
TITLE: READING THINGS FALL APART FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF**NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM****NAME: OINDRILA BHATTACHARYA****PH. D RESEARCH SCHOLAR IN ENGLISH, VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY,****PASCHIM MIDNAPORE****ABSTRACT:**

This paper of mine aims to read the much celebrated novel *Things Fall Apart* by the Nigerian literary titan, Chinua Achebe from the perspective of Buddhism propagated by Nichiren Daishonin. The paper is a humble attempt to move towards a better life-condition by viewing a few causes behind the grand fall of the protagonist and realizing how such a fall could be evaded, thereby also trying to project how Achebe has carefully problematized his text only to hint at a solution via high life-condition.

KEYWORDS:

Unconscious, Pre-Conscious, Conscious, Id, Ego, Super-Ego, Neurosis, Psychosis, Ten Worlds, Bodhisattva, Buddhahood.

THE PAPER:

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhist philosophy expounds that the life and actions of human beings are governed by Ten Worlds, that is, hell, hunger, animality, anger, humanity or tranquility, heaven or rapture, learning, realization or absorption, Bodhisattva, and Buddhahood. Hell is described as that condition in which an individual feels himself to be utterly trapped by one's situations and incidents, "sometimes dominated by rage and the impulse to destroy, at other times overcome with inertia and despair", (*Basics of Buddhism: A Selection*, 13). Hunger is considered to be that condition in which an individual is governed

by his cravings which he cannot control. Animality is that condition in which a person is controlled merely by instinct and in which he is sans any sense of reason or morality and he is only concerned with the present. Anger is regarded as that condition in which a person is “dominated by the selfish ego, competitiveness, arrogance and the need to be superior in all things”, (*Basics of Buddhism: A Selection*, 13). According to Buddhist philosophy, these four worlds are also called the four evil paths. The fifth world is Humanity or Tranquility which is held as a calm condition which enables an individual to judge fairly, control desires driven by instinct, to be guided by reason and to act in harmony with the environment. However, in this condition, a person is often susceptible to external influences. The sixth one is that of Heaven or Rapture in which one is at ecstasy out of pleasure due to the fulfilment of his desires. But this condition is not like the true happiness of Buddhahood and is therefore not lasting and vanishes as time passes or when there is even a minor change of circumstances. The seventh world is Learning which is a condition in which through the teachings of others, a person aims at acquiring some self-reformation, eternal truth or some skill. Realization or Absorption is that condition in which one discovers through his own effort and observations a truth that is somewhat partial. The ninth world is Bodhisattva, a condition in which one seeks enlightenment for himself and devotes himself through actions of compassion and altruism to bring happiness to others by trying sincerely to bring relief to those who are suffering. But Buddhist philosophy warns that in spite of all these, “Bodhisattva can have the negative aspect of self-sacrifice, which can lead to disrespect for one’s own life and a condescending attitude to others”, (*Basics of Buddhism: A Selection*, 15). The final, that is, the tenth world is Buddhahood which is “a state of true, indestructible happiness, a condition of perfect and absolute freedom, characterized by boundless wisdom, courage, compassion and energy”, (*Basics of Buddhism: A Selection*, 15).

If a quick glance can be cast on Freudian concept, then there are three levels in human mind, the Unconscious, the Pre-Conscious and the Conscious. The Conscious is related to presence and it depicts reason and logical thought. This is generally controlled or moulded by Super-Ego which represents the conscience – the social morality. The Unconscious acts as a storehouse where all the unfulfilled desires, traumatic past incidents and experiences, which are forced out of the Conscious and the Pre-Conscious are repressed. The Unconscious is often driven by Id which depicts irrational thought. The Pre-Conscious lies between the Unconscious and the Conscious. The Pre-Conscious is guided by Ego which constitutes the ‘I’ of a person. Ego depicts a somewhat coherent organization of mental processes. Thus often the Id urges a person to do something, the idea of which is revived from the storehouse, the Unconscious. This idea is sent to the Pre-Conscious level and before the ‘I’, that is, Ego sends it to the level of Conscious, the Super-Ego sends the message to the Ego whether it would be socially or morally wise to execute the idea or not. Then, if the Ego finds that execution of that idea would not be socially or morally acceptable, then it represses the idea into the Unconscious, and if Ego judges that execution of that idea would be socially or morally acceptable, then it sends the message to the Conscious that it is okay to carry out or express the idea. Often, the Ego, instead of repressing the idea into the Unconscious or sending an absolute positive signal to execute the idea, may sublimate it and then send it to the level of the Conscious to be executed in a sublime way thereby making it socially or morally acceptable, and making the person wise or noble in the eyes of the world. The Unconscious and the Pre-Conscious always interact. When a person is at war with himself, then there is a war going on between his Ego and Id. This conflict is Neurosis according to Freud. There may also be a similar conflict between the Ego and the outside world, and in Freudian term, it may be called Psychosis.

Among the Ten Worlds of Buddhism, the four- Hell, Hunger, Animality, and Anger, that is, the four evil paths may then be compared to the condition of Id-guided state in which a person is purely driven by instincts and uncontrolled desires which he seeks to be fulfilled instantly. The other four worlds, Humanity or Tranquility, Heaven or Rapture, Learning, Realization or Absorption may be compared to the condition of Super-Ego guided state in which a person is driven by some reason and logical thought and is much more calm and is controlled by some external stimulus or stimuli. The ninth world, that is, the condition of Bodhisattva may be compared with Freudian Pre-Conscious level, where Ego, that is, I depicts a coherent organization of mental processes. In this condition, thus a person carefully judges whether his execution of an idea will be socially or morally acceptable, and if necessary, sublimates the idea making it a noble one on execution, and when a person's Ego thus continues to function properly, he becomes happy, and gradually and finally rises to the level of the tenth world of Buddhism, that is, Buddhahood with the ultimate, perfect and absolute freedom, courage, compassion, wisdom and therefore the absolute happiness. But, if the person's Ego malfunctions, then, the person may get reduced to the four evil worlds, may get fragmented, and may suffer from Neurosis and Psychosis.

In Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the hero, Okonkwo who is presented as one of the greatest men of his time, the highest epitome of his race and Igbo values, a figure whom his entire village, Umuofia, as also more than some nine other villages have worshipped, has been endowed with such values and features which could have uplifted him to the tenth world of Buddhahood, had he taken some effort to resist himself from falling down headlong to the four lower evil worlds, which has inevitably led him towards his pathetic downfall, his tragic end as he commits suicide, an abominable crime according to his own clan and at death is reduced to a fragmented condition of an 'osu', an outcast and his name is erased forever consciously from the mind of his Igbo clan which has once hero-worshipped him. In spite of

being a great achiever, the receiver of the highest title of his clan, he is seen to be controlled by Id-induced instinct and impulses, like, anger, from the very beginning of the novel, “He had a slight stammer and whenever he could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had no patience with his father”, (*Things Fall Apart*, 3). In fact, throughout his life, Okonkwo has allowed himself to be guided by a strong impulse and fear, that is, not to be like his father, Unoka. Okonkwo’s impulsive rage, limitless ambition to be the best, his tendency to reject everything that is less than excellence, uncontrolled anger which causes him to act irrationally in certain situations, all these are due to his anxiety and instinctive drive, never to be regarded as weak. It is this anxiety which forces him to conceal his compassionate nature, even his true love for Ikemefuna whom he loves like his own son, but whom he kills with his own hands out of fear so that he is not depicted as weak and cowardly, in spite of the warning being given by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, one of the most respected men in the clan, “That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death”, (*Things Fall Apart*, 40). Similarly, he also represses his emotion, his fondness and love for his daughter from his second wife, Ekwefi- Ezinma. Achebe writes about him, “Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength”, (*Things Fall Apart*, 20). Okonkwo’s series of impulsive actions finally lead to his downfall and banishment from his tribe as he is forced to be exiled to his motherland, Mbanta leaving his hard-earned achievement, prospect and establishment behind at Umuofia. The errors that lead to his banishment are serious according to his clan. His first error is when he beats his youngest wife, Ojiugo during the Week of Peace for her recklessness. The second offence he commits is when he kills Ikemefuna. However, the most serious offence which leads to his exile is his accidental killing of the son of a kinsman whose funeral observances Okonkwo has been attending. At Mbanta, his mother’s folks have

taken efforts to guide him back to self-reformation, but Okonkwo pays no heed and allows his impulses to remain uncontrolled. As a result, at the critical juncture of the conflict between the traditional Igbo society and British Christian Imperialism, he fails to act with the much-needed wisdom. If Okonkwo has already been suffering from Neurosis since his killing of Ikemefuna and the consequent conversion of his own son, Nwoye to Christianity against Okonkwo's opinion, then, now he also starts suffering from Psychosis. On his return to his fatherland, Umuofia after seven years of exile, Okonkwo remains an unchanged man without any self-reformation. His fear and anxiety lead him to commit series of errors due to Psychosis and all these precipitate his tragic end. Due to lack of any wisdom, he joins an attack which is made against the Christian Church, and due to this, along with several others, he is arrested by the District Commissioner and is put behind bars. The tremendous humiliation that he suffers there acts as a catalyst making him act impulsively and commit some blunders which have rapidly pushed him towards his pathetic end. Purely guided by blind rage and driven by a mad desire of vengeance, he again prepares himself to commit a coming major blunder, "As he lay on his bamboo bed he thought about the treatment he had received in the white man's court, and he swore vengeance", (*Things Fall Apart*, 143). A meeting is called to discuss about the torment that Okonkwo and others have faced in jail in the hands of the white men. However, the meeting is interrupted midway due to the sudden arrival of the court messenger representing white authority. Okonkwo again acts impulsively as he "... trembling with hate, unable to utter a word", (*Things Fall Apart*, 146), draws his matchet and finally kills the messenger. The action alienates him from his clan as this impulsive action of Okonkwo is not supported by his fellow-Umuofians. Okonkwo, suffering from utter fragmentation, is reduced to the bottom of the ten worlds- Hell, to such an extent, that he commits the final blunder, he commits suicide and gets absolutely alienated from his clan at death. Neither the white Europeans, nor his own clansmen will touch his body.

According to Igbo belief, a person who commits suicide, actually commits an abominable crime and no clansman can touch the body of that man. The irony is that, Okonkwo, the once hero of the Igbo clan, has acquired a dishonorable burial like his father, Unoka, something of which Okonkwo has been perpetually afraid during his lifetime: “It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it”, (*Things Fall Apart*, 149). Thus, at the end, Okonkwo who has once been one of the greatest men in Umuofa, is utterly reduced and fragmented and is super-alienated as “now he will be buried like a dog”, (*Things Fall Apart*, 149).

By depicting with ample deftness the tragic downfall of the grand and lofty hero of the late nineteenth century Igbo society without idealism and without sentimentality, Chinua Achebe in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, has clearly projected how high life-condition is necessary for an individual to act with wisdom, compassion, freedom and courage without being vulnerable to Id-induced passions, like, anger, animality, hatred, fear, anxiety, and the like, which can lead to Neurosis and Psychosis and can only enhance the person’s sufferings if not attempts are taken by the person himself to move towards humanity, learning, self-reformation and gradually to the state of a Bodhisattva aiming towards Buddhahood. Indeed, it is rightly stated that “every individual can bring forth his Buddha nature, dormant within the other nine worlds, thereby accomplishing his or her self-reformation”, (*Basics of Buddhism: A Selection*, 16).

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