Things Fall Apart 4 Essay, Research Paper

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe s Things Fall Apart describes the flaws and struggles of one proud man s tragic life. The main character Okonkwo is a strong and proud warrior with great reputation in the village of Umofia. However, he is a man that struggles with the fear of failure and uncontrollable anger. Okonkwo s motivations, ways of acting and behavior in crisis prevent him from achieving what he wants, leading to his self-destruction.

Okonkwo is motivated for his desire of wealth and recognition. The wealth of a man in Umofia is measure by yams, size of the farm and number of wives. Okonkwo did not inherit any land or yams to start building up a farm. Okonkwo needs so bad yams to sow and start building his own farm that he humbles himself and asks for help to a wealthy man in the village. Okonkwo s reputation in Umofia is very good, the villagers think of him as a self-made man, hard working and fiery warrior; for him is not difficult to borrow yams to plant, his fellow villagers trust him. He plants the yams and works his land relentlessly. Although he encounters hurdles like bad weather, he became a very successful and prosper farmer. In addition to wealth, he wants to overcame his father s failures and achieve great prosperity and even greater reputation among the people of Umofia. Therefore, his desire for titles and respect makes him one outspoken leader of the village taking responsibilities in name if Umofia, such as carrying messages of war. Okonkwo was well known throughout the villages. His fame rested on personal achievements, he gained fame as the greatest wrestler when he was young, twenty years earlier.

Okonkwo s habitual ways of acting is dominated by violence and anger. He rules his compound with heavy hand; his wives and children feared his fiery temper. Most villagers have great respect for him, but they are annoyed by his brusqueness in dealing with less successful people. His suppressed uncontrollable anger most often finds outlets; it is very common for him to beat heavily his wives for any motive. For instance, during the week of peace, his youngest wife, who did not cook the afternoon meal on time, provoked Okonkwo s justifiable anger. He beats her very heavily; in his anger, he had forgotten that it was the sacred week. As a result, Okonkwo is punished, as is the custom by Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess. People in the village said his good fortune had gone to his head and he had no respect for the gods of the clan. His lack of patience toward his son Nwoye made their relationship based on fear instead of love and respect. Okonkwo wants his son to be a successful farmer and a great man, therefore he encourages him by telling masculine stories and by letting him know that was right to be masculine and to be violent. However, Nwoye preferred his mother s stories, so, Okonkwo saw too much of his father in him. Okonkwo assigns man s tasks to Nwoye, but always finds faults in his efforts to do them right, therefore, Nwoye was often reprimanded and beaten. Okonkwo told him once I would not have a son who cannot holds up his head in the gathering of the clan. I would sooner strangle him with my own hands . The white Christian attracted Nwoye, so he starts going to their meetings, Okonkwo disapproved his actions by beating him. Nwoye loses love and respect for his father and he leaves home to join the Christians missionaries.

Okonkwo faces a conflict of emotion when Umofia decides to kill Ikemefuna. Okonkwo likes the boy like a son, he is pleased the way Nwoye develops being close to Ikemefuna, The group of elders do not want Okonkwo to participate in Ikemefuna sacrifice, the boy has a close relationship with him. Although Okonkwo was afraid to lose him, he decides to go with them, he does not wanted to show any feeling for Ikemefuna. When one of the men hit the boy with his machete, Okonkwo looks away, Ikemefuna cries, My father they have killed me! as he ran towards him, dazed with fear Okonkwo cuts him down. He was afraid to show any sign of weakness that would be contrary of his image, a masculine and violent warrior. However, the worst crisis of Okonkwo s life happens when he kills one of the white s messengers at Umofia s meeting. The meeting was an opportunity for the village to start war against the white colonialists, Okonkwo argues. Okonkwo s anger and desire of vengeance is so high that he kills one of the messengers of the white s court. Okonkwo knew that Umofia would not go to war, they did not take any action, and they let the other messengers to escape. He heard voices asking, Why did he do it? Okonkwo feels abandoned, he is sad that his people did not fight the whites like a man; the warrior spirit of Umofia is gone. Okonkwo is alone, his anger turns into fear, the fear of exile once again, and the fear of facing the white s court and going to jail. Not having the support of his people was a strong blow to his pride. Seeing his village ancestors and traditions falling apart, therefore, he decides to kill himself. After all deep inside somehow Okonkwo was like his father, weak inside, choosing the easy way out: taking their own lives. They were fearful of facing the consequences of their weaknesses and failures.

Okonkwo s fears, uncontrollable anger, and unwillingness to adapt to a changing society caused by colonialism, led him to his destruction. His ways of acting prevented him to accomplish what he wanted. His life was ruled by violence, anger, and fear of himself. His behavior was dominated by the shadow of his father s failures. By taking his own life, Okonkwo s soul deep inside somehow was weak as his father s.