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REALITIES OF TRADITION AS PORTRAYED IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*
AND BAPSI SIDHWA'S *THE PAKISTANI BRIDE*

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ABSTRACT

Culture, which can be defined in numerous ways, is a complex thing which gives social meaning of life. Culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and habits acquired by a man. The Cambridge English Dictionary states that culture is the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular Time. Religion and Expressive art are important aspects of human culture. Celebrations, rituals and patterns of consumption are important aspects of folk culture. Social and political organization varies between different cultures. Achebe's most acclaimed literary work *Things Fall Apart* yields a tremendous amount of information regarding African culture before and during Africa's colonization. Themes throughout the novel include change, loneliness, abandonment and fear of individual who belongs to them. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo a local wrestling champion builds his fortune and strength with the help of his society's customs. Likewise, Okonkwo's society benefits from his hard work and determination. *The Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa is a novel about Kohistani tribes which takes place at mountainous region of Kohistan which is one of the most remote outposts of the world. Though this novel serves as a showcase for the author's feministic views, the portrayal of Kohistani culture, tradition and custom overtakes it. Bapsi Sidhwa uses her clever ideas to enable her strong feelings and tried her best to bring out the culture and practices in the society of which she has knowledge thoroughly. This research paper brings out the social norms, realities, beliefs of the tribes and the reason for their superior status of the Igbo Community and Kohistani Community.

Keywords: Tradition, Customs, Beliefs, Culture, Social Norms, Kohistani Community, Igbo Community

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INTRODUCTION

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Culture is the beliefs or attitudes about something that the people in a particular group or organization share. When used as a collective noun

a culture is the set of customs, traditions and values of a society or community, such as an ethnic group or nation. According to Natural History Museum, The Continent of Africa is essential to all cultures. Human life originated from this continent and began

to migrate around sixty thousand years ago. Kohistan is a mountainous region lying between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Kohistani people are also called as Dards because of the language they use from Dardic branch which actually hails from Indo-Aryan sub- family.

Analysis

The word culture derives from a French term which in turn derives from the Latin 'Colere', which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture. Thus, because of immigration, in many countries we can see mixed groups of culture, which makes up the country. The term western culture defines the culture of European Countries. This western culture is the reason for the rise of Christianity in the 14th century. African culture is now divided into two: North Africa and Sub-Saharan Culture. Africa is the home to a number of tribes, ethnic and social groups. One of the countries in Africa, Nigeria alone has more than three hundred tribal community. Igbo Culture is the customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria. Because of their various subgroups, the variety of their culture is heightened further.

The style of Achebe's fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people. *Things Fall Apart*, emphasis the inter dependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although Nwoye, son of Okonkwo enjoys hearing his mother tell the tale, Okonkwo's dislike for his son hearing stories from Nwoye's mother is an evidence of Nwoye imbalance. Later, Nwoye avoids beating from his father by pretending to dislike such *women's stories*. In *Things Fall Apart*, ceremonial dancing and the singing of folk songs reflect the realities of Igbo Tradition. Okonkwo's furious manhood overpowers everything in his life, including his own conscience. When he feels bad after killing his adopted son, he asks himself: when did you become shivering old women? (TFA, 51) He views all the things feminine as distasteful, in part because they remind him of his laziness and cowardice.

Thompson Diane critically comments that the women in the novel *Things Fall Apart*, meanwhile, are obedient, quiet, and absent from positions of deciding authority. But the fact is that Igbo women were traditionally involved in villager's leadership

activities.(42) Okonkwo went to see Nwakibie a man with highest title which one can take in their clan with a pot of palm-wine and a cock. Okonkwo worked for Nwakibie to earn his first Yam seeds. When the palm-wine was distributed to villagers, the wine was equally distributed to the wives of Nwakibie also.

.....the group drank, beginning with the eldest man ...Nwakibie sent for his wives...Anasi was the first wife and the others could not drink before her... There was authority in her bearing and she looked every inch the ruler of the womenfolk in a large and prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her husband's titles, which the first wife alone could wear. (TFA, 14)

Thompson Diane comments that the book opens with the Arcadian atmosphere that exhibits the essential qualities of a primordial image of a primitive society (124) which is bound by laws of nature, good and evil, totems and taboos, beliefs and superstitions, myths and legends, rites and religion, custom and observances punctuated by folk speech, proverbs, songs, anecdotes, etc. and each of these has a meaningful function in the total structural pattern of the novel because each tends to serve as a technique when examined from the context of the culture. The same Arcadian atmosphere is reflected in *Things Fall Apart* as,

Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear.(TFA, 7)

Things Fall Apart is replete with myths, through which the whole Igbo cultural dreams is expressed. Traditional practices in the village Umuofia such as regarding ancestors and old people as Gods and Goddesses, consulting and obeying the oracles from their ancestors and Hills, exiling from the village (a punishment for people who commit mistakes), killing of twin babies, ...*Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and child-births. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been*

immediately thrown away.(TFA,113), Masculinity of a man are regarded as sacred and esoteric.

The Igbo tribal world is to go in complete agreement with the spirits of the Oracle. Because of the Oracle Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna, a fifteen year old boy who was brought from neighbouring village for settlement and because of that Okonkwo is exiled from Umuofia for years. Okonkwo who by virtue of his prowess has won battles and has had five heads severed. Okonkwo is a great farmer and husband of three wives and father of eight children all a sign of prosperity and masculinity. Thus in Okonkwo's lifetime Okonkwo has become a living myth.

Thompson Diane remarks that in the novel *Things Fall Apart* the myths, rituals and religion show the inseparable link between the predicament of Okonkwo and the inner scheme of things in the Igbo culture (70). Okonkwo's fight against the Christian missionaries to preserve his tradition is a war of blame and the best way of facing that is hanging by himself. He deserves to be called perhaps the bravest African. But his suicide which is a grave sin in the Igbo culture, makes the clansmen to hesitate to touch Okonkwo's body to do the last rites.

From the interview with the Kohistani people by supreme master TV it is clear that Kohistan mountain region is conquered by Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim. Recently Pashtuns, inhabitants of South Afghanistan are absorbed. The cultural influence of Pashtuns is transferred to the Kohistanis. The Kohistanis are Muslims. They are motivated by the teachings of Quran. The people of Kohistan have their own culture and own history.

Sreeja Balakrishnan mentions that the struggle between different cultures motivates the argument in the society, which in turn disturb peace and harmony (2). After the marriage of Zaitoon, adapted daughter of Qasim, a Kohistani man, Zaitoon is forced to get out of her city culture and again forced to fit into the Kohistani culture and social norms. Qasim says, *Bibi, you will like my village. Across the river, beyond those mountains, we are a free and manly lot...* (TPB, 100). When Zaitoon reached the mountain, her thoughts and dreams about the mountain were shattered. She

realises the truth that there is a huge difference between her Punjabi and Kohistani culture, language, style, dressing, tradition. Her colourful clothes are totally different from dull coloured fabrics worn by the Kohistani women. She is forced to survive on the dry maize bread dipped in water which is the staple diet of the villagers.

Bapsi Sidhwa visited the Karakoram Mountain Range with her husband. Bapsi Sidhwa stayed there for some days. Sidhwa observed the beliefs, rituals, customs and traditions of the Kohistani tribe. On hearing, the tragic story of a Kohistani tribal lady Bapsi Sidhwa decided to write the novel *The Pakistani Bride*. Niranjana Iyer comments that Sidhwa mainly comments on the practice of Bride Price and its role in Kohistani Culture. The bridegroom gives some amount of money or gifts to the bride's family before the marriage is finalized. This is called Bride Price and this practice is common among the Kohistani tribe. Qasim married his wife Afshan because the girl's father, Resham Khan, could not return the loan that he received from Qasim's father. *You know of the bad feeling between me and Resham Khan? It is because of a loan. He hasn't paid me yet... Anyway this will not lead to a feud. Resham Khan has promised us his daughter* (TPB, 7). As part of custom although Qasim is not interested in receiving the Bride Price, he received Bride Price from Sakhi for the regular cultural practice and marries his daughter to him. Thus Sakhi becomes the owner of Zaitoon by paying Bride Price and Zaitoon becomes a commodity.

Kim Ann Zimmermann critically refers that the seclusion of women is problematic in Kohistani culture. Zaitoon was sent to school to gain the knowledge enough to read the Quran. When Zaitoon expresses her dislike towards marriage, Qasim forces Zaitoon to marry Sakhi, a Kohistani tribal man to keep his word and to prevent his honor. *Hush Zaitoon, that's no way to speak to your father. It is not seemly a decent girl doesn't tell her father to whom he should marry her. 'Now understand this'...I've given my word...I've given my word. On it depends my honour. It is dearer to me bare hands.* (TPB, 158)

Paul Hockings writes that in Kohistani society women are considered as part of man's property, women do not have rights of their own; women survive to fulfill their husband's desire. Sakhi believes that Zaitoon is inferior to him and he can rule her. Her mannerisms are mocked at, her movements are watched, her liberty is stopped and her fate proves to be a bonded slave. *You are my woman! I'll teach you to obey me!* (TPB, 172-173). Zaitoon's friendly gesture of waving at the army truck evokes anger to Sakhi. He beats Zaitoon and scolded her that *You dirty, black little bitch, waving at those pigs...* (TPB, 185).

Sreeja Balakrishnan reviews that in Kohistani Community if the bride runs away, to protect the Kohistani honour, Kohistani tribesmen should establish justice by brutally killing the bride. Brutal killing tradition is portrayed by Bapsi Sidhwa through the conversation between Carol, a young lady who married Farukh, a Kohistani tribal man and Major Mushtaq....*What will they do when they find her?* 'Beat her up. Probably kill her...' (TPB, 223). Major Mushtaq understands Sakhi's condition that Sakhi is forced to do such deeds because of Sakhi's tribal social norms. So Major Mushtaq promises to Sakhi that *I swear no one will say otherwise... I give you my word. Your honour will not be sullied* (TPB, 243). Sakhi informs his tribal people that he found out her, killed with his own hands and buried in the forest itself. The tribes were in a great relief that their norms are protected.

Conclusion

The restrictions enforced by the tribal society are binding and the tribe has been strong adherents of the norms for ages. People who are exposed to a new culture always face problems in adapting themselves to the new culture. Achebe's genius lies in his ability to narrate the reality from his culture in all its fullness and depth. Bapsi Sidhwa does not judge but merely depicts the Kohistanis beliefs and cultural practices as it appeared to her.

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