

Magic in Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

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Abstract: Magic exists from the time of primitive societies. It has been transmitted from generation to generation until this day. The motive behind magic comprises is a great desire to harm opponents, friends and relatives. In this paper I would like to highlight magic and its impact on the victims, taking Chinua Achebe's novel Things Fall Apart. I have chosen this novel for purpose as it, because it reflects what actually inspired in Nigerian societies and Achebe has used authentic stories to reflect the real practice of magic among primitive people. Civilized citizens neither practice magic nor believe in it. *The most powerful example of magic in the novel is when a man wanted to sell his goat at the market. He tied the goat it with a rope and pulled it behind him, but a thief cut the rope and tied a log of wood to replace the goat. The man realized something amiss when people started looking and laughing even though he didn't feel under the influence of magic. Suddenly upon looking back and discovering he had been pulling a log instead of his goat he became quiet angry. Magic is famous all across the globe, but not all people believe in its existence. In backwards societies they practiced it as a very natural daily activity. Sometimes magic is even used on animals some African tribes use magic to prevent calves from sucking their mothers' teats. Magic is practiced everywhere, it may disguise itself in different ways, and eventually transformed into a phenomenon, but educated people do not deal with it and despise those who practiced it. Primitive societies had strongly believed in magic, and avoided completing any task without the use of magic. However educated citizens believed the rational explanation of anything and everything includes the existence of magic in the eyes of the beholders. People have different perceptions about magic as it has different connotations for everyone. Therefore one explanation is not adequate to demonstrate encapsulate the essence of magic. Magic is a word that bears many definitions. For example according to Merriam-Webster, magic is "a power that allows people (such as witches and wizards) to do impossible things by saying special words or performing special actions".*

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1. Introduction

Since times immemorial, magic was practised by people. It was prominent in India and Nigeria – two countries that are reputed for their strong and harmful magic. It eventually spread to the rest of countries in the world. It is very harmful, as the enemy is unseen and People used magic to separate couples, harm innocent people and cause troubles to others.

This paper explores and discusses magic in the book by Chinua Achebe. Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines magic as

"The use of special powers to make things happen that would usually be impossible, such as in stories for children."

This definition implies that those who practise magic deal with devils to tamper with normal objects and circumstances harm others. Alternatively, the latter part of the definition refers to tricks that are performed to entertain others.

Another definition of magic, as stated in Encyclopaedia (2008), is as follows:

"Alternatively refers to acts of sorcery involving attempts to control the natural world by mystical, paranormal, or supernatural means".

The reader of Things Fall Apart can effortlessly internalise the magic because it is quite discernible. In this novel, Nigerian citizens are portrayed as ignorant, as they

believed in magic and visited medicine men to cure their diseases and execute things that seem difficult for them.

Chinua Achebe is not the only writer who wrote about magic. Ben Okri also discussed magic in his novels. Their fictional narratives were characterised by powerful mythical and magical elements, as they were writers of the margins – they authentically reflected what is actually practised by communities across Africa.

A friend of mine once told me a strange story about magic. He said, "I had been engaged with a young girl. Unfortunately, our relationship was not fulfilled, so I left her and got married to another girl. When I went to the hotel after our wedding to start my honeymoon, I intended to practice sex for the first time. However, I was shocked as I was unable to go through with it. I became quite angry and nervous my wife told me that it might be due to psychological issues. But I didn't believe her. I went to the doctor to enquire about it, the test result turned out to be positive. I confided in my close friend about my problem who, in turn, advised me to recite verses from the Holy Quran, as it is a medicine for spiritual diseases. I listened to his advice and followed his instructions, and eventually, I was able to perform normally."

My friend's personal experience made me realize that this is quite normal in primitive communities.

Things Fall Apart

Magic in Things Fall Apart

In this part, I would like to discuss magic in general and subsequently its existence in Things Fall Apart, in particular.

During the invasion scare of 1940, regular stories that involved learning military secrets from the dead were published by Skelton. However, the efforts to flush out fraud and strengthen security did not dampen the public interest in spiritualists (the national union stated that the daily papers were allowed to feature astrological information). According to mass observation, a quarter of the population was gripped by paranormal beliefs. A large section of their population referred to horoscopes, and the supernatural beliefs were encouraged by the uncertainty and enhanced sensitivity due to the blackout. This sentiment was depicted in the context of Nigeria through *Things Fall Apart*, one of the most famous novels written by Chinua Achebe. Even though the writer did not dive deep into the topic, his examples were subtle yet potent enough to provide the readers an insight into the topic.

Nigerian society thinks that when a woman gives birth and her children die, this is due to something called *iyi-nwa*, which it is like a bone buried by the child so as to die.

“Where did you bury your iyi-nwa. Okabue had asked Ezinma, she was nine then and was just recovering from a serious illness. What is iyi-nwa? she ask him in return. You know what it is you buried it in the ground somewhere so that you can die and return a gain to tournament your mother” Achebe 1969

The medicine man asked the girl about the location of her bone, as he believed that the disease occurred due to the bone that had been buried under the ground. He thought that the child would recover when he dig out the bone. In this instance, the belief is that children die due to magic, as exemplified by the bone that was buried by a child. However, such a thing was not believable unless it was normal. How can a child bury a bone before she or he is born?

In the market, people used magic to attract people towards their goods and termed this as medicine

“The market in of Umuilke was a wonderful place” Achebe 1969

This statement was uttered by the young man who had been sent by Obrieka to buy the giant goat.

“There are so many people init that if you throw up a grain of sand it would not find a way to fall to the ground again” Achebe 1969

Obrieka perceived this phenomenon to be a result of great medicine.

The ritual medicine was performed before dawn by a woman holding a fan. She beckoned all the people from other clans in the market with this magic fan. She also beckoned in the four directions so that people are attracted to the market under the influence of her medicine or magic.

There were skilful thieves in the market who used medicine to steal with such ease and expertise that even a man’s clothes could be stolen in the market without his awareness Obiericasa did

“I warned Nwankwo to keep a sharp eye and sharp ear. There was once a man who went to sell a goat. He led it on a thick rope which he tied around his wrist. But as he walked through the market he realized that people were pointing at him as they do to a mad man. He could not understand it until he looked back and saw that what he led at the end of the tether was not a goat but a heavy log of wood” Achebe 1969

Another instance of the use of magic is when one of the women who had converted to Christianity allowed her husband to mutilate her child because the child was Onanje (a child who died after birth) Achebe 1969

“This child had been declared as an Obanje plaguing its mother by dying and entering her womb to be born again four times, this child had run its evil round. And it was mutilated to discourage it from returning”. Achebe 1969

According to their beliefs, this child dies due to magic. There are sprites who are considered to be holy. Enoch, one of the men who was converted to Christianity, killed a boy from Egwugwu who was an ancestral sprite. Subsequently, the mother of this child wailed all through the night.

“On the next day all Egwugwu of Umofia assembled in the market place they came from all quarters of the clan... sent terror of fears into every heart. For the first time in memory the scared – bull roared was heard in the broad daylight. From the market place the furious band made for Enoch’s compound. Some of the elders of these clan men with them wearing heavy protection of charms and amulets. These were men whose arms were strong in Ogwa or medicine”. Achebe 1969.

These are some examples of the magic practised in Nigeria that Chinua Achebe reflected in this masterpiece to allow the readers to know about the traditions and magic practiced in his society.

2. Conclusion

The paper explored and discussed magic in *Things Fall Apart*, a novel written by Chinua Achebe, in full Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, (born November 16, 1930, Ogidi, Nigeria - died March 21, 2013, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.), Nigerian novelist acclaimed for his unsentimental depictions of the social and psychological disorientation

accompanying the imposition of Western customs and values upon traditional African society. His particular concern was with emergent Africa at its moments of crisis; his novels range in subject matter from the first contact of an African village with the white man to the educated African's attempt to create a firm moral order out of the changing values in a large city.(Britannica2020).

Modern societies do not believe in magic and do not practice it at all. Many people from all walks of life claim to have seen ghosts. Have they seen ghosts in reality or had they imagined seeing them? What is magic? What are the forces that cause such apparitions? Do dead people rise from their graves or is it just a trick of our mind? A lot of authors answered these questions and discussed such things in volumes such as Roger Boar and Nigel Blundell in *The World's Greatest Ghosts* (2002)

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