

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Aristotelian Hero: A Study in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart***

**A Thesis submitted to the Central Department of English in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
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**by**

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This thesis entitled **Aristotelian Hero: A Study in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*** by Binod Kumar Subedi submitted to the Central Department of English, Traibhuvan University, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

The present research work basically focuses on presenting Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel as an Aristotelian Hero. Throughout the novel we can see Okonkwo guided by the ambition to succeed in everything. He is so obsessed by success that he finds his father a complete failure in his life. He wants to win laurels in whatever tasks that he gets involved in. Like the protagonist of a Greek tragedy, however, Okonkwo carries within himself the seeds of his own destruction. He is secretly plagued by the fear of failure and of weakness. He is desperate to prove that he is better than his father, Unoka. Okonkwo, therefore, strives to be everything his father was not: strong, manly, prosperous and respected. This obsession to succeed in life takes him on the path of ultimate downfall which ends with his suicide.

## **CONTENTS**

**Approval Letter ii**

**Acknowledgement iii**

**Abstract iv**

<b>I.</b>	<b>Introduction: Tragedy, Observation and Fall</b>	<b>1-12</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>A Theoretical Analysis: Concepts of Hero</b>	<b>13-30</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>A Textual Analysis: Oknokwo as a Tragic Protagonist</b>	<b>31-52</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Conclusion: A Tragic Figure to the Hilt</b>	<b>53-55</b>

**Works Cited**

## **I. INTRODUCTION: Tragedy, Obsession and Fall**

This research is a study of Chinua Achebe's critically acclaimed novel *Things Fall Apart*. It presents the protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo as an Aristotlian hero. The novelist has presented Okonkwo in such a way that he has all the qualities of a tragic character as conceptualized by Aristotle. Like the protagonist of a Greek tragedy, Okonkwo carries within himself the seeds of his own destruction. He is secretly plagued by the fear of failure and of weakness. He is desperate to prove that he is better than his father, Unoka. Okonkwo, therefore, strives to be everything his father was not: strong, manly, prosperous and respected. This obsession to succeed in life takes him on the path of ultimate downfall which ends with his suicide.

Tragedy is a dramatic representation of serious actions, which causes physical, psychological and spiritual disaster for the protagonist and the life around him. Tragic plots offer a pessimistic but grand vision of life. They illustrate failure, conflict and disaster, but at the same time they sing the sad music of humanity bringing the pain and pleasure, love and hatred together. In most tragedies, these aspects of life are stressed. In each of the tragedies, the plot contains chaos and death. Chaos, also could be called disorder, is both personal and communal in tragedy. In some tragedies the central character is in chaos while in some others, both the central character and the whole community is in chaos. In Othello, for instance, the hero descends into personal chaos when he is misled into believing that his wife is unfaithful to him. In King Lear, on the other hand, the chaos is both personal and communal. Lear gradually loses control of himself and he descends into madness, then his family, the whole nation and finally even nature plunges into chaos. The third act shows a mad Lear on personal chaos having been shut out of his daughter's home raving in a storm. Chaos casually ends into death. It is a great shadow that

hangs over all tragedies. At the end of many tragedies, the audience is left staring the reality of death and the entrapment of chaos.

Tragedies usually center on the character of the hero who is man of exceptional qualities in a high position. These men inspire wonder and awe in others; so whatever happens to them has grandeur and significance. Because they are both remarkable and occupy high positions and it is obvious that their tragedy will affect the whole culture.

The central character or the hero in tragedy is larger than life, almost god like figure. He has mythical, legendary or historical feature. Almost all of the tragedies are about high born noble class male characters. The main action of tragedy is the fall of the hero. The fall is both external and internal. Externally, the fall is the fall of peace of mind. In Oedipus Rex, the hero Oedipus falls from his power of king to a blind man exiles himself from Thebes. One major fall of the hero or his flaw, or an error or judgment is his fatal flaw. The idea of fatal flaw is that the hero has a fault error, which brings disaster. It is common to think of this flaw in terms of Dr. Faustus' longing for too much knowledge, Hamlet's too much philosophizing and Othello' too much of believing in rumor. Despite their many good qualities, one single flaw forces the tragic heroes to fall into destruction. The fall of the hero is always inevitable. It is very painful for the audience to witness events, which it sees as inevitable. The irony is obvious in regards to human characters.

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, based his theory of tragedy on the examples that were available to him at that time. He did so by studying and analyzing the tragedies written by Greek dramatists such as Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides. Aristotle's concept on tragedies is applied in great part to many tragic plots and serves as a suggestive starting Aristotelian mode of tragic construction. Aristotle defined

tragedy in these words:

tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of ornaments, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of emotions. (Adams 53)

Aristotle also talks about ‘catharsis’ while writing about the function of tragic plot. The word ‘catharsis’ in the Greek language signifies ‘purgation’ or ‘purification’ or may be both. Aristotle sets out to account for the undeniable fact that many tragic representation of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed, but relieved, or even exalted. Although there are many disputes about it, some critics argued that ‘catharsis’ is not any effect to the audience, but an element within the play itself. It is also argued that it is the purgation and purification of guilt attached to the hero’s tragic act. Through the demonstration by the course of the drama that the hero performed this act without the knowledge of its nature. But Aristotle might have used this distinctive effect on the reader and the audience the pleasure of pity and fear, as the basic way to distinguish the tragic from the comic and any other forms of art. Aristotle regards the dramatist’s aim to produce the highest degree of pleasure in tragedy as the principle, which determines both the choice of the tragic protagonist and the organization of the tragic plot.

Aristotle, talking about the nature of the tragic protagonist, says that he should be neither too good nor too bad. To evoke our pity and fear, he should be the mixture of these two; and also that the tragic effect will be stronger if the tragic protagonist is better than ourselves in the sense that, he is of higher than ordinary moral world.



Such a man is shown as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of a mistaken act, to which he is led to his hamartia; an error of judgment; or as it is often said, the tragic flaw. The tragic hero moves us pity and fear because he is not an evil doing person, and we recognize similar possibilities of error in our own lesser and fallible selves. Aristotle grounds his analysis of the very structure and the incidents of the play on the same principle. The plot, he says, which will most effectively evoke tragic pity and fear, is one in which the events develop through complication to a catastrophe where there occurs a great change in the events and incidents that come during the actions that the tragic hero chooses, a sudden reversal in the fortune of the tragic protagonist from happiness to miseries.

Certain periods produced great tragedies and great tragedians. There is diversity in the norms of writing tragedies as the age differed. Each of the age has affected the way tragedies are written. The Greek period in the fifth century B.C. is considered as the most fruitful period as far as tragedy is concerned. In this period, great playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes wrote tragedies in a great number. Similarly, there were also proves that the age must have produced innumerable tragedies. Moreover, drama at that time was not only for entertainment but it was also connected with religious festivals as a necessity for culture.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* shows human struggle against divine will or the destiny set by divine power. Oedipus is the king of Thebes and he falls from his prosperous life to misery. He is over confident of his own abilities for his knowledge and intelligence. He is the judge of his own actions and behaviors. Poor Oedipus is lacking foresight and he also lacks the knowledge of the savage envy that was all the time driving him to the great fall. Aristotle describes the tragic hero as the

intermediate kind of personage in his moral character. He should be neither too good nor too bad but someone morally like us in whom we can engage our emotional concern. Oedipus is like us, only the difference is that he is the most powerful of men. He has both good and bad merits. When we see that the cause of tragic hero's downfall lies in some great error of judgment, that is hamartia in Aristotelian terms, we relate this tragic flaw with the people like us. Then we see the resemblance of the tragic emotion by the sense of sympathy and empathy.

*Oedipus Rex* is what is known as tragedy of destiny. Its tragic effect lies in the contrast between the supreme will of the gods and the main attempts of mankind to escape the evil that threatens them. The moral we learn from the tragedy is submission to the divine will and realization of his own importance.

In Elizabethan period in England, classical Greek dramas were discovered and studied because of the revival of learning in Renaissance. William Shakespeare wrote many tragedies on the theoretical framework of Aristotelian norm of tragedy. Like Aristotle, Shakespeare emphasizes on the nature of his tragic heroes. But some of his tragic heroes are by all means responsible for philosophical and aesthetic effects in his tragedies. The fall of his heroes make us vividly conscious of the possibilities of human nature and the tragic fate of his heroes is derived clearly from their own deliberate choices. In *Othello*, tragedy is not the result of any external force but due to the tragic flaw in the particular nature of the hero. Ignorance and knowledge, intelligence and lack of intelligence, innocence and experience, wisdom and folly, skepticism and gullibility and such many opposites are in a person. One may fall in contradiction. There can't be any contradiction in the fact that Othello is a great figure superior to other people in his land but he is inferior to Iago. The error of judgment he makes is very ordinary. He has much more faith in Iago and less faith in

Desdemona. This is the very cause that makes Othello tragic figure. One error that is widely pointed at is the lack of resounding in his character. He never doubts in the character of Iago but he always does so in Desdemona's character. He loses the sense of skepticism and falls into gullibility. It is his tragic flaw, an error of judgment on his side. Here he becomes the subject of mechanization of the fate. His tragic flaw can undermine basing it on the common nature of human being.

In the romantic period, all of the romantics concentrated more on poetry than other genre of literature. Very few plays were written and tragedies were written fewer. The tragedies written in this period have high literary and poetic quality. It seems that romantics have their own norms of writing tragedy. These tragedies have emotional qualities arousing much pathos and horror. Romantic tragedy lacked the cathartic effect on audience. The flaw of the heroes in romantic tragedies was not because they were inherently evil people but because of fatal error of judgment. Romantics could not produce this fine balance between man being a wonderful piece of creation and still possessing one or two grave errors of judgment. When the balance between these two opposites- angelic man and common man is lost in these tragedies- the therapeutic effect of the work loses.

Modern tragedians are innovative in style and norm of writing tragedy. Aristotle points out that the tragic protagonist should be of noble and highborn class. He should be like either Oedipus or Hamlet. This is often interpreted that the tragic protagonist should have magnanimity and higher spirit than the average people. Similarly, Aristotle suggested that the plot is the heart of each tragedy and the character comes secondly. But modern tragedies emphasize not only the character of noble born heroes but also the ordinary citizen can be the tragic hero. This suggests that modern tragedians have rediscovered tragic principle of their own. For them

ordinary citizens are equally tragic like the highborn kings or princes. Arthur Miller's tragedy *The Death of a Salesman* uses an ordinary sales man as tragic hero and his tragic fall can equally be cathartic like that of Oedipus' or Hamlet's tragic fall. Similarly, John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* is also a tragedy that has not a highborn noble class hero. Maurya is a tragic protagonist and the tragic fall of Maurya is equally cathartic like that of Oedipus or Hamlet.

Some modern tragedies emphasize on the tragedy of all human beings rather than emphasizing the tragic fall of an individual hero. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* emphasizes the tragedy of all human beings in the hands of divine. Vladimir and Estragon are not individual heroes of noble born class but they are the representative figure of every human being leading an absurd and a tragic life.

Widely known as "the father of the African novel in English," Achebe is one of the most significant writers to emerge from contemporary Africa with a literary vision that has profoundly influenced the form and content of modern African literature. In his novels, he has chronicled the colonization of Nigeria by Great Britain and the political turmoil following its independence. Achebe's novels represent some of the first works written in English that articulate an intimate and authentic account of African culture and mores—especially his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which critics have proclaimed a classic of modern African fiction. A major theme of Achebe's writings is the social and psychological impact of European imperialism on indigenous African societies, particularly with respect to a distinctly African consciousness in the twentieth century. Critics have praised Achebe's novels for their insightful renditions of African history as well as balanced examinations of contemporary African politics and society. Scholars also have

praised Achebe's innovative fusion of Igbo folklore, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions with Western political ideologies and Christian doctrines.

Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, was published two years prior to Nigerian autonomy in 1960. He followed his literary debut with three other novels—*No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *A Man of the People* (1966). By 1966, however, Nigeria's political climate worsened, deteriorating into a thirty-month civil war. Achebe quit his position at NBC and moved to the eastern region of Nigeria, which briefly seceded to become the independent state of Biafra. While there, Achebe devoted all his time to Biafran affairs and writing poetry, short stories, and essays. His most notable work during this time was his book of poetry, *Beware, Soul Brother* (1971). After the war ended in 1970, Achebe accepted a series of visiting professorships in the United States, where he founded and edited the respected African literary journal *Okike* and published *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975), a collection of literary and political essays written between 1962 and 1973. In 1976 Achebe returned to Nigeria where he began teaching at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. By the early 1980s, he was actively involved in Nigerian politics, serving first as the deputy national president of the People's Redemption Party and later as president of the town union in his hometown. At the same time, he also issued a polemical commentary on Nigerian leadership, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983). In 1987 Achebe published *Anthills of the Savannah*—his first novel after a twenty-one-year sabbatical from writing long fiction and the work that won Achebe a nomination for the prestigious Booker Prize. In 1990 Achebe nearly died from injuries sustained in an auto accident on a Nigerian highway under suspicious circumstances. Achebe spent six months recuperating in England following the accident, and moved to the United States where he continues to write and teach.

A realistic and anthropologically informative portrait of traditional Igbo society distinguishes *Things Fall Apart*, which is named after a title from a line in Irish poet W. B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming." Set in the village of Umuofia during the initial stages of colonization in the late 1880s, the narrative traces the conflict between Igbo and Western customs through the characterization of Okonkwo, a proud village leader whose refusal to adapt to the encroaching European influences leads him to murder and suicide. *No Longer at Ease* follows Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of the protagonist of Achebe's first novel, throughout his failure to successfully combine his traditional Igbo upbringing with his British education and affluent lifestyle in Lagos during the late 1950s. Describing Igbo village life during the 1920s, *Arrow of God* centers on Ezeulu, a spiritual leader, whose son Oduche attends a missionary school to learn about Western society and technology. When Oduche comes home, he nearly kills a sacred python, which precipitates a chain of events culminating in Ezeulu's loss of his position as high priest and his detention by British authorities. Highlighting the widespread graft and abuse of power by Nigerian leaders following its independence from Great Britain, *A Man of the People* focuses on the tribulations of a Nigerian teacher who joins a political group working to remove a corrupt bureaucrat from office. The poems of *Beware, Soul Brother*—which later was republished as *Christmas in Biafra* (1973)—reflects on the human tragedy of the Nigerian civil war, using plain language and stark imagery. Similarly, some of the stories in *Girls at War* are about aspects of imminent war. Most of the stories deal with the conflict between traditional religious values and modern, secular mores, displaying the full range of Achebe's talents for humor, irony, and political satire. Divided into two parts, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* addresses a number of literary and political themes, with special emphasis on traditional and contemporary

roles of art and the writer in African society. Set in the fictional West African country of Kangan, *Anthills of the Savannah* is about three childhood friends who hold influential governmental posts. When one of them fails in his bid for election as president for life, he works to suppress his opposition. After successfully conspiring to murder one friend, he meets a violent death during a military coup, while the third friend dies in a street riot. Generally considered Achebe's most accomplished work, *Anthills of the Savannah* illustrates the often dire consequences for society when individual responsibility and power are recklessly exploited. While retaining the use of Igbo proverbs and legends to enhance his themes, Achebe also pays more attention to the development and role of the women characters in this novel. In the book, Achebe gives women strength and composure as the agents of traditional morals and precepts. Finally, *Hopes and Impediments* (1988) gathers new and previously published essays and speeches, including a controversial essay attacking British novelist Joseph Conrad as racist. The book also includes a tribute to American novelist James Baldwin, along with several commentaries on post-colonial African society that high-light cultural forces influencing its modern-day character.

Many critics regard Achebe as the finest Nigerian novelist of the twentieth century with his works often serving as the standard for judging other African literary works. Achebe's literary criticism and sociological essays also have won praise. As one of the most discussed African writers of his generation, Achebe has inspired a substantial body of criticism and scholarship about his writing and political stances. Achebe's inventive usage of Igbo proverbs and folklore in his novels is the most studied feature of his art. Scholars have mostly concentrated on the significance of proverbs in Achebe's construction of vernacular speech patterns and social

conventions, as well as a way to distinguish identities of his fictional characters. Scholars also have focused on how the proverbs provide thematic control to Achebe's narrative structures. Critics note, however, that Achebe's writings have relevance beyond the borders of Nigeria and beyond the anthropological, sociological, and political concerns of post-colonial Africa. Achebe's literature also deals with the universal qualities of human nature. As Achebe has said, "My politics is concerned with universal communication across racial and cultural boundaries as a means of fostering respect for all people.... As long as one people sit on another and are deaf to their cry, so long will understanding and peace elude all of us."

The novel *Things Fall Apart* is Chinua Achebe's homage to his ancestors and the culture of the Ibo tribe in Nigeria. Written in 1958, it has been translated into 40 languages and sold more than 2.5 million copies.

W.B. Yeats in "The Second Coming" describes the chaos that ensues when a monster returns to earth. *Things Fall Apart* also has a chaotic storyline that describes how the mixing of cultures and the breakdown of traditions can lead to unthinkable results.

Achebe's blend of culture and harsh reality makes for an amazing read that should be required for high-school students. It provides a wealth of information about the culture and traditions of Nigeria, and details about how colonialism was able to tear apart a powerful tribe.

*Things Fall Apart* is a work of fiction and its depiction of Ibo tribes and customs is informative. Ibo proverbs are included in the book; one of the more interesting is the story of the locusts. The village elders say that locusts - considered a tasty treat - come only once in a generation, which explains why villagers are thrilled



when a huge number descends on the village.

The culture of the Ibo tribe begins to break apart with the arrival of Europeans. Christian missionaries disrupt daily life as they attempt to convert individuals. The villagers offer the Christians a plot of land in the "evil forest" where people who died from evil diseases are buried. At first, only the lowly of the tribe convert, but eventually more respected men do.

This offends Okonkwo, the violent main character, who longs to drive out the Christians in a holy war. The other villagers overrule him, explaining that it would not be right to fight other clansmen. The results are heartbreaking as the change in lifestyle pushes him over the edge.

The present research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives an introductory outline of the study, also introduces the fictional world and the critical overview of the author and his works. The first chapter will define tragedy, obsession and fall.

The second chapter is meant to develop theoretical modality that is to be applied in this research work. It provides a short introduction to the concept of conventional hero. This part of the work defines the terms – hero: the multiple one. The third chapter of the research is an analysis of the text at a considerable length on the basis of the second chapter. It will sort out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the study – the tragic end of the protagonist, Okonkwo results from his obsession with the feeling of being great. This portion of the work should serve as a core of this study. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the entire study. On the basis of the analysis of the text done in the chapter three, it will conclude the explanations and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters.

## **II. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: Concepts of Hero**

The present chapter throws light on the concept of hero with its conventional meaning to his multiple roles. With the definition of hero the chapter brings all the major tragic heroes of the bygone eras into focus. It also includes extracts of different philosophers and playwrights on the concept of hero. It also describes the tragic flaws which lead to the downfall of otherwise perfect protagonists like Oedipus, King Lear Othello, Hamlet and Willy Lowman. Basing on the description of these famous tragic characters the chapter also brings Okonkwo having the similar flaws which take him to his ultimate destruction.

The concept of the hero has undergone various changes with change in time and circumstances resulting in the emergence of the thousand of different types of heroes. Such heroes, with different roles in themselves, convey many human traits. As they are the central characters, they appear, disappear and reappear in the literary works.

A personality, who constructs or deconstructs or challenges order, is traditionally known as the hero. In social context, he challenges the decrepit tradition and devotes himself for the establishment of the new one; in political context, he does his best to popularize his party; in literary context, he is the central character around whom the main story of the work revolves. The hero, with his dominating and challenging roles, is the central character of a literary text like fiction, poetry or any other kind of narrative. In many other social contexts, the hero is the focal-point of the mass who leads the people towards salvation, hope, betterment or towards crisis and death.

The definition of the term 'hero' can not be transfixed because there are and

there can be villainous and heroic qualitative overlaps in a real or fictional character. The definition needs to be functional so that one can have some starting points about the understanding of this 'central' character. The hero, because he is the leading character, dominates all the characters in the work. Every step taken by the hero moves the story to one or another direction. Generally s/he has a glorious life and death for the sake of the people. The hero sacrifices himself for power, wealth and pleasure. And yet again he combines both positive and negative traits. In such pervasive contexts, the hero can be located in fictional or real ground. The work concentrates on the understanding the concept of hero in literary contexts taking examples from the form of literature like mythical narratives, poetry, and mainly drama.

Since the hero is the central character, his role is really significant and considerable. Various attempts have been made to give the definition of the hero, but all of such definitions have always remained pervasive because of the changing concepts of the hero. Tracing the mythological adventure of the hero, Joseph Campbell says, "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder. Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30).

From his viewpoint, every hero has to encounter marvelous and adverse forces and get victory over them. Prometheus ascended to the heavens, stole fire from the gods, and descended to the earth to give it to humanity. Jason sailed through the clashing rocks into a sea of marvels, circumvented the dragon that guarded the Golden Fleece, and returned with fleece, and the power to wrest his rightful throne from a usurper. Such mythological heroes were seen very brave and powerful. They were

superhuman. The heroes did unexpected deeds. They might have direct link even with gods, or they could challenge them as well. So, from mythological viewpoint, one should be very powerful and superhuman to be the hero.

The characters in modern literary works are unlike the ancient mythical ones. The role, concept, presentation and function of the hero have been challenging. Unlike the mythological heroes, modern ones do not have any link with supranational elements. So, the hero seems more to represent the mankind rather than the supernatural elements. People do not believe if the hero talks with God or returns from his death. They rather believe that there is no god, and death is inevitable. So, the hero is not the superhuman, but human with many roles, functions and faces. The personality of the hero is judged not from his/her link with god or other supernatural elements, but from his/her creative skill and active participation in many fields of individual and social life.

The hero, in modern sense, is the central character with many important qualities and traits. S/he may possess something more than of other characters, but never a superhuman. Frederic Nietzsche opines that a hero should be superman. Nietzsche says, "Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea, to receive a polluted stream with becoming impure. Lo, I teach you the superman; he is that sea; in him can your great contempt be submerged" (qtd.in Reed 4).

Nietzsche places the hero above the man, but he does not mean that the hero is a superhuman. Aristotle express that a hero in a tragedy should be good but not too good. For Aristotle, the hero possesses many good qualities, but s/he is not free from some human errors. George Gordon Lord Byron views that a hero should be self-oriented personality whereas Henrik Ibsen opines that even an ordinary man with his

ordinary qualities and traits can be the hero of a literary work.

Hero, though a single character, has many roles and selves. S/he can be seen in many changing faces within a single literary text. There have been significant attempts to determine the definition of hero, but one definition paves the way for another one. The concept of the hero has been changing with the change in time and situation. From myth to religion, from culture to literature, and from history to politics, heroes are seen with stamp of multi-dimensions. In the course of time, hundred of the concepts of the hero and thousand of the heroes have appeared. Among them, some are already forgotten; some still exist in history and in our memory; and some, because of change in concept, are disregarded by modern people. Similarly some new concepts are into existence. There was a time when people worshipped leaders like Hitler, Mussolini as heroes, but because of change in concept, they are rather laughed at by modern people.

Because of his/her multi-dimensional personality, a particular definition of the hero can not be given. That is why Joseph Campbell's hero has thousand faces. The hero can be seen both as a social reformer and a social enemy; s/he can be seen even as a lover and a warrior. There is not any particular role and function of the hero. Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* is a lover whereas Dr. Faustus in *The Tragic history of Doctor Faustus*, a pleasure seeker. Prospero in *The Tempest* is a magician whereas Higgins in *Pygmalion* a professor. On the other hand, Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* is neither a lover nor a pleasure seeker but a selfless personality with no individual ambition in life.

A hero's definition, presentation and attributes have never been the same as literary works through the ages. A hero can have one or more among thousand of

faces. Othello is not only a brave military general but also a jealous husband. He is a gullible and romantic personality as well. He has many attributes. Torvald Helmer in *A Dolls House* is both a lawyer and moralist. Similarly he is a dominant husband and an opportunist. A single character can be analyzed by various angles. Since the hero has all-round role, s/he can be seen with many attributes in many faces. The one thus is multiple in modes and behaviors.

Hero is an integral part of a literary work. He is the focal point both of the authors and the readers. The narratives are dedicated to the personality and function of the hero who struggle for existence leading the society for betterment, introducing new ideas and sacrificing him/herself for better causes. The position and the class of the hero matter less than his central role and creative skill. At the same time a hero commits mistakes too and he falls.

The classical concept of the hero covered a long span of literature. All the chief figures in the Greeks tragedies were kings, queens, princes or of noble birth. The ordinary men had no role in those tragedies. They were used only for comic purposes. For the classical writers, only the men from kingly and noble class would have required qualification to be a hero. As the main aim of those literary works, mainly plays, was to show the “falseness of human power and wealth”, the characters in the classical plays were from high and noble class (Rees 52). The protagonist Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* or Antigone in *Antigone* was from noble class. By observing the various classical plays, Aristotle in his *Poetics* expressed his concept of the ‘Ideal Tragic Hero’. He welcomed the intermediate kind of personage as a tragic hero. For him, to arouse the emotions of pity and fear in the spectator’s mind, a hero should be ‘good but not too good’. The hero, for him, should be above the average people.

In Elizabethan period, we find that there is an unprecedented impact of Greek tradition. That is to say, heroes have heroic traits and drawbacks that lead them to collect sympathy of people and that lead them to fall. Heroes of this period are men of extraordinary rank and reputation. William Shakespeare's heroes in his tragedies are men of high social and political status. His heroes are king, or prince or army generals. A.C. Bradley says, "A Shakespearean tragedy as so far considered may be called a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate" (11). Though they are the men of extraordinary rank, they have a particular fault in themselves. That fault, hamartia in Aristotelian term, causes the downfall of the hero which produces the emotions of pity and fear in the spectator's mind. Shakespeare seems to be fully influenced by Aristotelian concept of the hero. So in Elizabethan, especially in Shakespearean concept, a hero belonged to a high and noble class followed by a 'tragic flaw' in him. Hamlet is concerned with the downfall of the hero Hamlet. He has a good character-kind, thoughtful, gentle and cultivated- yet in some ways weak and indecisive. It is his indecisive nature that causes tragedy in the play. He is qualified, serious, sensitive as well as brave. Unlike a common man, he does not express his venom and anger in words. Here, Shakespeare created the hero of indecisive nature. Likewise he is both a lover and a deceiver. Judging Hamlet's character, S.T. Coleridge comments:

Shakespeare seems to mean all Hamlet's character, to be brought together before his meditative excerpts in the grave-digging (scene), his yielding to passion, his love for Ophelia blazing out, his tendency to generalize on all occasions in the dialogue with Horatio, his fine gentlemanly manners with Osrick, and his and Shakespeare's fondness for him. (39)

Firstly he loves Ophelia, but later he is not true to his words. As a result she commits suicide. Similarly Macbeth, who leaves no stone unturned to safeguard his national integrity and sovereignty, in the play Macbeth, is a heroic figure with power, dignity and reputation. But, because of his over-ambition, his good senses surrender to the evil ones. "His character, as built up in his first appearance, is just as his wife afterwards so accurately analyses, a man toweringly but timidly ambitious"(Harrison 191). He is firstly a true patriot and secondly a notorious conspirator. He is a dangerous creature within attractive attire. A.C.Bradley adds, "this bold ambitious man of action has, within certain limits the imagination of a poet- an imagination on the one hand extremely sensitive to impressions of a certain kind, and, on the other, productive of violent disturbances both of mind and body" (353).

We find the combination of both ambition and imagination in him. George Sainsbury comments, "the Macbeth who is excited by the prophecy of the witches is exactly the same Macbeth as he shrinks from visioned dagger, as he who is struck to a kind of numb philosophizing by the cry of women that announces his wife's death" (327).

In the same Elizabethan period some dramatists like Christopher Marlow, John Webster welcomed the Machiavellian concept of the hero. They were impressed by the principles of Nicolas Machiavelli. He expressed that a ruler had to be cruel, violent and uncompromising. So, the Machiavellian hero, guided not by conscience but by his will, was ready to do everything for power and wealth. For the first time, Christopher Marlow's heroes are bold and are after lust, knowledge and power. In *Jew of Malta*, the hero Barabas, who not only attacks his own motherland but poisons his own daughter as well, has no least love and compassion in his heart. Not negotiation but violent, conspiracy and murder are his favorite means to fulfill his



individual wills. Marlow created a violent hero with no love at all. John Webster followed Marlow's footprints in this case. Webster's plays *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are very powerful. Bosola, the hero in *The Duchess of Malfi* plays a violent role for power, wealth and pleasure. For him, murder is an ordinary game. Challenging all moral considerations, he proves to be anti moralist. F.L. Lucas judges the character of Bosola and says, "he is cynical, yet furious against hypocrisy; his insight avails to show him only his own and the world's degradation; too proud to flatter, he stoops to be a tool; and only when it is too late he deserts the side of sin, to earn the wages of death" (23).

In the romantic period we again find transgression in the concept of the heroes. In this period heroes are basically men of simple living. They do not come from castle but from countryside leading rustic life and playing in time of nature. He is not degree decorated nor the lord he is. He is a very common man from the lap of nature. A Wordsworthian hero is capable of dancing in the tune of nature, speaking her language, and understanding her feelings. Referring to the Romantic concept of the hero, Walter L.Reed says:

The romantic hero is not a simple being, but one evolves in set of relationships both dialectical and dynamic. The hero is first of all a figure related to a ground. He is not himself divine or immortal but, like Achilles or Odysseys, he has a privileged relation with the supernatural of the gods or, as is more usual in Romanticism, the natural supernaturalism of the created world. (10)

These heroes are simple beings with not so great ambition and expectation. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', an old sailor is the

hero.

George Gordon Byron gave birth to a new type of hero called 'Byronic Hero'. He challenged the ordinary romantic hero by giving birth to his ruling personage. The Byronic hero, unlike the romantic or Shakespearian heroes, is self-oriented. He does not care the social norms and values. "The type is descended from Miltonic Satan and the criminal heroes of Mrs. Radcliffe; but the lowering doom is darkened by Byron's sense of predestination..." (Baugh 1221-1222). This hero occurs in various guises in Byron's writings, but from the first sketch in the opening canto of *Childe Harold*, and in verse romances and dramas that follow. His persistent character is that of a moody, passionate, and remorse torn but unrepentant wanderer evaluating the Byronic hero, Abrams et.al. says:

In his developed form, as we find it in *Manfred*. He is an alien, mysterious, and gloomy spirit, immensely superior in his passion and powers to the common run of mankind, whom he regards with disdain....The literary descendants of the Byronic hero include Heath cliff in *Wuthering Heights*, captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, and the hero of Puskin's great poem 'Eugene Onegin'. (506)

He is in his isolation absolutely self-reliant, inflexibly pursuing his own ends according to his self generated moral code. The concept of Byronic hero helped even Fredrick Nietzsche to form his concept of the superman, the great hero who stands outside the jurisdiction of the ordinary criteria of good and evil. Byronic hero, in this way, is self-oriented following his individual moral-code. Byronic concept of hero, though Byron himself was from romantic period, challenged the Wordsworthian concept of the hero.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that people began to see that ordinary men and women were interested, and that tragedy as well as comedy could be found in everyday life. Regardless of few exceptions, most of the plays up to nineteenth century were concerned with the story of the characters belonging to the high class. With the arrival of Henrik Ibsen a great Norwegian dramatist, a new concept of the hero came into existence. *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and other plays showed that the theatre could be used for discussing the moral and social problems of real life in a modern setting. He viewed that the heroes of the plays could be from the middle or lower social ranks who suffered a commonplace or domestic disaster. As a result there appeared a great transgression in the concept of the hero. Helmer, in his *A Doll's House*, is an ordinary man. He is an ordinary being who becomes irresponsible to his wife. "Torvald Helmer is technically the villain, but he has many of the characteristics of a kind, considerate husband and a good father" (Knicherboeker and Reninger 667). He can be known as a kind husband, a good father as well as a villain. He is the combination of many selves. William Archer points out, "as for Helmer, I am not aware that anyone has accused him of unreality. He is too real for most people- he is commonplace, unpleasant, objectionable. The truth is, he touches us too nearly; he is the typical husband of what may be called chattel matrimony" (62).

His heroes, unlike Hamlet or Oedipus, are ordinary beings sharing the same problems that we face in our day-to-day life.

Arthur Miller, an American dramatist, proved that common man can also be a tragic hero. One's family status should not necessarily be the criterion for the making of tragic hero. Whosoever he may be in professional life, the fall from his position would be convincing to form the tragic art. In his *Tragedy and the Common Man*,

which was later compiled in Lee. A. Jacobus' *The Bedford Introduction to Drama*, Miller considers a common man as tragic character in the modern capitalists' society:

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes Complexes, for instance, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations. (1041)

Miller is of the opinion that a tragic character is the representation of tragedy of everyone. He may come from the so-called sophisticated family or from the lower class family background. Even if it is the tragedy of a simple salesman in the city, Lowman represents every man in the universe. For example, the cause of tragedy of Macbeth and Lowman is due to their high ambition. The commander Macbeth finally suffers the unnatural death at the hands of the son of Duncan, and Lowman is badly shocked as his ambition of becoming financially powerful through his son is shattered. The desire for power, political in the case of Lowman, ultimately leads to tragedy.

Moreover, the tragic flaw of these characters is liable to be found in everyone unlike the Shakespearean tragic character. Miller's tragic character is among the average individual of contemporary American society. He is one of the persons mainly the representative of the lost generation of 1940s. However, he is also the representative of the common human beings of all times.

An individual has his sentiment and emotional attachment to life common to everyone. He may be King Lear or commander Othello or prince Oedipus or

salesman Lowman or anybody. Everyone has the tragic flaw, and it is not necessarily that he has to belong to the royalty, for instance:

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his 'tragic flaw', a falling that is not peculiar, grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing - and need be nothing - but his interest unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active relationship, are 'flawless'. Most of us are in that category. (Miller 1042)

Therefore, there can be 'tragic flaw' in the common man too. It should not necessarily be linked to the character of high family status and social profile. He further stresses the idea as:

Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or so-called nobility of his character, is really but clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, not are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king. (1042)

Hence, tragedy is the result of a man's total action. Tragic right is a condition of life. All our miseries go together with heroes. The tragic hero can't do heroic action alone. The hero is the subject, and what he does is the object. Tragic action

sounds heroic and the victim is the tragic character. His assertion is that the impression is so firmly fixed that all almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies “more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker’s brightest opinions of the human animal”(1042). Since man is the rational being, he is conscious enough to manage himself in relation to others and the environment. His understanding of life and word can best be expressed in tragic art. It is not mere death, but the most elevated idea of living of the best-evolved species of all. For, if it is true to say that in essence "the tragic hero is intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality, and if this struggle must be total and without reservation, then it automatically demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity" (Miller 1043).

When one suffers physically, he wins spiritually. At the cost of the material power, the tragic character becomes greater in terms of experience. His understanding of life and the world would essentially be noble and distinct. Tragedy is then not a loss. It is the process of living. One’s struggle can be judged in his tragedy. His guts also count much in his performance. It is the best art which touches human heart and moves him. Miller concludes his point when he says: “It is time, I think that we who are without kings, took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can possibly lead in our time- the heart and spirit of the average man” (1044). One can identify oneself with the tragic character, and, thus, the hero is an average man like all human beings. Many people can share their feelings and sentiments with average man.

Frederich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* says that there are two forces in Greek tragedy. But he rejected the notion that tragedy was to be associated with serene contemplation. He brought the notion that Greek tragedy was developed under

the auspices of Apollo. Apollo is the god of the poised, harmonious 'classical' art that we traditionally associate with the Greeks. Nietzsche conceded a role to Apollo in Greek tragedy, but it was a role finally subordinate to that of Dionysius, the god of wine, intoxication and disorder.

The luminous order and tranquility that are traditionally associated with Greek art were not the expression of a naturally Apollonian spirit. The Greek was naturally Dionysian; and his art to us represents a victory won over his own nature. Tragedy, for Nietzsche, is the product of fruitful tension between these diverse energies. Certain other forms of art contrive to remain relatively pure. For instance, the painter, the sculptor, and the epic poet are characteristically Apollonian; they work under the special patronage of the god of light, or vision, and of dream. And the actor, the dancer, the musician and the lyric poet are characteristically devotees of Dionysius. They follow a wilder prompting, and create dynamic patterns out of ecstasy and incantation. Nietzsche, talking about tragedy, also charged Aristotle with folly in having supposed that the function of tragedy was to purge us of the emotions of pity and fear. He answered Aristotle that tragedy is not cathartic but tonic.

One may be puzzled with Nietzsche who talks about dream like Freud does. For the modern readers will be tempted to regard Nietzsche's Apollonian art as that of the conscious mind and the Dionysian as that of the unconscious in which case, dream, with its bold violations of space – order and of logic and its connections with the primordial depths of the mind seem to be Dionysian rather than Apollonian. But Nietzsche uses dream primarily in the sense that of the seer's vision, the waking dream, an ideal view which represents phenomena not as they are, but as they ought to be. For this very reason, the Apollonian dreaming art demands a Dionysian counter balance. The idealized representation degenerates into a flaccid and sterile

academicism. The detachment proper to great art can come only after passionate involvement.

To participate in the experience of genuine tragedy, man must put aside the brittle rigidities of his rationality. Man must lose his petty civic identity and become elemental man; he must before the vision of the God can be elemental to him, become the satyr or the goat-man.

According to Nietzsche, this was just what actually happened in the course of history. Ancient Greek tragedy grew out of the worship of God Dionysius. The satyr-chorus originally the band of ecstatic worshippers – was the womb of dialogue. Nietzsche says that in the plays before Euripides, all the tragic protagonists were types of the Dionysius, seen as such by the chorus in their ecstatic state. When Euripides failed to retain in this primitive function, he destroyed tragedy. Nietzsche, elaborating the point says that the optimistic dialectic of Euripides – which Nietzsche associates with that of Socrates – drove music out of tragedy. In the Socratic-Euripidean dispensation, there was necessary, visible connection between virtue and knowledge. Hence, the tragic protagonist necessarily became a dialectician, the dramatist became essentially an echo of his own conscious knowledge; and the dark vital wisdom of the chorus was rendered nugatory. In short, Euripidean tragedy has moved towards the Apollonian role.

True tragedy, on the other hand, Nietzsche has asserted in *The Birth of Tragedy*, could be interpreted, only as “a manifestation and illustration of Dionysian states as the visible symbolization of music, as the dream world of Dionysian ecstasy” (111).

Such dream-world is, of course, in Nietzsche’s terms, Apollonian – but in



tragedy, Apollo is made to express Dionysian knowledge through hidden behind a veil:

The Apollonian illustration is (in the effect of tragedy) found to be what it really is the assiduous veiling during the performance of tragedy of the intrinsically Dionysian effect: Which however, is so powerful, that it finally forces the Apollonian drama itself into sphere where it begins to talk with Dionysian wisdom, and even denies itself and its Apollonian conspicuousness. Thus then the intricate relation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in tragedy must really be symbolized by a fraternal union of the two deities: Dionysius speaks the language of Apollo; Apollo, however, finally speaks the language of Dionysius; and so the highest good of tragedy and of art in general is affianced.

(166-67)

The spectator of tragedy sees the hero in epic scale and beauty. The epic is an Apollonian art nevertheless, wrought up in Dionysius ecstasy, the spectator delights in the hero's annihilation. He feeds the actions of the hero to be justified, and it nevertheless still more elated when these actions annihilate their originator. When Apollo begins to talk with Dionysian wisdom, Nietzsche says that he gives us myth, for tragic myth, as Nietzsche defines it is "a symbolizing of Dionysian wisdom by means of the expedients of Apollonian art" (168).

Tragedy, as the story of unhappy ending, is related to fall. Fall in tragedy is natural and necessary, and this fall chiefly occurs in the protagonist and the other chief characters. With the beginning of the human civilization fall also came, as George Steiner says that the fall of Troy is the first great metaphor of tragedy.

Where the city is destroyed because it has defied god, its destruction is passing instant in the rational design of God's purpose. Its wall shall rise again, on earth or in the kingdom of heaven, when the souls of man are restored to grace. The burning of Troy is final because it is brought about by the fierce sport of human hatreds and the wanton, mysterious choice of destiny.

Steiner states that instead of altering or diminishing their tragic condition, the increase in scientific resource and material power leaves men more vulnerable. The destruction caused by such thirst can not be considered as the tragic fall. In the book *The Death of Tragedy* Steiner says, "The wars recorded in the Old Testament are bloody and grievous, but not tragic. The Peloponnesian wars, on the contrary, are tragic. Behind them lie obscure fatalities and misjudgments" (6).

The fall comes in tragedy like the bloody wars in *The Old Testament*. Because of the thirst for blood, men go out to destroy one another in a kind of fury with hatred in an immoral and cruel way. Our world of moral discipline and order, due to such inhuman thirsts, has grown frivolous and ridiculous. So, fall in tragedy comes in disaster, a specific moral fault or failure of understanding resulting hatred and bloodshed. The Greek tragic poets assert that the forces that shape or destroy our life lie outside the governance of reason or justice. Worse than that, there are around us demoniac energies, which prey upon the soul and turn it to madness. It poisons our will so that we inflict irreparable outrage upon ourselves and those we love.

Tragedies end badly as the tragic protagonists are broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. The fall of the protagonist in tragedy takes our heart to associate with him. We give pity and sympathy to that fall, so that the fall itself should be arranged according to probability

and necessity of the situations. Fall is a conflict, but it is not always conceived in terms of elevated tragic sense or tragic vision which we understand in Greek or Elizabethan tragic modes. In the context of *Things Fall Apart* tragedy occurs as the protagonist is obsessed with the feeling of failure.

### **III.TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: Okonkwo as a Tragic Protagonist**

The present chapter focuses on showing Okonkwo as a Greek tragic hero on the basis of the discussion about the concept of tragic hero in the second chapter. Throughout the novel we find Okonkwo guided by the fear of failure and weakness. Though he looks strong and commanding from outside, he suffers from the obsession of proving himself a far as successful individual than his father. Some extracts from the text prove that Okonkwo is really a tragic figure fighting hard to present a different face to the society.

*Things Fall Apart* remains the most widely read African novel and the failure of its hero continues to generate haunting questions in the minds of the readers, especially those who seem to identify with the hero's tragedy. Central to this discomfort is the question: why did Achebe choose as his hero an aspiring but brutal young man who ultimately took his own life? The author himself acknowledges that he has "been asked this question in one form or another by certain kind of reader for thirty years" (Lindfors 22). According to Achebe, these readers wanted to know why he allowed a just cause to stumble and fall. Why did he let Okonkwo fail?

Several commentators have argued that Okonkwo's failure is due to the fragmentation of Umuofia society and destruction of its cultural values by the colonial powers. There is no doubt these things played an important role in the suffering mind of the hero, but to argue that it is the reason for his failure is too limited. Hence, this thesis is an argument, contrary to popular view, that Okonkwo's downfall is not necessarily due to departed African glories but due to his individual character weaknesses. Okhamafe aptly noted, perhaps, "things begin to fall apart in this nine-village Umuofia clan long before a European colonialist missionary culture inserts

itself there” (Okhamafe 134).

The novel depicts the tragic end of protagonist, Okonkwo. Among the Ibo, who regard “the art of conversation ... very highly” and consider proverb the “palm-oil with which words are eaten,” Okonkwo was described as a man with slight slammer who used his fist when words would not come quickly enough. Although Okonkwo was “not a man of thought but of action”, he did consider certain things: Okonkwo wanted to be a great man (69).

Okonkwo believed that when a man said yes to his greatness, his *chi* would concur. When he took the eight hundred seed-yams from Nwakibie, and “it seemed as if the world had gone mad,” Okonkwo decided that because he had survived that year, he would survive anything” (23-24). This he attributed to his “inflexible will”.

Yet despite his determination for greatness, strict adherence to the ideals of his clan, and the respect of his fellow clansmen, Okonkwo possessed a hamartia. His flaw is his twin fears of failure and weakness, which dominated every aspect of his life. Achebe explains early on that Okonkwo “had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had no patience with his father” (4). Although, Okonkwo demanded greatness and commanded respect among his people, his father was a failure. True, Unoka was a gentle and compassionate man; he was flexible and understanding. Because of his skill on the flute, other villagers often called him to play and teach his songs. Unoka was a great talker and as a result was always successful in borrowing money. However, Unoka was a failure because he was a loafer, deeply in debt, and barely able to feed his wife and children. He was called an *agbala*, and Okonkwo hated him for it.

Okonkwo’s life was dominated by fear. Achebe writes, “it was fear of

himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father” (13). He hated everything his father loved: “to show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength” (28). Okonkwo’s fear, his tragic flaw, caused him to participate in the sacrifice of Ikemefuna.

Prior to Ikemefuna’s death, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a great warrior in his time, now elderly but accorded great respect, told Okonkwo: “That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death” (57). Okonkwo did not understand. In Africa, age is respected and representative of wisdom. Although Achebe describes Okonkwo as “one of the greatest man of his time”, he also mentions Okonkwo’s youth. Although a great man, he lacked wisdom. Okonkwo himself states: “a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness”; following this, he should have respected the advice of Ogbuefi and declined to participate in killing (19). However, even Okonkwo’s desire for greatness (and his love for the boy) could not overcome his fear of being seen weak.

Okonkwo was not evil, nor was he a cruel man; he was a great man with a tragic flaw. When the man, who cleared his throat, raised his machete, “Okonkwo looked away” (61). Nevertheless, after Okonkwo looks away he becomes “dazed with fear”; he deals the deathblow to Ikemefuna because “he was afraid of being thought weak” (61).

It could be argued Okonkwo had no alternative but to participate in killing. One can say his respect for the decisions of the clan governed his actions. However, Okonkwo’s friend Obierika repudiates this claim, stating, “if oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it” (67). Echoing the advice of Ogbuefi, he adds; “if I were you I would have stayed at home. What you

have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families”(67). Obierika’s statement is significant on several levels. First, because Obierika was as successful as Okonkwo and both had similar backgrounds in the culture, Obierika’s ideas (especially regarding such a significant event as the killing of Ikemefuna) provide an important contrast to Okonkwo’s. Because Obierika’s ideas contrast with Okonkwo’s, and because Obierika is capable of echoing the advice of the wise Ogbuefi, the reader can see that Okonkwo is not a victim of circumstances but a person who has made bad decisions. Finally, by stating that Okonkwo’s part in the death of Ikemefuna is “the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families,” Obierika foreshadows both Nwoye’s conversion to Christianity and Okonkwo’s death at the end of the novel.

Okonkwo was driven to hate everything his father loved. His father’s flexibility, compassion, and understanding embodied the female characteristics of the society and according to Okonkwo; these are the characteristics of weak personality that hinders to achieve heroism. Therefore, Okonkwo had an aversion to the Earth. In fact, Achebe describes Okonkwo as a man whose “heels hardly touched the ground” and who “seemed to walk on springs” (4). Ultimately, Okonkwo’s refusal of the female aspects of the society leads to his demise.

When the Christians come, Nwoye is deeply captivated by their poetry. A hymn about brothers who sat in fear and darkness seems to answer his questions regarding the seeming meaninglessness of Ikemefuna’s death. As a result, Nwoye leaves his father to join the Christians and further repudiates his clan by accepting the name Isaac. In one of the few instances in which Okonkwo ponders life, he is horrified to contemplate the gravity of Nwoye’s decision. Ancestralism is very significant in Umuofia, where the dead are believed to play an active role among the

living, but only through continued worship and sacrifice of one's children. Okonkwo considers his own destruction; "Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors?" (153). He shudders at the prospect of his annihilation.

In Umuofia children are revered, elders respected, and one's eternity is dependent upon offspring following the tradition of clan. Okonkwo's fear, his hamartia, brought him to kill Ikemefuna. In doing so, Okonkwo helped turn his son Nwoye away from the traditions of the clan and towards Christianity. By sacrificing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo participated in his own destruction.

*Things Fall Apart* is not a novel without a cultural context. It is a text rooted in the social customs, traditions, and cultural milieu of a people. What is there in this novel is a vivid picture of the Igbo society at the end of nineteenth century. Achebe described for the world the positive as well as the negative aspects of the Igbo people. He discussed the Igbos' social customs, their political structures, religions, even seasonal festivals and ceremonies. He provided the picture without any attempt to romanticize or sentimentalize it. As he said in another occasion, "the characters are normal people and their events are real human events" (Lindfors 21). Achebe told the story as it is. The fact of his account is that the Igbo clan is a group of African people with a complex, vigorous, and self-sufficient way of life. Prior to the invasion of their land and the eclipse of their culture by foreign powers, they were undisturbed by the present, and they had no nostalgia for the past. In the novel, Achebe portrayed a people who are now caught between two conflicting cultures. On the one hand, there is the traditional way of life pulling on the Umuofia people and one man's struggle to maintain that cultural integrity against an overwhelming force of the colonial imperialism. On the other hand, we have the European style which, as presented,



seems to represent the future, a new community of the so-called “civilized world”. It now appears this African man, Okonkwo, and the entire society of Umuofia must make choice between the old and the new-if they have the power. The desire to become a member of European-style society has its attraction. For one, it is conveyed to the Umuofia people, including Okonkwo, as a means of enjoying the spoils of twentieth-century civilization. But Okonkwo refused to endorse the appeal. He recognized that accepting the invitation is done at the expense of things that comprised his identity and defined his values.

So when some members of the Umuofia community unwittingly accepted the invitation and endorsed “a strange faith,” things fell apart for the Igbo people in Achebe’s novel. Umuofia’s integrated, organic community was irreparably fractured. Their gods were blasphemed and their hero disabled. Their customs were desecrated and shattered. The people were divided or put asunder. The British District Commissioner took charge and controlled the people. So we have what seems like a total imposition of one cultural, social, and political structure upon another. The hero of the novel found himself plunged into disaster. He had to kill himself. Obierika, one of the characters in the novel, expressed it this way: “That man (Okonkwo) was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog” (147). This was a tragic act, leading to the exacerbating question of why the hero failed especially among those who have experienced or confronted the harsh face of colonialism. However, Okonkwo’s calamitous act was not unexpected. All that happened to him and the fact that he had to take his own life were primarily the function of the Igbo’s conception of a hero and, perhaps, the rift within the clan brought about by foreign domination.

A hero, in the Igbo cultural belief system, is one with great courage and

strength to work against destabilizing forces of his community, someone who affects, in a special way, the destinies of others by pursuing his own. He is a man noted for special achievements. His life is defined by ambivalence, because his actions must stand in sharp contrast to ordinary behavior. So a hero is not made in isolation; rather he is a product of the social matrix within which he operates. The person's determination to pursue his individual interest concomitantly with that of society is a constant source of dynamic tensions because his obligations to his society can become an impediment to his individual quest for fame and reputation. However, this impediment must be overcome if he is to be a hero. Paradoxically, a hero becomes both the disrupting and integrating principles of the community. Okonkwo, the central character in *Things Fall Apart*, is the epitome of this complex concept and the personification of the cultural ambiguity of the Igbo people.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe made it clear that Okonkwo's single passion was "to become one of the lords of the clan" (92). According to Achebe, it was Okonkwo's "life-spring." Okonkwo wanted to be a hero. Unfortunately, the road to heroism in the Igbo's belief system is chronically fraught with difficulties of varying degrees.

The first challenge Okonkwo was expected to overcome was his father's reputation-in this case his father had none. However, he was determined to succeed in whatever respect his father had failed, knowing full well that among his "people a man was judged according to his worth and according to his father"-a juxtaposition of opposing claims about which the narrator made no attempt to reconcile(6). His father, Unoka enjoyed gentleness and idleness. He "was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow" (3). Unoka was said to rejoice in song, dance, and drinking of palm-wine as his way of avoiding responsibility. In fact, he preferred

these things to tending his yam-field. He was a man without title in the village of Umuofia, and he could not endure the sight of blood. Biologically, he was a male, but among the Igbo, he was never a man. So people laughed at him. In order to become a hero, Okonkwo felt he must overcome this public estimation of his father. At the outset of the novel, Achebe made the following remarks about Okonkwo: “His fame rested on solid personal achievements. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness” (9). So Okonkwo hated what his father was and become the opposite.

Not only is a hero expected to overcome the reputation of his father, he is also expected to surpass the reputations of his peers. In other words, he outperformed people in his age group or those he grew up with. Among the Igbos good effort is respected, “but achievement was revered” (6). Okonkwo must achieve concrete things to be a hero and he did. Here is Achebe’s account of his achievement:

If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age, he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most, one could say that his chi or personal god was good. But the Igbo people have a proverb that when a man says yes, his chi says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly: so his chi agreed. And not only his chi, but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. That was why Okonkwo had been chosen by the nine villages to carry a message of war to their enemies unless they agree to give up a young man and a virgin to atone for the murder of Udo’s wife. (Achebe 19-20)

Okonkwo’s accomplishments in Umuofia earned him the respect and honor of

the elders and the people. He defeated Amalinze the Cat and was proclaimed the greatest wrestler in Umuofia and Mbaino. He demonstrated exceptional skills as a warrior of the clan by bringing home five heads during inter-tribal conflicts. Achebe portrayed him as a man with “incredible prowess” and passion to conquer and subdue his enemies. He was a successful farmer and married three wives -clear evidence among the Igbos of a strong and wealthy man. The ultimatum of war that he delivered to enemy of Umuofia yielded immediate results. Achebe wrote:

When Okonkwo of Umuofia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and imperious emissary of war, he was treated with great honor and respect, and two days later he returned home with a lad of fifteen and a young virgin. The lad’s name was Ikemefuna, whose sad story is still told in Umuofia unto this day. (9)

Okonkwo started with nothing, but through hard work and determination he became successful.

Another barrier one is expected to overcome in the quest for heroism is the person’s obligation to the society, which, of course, may adversely affect his individual quest for reputation. The nature of the dynamic tensions this can create was evident in Okonkwo’s lifestyle. Perhaps this accounts for the reason some interpreters of *Things Fall Apart* think that Achebe paints “a paradoxical portrait of a protagonist who is both a typical Igbo man as well as an individual” (Lindfors 17).

Among the Igbos, a person’s obligation to the society calls for cooperation. It calls for submission to the counsel of elders, the precepts, and laws of the land, which are established for the good of the society I think the most difficult aspect of it all is the subordination of one’s own interest to that of the group or society. Okonkwo had

a scrupulous desire to fulfill his obligation to the society, but he often realized that it only brought him to a crossroad of conflicting loyalties. A typical example of this happened on the night when the Priestess of Agbala came to take Ezinma, Okonkwo's daughter, for Agbala's blessing. In spite of his inexorable commitment to support and defend the laws of the land, Okonkwo felt the natural pull to resist established social order. He was expressively unapproving of the untimely visit by the Priestess. He perceived her arrival as an intrusion to his family's domestic life. However, his insistent but unsuccessful protestations only elicited a scream from the Priestess of Agbala, who warned, "Beware, Okonkwo!" "Beware of exchanging words with Agbala. Dose a man speak when a god speaks? Beware!" (Achebe 96). Albeit, the Priestess took Ezinma to the Oracle of the Hills and Caves and returned her safely to Okonkwo's family the following day. But we learned from the narrator that Okonkwo was noticeably worried, and wondered about these conflicting loyalties.

Even Obierika, who seemed to disapprove of Okonkwo's commitment to the central doctrines of his culture, observed and agonized over the lack of equilibrium between the pull of private values and public expectations. The force of this pull is succinctly captured in the following passage:

He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away what crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offense on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land not just on the offender. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soled the others. (Achebe 88)

Obierika, like Okonkwo, felt the endemic tensions of conflicting cultural

values—the incessant discord between public loyalty to the goddess of the clan and private loyalty to the family. But the difference between Okonkwo and Obierika was, Okonkwo was a man of few words. He allowed his actions to speak for him. However, the cumulative effects of all these things led to his eventual suicide. This is the kind of dilemma one confronts on the road to heroism and it can be overwhelming. A hero, in Okonkwo's world, must face a constant strife between two sets of values, the societal and the personal, but he never can find the equilibrium. It is, therefore, not a surprise to Okonkwo that he takes his life. This is what precisely Sarr observed when he critically remarked, "Ibo society is full of contradictions. It is male-dominated society, in which chief goddess is female and in which proverbial wisdom maintains 'Mother is supreme' – a sustained duality in belief systems common to much of Africa" (349).

Central to this observation is the fact that the Igbo community is a society that is at once communal and individualistic. Such a worldview or ambiguous value system reveals, Sarr properly concluded, "the dilemma that shapes and destroys the life of Okonkwo" (349).

Although Okonkwo expressed rigidity and inflexibility in his life, Achebe told us that down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. I believe the most charitable way to understand this is by looking briefly at different manifestations of Okonkwo's esoteric life. For example, when he violated the peace week by beating his youngest wife, which was an offense to the goddess, Okonkwo agreed to make offerings as demanded by the custom of Umuofia. In fact, he offered an additional pot of palm-wine, which was a distinct indication of genuine repentance and cooperation for the good of the community Achebe had Ezeani say to Okonkwo:

You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbors. We live in peace with our fellows to honor our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil. [As Okonkwo heard this] He staff heavily on the floor. Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your Obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her. [As soon as Okonkwo heard this] His staff came down again. The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish. His tone now changed from anger to command. You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries. He rose and left the hut. Okonkwo made the sacrifices to the earth goddess. (22)

In another occasion, we learn that Okonkwo breathed a heavy sigh of relief when he found out that his wife, Ekwefi was unharmed after he had fired at her in a fit of rage. Thus, we observe within some of these occasional flashes of cruelty, a rare manifestation of tenderness. Similarly, on the night when the priestess of Agbala carried Ekwefi's daughter off to the Oracle of the Hills and Caves for the young girl to pay homage to her god, Ekwefi followed in terror for her child. Cognizant of his wife's state of terror, Okonkwo joined Ekwefi to provide re-assurance. When Ekwefi noticed Okonkwo's presence, "Tears of gratitude filled her eyes" (Achebe 106). As both of them waited outside their home in the dawn, Achebe said, Ekwefi remembered the generous love with Okonkwo had taken her at the moment she

became her wife. Perhaps Okonkwo was not a cruel man. For these occasional episodes are seemingly indications of kind-hearted man.

Paradoxically, Okonkwo would never achieve heroism among the Igbos if he totally subordinated his interest to that of the society at large. Hence, it was incumbent on him to exhibit other qualities that might be perceived as a threat to social order. “And he did pounce on people quite often” (Achebe 3). As Achebe said, Okonkwo made people wonder whether he respected the gods of the clan. He “was popularly called the ‘Roaring Flame’” (108). “Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody halfway through, not even for fear of a goddess” (21). In his culture, a man who was unable to rule his own family was not considered a real man, not to mention a hero. So, Okonkwo “ruled his household with a heavy hand” and made people afraid of him (9). A hero should be impervious to emotions. The narrator told us that Okonkwo expressed no emotion, except anger. He was stoical to the harsh realities of life and appeared immune to problems. This is life of a hero, a self-made man. Sometimes Okonkwo acted as if he was answerable to no one, and at other times he was the opposite. Obierika (Okonkwo’s closest friend) pointed to this cultural ambiguity in the system when he sought (as he always did) a compromise from Okonkwo between conflicting loyalties. But Okonkwo responded impatiently, “The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger” (47). It would seem, for the Igbos, a hero must lead a life of self-contradiction; and Okonkwo was one primary example. It is, therefore, not surprising why contemporary commentators like Wasserman and Purdon contended that “Okonkwo represents a type of selfish individualism that is in essence a threat to Ibo notions of clan, and culture” (327).

In opening lines of chapter seven, the narrator said, it seemed the elders of Umuofia had forgotten Ikemefuna (the lad who was entrusted to Okonkwo’s care) but



not the oracle. For three years Ikemefuna lived in Okonkwo's household. He was wholly absorbed into the family and Okonkwo became fond of him. Suddenly, the announcement came from the Oracle that Ikemefuna must be killed according to the tradition of Umuofia. The boy at this point regarded Okonkwo as a father. So, Ogbuefi Ezeudu specifically warned Okonkwo to stay at home. "The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him (Ikemefuna) outside Umuofia as it is the custom, and kill him there. But I warn you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you father" (40).

The cultural practice was that when the gods or goddess demanded anyone for sacrifice, the family must be executed because the Umuofia people believed that the emotional attachment the family must have for that individual would interfere with the process or the obligation to execute the demands of the Oracle. Hence, Ogbuefi Ezeudu sought for at least a passive compromise from Okonkwo. Since Okonkwo's passion was to be a hero, he felt his manliness might be called into questions; therefore, he defied his friend's admonition and accompanied the procession into the forest.

What happened next would be used in the novel partly for the downfall of Okonkwo. Ikemefuna had to die. The values of the whole clan of Umuofia would be tested, if not forever, by his journey in which Ikemefuna would be killed. Achebe explained the episode in these words:

As the man who cleaned his throat drew up and raised his machete, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot (of palm-wine) fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo

drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. (43)

The death of Ikemefuna invoked varying or contrasting emotional reactions from both Okonkwo and Nwoye (Okonkwo's son) which dramatizes what Okonkwo apprehended as a dichotomy between strength and gentleness. Achebe said:

as soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna [someone he had come to know and treat as a friend] had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry....He just hung limp. (43)

Nwoye would have loved to cry, but couldn't, because Okonkwo had tried to raise him up like himself. In Okonkwo's world, real men do not show effeminate emotion. Crying is not a masculine attribute.

In chapter Eight, we are told that Okonkwo himself could not sleep. He was distraught and deeply affected by the death of Ikemefuna and son's reaction to it. As Achebe told us, Okonkwo was not a man of many words (something traditionally viewed as a masculine quality in Umuofia's believe system), so he bottled his feelings within his heart. For two whole days he ate nothing as he struggled to erase the memory of killing a child who called him father. It was the cumulative effects of these things, including the impact the death of Ikemefuna had on his son that paved the way to Okonkwo's eventual suicide. But the death of Ikemefuna had no immediate on the Umuofia people. It was however, definitely an apocalyptic step towards things that were yet to come.

Later at the funeral of Ogbuefi Ezeudu, Okonkwo's gun accidentally discharged and killed the son of Ezeudu. Even though this was an accident, it was

viewed as an abomination in the land, for under no circumstances would someone kill a classman. Okonkwo and family had to flee the land before the cock crowed. They found refuge in his mother's village, Mbanta. He and his family endured seven years in exile. In the meantime, offerings were made in Okonkwo's compound, after their departure, to cleanse the land and placate the gods. Okonkwo saw this sojourn to Mbanta as a training experience in the wilderness. While he was in the village, he found out that the Mbanta clan was allowing missionary to establish Christian churches and make converts especially among the untouchable. He saw how the missionaries defied the power of the local gods. His son, Nwoye, who suffered from the inner turmoil as a result of the death of Ikemefuna, decided to attend the mission school. He left his father's house and joined the Christian church. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. Okonkwo was furious and disappointed. He tried unsuccessfully to get the Mbanta clan to chase the missionaries out. When they couldn't get the missionaries out, "Okonkwo sighed heavily and longed for his father's land", where according to him, "men were men, bold, war-like" (141).

When he finally returned to his fatherland, little did he know that the missionaries had penetrated his father's land too and made converts of different categories of Umuofia clan, ranging from the low-born and outcast to the men of title and stature. They also established white government with courthouse where "the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance" (123). Obierika explained it this way: "the white man is very clever, he came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (125). Fallen apart indeed! "Okonkwo's return to his native land was not as memorable as he had wished" (129). He never received a hero's welcome he dreamed of. He returned to a

different Umuofia from the one he had known. In the present Umuofia, “men (have) unaccountably become soft like women” (129). He wanted to fight, but Obierika said to him: “It is already too late...Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the strangers. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government...How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us?” (124).

Okonkwo left and killed himself not because of the departed African glories. Rather, it was the inevitable consequence of the Igbos' complex concept of a hero. Okonkwo, who had a resolute hunger to become a hero, was not afraid of the forces that surrounded him. However, he was so overwhelmed by the cumulative effects of his experiences on the road to heroism that he felt the only thing left to do was to commit suicide. Okonkwo had to maintain his integrity as a hero. The truth of this profound, but ambivalent act is reflected in the Igbo proverb that says: “the thought that led a man to truncate his own existence was not conceived in a day” It was not just one single thing or event that forced Okonkwo to kill himself. His suicidal act was an ultimate expression of the compound effects of his own experiences in his unflinching desire to become a hero. Okonkwo was a hero. Hence, he had to depart from the battlefield as one. A hero would rather die than to be captured and/or humiliated by the enemy. Okonkwo's death cheated his enemies, the European colonizers, of their revenge. But to the Umuofia people, it was unambiguously imprinted in their minds that there had been an irreversible break with the past. Umuofia would never again be what it was.

Okonkwo believed that when a man said to greatness, he would concur. When he took the eight hundred seed-yarns from Nwakibie and “it seemed as if the world had gone mad, Okonkwo decided that because he had survived last year, he would

survive anything” (23-24). This he attributed to his “inflexible will” (24).

Yet despite his determination for greatness, strict adherence to the ideals of his clan, and the respect of his fellow clansmen, Okonkwo possessed a hamartia. His flaw was his twin fears of failure and weakness, which dominated every aspect of his life. Achebe explains early on that Okonkwo “had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had no patience with his father” (4). Although Okonkwo demanded greatness and commanded respect among his people, his father, Unoka, was a failure. True, Unoka was a gentle and compassionate man; he was flexible and understanding. Because of his skill on his flute, other villagers often called on him to play and teach his songs. Unoka was a great talker and as a result was always successful in borrowing money. However, Unoka was a failure because he was a loafer, deeply in debt, and barely able to feed his wife and children. He was an *agbala* and Okonkwo hated him for it.

Okonkwo’s life was dominated by fear. Achebe writes, “It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father” (13). He hated everything his father loved: “One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness” (13). Okonkwo believed that, “to show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength” (28). Okonkwo’s fear, his tragic flaw, caused him to participate in the sacrifice of *Ikemefuna*.

Prior to the *Ikemefuna*’s death, *Ogbuefi Ezeudu*, a great warrior in his time, now elderly but accorded great respect, told Okonkwo: “That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death” (57). Okonkwo did not understand. Although Achebe describes Okonkwo as “one of the greatest men of his time,” he also mentions Okonkwo’s youth. Although a great man, he lacked wisdom. Okonkwo himself

states, “A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness” (19); following this, he should have respected the advice of Ogbuefi and declined to participate in the killing. However, even Okonkwo’s desire for greatness did not overcome his fear of being seen as weak.

It could be seen that Okonkwo had no alternative but to participate in the killing. One can say his respect for the decisions of the clan governed his actions. However, Okonkwo’s friend Obierika repudiates this claim, starting “if the oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it” (67). Echoing the advice of Ogbuefi, he adds, “If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families” (67). Obierika’s statement is significant on several levels. First, because Obierika was as successful as Okonkwo and both have similar backgrounds in the culture. Second by mentioning that Okonkwo’s actions will not please the Earth, Obierika draws attention to the imbalance between the male and female elements in Okonkwo. We can see that Okonkwo’s not a victim of circumstances but a person who has made bad decisions. Finally, by stating that Okonkwo’s part in the death of Ikemefuna is “the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families” (68).

When the Christians come, Nwoye is deeply captivated by their poetry. A hymn about brothers who sat in fear and darkness seems to answer his questions regarding the seeming meaninglessness of Ikemefuna’s death. As a result, Nwoye leaves his father to join the Christians and further repudiates his clan by accepting the name Issac. Okonkwo’s horrified to contemplate the gravity of Nwoye’s decision. Ancestralism is very significant in Umuofia, where the dead are believed to play an active role among the living, but only through continued worship and sacrifice of

one's children. Okonkwo considers his own destruction: "Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors?" (153). He shudders at the prospect of his annihilation.

In Umuofia children are revered, elders respected, and one's eternity is dependent upon offspring following the traditions of the clan. Okonkwo's fear, his hamartia, brought him to kill Ikemefuna. In doing so, Okonkwo helped Okonkwo participated in his own destruction.

Okonkwo is a particular kind of protagonist: the great warrior who carries with him the fate of his people. He is as Michael Valdez Moses has argued, Homeric hero cast in a distinctly Achillian mold. Like Achilles, Okonkwo is a "a man of action, a man of war" (7). His 'fame' among the Igbo rests 'on solid personal achievements' (3), foremost of which are his exploits as the greatest wrestler and most accomplished warrior of the nine villages. He is a man renowned and respected for having brought home from battle five human heads; and on feast days and important public occasions; he drinks his palm wine from skull of the first he killed.

Okonkwo is, in other words, identified with his community to the extent that it esteems the martial ethos he embodies, and while his village certainly does more than make war, it especially prizes those men who win distinction on the battlefield. This does not mean that Okonkwo epitomizes all the virtues of Igbo culture, or he is himself without fault. On the contrary, Achebe himself understands that, within an Aristotelian framework, his hero is necessarily a flawed character, guilty of errors in judgement-guilty, to use the Greek term, of hamartia.. The tragic protagonist is the man who is larger than life, who exemplifies virtues that are admired by the community, but also a man of who for all that is still human. He can have flaws as very elegantly underlined in Aristotle's work. Obviously Okonkwo's "larger than

life” (“he was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a severe look” (7) yet his epic proportions carry a figurative as well as a literal significance: they indicate the difficulty he experiences fitting within the boundaries of any social order. So it is that as a “a man of action”, a great athlete and warrior, he is excessive both in his high-spiritedness, what the Greeks called thymos (“whenever he was angry and could not get his words but quickly enough, he would use his fists”, and in his prideful arrogance, what the Greeks called hubris (8). “The oldest man present said sternly to Okonkwo that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble” (28). Indeed, like many of the heroes of classical tragedy, Okonkwo’s immoderate behaviour consistently places him at cross purposes not merely with his fellow Umuofians, but with the Gods themselves. “Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess” (31). It comes as no surprise when he is sent into temporary exile for offending Ani, the Earth deity. We should see that Achebe clearly intends to recognize Okonkwo’s faults are essentially virtues carried to an extreme, and that while he is obviously not perfect. He nevertheless represents some of the best qualities of his culture. As Obierika remarks near the novel’s end, “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia” (191).

The rapid changes which have taken place in Umuofia destroy the triumph of Okonkwo’s return from exile. Not only has the new religion grown in strength, the Europeans have also brought their own form of government, and increased trade in the area. Okonkwo’s could not bear such European encroachment in his area and decided to fight against it. Unfortunately he could not get support from his tribesmen and with no option around he had to commit suicide. The suicide is itself a profound violation of Igbo law, which strictly prohibits acts of self-destruction. For Ogbba the



suicide grows out of Okonkwo's failure to act with sufficient piety toward the Igbo gods and traditions, while for Opata it is a consequence of the Igbos' refusal to rally around Okonkwo and join him in resisting the British. Okonkwo's suicide is the logical and necessary consequence of an idealistic and absolutist position. Both nationalist history and heroic tragedy demand that he remains unyielding and that the Igbos honour their cultural heritage by refusing assimilation. Even in this final gesture, then, Okonkwo functions as the true representative of his people. For, as he sees it, Igbo culture has willingly succumbed to its own annihilation, committing what is a form of collective suicide by submitting to the Britain. In taking his own life, Okonkwo has simply preceded his people in their communal destruction. Once again he has let the way.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION: Okonkwo, a Tragic Figure to the Hilt**

The previous chapters have studied, analyzed and assessed certain features of tragic hero referring to many famous tragic characters like Oedipus, King Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Willy Lowman and so on. Though there are various stand-points from where one can look into the concept of hero, my attempt has been to highlight the qualities of hero that are present in the protagonist – Okonkwo on Aristotelian model

The story of a literary work revolves around the action, interaction and reaction that take place between the different characters. A literary work encompasses multiple characters possessing a variety of traits and behaviours in them. The hero, since he is the central figure, plays vital and considerable role in the work. The hero appears, disappears and reappears frequently, and reaches every corner of the work. As a result, we can see him differently while looking from the different corners. Similarly, he establishes different kinds of relations and connections with almost all of the characters that result in the emergence of his multiple faces and roles. Because of his multifarious faces and roles, the hero seems to be a divided personality. Though he seems like a divided personality, he is always a single individual with plural faces and roles.

While looking at the literary history, we have found various heroes with many faces and roles. They always convey many human traits. Every hero from King Oedipus to Okonkwo, whether he belongs to the higher or middle or lower class, has appeared in many faces and roles. The roles they have played are of equal success. King Oedipus is not only a helpful king but also a murderer and an investigator. Likewise we see the many faces of Okonkwo as he moves from stage of an ambitious man to a complete failure in the end.

From the beginning, Okonkwo is in the grip of his father's failure. Unoka has not achieved any kind of status in the tribe by the usual means of wealth and titles. He is a gentle, improvident man, most happy when playing his flute, relaxing with the villagers, and recalling his happy boyhood. He is ill at ease when the conversation turns to warfare and to any of the other more aggressive features of village life; then he finds an escape in his flute playing.

Such a father need not have been a hindrance to Okonkwo's ambition. The tolerance and openness of Igbo society enable the individual with drive and ability to succeed. The narrator at one point in the novel says, "Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" (34). But Okonkwo does not see it in this way. He feels that he must succeed in everything his father failed at and so wipe out his memory. This is the hidden motive behind his impressive achievements.

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man but his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion – to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. Driven by his private obsession, Okonkwo has only one aim in life to succeed and to succeed in terms of war fare, wrestling, wealth

and status. At first, his achievements are remarkable. Despite unimaginable difficulties he survives a general farming catastrophe, and this like other successes reinforces his inner driving force. Once he says, "Since I survived that year, I shall survive anything" (32). He put it down to his inflexible will. And Umuofia is impressed. Although the villagers do not fall into the error of believing a man is in complete control of his destiny, they are prepared to acknowledge his achievements.

Okonkwo's inflexible will is bringing him success in a society remarkable for its flexibility. At first the impetus of his fanatical ambition brings quick results; only later does the rigidity of his aims begin to upset the equilibrium of a system developed in conformity with a far less aggressive concept of character. This danger first makes its appearance within the family. The traditional balance here, as Achebe depicts it, is between the masculine and feminine virtues. But Okonkwo reacting against his father's effeminacy simplifies this pattern and insists that his sons share his thoroughly masculine aggression and virility. So, he told his sons masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Okonkwo was so upset by the failure of his father that he wanted to succeed in his life at any cost. As his status and wealth increase so does his self-assertion. We sense a growing alienation between him and his easy-going clansmen as he enforces his will more and more emphatically upon his family.

It is the tragedy of Okonkwo that embodies the theme of the novel. Because he is so devoted to Ibo ideals, his downfall symbolizes the breakdown of traditional ways brought about by colonialism.

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154-170.