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Okonkwo : A Tragic Hero in the Classical sense

Aristotle in his Poetics writes about the basic features of the tragedy - "The plot of tragedy traces the tragic fall of the hero as a consequence of a tragic flaw in his character and/or an error of judgement or may also be a product of the hero's pre-ordained destiny." The plot of tragedy traces the tragic fall of the hero, when a disastrous change of fortune or reversal, catapults him from the heights of happiness to the depths of misery. This fall usually comes as a consequence of a tragic flaw in the hero's character and/or an error of judgement, although the fall may also be a product of the hero's pre-ordained destiny or fate. The tragic hero is supposed to move us to pity, because since he is not an evil man, his misfortune is greater than he deserves.

Okonkwo is the protagonist of Things Fall Apart. He is a self-made man who got the prestige and honour in his clan due to his own ability not inherited by his father. His father, Unoka had never gained any title in his life and is considered as a lazy, weak and coward person. When he died he left numerous debts

unpaid. It was upon Okonkwo to pay his debts and move his house to adversity to prosperity. Okonkwo always hated with the nature of his father so, he always try to show masculinity and acts violently so that no one can consider him a weak or kind person. He always acts violently without any thinking and this fault in his nature becomes the cause of his suffering and downfall. Like a tragic hero, the novel portrays his success and his downfall.

In the very beginning of his life, he increases the honour of his village by winning a wrestling contest. It was the first success in his life. Depicting this incidence, Achebe writes:

"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 honor to his village by throwing Amalinze, the Cat. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of the town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights."

Okonkwo's personality was very inspiring. 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 houses could hear him breath. When

his heels hardly touched the ground. He seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody.

Okonkwo's always acts violently without any thinking. It was the cause of his sufferings. As we see that in each of Shakespearean tragedy, the main protagonist suffers from a tragic flaw, similarly here Okonkwo suffers from this tragic flaw. It is seen at many times in the novel. During the week of peace, Okonkwo notices that his youngest wife, Ojiugo, has left her hut to have her hair braided without having cooked dinner. He beats her for her negligence, shamefully breaking the peace of the sacred week in a transgression known as *nso-ani*. The priest demands that Okonkwo have to give a nanny goat and a hen and pay a fine of one length of cloth and one hundred cowries.

Later Okonkwo's decision to take part in the death of Ikemefuna is another incidence of his tragic flaw. The elders of clan has prohibited him to involve in the murder of Ikemefuna, since the latter call him father. But, Okonkwo wants to show that he is not a coward and is not afraid of bloodshed. After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo sinks into a depression. He feels weak, and he can not sleep or eat. When Ezinma, his daughter, brings him his evening meal three days later, she tells him that he must finish everything. He repeatedly wishes that she were a boy, and he berates himself for acting like a "shivering old woman." His violent action is seen also at the

gun saluting ceremony Okonkwo's gun explodes suddenly. A piece of iron pierces the heart of one of Ezeudu's sons. Okonkwo is to be exiled for seven years. Okonkwo packs up his most valuable belongings and moves for Mbanta, the home of Okonkwo's mother.

After seven years of exile, when Okonkwo returns to his native place, the situation was fully changed. The Christian missionaries has divided people and breaks the kinship bond. Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, has also embraced Christianity. Okonkwo also wants to regain his old position and reputation. In anger, he kills the court messenger. It was certainly an element of self-destructiveness. Okonkwo wants to take revenge of humiliation by the District Commissioner. But he does not get any support from his clan members. At last he takes the decision of suicide. He does not to embrace defeat so he hanged himself.

Okonkwo is a tragic hero in the classical sense: although he is a superior character, his tragic flaw - the equation of manliness with rashness, anger and violence - brings about his own destruction. He achieves great social and financial success by embracing these ideals. He marries three wives and fathers several children. Okonkwo finds himself unable to adapt changing times as the white man comes to live among Umuofians.