



RESEARCH ARTICLE

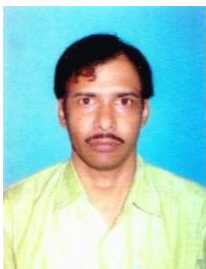
Vol.2.S.1.,2015

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

FILIATION AND AFFILIATION IN *THINGS FALL APART*

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Article Info:

Article Received:31/03/2015

Revised on: 05/04/2015

Accepted on: 08/04/2015

ABSTRACT

The term 'filiation' means what one inherits; one's past and tradition. 'Affiliation' means creation of one's own world which is radically different from one's tradition. Both these terms, contrastive in nature, involve father-child relationship. They also highlight postcolonial response to tradition. The protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo despises his genetic father as being lazy, improvident. He climbs up the ladder of his success by his volition and determination. He creates his own world. He sticks to his culture and tradition. Okonkwo's own son, Nwoye, finds fault with the manners, mores and outdated crude customs of the Igbos. He breaks away with his own tradition, his religion and finally his biological father. He finally gets converted to Christianity. This paper attempts a reading of Achebe's epoch making novel in the light of the concepts of filiation and affiliation.

KEY WORDS: Filiation, inherits, genetic, improvident, crude, mores, affiliation

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The idea of a parent-child relationship has been an important troupe in literature. It is Oscar Wilde who pioneered and revolutionized the idea of a self-created man in his *'The importance of Being Ernest'* (1895). The concept may be traced back to Nietzsche. However, two immortal writers, J.M. Synge and James Joyce followed the same literary tradition in their canonical texts *'The Playboy of the Western World'* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* respectively. In Synge's drama there is a suggestion of parricide or at least the conversion of father into the revised version of the son. In Joyce's novel the hero Stephen Dedalus's resolution not to serve 'my home', 'my fatherland and 'my church' is a symbolic parricide required for his self-origination and for free expression of his artistic self. The terms 'filiation' and 'affiliation' were first used by the literary critic, Edward Said in his seminal work, *'The world, the Text and the Critic'* (1984). The term 'filiation' implies the norm in patrilineal societies-- one's own inheritance whereas 'affiliation' connotes the 'radical creation of one's own world, context and version of tradition.' The repudiation of the genetic father stands for the rejection of the authority and determination to invent self in condition of cultural freedom. This is quite natural in colonial situation--it helps the discursive formation of the colonized subject. Filiation and affiliation also highlight post-colonial responses to tradition. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* the protagonist, Okonkwo, upholds his tradition, his past, his culture and clime but, his son revolts against him and breaks away with his tradition. The novel makes an interesting reading in the light of the concept of filiation and affiliation.

Okonkwo begins with a sense of filial ingratitude. As he steps in manhood Okonkwo is haunted with an inborn fear, the fear of failure:

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 of magic, the fear of the forest, and 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, lest he should be found to resemble his father.

His aversion to unsuccessful men like his father coupled with his anxiety made him adverse to his biological father:

Okonkwo was ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved.

Okonkwo is faced with an identity crisis. He can not identify himself with his father, doomed to meet his failure for his idleness and improvident nature. He outgrows the influence of his father. He finally overcomes the legacy of his father. He succeeds in carving out his career as a great wrestler in his clan. He is a legendary wrestler, a proud emissary of war and a man of the people. He tries his best to uphold the traditions and customs of his clan. His ancestors and their ways are objects of veneration for him. In time of his seven years' exile from his own clan Christian missionaries settle in Umuofia. The whitemen's enterprise has been beautifully summed up by Obierika.

The whiteman 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 won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.

In an attempt to defend his own culture and clan Okonkwo bravely stands up to the inroads of the western powers. In the process of doing so he gradually realizes that he stands alone and commits suicide. Okonkwo's tragedy is the tragedy of all natives in defiance of external forces.

If Okonkwo conforms to his own tradition, his son, Nwoye seeks to free himself from the hold of his predecessors. As an immediate successor Nwoye was quite simple and banal. He has not the promising beginning. Okonkwo too has an anxiety of influence:

Nwoye was then twelve years old but was already causing great anxiety for his incipient laziness. At any rate that was how it looked to his father and he sought to correct him by constant nagging and beating. And so Nwoye was developed into a sad faced youth.

Needless to say, Okonkwo was disappointed with Nwoye. As his son could not fulfil his expectations Okonkwo despises:

I will not have a son who cannot hold up his head in the gathering of the clan. I would sooner strangle him.

However, amid all these tortuous experiences and insults Nwoye's only consolation was his playmate, Ikemefuna, the hostage boy. It is Ikemefuna who helps to stamp out all his laziness and develop him into manhood.

Ikemefuna's death is central to the tragic catastrophe of Okonkwo. So far during his sojourn at Okonkwo's house, Ikemefuna had been like a surrogate brother and playmate. The laws of the clan which dictates Ikemefuna's death, snaps the bond of brotherhood with him. This unmitigable cruelty coupled with his own father's participation with the killer-party impels an intense abhorrence. He feels:

--- something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow.

Nwoye grows disdainful to his religion. He gradually distances himself from his own clan, his own father. Nwoye's growing scepticism about the laws, customs, religion of the clan goads him on to the arms of the new religion:

It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna.

As a supersaturating effect of the prospect and a mounting assurance of the new Christian religion, Nwoye grows repulsive to his clan, to his religion, to his tradition and finally he slits the umbilical cord by denying his biological father:

'He is not my father'

This denial of his biological father is necessary for his initiation into the new religion. For, his father represents old values and belongs to the tradition which ideologically he cannot identify as his own. When his physical as well as psychological conversion to the new religion is complete, he abandons his father:

But he was happy to leave his father. He would return later to his mother and his brothers and sisters and convert them to the new faith.

At the end Nwoye emerges liberal individual and he resolves to go to Umuofia, his native clan for joining missionary Christian school as a learner. He is christened as 'Isaac' and within a few years Mr. Brown sends him to the new training college for teachers in Umuru.

The novel involves clash not only of colonial power and natives the former overpowering the later but also conflict of the authority and subversion, tradition and modernity, the tension of values lived by one generation and the crisis of identity for the other. It foregrounds the passing of one culture at the intrusion of exotic forces and a new set of values defining human relationship.

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