***Things Fall Apart*  by Chinua Achebe**

**(English, P.G. 4th Semester)**

Chinua Achebe’s first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) successfully reflects the issues of identity and the values of unspoken and unheard of phases and facets of African life. It is set in the1890s and portrays the clash between Nigeria’s white colonial government and the traditional culture of the indigenous Igbo people. It shatters the stereotypical European portraits of native Africans. Achebe effectively counters the persistent and self-serving European stereotypes of African identity, particularly the notion that the traditional African identity of the Igbo clan is however a society, which cannot survive and unaltered in the modern world.

*Things Fall Apart* (1958) relates the **social identity** of the Igbo people in Nigeria. The first part of it focuses on the pre-colonial structure of Igbo society. They had no centralized political structure. They lived in autonomous villages and towns ruled by their elders. However, the Igbo communities had no centralized government. They were known as democratic by social and political structures revolved around the idea of ‘cross-cutting ties’. The most significant social markers of Igbo society are the unique system of honorific titles. The titles are not conferred by higher authorities, but they are acquired by individuals. The story of the wrestling match between Amalize, the cat and Okonkwo is an instance of the identity of the village that used to be decided through the wrestling contests.

Okonkwo distinguished himself and got the honour to his village, he impressed all the villagers by his reputation as a wrestler throughout the nine villages of Umuofia. The wrestling match is to honour the concept of identity of the Igbo people in and around the nine villages of Nigeria. The value of physical power is considered not only in the wrestling matches but also in farming and rural activities. The Igbo clan in Nigeria has a patriarchal social identity. The women are supposed to be the followers of the men. There are the rigorous beatings of the women. The violence is prohibited during the sacred Week of Peace. It makes to note that the violence is accepted if there is no celebration of the sacred Week of Peace.

**Cultural identity** is one of the aspects that go to change to suit the changing needs and conditions. However, in all the societies there are certain basic values that constitute the culture and these need to be perpetuated because the loss of culture would mean a loss of identity for that society. *Things Fall Apart* mirrors the cultural identity of the people through the multidimensional panorama of the Igbo society. The harmonious existence of Igbo in the nine villages of Nigeria perpetuates the cultural aspects of their own. The arrangement of wrestling matches is one of the parts of it that used to be decided the identity of the village.

The arrangement of the New Yam Festivals makes a sense of the unified kinsmen in the Igbo society and their beliefs towards rejoice. The fellow feeling of brotherhood is a typical one when Okonkwo invites his kinsmen to a moonlight dinner to offer his ‘Kola nut’ for their kindness. The changes in the social patterns and the ethics make the drastic changes in the identity of the people. Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo works hard to help his father during the planting season is an instance of pride for Okonkwo. The villagers have killed the ‘ill fated’ Ikemefuna mercilessly. Nwoye shifted his focus from the Igbo ethics to Christianity. The arrival of the missionaries in the Abame village is another example of the change in the social pattern. When the missionary entered the Abame village, the Igbo people ‘killed him and tied up his iron horse to the silk cottontree’ (TFA: 102).

**Pacification and Change after colonialism**

The identity issues of the Igbo people pacified after colonialism in Nigeria. The arrival of the missionaries and the new faith in Christianity weakens the identity of Igbo clan. Ancestral worship, customs, elderly advice regarding justice and religion fostered the pre-colonial identity of Igbo people but the conversion of the Igbo people to Christianity involves a partial rejection of the Igbo structure and social identity of the Igbo people. The response of Nwoye to join the missionary school is an instance of losing Okonkwo’s control over him and ultimately, he loses his identity as ‘a roaring flame’. Mr. Kiaga reacts that ‘blessed is he who forsakes his father and his mother formy sake’ (TFA: 112). It denotes an idea that the Igbo people are pacified their identity in order to accept the Christianity. Achebe does not present a clear-cut dichotomy of the white religion as evil and the Igbo religion as good. The belief about of ‘Evil Forest’ made downfall of the Igbo identity when the missionaries succeeded to build the church and the court in the villages to destroy the Igbo beliefs. Consequently, the villagers come to believe that the Christian god of the missionaries is more powerful than their ‘Chukwu’ and ‘Ani’ who were at the religious power of the Igbo people.

The social identity does not make the ‘honoured’ man/woman of the society to accept the changes and it always carry a certain amount of pride to identify him/her to preserve the ethics of the society. Okonkwo’s desire to respond violently to the Christian church is not completely motivated by a desire to preserve his clan’s cultural traditions. He has been fantasizing for many years about making a big splash with his return to his village, but the church has changed things so much that his return fails to incite the interest that he has anticipated. Ultimately, he acts violently, and his slaying of the court messenger constitutes an instinctive act of self-preservation of his identity and the identity of the clan. In the beginning of the novel, ‘Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours: “It was powerful in war and magic” (TFA: 9). At the end of the novel, the same power of war is in the doubt when all the clansmen gathered to decide about the ill-treatment given by the missionaries to the ‘titled’ men of Umuofia. They lost the power to resist the missionaries and when Okonkwo killed a court messenger, the people of Umuofia said, “Why did he do it?” (TFA: 149). The Igbo clan is viewed as cowardly. There is certainly an element of self-destructiveness in a way of the pacification of the Igbo clan by the colonial power. The unwillingness of the leaders of Umuofia to convince the villagers about resistance to the missionaries is related with the loss of identity as an integrated clan. As a result, Okonkwo willingly embraces because the alternative is to submit to the world, law, and new order with which he finds himself inexorably at odds. The suicide of Okonkwo is not merely the tragic end of the protagonist, but it is the example of the lost identity of the Igbo clan.

**N.B.:** TFA= Things Fall Apart