that code. Taking him to the outskirts of the village to be killed showed that it was not a celebration that they were going to enjoy. Moreover, he was escorted from Okonkwo’s house by being told that he would be taken to his own house, and he was killed from behind. All this shows that in obeying the dictates of the Oracle, they tried, in their own way, to soften the sentence as much as possible. After the heinous act had been committed the entire village, Okonkwo being no exception, suffered from the depression:

Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna.¹⁰⁹

But the strict conformity of Okonkwo and the people to the religious system of the clan had a negative influence on society. The murder of Ikemefuna frightened Nwoye who later on left his father, his father’s society, ancestral spirits and cultural gods, and took refuge in Christianity. He had not been able to forget the crying of twins abandoned in the Evil Forest. These incidents paved the way for the disintegration of the society.

The uncompromising character of Okonkwo, thus, pervaded throughout the novel. To him, strength, manliness, rigidity and conformity to the traditional values was the only way of becoming a great man. So, in his society, time and again, he found himself in contradiction with others. Any
deviation from the codes and norms of the society became a subject of anxiety for him. He expressed his anxiety and, if necessary, protested in such cases. He objected to Obierika's stand of aloofness with regard to the killing of Ikemefuna, and his doing something better:

You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die.\textsuperscript{110}

Okonkwo's rigid perspective of greatness as a sign of manliness, strength and violence did not break even when he heard that Ndulue, a fearless warrior and a great man, and his wife Ozoemena had one mind. Their love and affection was so strong that his wife died when she confirmed her husband's death. It was a flaw in his character when he doubted such a story. But Obierika understood the Igbo world in its correct perspective and so, he agreed and appreciated the relationship of the old couple in life and death. Thus, the conflict between Okonkwo and Obierika is the conflict between rigidity and flexibility. Okonkwo was rigid and suppressed the voice of the liberal minded Obierika time and again. When Obierika expressed his dissatisfaction about the ozo title which prohibited from tapping palm trees, Okonkwo said:

But the law of the land must be obeyed.\textsuperscript{111}

Obierika, a foil to Okonkwo, had developed a sense of agnosticism regarding their laws and customs. He pointed out the impracticability of these laws, which merely disturbed the normal course of life. It has no
reason to prohibit its owner from tapping his palm trees. But Obierika knew he could not ask such questions in that rigid society. The time was not yet ripe enough to raise such questions in that society. So, he held his peace, abstained from criticism, compromised and even started appreciating the title by comparing it with other clans. But there is no doubt that all those rigid and impractical, superimposed rules and restrictions led to the disintegration and fragmentation of the clan when the white man appeared on the scene.

Chinua Achebe was at his best as an artist in depicting the ceremony where Obierika’s daughter’s bride-price was finalized. He also envisaged the custom in the perspective of native socio-cultural origins to show that even when these people did something contrary to humanism, there was aesthetics inherent in their vision of life. It was because they were enveloped within such a worldview and socio-cultural structure that they could not see things objectively, and get rid their society of evil from such practices. They kept evaluating various methods of fixing bride price instead of abolishing the practice:

All their {people of Abame and Aninta’s} customs are upside-down. They do not decide bride-price as we do, with sticks. They haggle and bargain as if they were buying a goat or a cow in the market.

“That is very bad” said Obierika’s eldest brother. “But what is good in one place is bad in another place. In Umunso they do not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks. The suitor just
goes on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop. It is a bad custom because it always leads to a quarrel.\textsuperscript{112}

Although, there were some degree of flexibility found in their vision of life, yet their basic instinct was deeply rooted in their tradition. It appeared before them that their way of life is almost natural and not a construct of their socio-cultural milieu. So, they were not able to differentiate between the biological and the cultural existence of human beings. Their patriarchal society and black culture were so natural to them that they seemed to them as biological entities and not ideological stands. These were so rooted in them that Machi refused to accept that there could be some tribes which were matriarchal in structure:

That cannot be.... You might as well say that the woman lies on top of the man when they are making the children.\textsuperscript{113}

To them, biological and ideological identities seemed to be the same. Obierika compared the whiteman to a piece of chalk. The imagery was used to imply that there could not be any human beings who were not black. They regarded the whiteman as a deviation from natural human beings:

Those who knew Amadi (the name of a whiteman) laughed. He was a laper, and the polite name for leprosy was the whiteskin.\textsuperscript{114}

Thus, whiteman is not natural to them. They did not have any hatred in their hearts against women or whiteman but they refused to accept them as equals or partners.
Thus, there was a difference in their comprehension and perception of reality. The same controversy between illusion and reality raged in their medicine system. It was because of this that Ekwefi, one of Okonkwo’s wives, lost all but one child. They did not have any scientific method of diagnosing and treating any disease. Their whole system is based on superstitions, beliefs and intuition. Thus there was no solution in their disease. Okonkwo consulted many medicine men but could not save his children. Ekwefi’s nine children died one after another and there was no improvement of the situation as the medicine-man believed that it was because of a wicked child who took birth and died only to be reborn again to torture its mother. The trauma of such a mother is depicted with full of compassion:

At last Ezinma was born, and although ailing she seemed determined to live. At first Ekwefi accepted her, as she had accepted others---with listless resignation. But when she lived on to her fourth, fifth and sixth years, love returned once more to her mother, and, with love, anxiety. She determined to nurse her child to health, and she put all her being into it. She was rewarded by occasional spells of health during which Ezinma bubbled with energy like fresh palm-wine. At such times she seemed beyond danger. But all of a sudden she would go down again. Everybody knew she was an Ogbanje. These sudden bouts of sickness and health were typical of her-kind. But she had lived so long that perhaps she had decided to stay. Some of them did become tired of their evil rounds of birth and death, or took pity on their mothers, and stayed. Ekwefi believed deep inside her that Ezinma had come to stay. She believed because it was that faith alone that gave her own life any kind of meaning. 115
When a medicine-man discovered the *iyi-uwa* of Ezinma and destroyed it, only then that cycle of birth and death apparently came to an end. Later when Ezinman fell ill, Okonkwo gave a proportion of medicine before Ezinma to take the stream of it as a medicine for Iba and so Ezinma soon recovered. Achebe in the scene depicted both the superstitious and herbal medicine system of Africa.

Okonkwo’s family with all his wives and children had been delineated in the novel in minute detail to show the pre-colonial African family life. Okonkwo used to be the head of his family maintaining the Yam, the king of all the crops, and his each wives used to cultivate their green vegetables like cassava. Okonkwo provided yams to his each wife every time before cooking and used to get their dish for him at the time of taking meals. He used to live in his own obi, while three of his wives had their separate huts for each one of them. They maintained nice relationship among themselves and took care of their children’s education. Achebe portrayed this aspect of the society:

Okonkwo had eaten from his wive’s dishes and was now reclining with his back against the wall...Low voices, broken now and again by singing, reached Okonkwo from his wives’ huts as each woman and her children told folk stories. Ekwefi and her daughter, Ezinma, sat on a mat on the floor. It was Ekwefi’s turn to tell a story.

Thus, their children grew in harmony and affinity among themselves. The mother-daughter relation can be explicated through the relation between
Ekwefi and Ezinma. Ezinma helped her mother as an equal partner to pluck the hen. She calls her mother by her name and she responds her with equal zest for life and relations:

Ezinma was an only child and the centre of her mother’s world. Very often it was Ezinna who had decided what food her mother should prepare. Ekwefi even gave her such delicacies as eggs, which children were rarely allowed to eat because such food tempted them to steal. One day as Ezinma was eating an egg Okonkwo had come in unexpectedly from his hut. He was greatly shocked and swore to beat Ekwefi if she dared to give the child eggs again. But it was impossible to refuse Ezinma anything. After her father’s rebuke she developed an even keener appetite for eggs. And she enjoyed above all the secrecy in which she now ate them. Her mother always took her into their bedroom and shut the door.\[117\]

Ezinma’s relation with her step-mother also portrays the unity of their common values. She helped her step mother in building a fire in the second day of the New Yam Festival:

\begin{quote}
"Let me make the fire for you," Ezinma offered. \\
"Thank you, Ezigbo," she {Nwoye’s mother} said. She often called her Ezigbo, which means ‘the good one’.\[118\]
\end{quote}

They even did not draw a line between their children and Ikemefuna. The incident where Ikemefuna controlled all the children of the family proved that he had also become a member of the family. Obiageli broke her pot while coming from the stream. It was when she tried to make inyanga with her pot:

Ikemefuna came first with the biggest pot, closely followed by Nwoye and his two younger brother’s. Obiageli brought up the rear {with her broken pot, when her mother consoled her}
Nwoye’s younger brothers were about to tell their mother the true story of the accident when Ikemefuna looked at them sternly and they held their peace.119

While depicting the rise and development of Okonkwo as one of the judges of the traditional society, Achebe introduced their justice system which was well-organised and true to the spirit of the clan. They evoked enough fear among their subjects by centralizing their entire world within their power leaving their subjects only as physical entities to control them:

“Uzowulu’s body, I salute you,” he said. Spirits always addressed humans as ‘bodies’. Uzowulu bent down and touched the earth with his right hand as a sign of submission.1120

These nine egwagwus were none but the leaders of the nine villages of Umuofia in reality but worked in the mask of egwugwa as the spirits and ancestors of the clan. They conducted such cases which could not be solved by ordinary people or elders:

“I do not know why such a trifle should come before the egwugwu,” said one elder to another.
Don’t you know what kind of man Uzowulu is? He will not listen to any other decision, replied the other.121

Thus it worked as the Supreme Court of the clan. They gave justice in an unbiased and democratic way. So Okonkwo one of the judges of the clan was not even forgiven when he committed an inadvertent crime.

If Achebe depicted a well organised and successful justice system of pre-colonial African society, he did not ignore the darker aspects of Africa. That assertion is a proof of his objectivity. Perhaps life in the pre-colonial
African society was metaphorically depicted in the following passage which introduced the family of even Okonkwo in the grip of oral tradition, on the one hand, and the cultural gods and goddess on the other:

The night was impenetrably dark. The moon had been rising later and later every night until now it was seen only at dawn. And whenever the moon forsook evening and rose at cock-crow the nights were as black as charcoal.122

Thus in the society, oral tradition, including its literature, gave meaning and significance to their existence. They used to tell stories to their children to educate them. Ekwefi told Ezinma the fable of a wily and cunning tortoise who deceived birds by telling them, “a man who makes trouble for others is also making it for himself.”123 If he exploited them and created problems for them, it would all ricochet. The story of the Tortoise carried the wisdom which even their native gods and goddesses were expected to learn from. Because these gods and goddess, about whom the narrative voice said, “there is no humanity there”124, had become the voice of the society, killing and harassing innocent children time and again.

When Ezinma and Ekwefi were telling stories in turn happily, Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, came to take Ezinma before the Earth Goddess in her house in the Hills and the Caves. Achebe has depicted the scene in a lucid manner:

Once in a while Chielo was possessed by the spirit of her god and she began to prophesy. But tonight she was addressing her prophecy and greetings to Okonkwo, and so everyone in his
family listened. The folk stories stopped... At the mention of Ezinma’s name Ekwefi jerked her head sharply like an animal that had sniffed death in the air. Her heart jumped painfully within her.\textsuperscript{125}

The subsequent scenes are very pathetic. The priestess with all the power of her god threatened Okonkwo with dire consequences for objecting her and took Ezinma from her mother’s lap by saying:

‘come, my daughter...I shall carry you on my back. A baby on its mother’s back does not know that the way is long.’\textsuperscript{126}

When Chielo took away Ezinma from Ekwefi, her life seemed to be meaningless. Achebe again used rhetorics to bring home the point:

A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voices like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite.\textsuperscript{127}

Her sufferings at the tragic incident has been intensified when Okonkwo added:

Why do you stand there as though she had been kidnapped? \textsuperscript{128}

In such moments, Achebe depicted the darker aspects of African society in its naked realities:

There were no stars in the sky because there was a rain-cloud. Fireflies went about with their tiny green lamps, which only made the darkness more profound.\textsuperscript{129}

In such a crisis of the society, people become rebellious against their religious institutions and beliefs. Ekwefi asserted her individual freedom
before all the imposed gods and beliefs when she found herself in danger
before the cave of the god Agbala:

As she stood gazing at the circular darkness which had swallowed them, tears gushed from her eyes, and she swore within her that if she heard Ezinma crying, she would rush into the cave to defend her against all the gods in the world. She would die with her.\textsuperscript{130}

In the next morning Chielo returned Ezinma and she herself became a normal woman again helping the wife of Obierika at her daughter’s uri ceremony. It again depicted that the gods and goddess of the African native religious institutions have used innocent people to torture and harass the people of the society. The general people were innocent but had become the puppets at the hand of their gods and goddess. In this way the ill treatment done by deities to their subjects was also responsible for things falling apart on the eve of Christianing. The subsequent picture of the traditional society would be like the broken shell of the Tortoise:

His shell broke into pieces. But there was a great medicine-man in the neighbourhood. Tortoise’s wife sent for him and he gathered all the bits of shell and stuck them together. That is why Tortoise’s shell is not smooth.\textsuperscript{131}

Once upon a time the society had been united, and people lived in harmony speaking in one voice. The ‘Uri’ ceremony of Obierika’s daughter and the scene where a cow had been let loose were glaring examples of such togetherness. In the former case, some of the selected neighbours of Obierika came to help him in the preparation:
As soon as day broke, breakfast was hastily eaten and women and children began to gather at Obierika’s compound to help the bride’s mother in her difficult but happy task of cooking for a whole village.132

So also, when Ezelagbo’s husband’s cow has eaten his neighbour’s crops, every woman of that community went to the scene. The owner was soon heavily fined and the cow was returned to him. There was no quarrel or hatred against each other. In fact Ezelagbo was one of them who led the problem solved. They also checked whether any of the women of the community failed to come without any justifiable reason. Such co-operation existed not only in the intra community or clan but also in the inter-community or inter-clan basis. Achebe portrayed this understanding among themselves through the marriage negotiation of the daughter of Obierika:

This is not the first time my people have come to marry your daughter.... And this will not be the last, because you understand us and we understand you.133

It was such a healthy and cultured world that was broken into pieces; and the conflict once generated would become their destiny forever. They would never have the same beauty, harmony, poetry and dignity any more. As those aesthetics had become an inherent and intrinsic part of their lives, no outsider could readily identify with them. Besides, Achebe knew that the outsider’s perception of Africa’s indigenous traditions and culture would remain superficial. That is why he explained indigenous laws and customs time and again. When Okonkwo accidentally killed the sixteen year old son
of Ogbuefi Ezeudu at his funeral ceremony he was banished from his clan for seven years:

The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years. And before the cock crowed Okonkwo and his family were fleeing to his motherland. It was a little village called Mbanta, just beyond the borders of Mbaino. As soon as the day broke, a large crowed of men from Ezeudu’s quarter stormed Okonkwo’s compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend Obierika was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman.\(^{134}\)

Thus in the first part of the novel, the pre-colonial African society has been portrayed unhurriedly and in minute detail, analyzing each and every experience and event according to their own perspective. But in the second phase, where the novelist depicted the history of that society at cross-roads the pace is accelerated and events followed in quick succession to illustrate the advent of the whitemen’s influences in West Africa. So, Achebe devoted only six chapters to it while he had devoted thirteen chapters to depict pre-colonial Africa. In the third part, the story telling accelerates further, as it describes the disintegration of Umuofian society and the climax is reached when Okonkwo took away his own life.
The second phase of the story began with Okonkwo's exile. Even a man of his caliber and standing was not above the law of the land. Besides, his being away, paved the way for the English. No one could take the stand he would have taken regardless of the fact that his own son was one of them. Achebe tells the story of the coming of the white missionaries, followed by the civil administration, soldiers and traders. Okonkwo learnt from his friend, Obierika, about the advent of the white people in Abame, followed by the ruthless massacre of the people of that place in retaliation for the killing of the first messenger. The story of the massacre had spread far and wide and broken the will of the native people to resist the colonist's advance.

By the time Obierika made his second visit to Okonkwo, the whiteman had also appeared in Umuofia and "the circumstances were less happy". The readers are told that the missionaries had come to Umuofia and they had built their church there and had won a handful of converts. Further they had already started sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages.

In the beginning, Christianity appealed those oppressed by the natives themselves for one reason or the other: "the 'osu' for example against whom there were all sorts of allegations: they were considered "efulefu', worthless emptymen". So, the loss of those people was considered a good riddance
by the community. Chielo regarded “the converts are the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up”\textsuperscript{137}.

Obierika also informed Okonkwo that the missionaries were using Umuofia as a centre for their religious activities. This news instigated Okonkwo and he wanted to rebel against them. In his quest for understanding he made an attempt to listen to the missionary in the market place so that he could decide whether those aliens should be chased off or if necessary even beaten up. However, he chose to do nothing after hearing the missionary because he mistook him to be mad and harmless. He was immediately proved wrong because Nwoye seemed to find a panacea for his problems in the hymns and sermons of the new religion.

If the first part of the novel, which is devoted to the delineation of the pre-colonial African society is the depiction of “the ceremony of innocence’ of self-contained Igbo society in Umuofia before its exposure to the West\textsuperscript{138}, the colonial period, which has been depicted in the third part of the novel shows “the disintegration of the native society and collapse of the native administration with the onslaught of the white rule”\textsuperscript{139}. Thus the third part delineates Okonkwo’s return from exile and his confrontation with the sudden changes that have already engulfed his world. Okonkwo had assumed that he was returning to the same fatherland he had left; he soon realized it was not the Umuofia he had known before he was exiled. The
Christians were not the ‘mad’ people he had chosen to ignore, but they had built a church and had attracted not only the law born and the outcastes but also even men of title. Okonkwo was shattered to see that the once proud and powerful men of Umuofia had become ‘effiminate’ and cowardly. Okonkwo depicted, as the champion of traditionalism, one who wished to resist all that was alien and new, was as rigid as ever is. He had not changed in seven years. He resented the imposition of the new influences which were rapidly making inroads into Umuofian society. The great irony was that his own son was gradually swayed by the new religion and converted to Christianity.

The introduction of Christianity brought disaster for the collective unity of the society. It alienated the converts from their traditional ties and the royalty of their ancestors. The people of Umuofia could no longer be roused into collective action to protect their values and their way of life as Obierika explained:

*The Whiteman is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.*

And Okonkwo’s grief was not merely because of his own personal desire to become one of the lords of the clan, like a true hero, he was regretting for the cause of the people of his society.
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 he mourned for the war like men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women\(^1\).

Thus the very foundations of the community were shaken. Okonkwo wanted to fight and drive out the outsiders from the land of his fathers. Events came to a turning point, when under the guidance of Mr. Smith who was dogmatic and tactless, an ardent convert Enoch, who had been held in check by the first missionary Mr. Brown, exceeded his limit and unmasked an ancestral spirit Egwugwu. That was a sacrilegious act because even though some people knew who the egwugwu were and could identify the different persons representing the masked spirits by their walk, height and so on, they allowed the mystery to surround them because the sanctity of the powers and position of these egwugwu were central to the very existence of the clan and its worldview. So it has to be maintained with all caution. Achebe, in this way had depicted that when white man went to Africa, their native religious faiths were degenerating and people have already started doubting and questioning about the truth of these beliefs and traditions:

The egwugwu house into which they emerged faced the forest, away from the crowded, who saw only its back with the many-coloured patterns and drawings done by especially chosen women at regular intervals. These women never saw the inside of the hut. No woman ever did. They scrubbed and painted the outside walls under the supervision of men. If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan.\(^2\)
The doubt and agnosticism of the clan is depicted more explicitly in context to the wives of Okonkwo:

Okonkwo’s wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second egwugwu had the springious walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of egwugwu. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. The egwugwu with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan.\textsuperscript{143}

So, when whiteman went there, the native religious institutions were struggling to survive their authenticity and beliefs at their best and Enoch’s unmasking of one of the egwugwus gave a last death blow to such an institution. It is thus regarded the death of an egwugwu:

One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an egwugwu in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did.\textsuperscript{145}

Hence Enoch’s rashness, daring and religiosity infuriated the community. In their eyes, the church had ‘bred untold abominations’\textsuperscript{146} In Mbanta, Okoli was alleged to have killed a sacred python and in Umuofia the story of Enoch’s killing and eating of a Python spread but soon Mr. Brown restrained his energetic folk. The place of Python in their tradition was so established and central to their beliefs that no one could imagine that such a thing can even happen in the society deliberately. So, there was no punishment fixed for such a crime. And it is Christianity which had broken
and desecrated such belief and brought abominations for the first time. Thus when Enoch again unmasked an egwugwu, the long slumbering forces were unchained and the clan revolted:

That night the mother of the spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming- its own death. The spirits assembled and moved "like a furious whirlwind to Enoch's compound and with matchet and fire reduced it to a desolate heap. And from there they made for the church intoxicated with destruction."\(^{147}\)

In their fury for retribution they would have killed the missionaries, but they are appeased by Ajofia (Evilforest) "the spokesman of the nine ancestors"\(^{148}\) of Umuofia, and order was restored amongst the agitated people.

But the church building was demolished. It was a group rebellion against the evil that was penetrating and making inroads into their social structure. The administrative authorities, controlled by the whitemen, intervened, the elders of the clan were handcuffed and humiliated. It so happened that they were called presumably for friendly discussion to solve such type of problems between them. They did not know the hypocritical culture of the whiteman, that they will be arrested in the pretext of discussion. It was, thus, very important for them to assert their identity before the whiteman. Okonkwo, who was also jailed, snarled,
We should have killed the whiteman if you had listened to me.\textsuperscript{149}

They were merciessly beaten, and the entire village was fined for the destruction of the church. The high-flown sermon of the District Commissioner was a contrast to his own activities. The whiteman entered in the African world, desecrated their cultural and religious sanctities, abolished their native rules and regulations, deprived them of their rights and freedoms, and distorted their identities and culture by suppressing their voice, language and tradition. The new order that the white man had brought was a disaster for their cultural growth and disordered the harmony, beauty and justice of the African world. Thus every word of the district Commissioner was a torture to the souls of the six arrested leaders of Umuofia:

We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in our own country under a great Queen. I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn people's houses and their place of worship. That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world. I have decided that you will pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries.\textsuperscript{150}

When the whole village was thus fined, it was told to collect two hundred and fifty bags of cowries. And thus, bribery system, along with hypocrisy, was introduced in African society. They did not know that such a thing can be done:
They did not know that fifty bags would go to the court messengers, who had increased the fine for that purpose.\textsuperscript{151}

The hypocrisy was introduced first in the killing of the people of Abame in the market place. They hid themselves before the market was full of people and then they suddenly emerged from the hidden place and started the massacre at the unprepared innocent people. Achebe depicted how the bribery practice was first introduced in African world and broke the law and custom of the society and suppressed the native language, law and identity in the following dialogues between Obierika and Okonkwo. Obierika said:

"I told you on my last visit to Mbanta how they hanged Aneto."
"What has happened to that piece of land in dispute?" asked Okonkwo.
"The whiteman’s court had decided that it should belong to Nnama’s family, who had given much money to the whiteman’s messengers and interpreter."
Does the whiteman understand our custom about land?"
"How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad.\textsuperscript{152}

By the time Okonkwo was released from the prison his was a tortured soul that sought nothing but vengeance. He was not the sort of person who would bear such denigration unavenged. He embarked on the last day of his life, defiantly insistent and with a strong determination.

The final act which culminated in his death was symbolic of his single handed defiance of the British authorities. The climax reached when a court messenger tried to stop a meeting of the clan. Okonkwo chopped of his
head; but he was all alone in that act of violence. The leaders of Umuofia were too divided to follow Okonkwo’s example. He found himself isolated. The loneliness of Okonkwo was complete when he heard voices asking:

Why did he do it?'

Okonkwo, the defender of traditional culture and moral values revolted against the imposition of colonial coercion and hung himself, as he could not live to see the collective values crumbling, undermined and defeated. He recognized that the “centre could not hold” and world around him was disintegrated and changing. He could not compromise and live in an alien world.

Thus the tragedy of Okonkwo is one of the most pathetic experiences that Umuafia had got in the hand of the whiteman and Obierika is left in a world of wilderness. He told the District Commissioner about Okonkwo:

That man was one of the greatest man in Umuafia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog…'”

Okonkwo was well-versed in the customs and traditions of the land. He knew the repercussion of his rash act. Yet he went ahead as if he had reached a dead end and there was no room left for him to survive with dignity and honour. Through his death, Achebe wanted to show the West what they have brought in the previously dignified world of Africa.
Along with this death and destruction, Achebe introduced another complex issue at the end of the novel as if to suggest the coming of the beginning of an era of the distortion of Africa’s past and the humiliation of its people.

When the District Commissioner came to Okonkwo’s house to take him, he found him dead and wanted to know why they did not cut his body down from the tree. One of the men said:

It is against our custom. It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansman. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you are strangers.

Only then the District Commissioner understood the reason why Obierika said:

…and perhaps your man will help us.

Before this enlightenment of the custom, he thought about the suggestion as a characteristic feature of the African people:

One of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words.

Although he was corrected here, but he remains ignorant about the whole history and the civilization of the people of Africa. He thought he was bringing civilization for the first time in this savage and primitive society. In fact, he was so passionate about his task of ordering the presumably chaotic world that he has planned to write a book on it. Achebe has depicted through
him how the West has distorted and evacuated the African society, and its
civilization and history. What is more what is to Africa a sad story is to them
an interesting one. He did not feel that the incident of Okonkwo’s suicide
deserves more than a reasonable paragraph.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe has demonstrated Africa of the
precolonial and colonial era for a reconstructive purpose. Here the
reconstruction is done in the outsider’s perception of Africa’s past and also
in the insiders’ re-education and regeneration from their traditional
knowledge and wisdom. Thus the novel remains as a classical work in the
history of African literature both in terms of themes and techniques. It
interprets Africa from inside in a more authentic and creative way for a
better understanding of its history and civilization for the people of Africa
and the world.
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