

## **S.3 LITERATURE NOTES**

### **Things Fall Apart: Chinua Achebe**

#### **Plot synopsis**

The novel, Things Fall Apart, is structured or divided into three parts namely;

- (i). Okonkwo's youth in Umuofia
- (ii). His Seven-year exile in Mbanta
- (iii). Okonkwo's eventual return home.

Right from his childhood, Okonkwo is obsessed with his own masculinity. He does not want to resemble his father, Unoka in anyway. His tireless efforts and singular drive along with his local fame as a wrestling champion, go a long way in securing him a place among the titled men of Umuofia.

However, his zeal of becoming a great man frequently leads him astray and in conflict with the society.

When the clan elders decide it is time for Ikemetuna's execution, Ogbuefi, the elder warns him not to bear a hand in Ikemefuna's death, but despite the warning, kills Ikemefuna out of panic and being afraid of considered a weakling.

Often times, Okonkwo, manifests quick temper with his household. He is impatient with his children. His obsession with upward ascension into fame and traditional masculinity tends to alienate others leaving him in a precarious social position.

The first blow in Okonkwo's life comes when he accidentally kills sixteen-year-old son of Ogbuefi Ezeudu during the burial ceremony of the same man Okonkwo's gun misfires and kills Ezeudu's 16 year old boy. This act forces the village elders to burn Okonkwo's huts, kill his livestock and send him and his family into exile for seven years.

In the exile, an old friend, Obieroka from Umuofia visits Okonkwo in Mbanta to inform him that his eldest son, Mwoye has abandoned traditional igbo beliefs and joined the Christian faith. He disowns his own son for joining the new faith.

By the time Okonkwo and his family leave Mbanta after seven years in exile, there is already growing presence of foreigners in Umuofia and already creating deep internal divisions. Government officials have also begun filtering in, and installing a foreign rule of law.

Okonkwo finds these events disturbing and unwelcome. He grows increasingly furious with his fellow umuofians for refusing to take violent action against the missionaries and force them out.

Upon his return to the village after seven years of exile, he helps in destroying a Christian church, only to be arrested by the white government. Okonkwo realises other villages have changed so much. They are unable to fight the white man. With this revelation, he kills himself by committing suicide which is a taboo.

### **The relevance of the title , Things Fall Apart**

The title begins to make sense when quite a number of things start going wrong, both in Okonkwo's own household, and in the entire clan.

At first, Okonkwo's home is quite happy, prosperous, and his village (clan) united. Then certain unfortunate occurrences begin to happen, Okonkwo, the hero and protagonist of the novel, accidentally kills Ezeudu's 16-year-old son, and is forced into exile for seven years. His home is rased to the ground

Okonkwo loses his place in his clan, and the clan leadership. The white man sets in with his strange ways (religion, government etc.)

Families get divided some like Nneka and Mwoye embrace the new faith, while others like Okonkwo himself remain firm in, and faithful to their traditional religion and customs.

The die-hard Okonkwo loses his eldest son to the new faith, upon his return from exile, he finds that it is really too late to put the pieces together.

“Men are no longer the men they used to be; they have lost the power to fight”

Okonkwo articulates “they have broken the clan and gone their several ways. We who here this morning have remained true, to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland. If we fight the stranger , we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansmen... our fathers never dreamed of such a thing, they never killed their brothers.

In other villages, the converts are quite aggressive in their mode of professing the new creed, for instance, Enock kills an ancestral spirit or 'egwugwu'. As a result, some tribesmen are forced to fight in defence and honour of their ancestral spirits and goods. These very converts destroy Enock's compound and even raze the new church in Umuofia in a bid to pacify the spirit of the clan.

Okonkwo later after seven years in exile, kills one 'Kontina' or court messenger and hangs himself. Commits suicide thus committing yet another offence against the earth goddess, Ani. His body cannot be touched or buried.

In sense, Okonkwo's life has broken apart hence the tragic end.

### **Questions**

1. Why is Unoka, who suffers from a swelling in the stomach, left to die in the evil forest?
2. Why is Ikemefuna killed? Why does Okonkwo participate in the slaughter in spite of an elder's advice not to be involved in the sacrifice?
3. Discuss the character of Okonkwo and Unoka with clear significant illustrations from the novel, Things Fall Apart
4. Discuss the strength and weaknesses of Okonkwo as shown in the text.

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