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## **THE USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*: SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE AND CULTURAL REFLECTIONS**

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### ***Abstract***

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a seminal work that employs rich figurative language to convey cultural nuances, societal changes, and personal struggles within the Igbo community. This paper explores various forms of figurative language in the novel, including metaphors, similes, and personification, and analyzes their symbolic significance in reflecting themes of colonialism, identity, and tradition. By examining Achebe's use of figurative language, this study highlights how these literary devices enrich the narrative and contribute to the broader discourse on postcolonial identity.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Figurative Language, Symbol, Cultural Identity, Proverbs,

### **1. Introduction**

*Things Fall Apart* (1958) is widely regarded as a pivotal African novel written by famous Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, offering profound insights into the complexities of Igbo culture and the disruptions wrought by colonialism. The novel, which is traditionally structured and peppered with Igbo proverbs, describes the simultaneous disintegration of its protagonist Okonkwo and his village, Umuofia. Achebe's adept use of figurative language plays a crucial role in articulating these themes. This paper investigates the various forms of figurative language utilized in the novel and their symbolic meanings, shedding light on the intricate relationship between language, culture, and identity. By exploring these elements, the paper aims to underscore the novel's significance in both literary and cultural contexts.

Figurative language is a tool that helps convey the author's ideas and points. Just as you use it in your stories, authors use it in their novels. One novel in which we can see many different types of figurative language is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

### **2.1.1 Literature Review**

#### **2.1.2 Figurative Language in *Things Fall Apart***

Figurative language is a language that departs from the straightforward use of words. It creates a special effect, clarifies an idea, and makes writing more colourful and forceful. Figurative language adds an extra dimension to writing, giving plain writing richness and depth. Justyna S. S. (2016). Figurative language uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation. This paper considers metaphor, similes, personification, irony, allusion, and proverbs.

##### **2.1.1. Metaphors**

Achebe uses metaphors in *Things Fall Apart* to describe the Igbo people, their lifestyle, and their work. Achebe wants the audience to see and feel the images he creates. For instance, Okonkwo spends a lot of time in his fields working to feed his people. He understands the need for yams. He knows that the Igbo people depend on the yam as their primary source of food. They use the rainy season to grow their yams. The yam is considered the king of all foods. It is a food for men; the coco-yam is a woman's crop. 'His mother and sisters worked hard enough, but they grew women's crops, like coco-yams, beans, and cassava. Yam, the king of crops, was a man's crop. In many ways, Okonkwo's sense of self is tied up in his ability to grow what is needed for the tribe. He is proud of the hard work he has put into his farming and the success he has made of it. He is well thought of in his community. Here, the yam is a metaphor for masculinity and power.

"Living fire begets cold, impotent ash (Achebe 153)."

This quote is a metaphor for Okonkwo's and Nwoye's relationship. Okonkwo is often called "Roaring Flame" and is ferocious and aggressive, while his son is placid and quiet. Here, Okonkwo is wracking his brain as to why he has such a womanly son who went off to join the Christians. He finally realizes everything as he stares into the fire and sees that the flames leave ash behind. The flame is Okonkwo, and the ash is his son Nwoye.

Achebe frequently employs metaphors to encapsulate complex ideas and emotions. The metaphor of Okonkwo as "the ill-fated lad" illustrates the broader theme of fate versus free will (Achebe, 1958). This metaphor highlights the struggle between individual agency and the overarching forces of cultural change. Moreover, the comparison of Umuofia to a living organism emphasizes the interconnectedness of society, underscoring the communal values central to Igbo life.

##### **2.1.2. Similes**

This is a figure of speech that draws resemblance with the help of the words "like" or "as."

"He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth." (Achebe 147) More than any other literary device, the author uses similes to enhance his writing. Achebe uses similes to illustrate Umuofia and represent the lifestyle of the community. In this case, the

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words of the hymn offer a much-needed relief to Okonkwo's oldest son, who felt out of place in the Igbo society.

"Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water" (Achebe 1).

This simile compares him to the man he was wrestling with and describes his character trait of being a good wrestler.

"He threw himself into it like one possessed" (Achebe 19).

This is used to describe Okonkwo's character trait of always being hard-working. It describes him as having the urge to work and makes it seem as if he can hardly make himself not work.

Similes in *Things Fall Apart* create vivid imagery and enhance emotional resonance. For example, Achebe describes the villagers' fear of the unknown as "like a child who has lost its mother" (Achebe, 1958, p. 60). This simile emphasizes the vulnerability of the Igbo people in the face of colonial encroachment, symbolizing the loss of cultural identity and security. The use of similes also serves to bridge the gap between traditional Igbo experiences and the reader's understanding, fostering empathy and connection.

### **2.1.3. Personification**

This is a figure of speech in which a thing, such as an idea or an animal, is given human attributes. The non-human objects are portrayed in such a way that we feel they have the ability to act like human beings.

"Okonkwo was choked with hate." (Achebe 195)

This is an example of personification as clearly, anger cannot choke someone as it is an emotion and not a physical force. It shows the intensity of the hatred and anger that Okonkwo has towards the white men. He has gotten to such a point where his dislike for them is so much that it makes it hard for him to breathe.

"He heard the Ogene of the town crier piercing the still night air" (Achebe 9).

This is another example of personification. It exaggerates the characteristics of the crier's voice. The author uses it to create a feeling of urgency.

"... the huts, which formed a half moon behind the obi" (Achebe 14).

This is an example of personification. It describes the huts' shape, which couldn't actually form a half-moon, but he uses it to describe the setting.

Achebe's use of personification imbues nature and traditions with human qualities, reinforcing their significance in Igbo life. For instance, the earth is described as a nurturing figure that "cradles" its people (Achebe, 1958). This personification underscores the intimate connection between the Igbo community and their land, highlighting themes of belonging and cultural

heritage. Such personification reflects the Igbo's spiritual and symbiotic relationship with their environment, a relationship threatened by colonial intrusion.

#### **2.1.4 Irony**

This refers to the incongruity between expectations for a situation and the reality of that situation.

"They want a piece of land to build their shrine,' said Uchendu to his peers when they consulted among themselves. 'We shall give them a piece of land.' He paused, and there was a murmur of surprise and disagreement. 'Let us give them a portion of the Evil Forest. They boast about victory over death. Let us give them a real battlefield in which to show their victory'" (Achebe 149).

This quote shows the novel's use of plain irony. The Christians are given a plot of land in the Evil Forest because the Igbo people believed that if they gave them land in the Evil Forest, they would die, and their clan could go back to their previous way of life.

In Umuofia, it was known among the people that no one lived longer than seven market days in the evil forest because of the spirits and darkness that dwelled there. But, the Christians did not die after seven market days, and the people were shocked when they continued to prosper and build up their church, so needless to say, their plan hadn't worked.

Another example of irony is Okonkwo's suicide at the end of the novel. Okonkwo is a proud and important man, so you might not expect him to commit suicide. His death is especially ironic when you consider what he regularly said after the terrible harvest year: "Since I survived that year,' he always said, 'I shall survive anything.' He put it down to his inflexible will.' After saying he could survive anything, you would not expect him to commit suicide. Yet, in the end, it is his inflexible will that causes his suicide because he cannot deal with the change brought by the missionaries. So his death is even more ironic because the very thing that he says can get him through anything--his will--is what causes him to kill himself.

#### **2.1.5 Allusion**

An allusion is a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing, or idea of historical, cultural, literary, or political significance. It does not describe in detail the person or thing to which it refers. In his novel, Achebe used biblical allusions to foreshadow the arrival of Christian missionaries and to give context to their theology. For instance, the plague of locusts that occurs in chapter 7 alludes to the plague of locusts that blights Egypt in the book of Exodus. This allusion can be seen as a foreshadowing of the missionaries' disruptive arrival. This is fulfilled in chapter 15, where Obierika tells Okonkwo about the destruction of Abame village. After the first white missionary arrived, the local Oracle called the white men locusts and claimed that more of them would come and destroy the town. That prophecy proved true as Abame was later massacred by white men.

Secondly, the character Enoch in *Things Fall Apart* refers to a recent convert to Christianity. Enoch becomes zealous about the Christian faith and disrupts the spiritual traditions of

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Umuofia. In the Old Testament of the Bible, Enoch, the grandfather of Noah, is known for his devotion and service to God.

### **2.1.6 Proverbs**

Proverbs are short, pithy sayings that usually state a general truth or pieces of advice. In the Umuofian society, proverbs are used very often in conversations to help people understand things better. The following are examples of proverbs used in *Things Fall Apart*:

“A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his greatness” (Chapter 3).

This proverb simply means if you respect greatness, you will become great yourself.

“An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb.”

This proverb means that people feel uneasy if something is said that affects them personally, whether it is a joke or not. They cannot laugh about it.

“The lizard that jumped from a high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.”

This is a simple proverb teaching people to learn to appreciate themselves even if other people do not appreciate them.

## **2.2. Symbolic Significance**

Abrams A.H. (1981) defines a symbol as anything that signifies something else; in this sense, all words are symbols. In discussing literature, however, the term symbol is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event, which in turn signifies something or has a range of reference beyond itself. A symbol is something such as an idea, object, conventional or nonconventional, that is used to represent something else. It is a representation of ideas by something else: a person, place, object, or idea that stands for something beyond itself.

Symbols replace long explanations. They evoke or suggest feelings and appeal to our imagination. Most of the time, symbols enact meaning and have much to do with the theme of a play, poem, or novel.

## **2.3 Cultural Identity**

The figurative language in *Things Fall Apart* underscores the importance of cultural identity amidst external pressures. Achebe's metaphors and similes vividly illustrate the Igbo worldview, reflecting the community's values, beliefs, and practices. Through these literary devices, Achebe affirms the richness of African culture, challenging colonial narratives that sought to portray it as primitive or inferior (Ngugi, 1986). The narrative becomes a vehicle for cultural pride and resistance against cultural erasure.

Okwonko is in crisis with the white man's influence in his culture. Chinua Achebe presents Okonkwo's belief in the communal strength of the clan against the cultural dominance of the oppressive colonial power. His trust in his clan as a community and its culture is shattered into

pieces when he returns to Umuofia from exile. He lost his status and identity as a result of colonialism. On his return, he finds himself alien in his clan. He understands that cultural influences change as political power shifts. The new religion, the new administration, and Western culture have become influential in Umuofia, and native culture started deteriorating. The principal character, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart* stands for African traditional culture. Okonkwo's suicide indicates the fall down of the African culture and African identity that he represents. The sense of alienation forces Okonkwo to commit suicide.

#### **2.4. Colonial Disruption**

Achebe's figurative language symbolizes the disruption caused by colonialism. Metaphors depicting Okonkwo's struggles illustrate not only his conflicts but also the broader disintegration of Igbo society (Wright, 1993). The tension between tradition and change is encapsulated in the characters' experiences, mirroring the historical realities faced by many African communities during colonization (Ferguson, 2013). The figurative language thus serves as a powerful commentary on the destructive impact of colonial forces.

According to (Hasan 2020.), the intrusion of the white man and the introduction of a new religion led to a significant breakdown in the traditional rules and values that once guided the Igbo community. The coming of the whites (colonizers) disrupted the established norms of Igbo society, impacting various facets of their lives, including culture, social structure, and religion. The very essence of the title, *Things Fall Apart*, reflects a shift from order to disorder, emphasizing the impact of colonialism on the established societal structures and norms. Colonial rule disrupts social stability, causing instability and disintegration.

European colonization wrought a profound transformation in traditional politics, introducing new rules, altering land ownership structures, and establishing foreign governance. This upheaval disrupted the established political and social order, as European rules and authority directly challenged the community's traditional values and way of life. Consequently, men holding titles in their towns found themselves enslaved for daring to defy these foreign impositions. Notably, when Okonkwo suggested to Obrieka that Umofians resist the British, Obrieka astutely recognized the futility of such an endeavor, stating that the white man "has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. This insightful remark by Obierika serves as the first explicit acknowledgment of the book's title, *Things Fall Apart*.

Missionaries introduced Christianity to Umuofia, initially facing resistance from villagers. Despite initial rejection, their persistent efforts led to widespread acceptance, with many villagers eventually converting to the new religion. This transformation in religious beliefs marked a significant impact on the community. Simultaneously, European colonialism introduced English to Umuofia, creating a language barrier for the villagers, who struggled to comprehend as communication was facilitated through an interpreter. This linguistic change further highlighted the effects of colonial influence on Umuofia's cultural and social fabric (Piola & Usman, 2019).



## **2.5. Gender Dynamics**

Figurative language in the novel also comments on gender dynamics within Igbo culture. Comparisons of women to “sweet yams” emphasize their perceived value and roles within the patriarchal structure (Achebe, 1958). This figurative representation invites critical reflection on gender relations and the impact of colonialism on these dynamics (Morrison, 1992). By highlighting these gendered metaphors, Achebe provides a nuanced critique of traditional and colonial influences on gender roles.

The work offers specific examples to show the extent of imbalance Achebe betrays in his construction of the male and female characters. This dimension is captured succinctly in the excerpts:

He had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives (p.5).

Okonkwo is portrayed in excerpt one as a wealthy man. His wives and children depend wholly on him for their survival. The ideology here is that irrespective of the number of women a man marries, he can rule over them because he has the capacity, wisdom, and authority to do so. Okonkwo's wealth points to his industriousness, which the masculine gender is known for in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Thus, the male and female genders have been unevenly portrayed.

In excerpt two below, it is further shown that marrying many wives and having total control over them is a mark of wealth and an exclusive attribute possessed by men. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife (p. 7).

Okonkwo is still the character being described in the excerpt above. It can be seen that men are constructed as industrious. They are painted as those who work very hard, acquire wealth and marry as many wives as possible. The ideology of men controlling all the resources aids patriarchal hegemony in society. Also, the logic underlying the role and attributes assigned to men reinforces the belief that men are naturally superior, intelligent, and responsible. On the other hand, one may acknowledge that Achebe does not suggest that all men are intelligent and responsible, especially when one considers the difference between Okonkwo and his father, Unok, who is considered a worthless man in society. His projection agrees with the traditional trend in a patriarchal society that Achebe creates. We are introduced to a patriarchal society that privileges the male children over the female. The excerpt below captures the psychology of the society that is depicted in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Do you think you are cutting up yams for cooking? He asked Nwoye. If you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw. You think you are still a child. I began to own a farm at your age. And you, 'he said to Ikemefuna, 'do you not grow yams where you come from?' Inwardly, Okonkwo knew that the boys were still too young to understand fully the difficult art of preparing seed yams. But he thought that one could not begin too early. Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed. Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man (P. 26). In the excerpt above, attention is drawn to the rigorous process adopted by Okonkwo to ensure that his son, Nwoye and Ikemefuna become men indeed, especially his son, Nwoye. 'Yam stood for manliness,' and this is why Okonkwo is preoccupied with training his son to become a man by developing his manliness. Although Okonkwo knows inwardly that the boys are too young to prepare seed yams, he wants them to

begin early to learn the art since it is a difficult one, and he could not afford to have a failed son. The ideology and logic behind this rigorous training of the boys is to ensure that they do not appear feminine since yam stands for manliness. Men are rated based on their ability to feed their families on yams from one season to another. Okonkwo declares that he began to own farms at the age of his son, Nwoye. This implies that he became a great man at a very young age. Any great farmer is a great man and because Okonkwo is a great man, he wants his son to be a great man too. This further demonstrates gender role specification. No mention was made of Okonkwo's daughters. This shows how the girl-child is neglected in the pre-colonial Igbo society.

Yam planting is an exclusive reserve for the men and this is a mark of honour. 'Women planted maize, melons, and beans between yam mounds. This is less work that does not require tact or energy, but yam, the king of crops, requires a lot of energy. The ideology here is that men are superior to women. In the extract below, Okonkwo is projected as a wealthy, non-pleasure-seeking, and hardworking man. The evidence of his wealth is demonstrated by the large crowd he invites to the yam festival and feeds them on yam because his 'arm was strong'. Societal belief is evident here and polarizes between men and women. Men's arms are strong; that is, they are wealthy and can take up the responsibility of feeding their wives' relations during the festival. Achebe gives a balanced projection of the situation when he says that a man 'whose arm was strong' invites a large number of guests to the festival. The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man, whose arm was strong, as the Ibo people say, was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide. Okonkwo always asked about his wives' relations, and since he now had three wives, his guests would make up a fairly big crowd. But somehow, Okonkwo could never become as enthusiastic about feasts as most people. He was always uncomfortable sitting around for days, waiting for a feast or getting over it. He would be very much happier working on his farm (p. 30). Men are constructed as individuals who are not pleasure-seeking. Women and children are painted as enthusiastic about feasting and busy decorating the house and preparing the meals. As for Okonkwo, 'He could be happier working on his farm.' This shows that men are industrious while the women are lazy and pleasure-seeking. Thus, the writer creates the ideology that determines the role patterns and norms that make inequality appear natural and inevitable, especially in Igbo society. Men are presented as heroes who bring wealth and comfort to their families. In the excerpt below, Okonkwo is presented as a great wrestler in the novel. The sound of the drum ignited and rekindled the fire of victory in him. He begins to tremble with the desire to conquer and subdue. While the men wrestle, the women, as passive creatures, can only watch, clap and laugh. Wrestling is for men and Okonkwo is a renowned wrestler. Wrestling requires a lot of energy and tact which only the men, as the stronger and superior beings, possess. The drums beat the unmistakable wrestling dance-quick, light and gay, and it came floating on the wind. Okonkwo cleared his throat and moved his feet to the beat of drums. It filled him with fire as it had always done from his youth. He trembled with the desire to conquer and subdue (p. 34). The excerpt below portrays men as superior to and stronger than women. The ideology behind the careful crafting and construction of the male and a female in the text in a polarized manner is apparently intended to question the women's claim that 'whatever a man can do, women can do it better.' The boys and Obiageli were each given a pot fit for their ages. This is to show equality, fairness, and justice between the female and male



genders. However, Obiageli quickly fizzled out as she could not carry her pot of water safely, and consequently, she broke it. None of the boys broke their pots. The boys are portrayed as not only being more intelligent than Obiageli but also more careful. The meaning of the name Obiageli, 'I have come to eat,' further suggests that the female gender is only after pleasure and not work. The weeping was now quite close, and soon, the children filed in, carrying various sizes of pots suitable for their years on their heads. Ikemefuna came first with the biggest pot, closely followed by Nwoye and his two younger brothers. Obiageli brought up the rear, her face streaming with tears. In her hand was the cloth pad on which the pot should have rested on her head. (p. 35). Another thing to note here about linguistic gender construction is that while men are portrayed as very careful, women are portrayed as both careless and carefree. While Obiageli does 'Inyanga' (shows off absurdity) with her pot, the boys carefully protect theirs from breaking. Women are also projected as wasters based on the fact that Obiageli broke her pot which cost a fortune, while the boys are portrayed as mindful and protective. While the male gender is portrayed in a good light, the female gender is cast in a bad light. So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his Obi, and he told them stories of the land, masculine stories of violence and bloodshed (p. 42).

As can be seen in the excerpt above, every society has its socializing engines. These socializing engines are captured in appropriate language use, which a skilled writer presents in his works, such as in *Things Fall Apart*; hence, Okonkwo tells the boys masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Young men are taught to be tough and hard-hearted by the kind of stories they are told. So, there is a polarization between women and men in society, which results from the kind of education they receive. This kind of education or indoctrination aids the functions of the men and the women in a given society and encourages gendered roles. As defenders of their wives and children, men are prepared for war, while women are prepared for housekeeping and child-rearing. This reveals the fact that patriarchal structures are transmitted through literature and expressed in language, thus setting male and female genders apart. At the beginning of their journey, the men of Umuofia talked and laughed about the locusts, about their women, and about some effeminate men who had refused to come with them (p. 47). Men are portrayed here as a hard-hearted set of individuals who could not condone weakness in men for any reason. At the time set for Ikemefuna's execution, some men withdrew from the task and were tagged 'effeminate men.' Men who declined to go with them were seen as not being strong-hearted, hence the use of the adjective 'effeminate' to qualify them. This implies that men are strong while women are weak. Men make jest of their women because, to them, the women have no strong minds and cannot do certain things. Women can only tell stories and revel in pleasure. The word 'effeminate' used for the description of the men who could not come with Okonkwo and the others is meant to humiliate them and classify them as women full of fear. But real men are brave and daring and could stop at nothing in order to show their manliness, even when it involves killing Ikemefuna, who had lived with Okonkwo for three years and called him father. "When did you become a shivering old woman", Okonkwo asked himself, 'you who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war?' how can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo you have become a woman indeed? He sprang to his feet, hung his goatskin bag on his shoulder and went to visit his friend, Obierika" (p. 51).

Bravery and valour are ascribed to men in the excerpt above. Okonkwo is ruminating on the experience of killing Ikemefuna. He appears to show weakness and fear, but he promptly chides himself for expressing attributes that belong to women. He asks himself rhetorically, 'When did you become a shivering old woman?' This implies that weakness and fear are associated with women and not men. Men are courageous and carry out heroic deeds of which the killing of Ikemefuna is just one. Okonkwo is famous for his valour in war throughout the nine villages of Umuofia where he has killed five men. When he recounted this to himself, he dismissed fear and remorse for killing a boy who calls him father. He sprang to his feet and set out to visit his friend, Obierika. Okonkwo has told Nwoye tragic stories of war and bloodshed in order to inculcate in him the manly attributes of valour and fearlessness. So, fear has nothing to do with men. They are fearless, courageous, and heroic in character. It was always said that Ndule and Ozoemena had one mind', said Obierika..... 'I did not know that' said Okonkwo. 'I thought he was a strong man in his youth' (p. 54). Any man who shares ideas with women before executing them is considered to be weak. The societal belief about men is that men are superior, independent and courageous. A man who subjects his opinion to his wife's consideration and possible approval is a weakling. Hence, Ndule is a weakling for sharing his ideas with his wife, Ozoemena. That Ndule shared ideas with his wife surprised Okonkwo, hence Okonkwo's declaration, 'I thought he was a strong man in his youth.' Men are described as absolute rulers who make and implement whatever decision they want, while the women are to say 'Amen.'

In the extract below, Okonkwo is constructed as a demi-god in his home. His wives are not expected to go close to his door except upon invitation. Okonkwo turned on his side and went back to sleep. He was roused in the morning by someone banging on his door. 'Who is that? He growled... of his three wives Ekwefi was the only one who would have the audacity to bang on his door. (p. 60). Okonkwo is both dreaded and feared by his wives. He ruled his family with an iron hand and none of them but Ekwefi could have the audacity to bang on his door. The word 'he growled' is used in the excerpt to show Okonkwo's fierceness when speaking to his wives. He is a domineering head and a threat to his wives. Instead of honouring and respecting men, women dread and fear them. It is completely audacious for women to knock on their husbands' doors. Their husband must invite them before they enter the men's hut. The asymmetrical portrayal of the emotional configuration of the two genders in Achebe's language is obvious from the extract below: 'Ezinma is dying' came her voice, and all the tragedy and sorrow of her life were packed in those words. Okonkwo sprang from his bed, pushed back the bolt of his door, and ran into Ekwefi's hut.... 'It is Iba' said Okonkwo as he took his matchet and went into the bush to collect the leaves and grasses and barks of trees that went into making the medicine for Iba (p. 60). T

here are sharp contrasts between men and women, as projected in the extract above. While Ekwefi is portrayed as being emotional and confused, Okonkwo is portrayed as a courageous man who could promptly arrest any situation. That women are emotional is encapsulated in the expression '... all the tragedy and sorrow of her life were packed in those words'. Men, as represented by Okonkwo, are portrayed as brave, agile, and solution providers. While Ekwefi is sorrowful and in a pensive mood, Okonkwo 'sprang from his bed,' 'pushed' back the bolt of his door,' discovers what is wrong with Ezinma and declares that 'it is Iba,' and dashes into the bush to gather herbs, roots, and barks of the tree to produce the medicine to cure Ezinma's Iba.

Men are thus portrayed positively as more decisive in the face of danger than women who are usually confused in the face of danger or adversity. It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders. The titled men and elders sat on their stools, waiting for the trial to begin (p. 70).

The domineering and absolute rulership of men over women is further described in the above extract above. This expression in the extract disambiguates any contradiction to this claim: 'It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men.' Women have no voice in the pre-colonial Igbo society. They could not express themselves when they were faced with issues that concerned them. The elders and titled men have taken their place in court to decide the case between Ezewulu and Mgbafo, his wife. Women are to be seen and not heard. Achebe's society is patriarchal. Mgbafo herself, who is directly involved in the matter, has to be represented by his brothers since society has considered it unacceptable for a woman to talk before men. 'My in-law has told you that we went to his house, beat him up and took our sister and her children away, all that is true.... My sister lived with him for nine years. During those years no single day passed in the sky without him beating the woman.... 'Two years ago,' continued Odukwe, 'when she was pregnant, he beat her until she miscarried'... 'Last year when my sister was recovering from an illness, he beat her again... (p. 67).

Women as represented by Odukwe's sister, Mgbafo, are helpless in the patriarchal world of Achebe, as aptly captured using the indicative mood in the excerpt above. The image of the helplessness of women is painted very glaringly in the excerpt above. Odukwe, as the voice of his sister, Mgbafo, recounts the tragic experiences of Mgbafo in the hands of her husband, Ezewulu. Ezewulu constantly beats up his wife. We are told that 'no single day passed in the sky without his beating the woman.' Women are made to live in fear as their husbands often batter them. A man who cannot rule his woman is considered a woman. So, in order to be a man, beating women becomes a normal practice. The seriousness of the beatings Mgbafo received from her husband is captured in 'when she was pregnant, he beat her until she miscarried.' Beating is one of the measures adopted by men to rule their wives. It was late afternoon before Nwoye returned. 'Where have you been?' .... 'Answer me,' roared Okonkwo, 'before I kill you!' he seized a heavy stick that lay on the dwarf wall and hit him two or three savage blows. The women were screaming outside, afraid to go in ... (p. 121). Okonkwo's temper and disposition towards Nwoye and his household are portrayed in the excerpt above. The expressions such as 'roared Okonkwo,' 'before I kill you!', 'seizes a heavy stick', 'hit him two or three savage blows' succinctly portray the kind of person Okonkwo is. He could be described as a quick-tempered, authoritative, and callous individual. His thunderous voice sends a shiver down the spine of his victim. He does not merely threaten Nwoye but practically deals with him in a manner described as savage-merciless manhandling. Fear seized the women who witnessed this unrestrained vent of anger by a man who was determined to kill. In their helplessness, they resorted to screaming, a characteristic nature assigned to women by society. The only assistance Nwoye could get from the 'wailing women' is their scream. Okonkwo does not like people who display feminine dispositions. He shows this in the excerpt below: He, Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How could he have begotten a woman for a son? (p.124). Okonkwo is restless because of his son, Nwoye. Nwoye has joined the Christian faith contrary to the

expectations of his society. Women are believed to be weak in mind and character and this presupposes them to instability and frequent change of decision. Women could embrace the Christian faith, but not Nwoye, a man who could take over from his father, a man who would rule over his wives and children. Okonkwo, being a real man, is metaphorically likened to not just an ordinary fire but a devouring fire, hence, 'called a flaming fire,' but 'how could he have begotten a woman for a son? This rhetorical expression captures Okonkwo's surprise. While men are portrayed to be strong, rigid and determined, women are portrayed to be weak, flimsy and easily tossed about by every new doctrine. 'Let us not reason like cowards,' Said Okonkwo. If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see... This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in my fatherland, Umuofia. (p.127).

Okonkwo describes Christian activities in Mbanta as 'pouring filth over us' and describes Okeke as a coward because Okeke sues for calm and restraint. 'let us not reason like cowards,' Okonkwo thunders. He is quick-tempered, aggressive, violent and abusive. He calls for war as a blood-thirsty wolf and disdainfully insults the Mbanta clan and calls it a 'womanly clan.' To Okonkwo, men are to be brave and action-oriented, while women are cowards. He declares that such a thing will never happen in his fatherland. It could only happen in his motherland. His fatherland is associated with strength, bravery and courage, while his motherland is associated with cowardice, weakness, and timidity. Although he had prospered in his motherland, Okonkwo knew that he would have prospered even more in Umuofia, in the land of his fathers, where men were bold and warlike (p.130). In the above excerpt, prosperity and success are attributed to the masculine gender. Although Okonkwo prospered in his motherland, Mbanta, he knows that greater prosperity lies in his fatherland, Umuofia where men are bold and warlike. The ideology behind this kind of portrayal is the entrenchment of masculinity. No matter how good the woman is, the man is always better and superior. Mbanta is a clan of cowards without prospects for prosperity. On the contrary, Umuofia is portrayed as a clan of bold and warlike people, and success seems to be the attendant of boldness and warlike disposition. Umuofia is a clan of warriors, while Mbanta, the motherland, is a clan of cowards. In the extract below, the narrator constructs men as people who solely make decisions in their homes. The indicative mood is deployed to aptly capture men as individuals who do not involve their wives in the running of their homes. The male characters in the novel linguistically construct their sons as men and not women. This kind of portrayal is evident in the extract below: He sent for the five sons, and they came and sat in his Obi. 'You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye... (Pp. 137-138).

As far as Okonkwo is concerned, embracing the Christian faith is a sign of weakness and femininity. For Nwoye to embrace the Christian faith, he is seen as a woman because to Okonkwo, such triviality as Christianity is stock-in-trade for the women, and not for the men. Men are believed to be stout-hearted and can only engage themselves in serious issues. Christianity is not for responsible people but for the senseless, trivial and timid people women. Okonkwo will only have sons and not daughters. He prefers sons to daughters and any of his sons who join

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Christianity automatically becomes a woman. He has nothing to do with women because they are not important. Women cannot come out when his Umunna comes out. Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan ... he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountable become soft like women (p. 146). Softness is constructed as an attribute of women, not men. A soft man is tantamount to a woman. For the clan of Umuofia to become lenient in their treatment of the new religion, which threatened the long-established way of life and belief system, Okonkwo mourned for them. They have become unreasonably soft like women. Men who were previously warlike had suddenly become as soft as women. The portrayal shows men as strong-hearted people and women as soft-hearted people.

### **3. Conclusion**

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* showcases the power of figurative language in articulating the complexities of cultural identity, colonial disruption, and gender dynamics. By employing metaphors, similes, and personification, Achebe enriches the narrative and deepens readers' understanding of the Igbo experience. The symbolic significance of these literary devices contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonial identity, affirming the resilience and richness of African cultures in the face of adversity. This study underscores the novel's enduring relevance and its profound impact on both literary and cultural landscapes.

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