



## FOCUS ON THE INDIGENITY OF NIGERIAN ORAL CULTURE THROUGH PROVERBS IN ACHEBE'S NOVELS

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**Abstract:** This paper aims on Chinua Achebe's literary interventions as an important and powerful counter-narrative to European colonial representations that denigrated African cultures as backward subverted, primitive, and under civilized. Enhancing on Achebe's major works and essays, the study explores how Achebe retrieves the complexity, dignity, and philosophical depth of Igbo culture through orality, folklore, history and tradition. Achebe's works are scrutinized as a deliberate cultural project which aims at recovering and reclaiming African self-worth, mainly among educated Africans who had internalized colonial prejudices against their own heritage. This research focuses on Achebe's use of oral traditions- such as proverbs, myths, folktales and communal narratives where these are treated as central literary devices that personify Igbo worldview, moral reasoning and social organization. These are not just small aesthetic element, spirituality and collective governance. This paper further lights upon Achebe's strategic use of language especially English to judge African experiences, making argument on transforming the colonial language into a medium of resistance by implanting Igbo linguistic patterns and cultural themes within it. Achebe put forward creating a different contrast between indigenous oral laws and communal ethics with imposed European works, Achebe clearly exposes the cultural harshness of the systems which was moreover created by colonial rule and its impact on generational identity. Finally, the study creates a conclusion that Achebe's works establishes an autonomous African literary tradition which counts and challenges Eurocentric hierarchies and confirms the legality and legitimacy of various cultures, oral culture as equal to written textual tradition. Emerging himself as the foundational figure in creating and redefining African literature and cultural self-representation.

**Keywords:** Chinua Achebe, Igbo culture, orality, colonialism, African literature, Things Fall Apart, cultural identity, proverbs, postcolonial studies

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### 1. Introduction

The Emergence of European colonialism in Africa remarkably disrupted different indigenous cultures, languages and systems of Knowledge, often signifying them as backward outcast, dark, uncivilized. African literature, especially in the Postcolonial period, adhered as an important site of residence such misrepresentations. Among all, Chinua Achebe, whose works stand as embarked sustained critique of colonial ideology and show a passionate affirmation towards African cultural identity. Chinua Achebe's works seeks to enhance the old stereotypes which were imposed by colonial discourse and to retrieve the old historical, moral and



philosophical validity of Igbo society in African culture. Achebe's literary mission triggered the African societies which engages coherent social structures, ethical systems, rich traditions which were present long before colonial interventions. Though his works he challenges the notion that African culture is primitive, backwards, stagnant, asserting instead its adaptive, dynamism and intellectual depth. Achebe contributes a significant aspect which lies in the recovery of orality-Proverbs, folktales, myths and communal narratives. These oral forms engage Achebe towards the interrelationship between the individuals and the community, as well as the Igbo people's profound bond with native and their ancestral values.

By injecting the English language infusing with Igbo idioms and speech patterns, Achebe tactically transforms a colonial tool into a medium of cultural resistance- his works, especially "Things fall Apart", create views with authority and authenticity. This study enhances Chinua Achebe as a central figure in African literature whose works not only oppose colonial narratives but also inspires cultural self-recognition, pride and continuity among the Nigerians, particularly the educated generation who were shaped by colonial influence.

## **2. Literature Review**

Chinua Achebe happens to be the Chief architect in Nigeria work as art and stands as the epoch-making pills against decolonization. He stands committed to challenge the disgraceful "savage" and "barbaric" images contained by western colonial discourse. Achebe's most indigenous work "Things Fall Apart" (1958) is accepted as one of the deliberate creations the long rooted "Complex of the Self-abasement" in African consciousness. Accepting Igbo culture as life sustaining, prospective and subtle Achebe overlaps. The simple shortcomings and bestows all parallel positiveness of African worth. The core-vision of Achebe relates to a visible confrontation between the European textual authority and African oral tradition. Pre-colonial Igbo society and the day-to-day life was packed with sharp reasoning and insight with the current of ancestral injunctions that stands opposed to the "written laws" of the colonial forces. The art of masterful presentation of English language and the artful employment of the 'linguistic spirit' of the Igbo community in international readership level, Achebe did wonderful. Achebe's narrative zeal encompasses the style he maintains to incorporate lie Igbo proverbs where it is expressed as the "Palm oil with which words are eaten." The metaphoric and the metaphysic expressions and best deployed with the phrases like "the adaptive strategies of the bird evoke" and the "boastful lizards". Achebe's creation in novel form carries a pious interest where his individuality gets reflected and bestows a "third position" to African literature in the international arena not to visualize African culture in literature form as a mere marginal relic rather to be accepted as of autonomous reality. Moreover, translation of Achebe's artistic practice needs a deconstructive -reconstructive model. The method penetrates on churning out and pulverizing the colonial representations by removing "savage" or "barbaric" cliches from the flow of international of self-abasement. Achebe's critical learning paves the way for African literature as a repositioned indigenous tradition and ancestral authority. The method of dismantling envisages literacy and orality. It is purposeful mission to germinal indigenous linguistic forms. The cultural essence is endowed with proverbs and collective imagery. In nutshell, this framework is a sincere approach to African literature in Academic pursuit or inquiry where inherited wisdom is gracefully embraced not as a historical reference rather this opens a novel way of sensing African literature a vibrant, ever prospective and living mode of expression of reality that affirms the knowledge-system.



### 3. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative and interpretative research methodology based in closed textual analysis which seeks to prove the role of orality in constructing orality in the novels of Chinua Achebe. It primarily focuses on how Achebe shows and lets it stand, the Igbo oral traditions into the written English novel, using proverbs as aesthetic, cultural and narrative device which creates indigenous knowledge throughout the world. In this paper, the primary works of Achebe were taken for analysis which includes 'Things Fall Apart', 'Arrows of God', 'No longer at ease', and 'Man of the People'. These novels were worked upon as these works were well crafted with Igbo society and their extensive deployment of proverbs rooted in oral tradition. Major dates were collected through careful and repeated close reading. This study enhances an interdisciplinary analytical framework drawing on orality. Cultural and ethnographic perspective further shows the contradictions and interpretations of proverbs in relation to Igbo cosmology, moral values and communal ethics. Moreover, a comparative approach is adopted which aims to trace the variations in Achebe's use of proverbs across different novels.

### 4. Analysis and Discussion

In the literary domain of Nigeria, Chinua Achebe is one of the chief exponents to delineate the colonial tyranny of the Europeans against the parental and native culture of the Nigerians wherein the Europeans deliberately spread their latent motive to suppress the African tradition from the root calling it savage and barbaric. In most of his works he has brought about the candid effort of the Nigerians to overcome the European ideals injected into the African native culture resulting in shaking the traditional foundation of them. On the prospect Chinua Achebe also tries to purge of the educated Africans so that they will not anchor on the ideas that the African culture is embedded with superstitions and unreasonable thoughts which have nothing to inspire the educational values. To him, the Igbo cultural history should not be treated badly as it is done by the Europeans and it should not be treated undergrounded or superimposed describing it uncivilized and darkened. In some of his interviews Chinua Achebe has strongly denied that the thousand years Igbo culture is worthless and unreadable. On the other Achebe accepts the African culture and the Igbo in specific has its own origin as it is dynamic and progressive as of the others and it is ever shining and inspiring. As he says his motive was to set the score right with my ancestors. (Nwachukwu-agbada 121). Moreover, the writer flashes upon the orality of communication where the originality of the Igbo-social settings and wherein contained the deeply embedded knowledge of nature in its pure form.

"Things Fall Apart" in 1959 happened to be the center of attraction of many of the societies as Chinua Achebe unfolded the real truth-the rudimentary elements of African culture and the Igbo-past that rests on the nature's tincture and texture not at all was based on any superficial understanding. This encounter of Achebe in words and spirit attracted hundreds of pages of the literary magazines and surfaced itself as a matter of deliberation and logical approach. In this novel bloomed the colonial exploitation of the original thinking of the Igbo-past. He sincerely attempted to lay bare the positivity and affirmation of the Igbo-past compared to the Igbo-present. In the series of works of Achebe, he established the rawness and purity through orthodox that clings to the Nigerians.

Chinua Achebe's introspection of the Igbo past culture was based on Igbo tribe's beliefs in nature's control that is unique and special study is required to go down to this for a deeper understanding. Born in the lap of nature they have been thoroughly reared and taught the supremacy of the sounds and scents of nature. To him the Igbo-Past is celebrating and



shining. As he puts forward that his creation is an attempt to help his society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. To Achebe the Igbo culture is truly based on pure political base. The culture is inwardly framed upon a nature consistent defensive governmental structure. This is rational and legitimate. On the prospect Achebe strongly challenges the European culture and political frame which has nothing more to supplement the Igbo culture.

Chinua Achebe also ascribes a potential side of the African culture which should not be ignored or put aside. But this has been done by the Europeans frequently. But in real the African culture has been moved forward by its own survival methods and it has learnt to struggle and survive by its natural flow and stand point. Achebe also prefers English to other dialects to communicate his views only. To establish Nigerian racial pride as they can answer back to the Europeans within their communication frame. To Achebe it should be the prime duty of every conscious writer to defend and establish their own culture what he has accomplished in his writings. And for this Achebe has used some words which were unspoken and unheard. He has also set the train that the African writers should not be alienated or marginalized, which the Europeans are used to.

In most of his novels like things fall apart arrow of God and no longer at ease Chinua Achebe as one of the most prolific writers of Nigeria has adopted to oral form of communication. By doing this he has shown his excellence and expertism in using the oral communication of the Igbo tribe throughout his writing he has shown a close bondage of the individual with the community by oral form and there by prefers to establish and orally communicated society and the laws of Nigerian is both communicated orally as well as written. In his writings Achebe has attended to draw a line between the Nigerian written law and oral written law. The written law was the creation of the European set up which sometimes confuses and confirms the mind of the elderly African people or the older generation who never believe the written form as suitable to their belief and traditions. They find no value in it when the younger generation that has come up with mixed up learning formula imposed or spread by the Europeans in the present era are torn between the concepts of oral and written and sometimes biased to accept the colonial culture as an advance technical thing which stands opposed to the real of African culture which adopts the ancestral values and ideas. The communal laws were based on the ancestral mandates and oral arguments where the Europeans laws were set on a piece of paper. However, the older members of the Igbo society and the title name men remained out of touch with the written laws which required literacy when the orality was considered as the a pre literate medium. It is only the younger generation who are to choose in between and which one to accept. But as discerned the oral laws of communication had a broader appeal to the African behavior when not choosing the written are happened to the cause of lack of technological furtherance in Africa.

It is worthwhile to set the novels of Chinua Achebe as the clear-cut divider between the trend of European culture that was set to prevail in African culture with English settings as a temper to diminish or extinguish the African tradition and the trend of ancestral Igbo culture that has its deep origin and sustainability to continue by its own way with less written and more oral communication force. That is why the settings of Folker's proverbs stories and raw communication words of the Igbo are the central features of Achebe writings. As a prolific writer he exhibits his identity in closely communicating the human ideas in complete natural forms/in an unmixed pure way. As an individual writer he keeps himself alienated form the European trends that was shown in most of the advanced African writers who had complete



control over the English language as and partly influenced by the English culture. As a writer he knows it clear that art is ad always was at the service of man our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose (William Gerald). As a very responsible writers he creates a very parallel world of equal stature of complete African tradition and culture as compared to the writing carrying. the so-called sophisticated Europeans culture on the prospect Achebe writing is littered with pure African native communication surrounded with the local myths dialects proverb and narrations derived from nature. He does it deliberately only to provide an original stand and defense to the Nigerian Igbo culture to say the Africans which carries the high values and existence sustainability needs to be honored and studied.

In this case in his book of essays morning yet on creation day is an example and through his writings he ventured to create a completely new world of literature uniquely based on African tradition. Not that Achebe had no respect to English rather he stood with equal respect to English and his IGBO language as he admits to himself. Similarly to the Kenyen writer Naugi Wathimo Achebe created a third position out of the tension between IGBO and English even Achebe acknowledged when I am writing in English IGBO is standing next to it. I have therefore developed I think this possibly in which this language is are a communion.

As a powerful record of witness “Things Fall apart “things fall apart shades enough light on solace the happiness’ of late 1800 when the western community started empowering the Nigerian community and culture by its colonial ideals. The other novels like no longer at ease. A man of the people and Anthills of savannah of Chinua Achebe also came out to unnerve the colonial thread of culture and propounded the live voice of Africa within and solely reflected the IGBO language having its parallel excellence and uniqueness of survival by selecting the IGBO language stories, mythical mysteries folklores and proverbs Achebe pronounced the originality and created the interesting boundary lines to draw the minds of the reader around to the IGBO community and language as much as to the European ones. By this Achebe created the real third world of literary era of the Africans. Rightly Achebe used his English language for “infiltrating the ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within. Also, the native language forces its readers to look “outside of thesis constantly and identify more with the African culture”. The lines like “I don’t know why such a trifle should come before the Egwugwu show the African dialect in conversation. By setting the native communication of the Igbo inside English Achebe brings the Igbo potential before the enemy. The writing of Achebe is an unflinching representation of Igbo morality religion and culture. He strongly upholds the pro-African cultural manifesto whereupon he says “if a child washes his hands “he could eat with Kings” (Things fall apart ch.6). Referring to the washing of hands of Okonkwo Achebe wants to convey the pursing of activity of him to overcome the life style of his father. This includes the Nigerians in common implying if the Nigerians washed their hands they could be just as important as of Britain.

Achebe could establish the African pride by celebrating the folklore proverbs and oralities of them in the novels and thereby he could draw the attention of the educated Africans towards their own cultural originality and also succussed in proving the European notion wrong and also proved that the African culture is deep and strong and civilized.

## **5. PROVERBS:**

Proverbs have got a prominent place in any of the ideal writings as the most befitting tool to convey the cultural wisdom of only of the nation or countries or the piece of land where the



community survives. They candidly express the basis whereupon lies the belief and reasoning of the said communal dwelling. On the touchstone Achebe's novel are suitably packed with such reasoning through this pithy. Sayings of the Nigerians and the Igbo communities. Any kind of forecasting or prediction of the Igbos from the origin is clearly based on the natural beckons as they had recognized by their super intuitive capability that has been reflected in most of the lines of Chinua Achebe novels as follows.

“Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”. (Things fall apart 6)

The wisdom displaying proverbs are like:

“The lizard that dumped from the high iroko tree to ground said he would praise himself if no one else did” (Things fall apart 17)

Eneke the bird says that since main have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching.

IGBO culture is suitably and very conscientiously accommodated in the abode nature. The philosophy reasoning and spiritualism and all are constituted on the bulk of cosmic principles. They run live this in the pages and lines of Achebe live in the following ways

IGBO conscience is largely felt in the lives when a man says yes, his chi says yes also-proverb things fall apart.

If a man kills the sacred python in the scenery of his hurt the mother hides between him and his god”.

The enmity between Ezenether and Nawalka is displays in the proverbial lines like:

When a handshake goes beyond the elbow, we know it has trusted into another thing

The fruits and nuts are also the symbol of good life fortune and auspicious and depicted he who brings kola brings life.

In the same way the proverbial use like he who has people is richer than has money express the social unity and higher resources.

Considering the fact use of proverbs Achebe moves are artistically packed with proverbial structures where in blooms the validity of an oral community with every aspect fulfilled to complete with any advanced cultural community like European one.

## **6. CONCLUSION:**

As the chief exponent of oral communication values that need to be set as the example against the written text culture Chinua Achebe succeeds in his mission through his writing skills in the long as well as the short narratives. Achebe works of art amply suggest the value of oral culture is as important as the written text. More often the oral communication of any community is candidly connected with the principles of natural phenomenon that all the section of the people that are community both literate and illiterate com communicate in the same way. In the global family of culture, it is also proved that many of the written culture or text culture have developed from oral settings and latter have lost their purity of the descriptive quality after they have come to prescriptive mood and have been personalized. So, Achebe work stands as the milestone to safeguard the oral value not as a pre literate one rather proves it. As one adorned with the high quality of textual values simplified through all people communication language. So, it has got all the motherly descriptive feature of legal aspect that is more powerful than the perspective personalized textual structure. So, it should be a better admonition the would be a better admonition to all the literature scholars to accept the orality texture as equal with the written ones and they should be resisted from depreciating it. So, the prevalent European ideas



of cultivating the dependence on text as the legal institution or methods of law should be paralleled with the oral based literature and both are to be weighted with equal status and equilibrium be maintained.

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