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M.A (English) - Sem - 3

C.C - 12

Unit - III -

Chinua Achebe's
Things Fall Apart

Topic :- Clash of Cultures in 'Things Fall Apart'

Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' is one of the most popular novel of African literature. It was published in 1958 and its impact was electrifying that it was translated in to many languages such as German, Italian, Spanish, Slovene, French, etc. It still commands a pride of place in World literature and termed a classic. Chinua Achebe, the author of 'Things Fall Apart' was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, a large village in Nigeria. His parents, Izaiah and Janet were devout Christians. He was originally baptized Albert Chinulumogu. But he later rejected his Christian name, Albert for his indigenous one, Chinua. Although he was the child of a protestant missionary and received his early education in English, his upbringing was multicultural, as the inhabitants of Ogidi still lived according to many aspects of traditional Igbo culture. Achebe was a keen observer of the changes that took place in his native life. Though he was a Christian he remembers his curiosity regarding the native religious practices such as ancestral worship being observed by his relatives. In fact, his Christian background has helped him in studying the history of his people more impartially.

The novel presents a clash between two cultures: Western culture and Iboland. Achebe focuses upon the lives of Iboland (Western Nigeria) in the period between 1850-1900, covering the life of native people before and after the arrival of British colonies and Christian missionaries. The novel offers an almost documentary account of the daily life, ceremonies, customs, and faith of the Igbo people without evasion or romanticizing. Tired of the misrepresentation of African culture and lives in the western canon, Achebe tries to portray western colonialism and Christianity confronting an animist tribal system in Nigeria in its full complexity. His target audience is the Western reader and he wants to show that Igbo culture is also democratic, tolerant, balanced, open to progress and has a functioning belief system and an effective justice system. In Achebe's presentation, Igbos are a self-governing people. For big decisions all Umuofia gathers together under the leadership of ndichie (the elders) and during these meetings everybody can speak freely. The native people of Igbo society have developed a fairly democratic system of government where "a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father." So, Okonkwo, the main protagonist of the novel, gains property, wealth etc. and receives a prestigious position in native society in spite of the fact that his father, Unoka, was a lazy, idle, poor man who did not receive any title in his life. Igbos also have developed a well-established and effective justice system. When a member of their clan was killed by another

another clan, all the nine villages of Umuofia came together in the market place and decided to follow the normal procedure. Later we find in the novel that Okonkwo is sentenced to punish for exile due to break the silence in peaceful time and the murder of a clansman by mistake. In his absence, the clansmen, dressed in "garb of war" set fire to his house and barns and kill his animals. His life is wiped out so that community may heal and regain order. In other words, the individual can be sacrificed for the well-being of the community. The clan sacrifices Okonkwo by exiling him to appease the earth goddess, against whom Okonkwo has committed crimes.

Achebe also focuses upon the demerits of Igbo society in which twin born child were thrown in the forest because they consider them as curse on their clan. The author presents it through a character who born twins four times and every time she has to leave her children in the forest.

In this situation, the arrival of British colonies and Christian missionaries in Umuofia clan begin to divide native people in favour of and against of new religion. The villagers in general are caught between resisting and embracing change and they face the dilemma of trying to determine how best to adapt to the reality of change. Many of the villagers are excited about the new opportunities and techniques that the missionaries bring. The arrival of the white colonists and their religion weakens the kinship bonds

so central to Igbo culture. Ancestral worship plays an important role in Igbo religion and conversion to Christianity involves a partial rejection of the Igbo structure of kinship. The Christians tell the Igbo that they are all brothers and sons of God, replacing the literal ties of kinship with a metaphorical kinship structure through God.

The Christians arrive and bring division to the Igbo. One of their first victims is Okonkwo's family. The new faith divides father from son, and the Christians seek to attack the very heart of Igbo belief; such an attack also attacks the core of Igbo culture, as the tribe's religious beliefs are absolutely integral to all other aspects of life. The first converts are people who have no title in the tribe, and they accept Christianity to profit from a change in the social order. Nwoye, son of Okonkwo, accepts it because it seems to answer his long-held doubts about his native religion, specifically the abandonment of twin newborns and Ikemefuna's death.

The clash between native people and Christian missionaries reached ^{the} maximum height when church was burnt and many native people were humiliated by the District Commissioner. Okonkwo wants to react forcibly on white people but he felt that his people are not in his favour. Thus, he prefers dignified suicide to disgraceful surrender to the white man.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* thus presents a clash between two different cultures. Achebe dispassionately presents how things are beginning to "fall apart" in the Igbo society after the arrival of white men.