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# Moonlight on the Village Square: Echoes of Ancestral Wisdom in *Things Fall Apart*

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## Introduction

Literature has always been a reflection of men's life. It has rightly been perceived that literature deals with men and matters. It reflects the cultural and temporal background of the author's period. Achebe's literature reflects the post-colonial concept and serves as a means to comprehend the society of an era. His work "Things Fall Apart" is a rich literary work that aids in the preservation of ancestral knowledge systems and indigenous wisdom. This paper is an investigation on Achebe's intellectual representation of the culture, values, oral tradition and tribal systems with the intrusion of the colonial impact. The title of this paper signifies the tapestry of the shared spirit of the Igbo life and it deals with the ancestral cry amidst the long dusk of colonial encroachment.

## Review of Literature

Diana Akers Rhoads in her "Culture in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart" talks about Achebe's portrayal of the cultural sublimity of Igbo tradition, making it to be seen as a rich culture that deserves respect and that it tends to prosper more and more.

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o' in his "Decolonising the Mind and Marie Battiste's Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision" takes a stance on decolonial linguistic acquisition as a method of defiance.

"Things Fall Apart: An Analysis of Pre- and Post-Colonial Igbo Society" by Lame Maatla Kenalemang and "Analysis of Igbo Society" by Nina Ejeckam talks about the impact of colonial rule on Igbo society, leading to social, cultural, religious and gender-based influence.

"Indigenous Traditions in the Face of Western Influences" by Dr. S. Chelliah argues about the ethical considerations and the challenges in the novel, highlighting the contrast in the western ideologies and indigenous culture of the colonised people.

"The Impact of Colonization on African Identity and Culture in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart" by Dr. R. S. Regin Silvest and R. V. Sowmya talks about the disruption of African identity and the side-lining of the indigenous knowledge.

"Cultural Collisions in Things Fall Apart: Unravelling the Dynamics of Indigenous and Colonial Encounters" from Shanlax International Journal focuses on the cultural fracture, highlighting the decrement of cultural values.

## **Objectives**

- To trace out the portrayal of indigenous knowledge systems in *Things Fall Apart*.
- To bring out the ways in which Igbo culture is passed on and preserved through oral tradition.
- To use post-colonial and anthropological lenses in the interpretation of “Things fall apart”.
- To find out how a narrative can serve as a means to conserve indigenous culture and tradition.

## **Research Question**

How is the ancestral wisdom of the Igbo culture used as a key to preserve the culture and tradition of the society and resist colonial supremacy and influence?

## **Materials**

This paper uses a qualitative method of literary analysis using postcolonial theory, along with anthropological lenses. This paper uses Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* published by Heinemann in 1958 as its primary text. The paper uses postcolonial criticism by Ashcroft and Loomba, anthropological views from G.T Basden and Elizabeth Isichei, and *Oral Literature* by Ruth Finnegan. These works were chosen for their fine printing and good content.

The research also draws on a wide range of secondary sources like books, journals, articles, essays to provide ideas on the deeper research of the texts and helps in the application of the theoretical framework.

## **Application of Postcolonial Theory**

Achebe portrays Igbo culture from a native person’s point of view. The culture is portrayed as very old and traditional. The influence of colonization in African society is also portrayed in the novel. Edward Said’s critique of orientalism highlights the importance of African identity and cultural pride. This helps Achebe to make the reader visualize Igbo tradition.

The British influence was greatly intruding into the African culture through missionaries and administrators, who had a great influence over their culture, beliefs, religion and politics. These influences oppressed the Igbo culture. The major plotline too, revolves around how the protagonist, Okonkwo was unable to accustom himself with the invading forces which brought change in the indigenous culture. It highlights how the colonial invasion challenges those who are staunch followers of the Igbo tradition.

In the novel, we can also see the character Nwoye, who gets converted into a Christian and how this affects Okonkwo, the father of the boy. This shows the cultural division and difference of opinion that existed among the Igbo natives. This gives way to hybridity among the society, where individuals try to balance the native and colonial influence side by side.

Language is a tool to showcase opposition and resistance. It aids in the representation of a society’s problem to the world. English, being a universal language, is well utilized by Achebe to represent the reply and resistance of the native colonies like Africa, aiding in showing their thought process, feelings, denial and culture.

The lens of post colonialism in the novel, decodes how the indigenous customs tend to collapse and it also depicts how the colonisers’ law and ideology is implemented in a colony. This is seen in the novel, where the Igbo tradition, being sacred for the native people following Igbo tradition, has collapsed. Colonization has caused irreparable repercussions on Okonkwo, leading him to suicide, which is a breach of Igbo tradition.

## **Anthropological Lens**

This novel seems to be a record of the cultural practices, beliefs, ideologies of the Igbo culture. This lens helps to find out about the Umuofia society and how culture is taken to the next generations through stories and ritual practices.

There are various rituals carved in the plot like Egwugwu masquerades and yam festival throughout the novel. The fall of the protagonist shows how the societal values have undergone serious erosion due to colonial intrusion. Colonial intrusion seems to be the reason for the collapse of the indigenous values.

### **Tradition**

In the rustic countryside, oral tradition is passed on to generations through the word of mouth like folktales and proverbs. Likewise, the Igbo values and traditions are preserved and treasured. Cliff Geertz, an American anthropologist, talks about how culture is being a system of inherited conceptions expressed through symbolic forms.

There are ritual customary practices like Egwugwu which intertwines with spirituality. According to Victor Turner, rituals are the major forces in enforcing societal norms and cultural values. The colonial intrusion in the culture will diffuse the breakdown of spiritual values.

The novel shows how ancestral wisdom is transferred through kinship. Okonkwo gets stuck to the Igbo values and he has maintained the strength, honour and masculinity that is perceived in the society. His downfall is marked by how he is struck with the old tradition and has not moved on with time.

Achebe has used Igbo proverbs, idioms and storytelling in his English writings to show his disapproval of English influence. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) says that colonialism makes the indigenous expressions to disappear and vanish with time. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o)

Colonialism intervenes with Igbo custom and Okonkwo's tragic end shows the result of cultural disregard. This plot itself shows the author's resistance to accept the foreign influence. The novel's language, style and design itself shows the reflection of Igbo culture and the resistance to foreign culture.

### **Tribal culture in "Things Fall Apart"**

Chinua Achebe has shown the Igbo culture with communal background, ethnicity, ancestral wisdom and cultural and ritual practices. Cultural practices like egwugwu masquerades and ceremonies, the new yam festival, the week of peace, bride price negotiation, agbala - the oracle consultation was all portrayed with artistic expressions in the novel. The novel's portrayal of the indigenous tribal Igbo culture shows the cultural prosperity and the effects of colonial intrusion.

### **Findings and Result**

Storytelling, folktales and proverbs are the products of wisdom, which were taught under the moonlight as stories and values. They are filled with moral and educational values.

Cultural practices like egwugwu show the identity of Igbo people.

Igbo culture with gender roles and identity has changed with colonial influence but some people who are stuck with tradition like Okonkwo never change with time.

Achebe used English with Igbo culture and proverbs. He used English to show the influences of British colonialism where language serves as an aid to take the culture around the world and it also reveals the plights of colonization.

The natives show their resistance through recording their Igbo culture and experience in literature like Chinua Achebe.

The ancestral wisdom of the Igbo people aided the people to maintain their cultural originality through their cultural practices being. They also continued to speak in their native language instead of adopting the language of the colonizers. They never let go of their oral tradition.

Most of the Igbo natives showed strong resistance in getting converted into a Christian.

## **Interpretation and Discussion**

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a masterpiece which demonstrates the ancestral wisdom of the Igbo culture, primarily operating through oral customs and rituals. ‘The moon light on the village square’ is a symbol of how the Igbo society gathers under the moonlight to share rich knowledge and, it is a form of establishing their identity and preserving their culture. These customs strongly establish their norms and they serve as an act of resisting colonial rule.

The tragic fall of Okonkwo shows how people had battled with traditional rules and colonial pressures. The novel contains Igbo proverbs and this shows how indigenous writers have used English, the language of the colonisers, to voice out their problems.

## **Conclusion**

Chinua Achebe's “*Things Fall Apart*”, stands as a strong literary testimony of the ways in which literature treasures, values, records and spreads indigenous practices and knowledge systems. We come to know that ancestral wisdom is compiled and compressed in oral tradition, cultural beliefs, rituals and practices and these are recorded as literature by great writers like Achebe. With postcolonial insight and anthropological lens, we have decoded the colonial narrative and anthropological points of view, which shows that culture is deeply imbibed with the society. The phrase “moonlight on the village square” rightly describes how the indigenous values and customs continue to sparkle, despite colonial darkness. Through preservation and documentation of such values, the culture continuous to shine without any foreign threat.

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