

## **Aesthetics and Fine Arts of the Igbo Culture in *Things Fall Apart***

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### **Abstract**

The novel *Things Fall Apart* is divided into three parts. The events of the story are narrated by the author himself. The events facilitate him to explain the readers the intricate implications arising out of particular situations and circumstances. Thus, he plays the role of an intrusive narrator. The motivation of Achebe's writing *Things Fall Apart* is to respond to the negative images or representations of Africa. He intends to repudiate the Western clichés, stereotypes of Africa and its people. He wants to place an African at the radical center of his narrative, living and breathing in an African environment. Symbols are objects, characters figures or colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. It is highly symbolic. The locusts, fire and drums are important symbol used in this novel. In cultural arts such as music, dance, oratory and wrestling. Igbos of Umuofia are rich. The fine arts of Africa are functional and provides aesthetic pleasure. They are for serving the community. So, art is a part and parcel of their life.

**Keywords:** Igbo Culture, *Things Fall Apart*, aesthetics, arts, Igbo culture, wrestling

African literature forms a major part of twentieth century world literature. African Literature in the final analysis represents the writings of African nationals living on African soil reflecting the African native sensibility and atmosphere. The value of African Literature lies in its Africanness retained in spite of its cosmopolitan origin. Many of the novelists, poets and playwrights either eulogize their glorious past or speak of the devastation inflicted on the native societies by the colonial powers of Europe in terms of protest, conflict, anguish, anger or phobia. They make a fruitful use of the European literary forms in order to voice their strongly felt emotional turmoil, the offshoot of their encounter with the alien rulers.

African writings can be described as two-fold. Firstly, Africa's strange predicament is expressed by African themselves for the first time in a widely accessible medium. Secondly, African writing has the uncanny power of drawing a certain lasting emotional response from the

readers. Chinua Achebe, an outstanding novelist and a short story writer who excelled in depicting the African situation of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era.

Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian writer is truly outstanding among the few writers who excelled in portraying the African situation of the pre-colonial, era. His novels have pervading sense of Africanness and constitute so many chapters in the blighted history of his people. He possesses an effortlessness of story-telling and employs a curiously moulded tone which is at once formal and fiercely passionate. So, his novels and short stories become a rare phenomenon of literary excellence. They appear to contain a potent medicine which takes the reader into those occult zones of unravished beauty and the causes that spoiled it in the saga of African historical becoming.

Chinua Achebe was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria. His father Okafor Achebe was a Christian man and mother Janet N. Achebe was a devout Christian. He was baptized as Albert Chinuabumogu. He attended a primary school in Ogidi run by the Church Missionary Society. Then he attended government college at Umkohia from 1944 to 1947. In 1948, he entered University college in Ibadan, he had studied literature, history and theology at the University. As the first name of Queen Victoria's Prince consort was 'Albert', he dropped 'Albert' from his name and became "Chinua".

Chinua Achebe taught in a school for a year. Then he worked for a Nigerian Broadcasting Company, Lagos. In 1956, the company sent him to study broadcasting at the British Broadcasting Corporation in London. In 1957, he returned from England and continued to work in the same company. In 1961, he was promoted to Director of External Broadcasting. During 1960-61, he was travelled through East Africa on a Rockefeller fellowship.

Achebe has become renowned throughout the world as a father of modern African literature, essayist and professor of English literature at Bard College in New York. But Achebe's achievements are most concretely reflected by his prominence in Nigeria's academic culture and in its literary and political institutions.

He published his first novel named *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. Its impact was electrifying that it was translated into many languages such as German, Italian, Spanish, Slovene, Russian, Hebrew, French, Czech and Hungarian. The novel is multi dimensional in its perspective. It tells the story of an Igbo warrior Okonkwo who single-handedly fought the meddling of white rule in the native life.

The title for Achebe's novel comes from the poem. **The Second Coming** by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). The relevant lines quoted on the title page of the novel are:

“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”

In cultural arts such as music, dance, oratory and wrestling. Igbos of Umuofia are rich. The fine arts of Africa are functional and provides aesthetic pleasure. They are for serving the community. So, art is a part and parcel of their life.

### **Music and Dance**

For all occasions, Igbos sing songs accompany by dance. During the new yam feast, they sing songs. They spend three days in fun. After that the musicians go to the neighbouring villages to teach new songs and dances. They are in demand there. For these pleasures Unoka, the father of Okonkwo dedicates his life. When he was sent to the ‘Evil Forest’ to die alone he takes his flute Okafu emerges as the winner in a wrestling match; young men sing songs in praise of him. In a marriage function there is a non stop singing. Accompany the singers, musicians play on different instruments made of clay and metal. The Igbo sing songs not only for joy but also for sorrow and mourning. On the death of a village elder they sing,

“for whom is it well, for whom is it well?  
There is no one for whom it is well.”

The Igbo continue to sing even after the arrival of the white men. The songs are addressed to the white men and the court messengers. Thus, music is a second nature to them. Drums beat and dances are performed in all wrestling matches. Not only Okonkwo but also his wife Ekwefi are filled with excitement where they hear the drums as a mark of beginning the wrestling matches. Not only Okonkwo but also his wife Ekwefi are filled with excitement when they hear the drums as a mark of beginning the wrestling matches. On hearing the rhythm of the drums her heart beats faster and Okonkwo's feet start stamping.

### **Flute**

Flute is an important musical instrument. The Igbo community is good at making a variety of flutes. Okonkwo's father Unoka was good at playing flute. When he was sent to the ‘Evil Forest’ to die alone he takes his flute along with him. Ikemefuna is talented enough to make flutes with bamboo and elephant grass. Nwoye is much impressed by his skill in making flutes.

## Games and Sports

**Igbo community** gives much importance to games and sport. The spirit of sport increases the sportive nature of the society. In **Things Fall Apart** there are many instances where wrestling match is held, and they are described elaborately. Drum beats accompany the wrestling contests. Okonkwo is an enthusiast of sports. His wife Ekwefi is an admirer of wrestlers. She loved Okonkwo for his wrestling. The whole village of Igbo eagerly expecting the arrival of wrestling match. On the arrival of the match the village becomes alive. Everyone adjusts their work in order to attend the match. Wrestling is so important for Igbo society. Wrestling finds its place in their proverbs. There is a saying ‘you can’t wrestle with your own ‘Chi’. It means you cannot fight against your fate. Fencing is also in practice among the people of Umuofia. Almost all carry a machete. It is a useful instrument in the farm to cut and hack. In the battle field it is a useful weapon. The Igbo sports meet at the New Yam feast every year. It tests the stamina and skill of the community.

## Drums

Drums beat in all wrestling matches. Not only Okonkwo but also his wife Ekwefi are filled with excitement when they hear the drums as a mark of beginning the wrestling match. On hearing the rhythm of the drums her heart beats faster and Okankwo’s feet start stamping. A variety of drums known as the Ekwe, Udu and Ogene are used. During the wrestling match drums reflect the excitement of the people.

It was like a pulsation of it throbbed in the air, in the sunshine, and even in the trees, and filled the village with excitement. (31)

The drummers are completely absorbed in the beauty of the drums. The drum is not only an instrument of entertainment but also used to deliver messages. During ceremonies such as birth, death, marriage, wrestling match, title-taking ceremonies and feasts drum beat is heard. In **“Things Fall Apart”** when Ikemefuna is put to death a distant ekwe(drum) is heard accompanied with **‘Ozo’** dance. Thus, drum is a part and parcel of a man’s life in Umuofia. The drums are kept in long baskets. “As the man danced so the drums beat for him”.

An individual fate depends on his life style and behavior. Thus drums are transformed into metaphors of one’s destiny. When Ezendu dies, the drums call the village. During his funeral rites, there is a distant drum beat. Because of its varied uses and functions we can say that drums have a language. It is a fact that percussion instruments have their origin in the jungles of Africa.

Achebe opines that whenever the people are in need of guidance, it is the wisdom stored in the folklore that comes to their rescue. Folklore provides guideline to the individuals and to the society in times of need. Story telling is used to pass long hours in winter or night. They provide a wealth of information. Folklore plays a didactic role. The use of folk lore gives us a chance to understand a particular situation or a character in a better manner. The use of folk tales makes an argument effective, at the same time it serves as a means of mockery and criticism.

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