



Folklore in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart

B.P.Jyothi, Teaching Associate in English, Andhra University Campus,
Tadepalligudem, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract: Folk lore means the traditions and stories of a country or community. The story telling became part of a family folklore. Things Fall Apart is the name derived from W.B.Yeat's poem The Second Coming. This article highlights the main features of Folk lore and how they are applicable to the novel, Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. The article tells how Africans are interested in superfluous language. The characters in the Fables tell the beastly qualities in human beings. The Fables teaches a moral lesson especially with animals as characters Eg: Aesop Fables. The fable most commonly used in the sense of a short story decided to convey small useful moral lesson but often carrying with it associations of the marvelous or mythical characters. This form enjoyed popularity in 1920s and 1930s and has always been popular in Children's Literature. I am sure that this article will help the scholars and students pursuing post-graduation and research.

Key words: Egret, Perch, Gikuyu, Talon, Generic.

Introduction:

By Folk lore it is meant, "Those materials in culture that circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions whether in the oral form or by means of customary example"1. Folklore includes *Folk Art, Folk Crafts, Folk Tools, Folk Costume, Folk Custom, Folk Believes, Folk Medicine, Folk Recipes, Folk Music, Folk Dance, Folk Games, Folk Gestures and Folk Speech* as well as those verbal forms of expression which have been called Folk Literature, but which are better described as verbal art. Verbal art which include such forms as "Folk Tales, Legends, Myths, Proverbs." There are three methods of dividing a Proverb:

1. Basing on First Word in a proverb.
2. Basing on important phrase in a proverb.
3. Basing on Main Theme in a proverb.

Proverbs:

1. He who brings cola brings life. – Okeye to Unoka

Among these three last one can be taken into consideration.

Riddle: A Riddle is something that is difficult to understand. Among the Riddles we can find comparison and this analogy is found in (1). Comparison made with a living being, (2). A Riddle which has a comparison with man, (3). Comparison made with a tree, (4). Comparison with a thing. Poetry has been the primary concern of folk-lorists from both humanities and social services since the beginning of Folk lore as a field of study.



2. When moon shines bright even the crippled are hungry for walking.
–Achebe describing Harmattan.
3. A man, who pays respect to great people, also paves way for his own greatness.
–Okonkwo to Nwakabie.
4. A toad does not run in broad- day light.
–Okonkwo to Umofians regarding Obiago.
5. Let Kite perch, let Egret perch too, if one denies the other, others wings are broken.
–Nwakabie to Okonkwo.
6. When man started shooting without missing his mark, I learnt flying without
perching on a tree.
–Eneke the bird to civilians.
7. I can't live on the banks of rivers and wash my hands with saliva.
–Okonkwo to Ekwefi.
8. An animal rubs its plank to a tree, the man asks his kinsmen to scratch him.
–Mchandu to Mbainos.
9. A child can't pay for his mother's milk.
–Okonkwo to Mbainos.
10. Young people don't understand the bond of Kingship
–Old man to Mbainos.
11. To show affection a sign of weakness.
–Achebe regarding Okonkwo.
12. A Umophian should not refuse a call.
–Okonkwo to Umofians.
13. It was good olden days when warrior was a warrior.
–Okonkwo to Himself.
14. A person who does harm to others, does harm to himself.
–Tortoise to Birds.
15. If one threw up a grain of sand it will not find its way to the Earth.
–Achebe regarding Umofian.
16. We should bale this water which is ankle deep.
–Okike to the Umofian.
17. The white man has put the knife on the things that were held together and now
things have fallen apart.
–Oberika to Okonkwo.
18. If a rat is caught by its tail and dashed against the floor.
– Achebe regarding Okonkwo.
19. Never kill a man who says nothing...
–Uchandu to Oberika and others.
20. War like men became soft like women.

Usually in Africa, the evenings of storytelling around the fire side, grownups telling the children but everybody were interested and involved. Children would retell the stories the following day to other children who worked in the fields picking tea leaves or coffee beans of land-lords. The stories

with mostly against the brutes of prey like lions, leopard, tiger and the struggle against the hostile nature – drought, rain, sun, wind. This twin struggle, against nature and other animals reflected real life struggles in human world.



There are stories with human beings as the main characters. There were two types of characters of such human-centered narratives; the species of truly human beings with qualities of courage, kindness, mercy, hatred of evils, concern for others, and a man-eat-man, two-mouthed species with qualities of greed, selfishness, individualism and hatred. Cooperation as the ultimate good in a community, it could unite human beings with animals against ogres and beast of prey.

There are good and bad storytellers. A good –storyteller could tell the same story over and over again and it would always be fresh, to the listeners. The story was retold by someone and they made it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images, inflexion of voices to effect different tones. Language played a vital role and story tellers would play word-games, riddles proverbs. The images and symbols of Gikuyu language gave view of the world but it had beauty of its own. Chinua Achebe employed a new narrative technique called Oral Narration of Oral Tradition. It is like story within a story. The characters narrated four stories. 1.) *The Ear and Mosquito*, Okonkwo recalled his grandmother narrating the story when a mosquito was making a buzzing sound near the Ear. Okonkwo wonders why mosquitoes make sound only near Ear. One day Mosquito goes to Ear and asks him to marry her. Ear is stunned and it falls on the ground laughs and laughs. Ear says, “Mosquito you have no life – guarantee, when you bite a man he will smash you to death.” Mosquito is badly hurt that is why mosquitoes come to ears daily and they say, ‘I am alive’; ‘I am alive.’

2. The Earth and the Sky: Once the goddess of Earth and goddess of Sky fought with each other. Sky was angry and did not send rains. There was a dangerous famine and sky takes pity and she collects some raindrops from heaven wrapped in yam leaves and sends it through a bird. The talon of the bird is very sharp and yam leaves are torn into pieces and rained heavily. That is how heavy rains came to the earth. The story was narrated by Okonkwo to two sons Nowye and Ikemifuna.

3. Birds and the Tortoise: There was a drought in Nigeria and all the animals were dying. The heavenly angels feel pity and arrange a dinner for birds in Nigeria. Tortoise who reduced his weight was making a rattling sound in the shell. Tortoise tells the birds that he too will accompany. But birds say no, saying that tortoise is a cunning animal. Tortoise says previously, “I was cunning but now I am a changed person”. Birds believe and great day comes and Birds paint their bodies with cam wood and birds look pretty. Each bird lends its feather. Tortoise says, “Birds do you know? There is a tradition in heaven that whoever visits heaven, have to change their names.” Birds say they did not come across any rule as such. But Tortoise said, “yes there is a rule”. Birds believe this because Tortoise is a well-travelled animal. Well! When all birds change their names, Tortoise says, “my name is ‘All of you’”. The dinner starts. Tortoise speaks eloquently and birds feel pride in selecting Tortoise as main speaker. While speaking, Tortoise asks the heavenly angels, for whom is the dinner arranged for? Angels say, the dinner is arranged for all of you. Tortoise says the dinner is arranged for me alone and eats away all the dinner and leaves the bones. The



birds are infuriated and they decide to teach Tortoise a Lesson! They take away all feathers from Tortoise, Parrot which is more angry, asks Tortoise whether he has any message to convey to his wife at home. Tortoise tell parrot to tell his wife to keep all soft things ready, so that Tortoise can jump. The distance from sky to earth is so long that it cannot see the difference whether the bed has soft things or rough things. The Tortoise jumps and jumps until its shell is broken into pieces. Tortoise runs to enchanter and he makes a medicine and keeps the pieces together that is why tortoise shell is rough. The story is narrated by Ekwefi to Ezinma and other girls and it tells cunning nature of people.

4. **Kite and Mother Kite:** The Mother Kite teaches baby kite how to fetch food. The Mother Kite tells while flying in the sky. See there is a chick and baby chick loitering on the ground. There is also duck and baby duck. The mother kite asks to go and pick a baby duck and baby kite does it. What did the mother duck say? The baby kite said, "No mother duck did not say a single word, it just walked off." Mother kite says "Go and give back the baby duck immediately. There must be something behind its silence". The baby kite returns the baby duck and picks up the baby chick. The mother kite asks, "What did the mother chick say?" The baby kite says "Oh! My God, the mother chick was shouting and cursing. The mother kite says come on let us eat. There is nothing to worry about people who shouts. The story tells, silent people are dangerous. Uechand maternal uncle of Okonkwo tells the story to Oberica and others when they talked about how Abame people killed a Britisher who did not speak a single word when he entered Abaem. The story reminds the proverb,

"Barking dogs never bite." That is how Chinua Achebe narrated four stories in the novel. . .

Thus Folklore is a generic name used to denote those traditional beliefs, superstitions, manners, customs, observances of ordinary people which have persisted from earlier to later periods. In some cases down to the modern times; Folk-tales, traditional ballads, folk songs and proverbs also come under this heading and by a recent extension of meaning certain aspect of material culture, originally included by definitions.

"Objects which are mass produced and knowledge which is acquired through books or formal education are a part of culture, which include total body of learning. But they are not folk-lore in non-literate societies. Folk-lore is virtually identical with culture, but in literate industrialized societies it is only a fragment of culture. Anthropologists and humanists have defined folklore differently but their definitions are in fundamental agreement in excluding all learning that is transmitted by writing"³

References:

1. Jan Harold Brendan: The study of American Folk Lore.
2. William besom: International Encyclopedia of Social sciences. Vol-5 PP.496-97
3. Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol - 9,P.518.