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MARGINALIZATION AND SUBJUGATION OF WOMAN IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S
"THINGS FALL APART"

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ABSTRACT

From ancient period, women were treated as less than equal to men in many ways. Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. The women of the African countries are worse off than women elsewhere in the world in that they are far more marginalized and discriminated against than their counterparts in other countries. "Things Fall Apart" is a 1958 English novel by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. In the novel, Achebe explains the role of women in pre-colonial Africa. Women are relegated to an inferior position throughout the novel. Their status has been degraded. Gender divisions are a misconception of the patriarchy. Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart relegates women culturally as second fiddle who should not be heard at all.

In this article, the attempt was made to analyze the Igbo women's subjugation and marginalization in the context of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. Achebe exposes the subtle processes of subjugation and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male-centered Igbo society at large. These include social and psychological factors such as, woman's subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality. The author seeks to expose the ideology by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in society

This paper is an attempt to discuss women as a subjugated and marginalized group in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart.

Keywords: Discrimination, Marginalization, Subjugated, Relegate.

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INTRODUCTION

Marginalization is the social process of being relegated to the fringe of society. One such example of marginalization is the marginalization of women. Subjugation is the biased use of authority, law or physical force to prevent others from being free or equal. It can mean to keep someone down in a social sense such as an authoritarian government might do in an oppressive society. It can also mean to mentally burden someone,

such as with the psychological weight of an oppressive idea. In a social justice context, oppression is what happens when people are pushed down by societies. It is the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner. It can also be defined as an act or instance of subjugating, the state of being subjugated, and the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically, by troubles, adverse conditions or people, and anxiety.

Women play variety of significant roles in society from their birth till the end of life. Even after playing all her roles in efficient manner, she is weak because men are still, strongest gender of the society. Women are treated as the 'weaker sex' who needs to be protected entire life-be it by her father, husband or son. It is obvious that women are still subjected to persecution by the male even in the present days. Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality.

Things Fall Apart is a novel written in English by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. The novel depicts the life of Okonkwo, a leader and local wrestling champion in Umuofia - one of a fictional group of nine villages in Nigeria inhabited by the Igbo people. It focuses on his family and personal history, the customs and society of the Igbo and the influence of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on the Igbo community during the late nineteenth century. The novel analyzes the destruction of African culture by the appearance of the white man in terms of the destruction of the bonds between individuals and their society.

In Chinua Achebe's novel Things Fall Apart, the Igbo people's patriarchal society has a strict system of behavioral customs according to gender. These customs strongly restrict the freedom of Igbo women and help to reinforce generation after generation the notion that Igbo men are superior to the women of their tribe.

In the novel, women of the Igbo tribe are terribly mistreated, and viewed as weak and receive little or no respect outside of their role as a mother and tradition dictates their role in life. These women are courageous and obedient and they are nurturers above all and they are everything but weak. "Things Fall Apart" is one of the novels, which exposes the roles of women. In this novel, masculine and feminine social identity and language patterns reflect a distinctly negative social attitude towards femininity and an association of women and weakness. This novel is also a testimony to the social attitudes towards gender. By emphasizing the weakness of femininity and the benefits of masculine behaviour the Igbo people emphasize the gender stratification of their culture and ensure the continuation of patriarchy.

Among the people of this society, the condition of weakness is strongly associated with the state of being female and the worst insult that a man can receive is to be called a woman. In this novel the main character Okonkwo is often obsessed with proving his strength as a man because he seeks to escape the reputation of his father who was considered by his fellow clansmen to be weak like a woman and he is ashamed when he learns that "agbala was not only another name for woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title" when this insult is applied to his father. Okonkwo takes the insecurity of his manliness to extremes, and even unnecessarily kills the adopted son whom he loves deeply in order to prove his unwavering emotional fortitude. "Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak." (Achebe 43)

Okonkwo wishes that his favorite child, Enzima, should have been a boy. Okonkwo shouts at her,

"Sit like a woman." (Achebe 40).

When she offers to bring a chair for him he replies,

"No, that is a boy's job." (Achebe 41).

On the other hand, his son Nwoye was a disappointment to him because he has taken after his grandfather Unoka and has feelings of love and affection in him. For same reason Okonkwo had always resented his father Unoka also. Unoka was improvident. For him he was a failure.

Okonkwo encourages Nwoye to sit with him and tells him "masculine stories of violence and bloodshed." (Achebe 48).

According to Reddy, Indrasena in his work "The Novels of Achebe and Ngugi: A Study in the Dialectics of Commitment." "Okonkwo sees things and judge the same from a purely masculine point of view. He cannot imagine a man endowed with the finer qualities of gentleness and softness. For him these are nothing but feminine traits."

The protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo has several wives and he orders them around like dogs, but they are never to question what they are instructed to do, and they are expected to be obedient. We see this early in the story, when Okonkwo brings Ikemefuna into his home, Okonkwo tells his senior wife that Ikemefuna belongs to the tribe and that she is expected to look after him and she in turn asks him if he will be staying with them for a long period of time, and this sends Okonkwo into a fury and he snaps at her in a very degrading manner, "Do what you are told woman, When did you become one of the *ndichie* (meaning elders) of Umuofia?" Clearly she receives no respect.

In keeping with the Igbo view of female nature, the tribe allows wife beating. Okonkwo beats his youngest wife one day because she was visiting a friend and did not get home in time to prepare food for him. Then he also beat his second wife when she cuts some leaves of Okonkwo's banana tree in order to wrap some food to celebrate the Feast of the New Yam, and then referred to him as one whose "guns that never shot."

The world in *Things Fall Apart* is an androcentric world where the man is everything and the woman nothing and the greatness of a man in this society is measured in terms of his muscle power, wealth, titles and number of wives. It is a polygamous society. Men of titles occupy a place of importance in the society and are treated with honor and respect. It does not matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children he was not considered to be a man. Women do not have a say in any important matter. The idea of masculinity puts women on a remote margin. They are excluded from political, economic and judicial matters of the community and they are confined to the domestic sphere only.

The Igbo life is so much gender based that even in case of gods they place a male god at the apex and next in the hierarchy is a female goddess. Moreover they categorize crime as male and female. When Okonkwo kills someone by accident it was called a female crime. Not even the crops are exempted from such discrimination, Yams were an important crop for these people. "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed. So Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man.

This clearly shows the prevailing inequality between the genders in the Igbo community. Women's marginalization in Igbo society can be seen in all spheres of life. Women are not considered as equal to men, though you can notice that women are called for drinking, they are not allowed to continue drinking together with men. They take the horns and then after they leave men alone drink. It shows the culture of gender inequality in Igbo society whereby men and women have not the same value.

In the novel, Achebe describes the condition of women in the Igbo society in which men are permitted to marry many times. Women are bought and sold into marriage and after marriage they are insulted and beaten by their husbands. Achebe shows Igbo as a patriarchal society which gives more importance to their sons than to their daughters. The son's duty is taking care of farming, getting the yam seedling reeds and keeping the farming instruments ready for farm work. Sons get involved in masquerades, wrestling matches, meetings and accompany their fathers to ceremonies, while the daughter's world begins and ends with getting married, giving birth to children and serving the food to their husbands and children. Besides, Igbo society being a patriarchal one, it lays emphasis on a woman's capacity to give birth to more than one child, especially sons. In the novel it is shown that the husbands would slaughter a goat for their wives if they give birth to the third son in succession. For example, when Okonkwo's first wife, Nwoye's mother gives birth to

"her third son in succession, Okonkwo had gathered goat for her, as was the custom". (Achebe 82)

Women in the patriarchal Igbo society are expected to fulfill their gender role as a homemaker and a caregiver in the community while the men are the protector and the breadwinner of the household. As Beauvoir stated, women are seen as the "Other" as compared to the men who are seen as the Subject and the Absolute. This situation can be clearly seen in the protagonist Okonkwo's wives, they are the homemakers and caregivers of the household and each wife has to obey him at all costs and they also have to endure Okonkwo's temper and sudden outburst. The subordinate status of an Igbo woman is a norm that has been practiced since their forefathers.

Achebe explains the role of women in pre-colonial Africa. Blacks are marginalized but women are subjugated not only as blacks but as women also. Women are relegated to an inferior position throughout the novel. They are regarded as mere appendage to a man. They are treated as chattels.

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