

# Portrayal of Women in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God

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**Abstract:** This paper projects the portrayal of the women status in traditional African society by African prolific eminent writers Chinua Achebe. Africa is a continent where the dramatization of the fair sex is usual practice. Certainly the black continent is basically controlled by the male gender. It has a detailed study of Igbo culture in Nigeria, Africa. Post colonial feminism is a critical approach to the theory that takes aim at the bestowal of colonialism and their problems on women and gender. The finding explores how men and women are treated in a male dominant society. They also focus on inequality between men and women. Although women also have an main role in cultural system for example New Yam Festival.

**Keyword:** Gender, Africa, Society

## Women portrayal in Igbo Culture in Chinua Achebe Novels

Culture is the backbone of the society. We all know that culture binds, shapes transforms, renews and transports society to the next generation. A study of culture become mandatory for an entire society such as manners, dress, language, religious, rituals, norms of behavior and beliefs. The culture is adopted and followed by the people. To record a culture is the need of the day, because culture is changeable one in the fast changing globalized world. It is so need. Only from culture we can get the knowledge primitive's of science, and technology, medicine, geography and other sciences.

Olaudah Equiano in his autobiography, 'The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus vassa, the African' (1789), the first literary work to be published by an Igbo in English and Possibly in any language, writes about the richness of African and his Igbo heritage. He says

Our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundances w have plenty of Indian corn and vast qualities of cotton and tobacco..... we have also spices of different kinds, particularly pepper, and a variety of delicious fruits which I have never seen Europe.... All our industry is exerted to improve those blessings of nature.... Everyone contributes something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness we have no beggars... Deformity is indeed unknown amongst us, I meant that of shape..... our women too were in my eyes at least uncommonly graceful, alert and modest to a degree of bashfulness.... They are all remarkably cheerful. Indeed cheerfulness and affability are two of the leading characteristics of our nation.

Things fall Apart is a novel illustrate the life of Igbo society. In many cultures in different society, there is a big question, how the women treats and another question is male's attitude towards women. Achebe realized that colonized country destroyed by culturally, socially, and politically. The

movements of decolonizing importantly have to focus on the roles women. Mostly Africa is paternal society. They have more importance for male than the female.

We can understand from the beginning of the novel, the man is everything and women is nothing. in things Fall Apart Okonkwo id the protagonist ruled his house with strict rules. His wives, especially the youngest lived in fear of his strict rules. During the planting and harvesting season Okonkwo worked hard in his own land. But his wives and children were no strong as okonkwo. So they suffered physically, but they afraid of complain openly. Women suppressed in domestically. She belongs to the man.

There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one tittle which a man could take in the clan. (18).

According to Nyame, patriarchy is a system having the rule of father in family or the head of the family is a male person. The male person is dominant in all, in family and society. Women do not have any authority to lead a family or society according to Igbo belief in Things Fall Apart. Igbo culture considered that women should not interfere in social, political, and economical matters. Male power appears thus as fundamental in the Igbo patriarchal society where power is usually cited as the most important factor used by men to construct their own identities as the 'engendered' representatives of humanity. That power is not only at the physical level, but also at that of society itself.

Okonkwo is highly conscious of the male & female's job. They believe education system will helps the men to understand the value of tradition. His daughter Ezinma, asked him to bring to school.

Okonkwo's second wife had merely cut a few leaves off it to wrap some food and she said so. Without further argument okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping. Neither of the other wives dared to interfere beyond an occasional and tentative, " it is enough, oknokwo," pleaded from a reasonable distance(40)

Okonkwo beat his wife Ekwefi for a simple thing. The man will do anything to keep his prestige and dignity as the head of the family.

Rajesh argues that traditionally women are treated house wives, subjected to household works and for bearing children. Through the character of the Okonkwo Chinua Achebe projects the women's place and role in society. The social structure of the Igbo society can be seen through the people and ceremony. The people and elders sit on the common place and discuss ceremony and other issues but the women look on from far distance. They are not allowed to involve any meeting. It seems like women are the outsiders.

African women deteriorate on the skirt of their universe. Ignored, overburdened, degraded and made to feel like outsiders. They are not allowed and invited, when men were engaged in the discussion. They are not allowed in battle field, because war is man's job.

Asiyanbola states that,

Patriarchy structure has been a major feature of the tradition society. There are clearly defined sex roles, while various taboos ensure conformity with specified gender roles. Traditionally, men do not participate in domestic work including child rearing such tasks are considered to be the exclusive domain of women.(2).

Sumbal explores the Igbo culture and the aspects of gender bias. Where he argues that women are relegated to an inferior position throughout the novel *Things fall Apart*.

The marriage system in Igbo people shows the imbalance between men and women. Men are encouraged to marry several women as shows in *Things Fall Apart*. Nwaka, one of the leader of Umuaro Village has the five wife. Akuekbue has a two wife. The chief priest of Ulu, has three wife. Like this men are allowed to marry several women. But women have to tolerate the burden of their husbands humbly living in husbands house. For example the conversation of married Akueke,

They said the man ill- treated her, but Ojiugo's mother said it was a lie and that Akuke was headstrong and proud. "when a women marries a husband she should forget how big her father's compound was," she always said "A women does not carry her father's obi to her husband" (10)

In Igbo society Before marriage the originality of women is questioned buy the Igbo customs. Okuata is one of the character in *Arrow of God*, she was questioned by Igbo customs before marriage in front of Igbo people. It shows the insecurity of Igbo people. It shows that the virginity of the Igbo women is seems to be risks in their customs. The identity of Igbo women is dominated by the male. women are treated to consider their husbands' request if they beg a favour of their wives secretly. Ezeulu says in *Arrow of God*

It our custom a man is not expected to go down on his knees and know his forehead on the ground to his wife to ask her forgiveness or beg a favour. But, a wise man knows that between him and his wife there may arise the need for him to say to her in secret, I beg you. When such a thing happen nobody else must know of it, and that women if she has any sense will never boast about it or even open her mouth and speak of it. If she does it the earth on which the man bought herself low will destroy her entirely (172).

This paper describes the picture of women in Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. It is an attempt to depict the image of women in Igbo society. The issues of the women identity move various dimensions, social, religious, patriarchal and culture, and tradition each of this revolve around issues of identity and culture.

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