



## IMPLICATION OF PROVERBS AS A TOOL OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper attempts to explore Chinua Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs and idioms as a dynamic cultural tool to glorify the tarnished and neglected pristine African Culture. Proverbs are a natural part of the speech of all cultures and traditional societies. They contain the wisdom of the past generation. They are the gift to the future generation to lead the life wisely. They are of philosophical and moral nature. They are conveyed in a few words but in a forceful ways. They are the accumulation of observation of human beings, animals, plants, natural phenomena, folklore, values, perceptions, thoughts and feelings of society. Chinua Achebe, a renowned African writer has made prolific use of proverbs and popular adages in his novels than any other African novelist. His novels are woven around the Igbo culture and Igbo art. "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm- oil with which words are eaten." (TFA-6) According to Igbos, a good speaker is he who uses traditional proverbs with skill and wisdom. Indeed, for the Igbos the core of conversation is the appropriate use of proverbs. These proverbs contain truth, consolations and a frame of reference for a whole people. They also reflect the good and the lean time through which their societies have passed.*

**Keywords:** Implication, Culture, proverb, Igbo, Clan.

### INTRODUCTION:

Achebe in his novel *Things Fall Apart*, set in traditional village, has prominently used the Igbo proverbs which reflect African cultural identity. Achebe believes that proverbs provide an insight into character and give momentum to narrative action. Igbos have proverbs for all occasions and Achebe has aptly used them to indicate various kinds of moods and situations.

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He is flexible in the use of proverbs while delineating various complicated situations. The proverbs used by Achebe in his novels contain varieties of all human experiences - success, proud, prospects and achievements, failure, spirituality, power, politics, colonization, wisdom, love, anger, hatred etc. The proverbs of the Igbo clan are built around the nature and agricultural crops like kola, yam, corn, palm, moon, sun, forest etc., and familiar animals like lizard, tortoise, bird etc. The proverbs are supposed to be terse and carry verbal economy for their powerful effect. The Igbo proverbs which Achebe has dexterously used in his novels are remarkable for its terseness, naturalness, meaningfulness and appropriateness.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's success is conveyed through the proverb after initial disaster in his life - "if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with kings and elders." (TFA-8) The impact of beautiful moon energies and inspires the Igbo, "When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for walk." (TFA-10) On Obika's giving up palm-wine trade, Ogbuefi Idigo reasons in a suitable proverb, "A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing." (TFA-19)

Okonkwo's rising up suddenly from poverty and misfortune is expressed in the proverb, "Looking at a king's mouth one would think he never sucked at his mother's breast." (TFA-24) His dominating nature and anger is criticized and disapproved by the oldest man in the proverb- "those whose palm- kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble." (TFA-24) His story of belief in destiny, his prowess and hard work is expressed in the proverb- "when a man says yes his *Chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed." (TFA-25) His ego and arrogance in breaking the week of peace is expressed in the proverb, "They called him the little bird *nza* who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi*." (TFA-28) His anxiety about his son Nwoye is revealed to his friend Obierika in the proverb, "Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies?" (TFA-59) Motherly love and care is expressed when priestess Chielo takes Ezinma on her back and says, "A baby on its mother's back does not know that the way is long." (TFA-92) The ignorance and foolishness of Abame villagers who killed a white man without understanding and knowing him which resulted in the massacre of them by the white men is told in the proverb "Never kill a man who says nothing." (TFA-126) Okonkwo's heart ache regarding the worthless and effeminate son Nwoye is put in the proverb, "Living fire begets cold, impotent ash." (TFA-140) His loss of place and position in his clan is not left waiting for him and filled with another person. It is suggested in the proverb, "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another." (TFA-155) Zealousness and devotion of the converted Christian Enoch more than the white man Mr. Brown is pointed out in the proverb, "The outsider who wept louder than the bereaved." (TFA-167)



## CONCLUSION:

Achebe's mastery over Igbo proverbs, depth of Igbo cultural heritage and his resourcefulness and dexterity is clearly seen in the preservation of naturalness and flavour of Igbo proverbs while translating them into English language. They are used in speeches to appeal to the audience or to make the point more forceful and clear. All the proverbs used by Achebe help in revealing and understanding the character of Okonkwo, his struggle to save his community from the foreign invaders and his defeat at last. Mphavhele's observation about Achebe's use of proverbs is quite noteworthy- "Chinua Achebe ..... uses plenty of African proverbs in his writing. But he does it cleverly, so that a proverb is not simply dragged into the story." <sup>1</sup> His successful use of traditional proverbs from the Igbo culture in his novels strongly affirms the purpose of Achebe to uphold the greatness of cultural heritage of Igbos. He has not only highlighted the traditional African Igbo culture through the use of proverbs but also glorified it.

## REFERENCES

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2. Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.

(All the references are taken from the above edition.)