

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS *OKONKWO* OF 'THINGS FALL APART' AND *OOMAIYAN* OF 'RIVER OF A HAMLET'

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Comparative Literature focuses on the study of literature from different cultures, nations, and genres, and explores relationships between literature and other forms of cultural expression. It also studies and compares texts from a range of cultural contexts, historical periods, or literary movements.*

*This study compares two characters – **Okonkwo** of 'Things Fall Apart' and **Oomaiyan** of 'River of a Hamlet' each from a different nation, culture and different genre (drama and poem) and discovers similarities and dissimilarities between these two characters. These similarities and dissimilarities are found in their fame, physical abilities and fate. It sheds light on how the characters resemble each other and how they differ from each other. This comparative study instates the underlying principle of literature that literature shape and responds to values, social movements, or political contexts. It throws light on how two writers of different culture and nation produced characters with certain similitudes.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Comparison, Similarities, Dissimilarities, Fame, Physical Features, and Fate*

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the major themes of Chinua Achebe's novel '*Things Fall Apart*' is the process of colonizing an African country by white people and it's an effect on the indigenous people – the loss of their culture and tribal life. Sirpi Balasubramaniam's anthology of poem '*River of a Hamlet*' also deals with the same theme of loss of village life and culture but by infiltration of urbanization. '*Things Fall Apart*' also recorded the tribal life of the Igbo community before the coming of the white men. The novel documents what the white men destroyed. Likewise, the '*River of a Hamlet*' recorded the rural life and culture of the people who lived in a village near Palghat (Palakkad) gap during the early twentieth century.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To study the particular characters of 'Things Fall Apart' and 'River of a Hamlet'.
- To compare the particular characters of 'Things Fall Apart' and 'River of a Hamlet'.
- To present the similarities and dissimilarities of those characters.

## MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

To study and compare the chosen characters of the aforesaid works the author has taken up the comparative method. The secondary data has been used from different sources like books, journals, and websites relevant to the study. The texts of the works are the main source of this research article.

## FINDINGS

- Certain characters of different authors do have resemblances and differences.
- In particular, the characters Okonkwo of 'Things Fall Apart' and Oomaiyan of 'River of a Hamlet' have both resemblances and differences.
- Similitude occurs without the awareness of authors as they register the universal human feelings.

## DISCUSSIONS

### 'Things Fall Apart' by Chinua Achebe

'Things Fall Apart' is a novel written by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe and published in 1958. It is a chronicle of pre-colonial life in the southeastern part of Nigeria and of the arrival of Europeans in the late 1900s. The novel follows the life of Okonkwo, an Igbo man and local champion of fighting in Umuofia 's fictional Nigerian clan. The work is divided into three parts, the first describing his family, personal history and Igbo 's customs and society, and the second and third parts describing the influence of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on the Igbo community.

### River of a Hamlet

'River of a Hamlet' is an anthology of poem produced by Sirpi Balasubramaniam. This poetry collection has twenty-three poems providing an insight into the lifestyle of people in a hamlet of 1940s and 1950s. It describes the hamlet – it's geography, it's people, their physical traits, culture, and emotions.

By examining and comparing the characters Okonkwo and Oomaiyan, it is found that there are both similarities and dissimilarities between the two characters. These similarities and dissimilarities are found in their fame, physical abilities and fate.

### The Fame of Okonkwo and Oomaiyan

Okonkwo was the protagonist of the novel. He defeated the best fighter in the village as a young man and gained prestige among his people. He rose from nothing to an ambitious man of importance in his tribe.

"Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen, he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler, who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth." (Ch.1, pp. 3) <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart (1958)*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 2012 p.3. All the subsequent quotations from the novel are taken from the same edition.

“Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars.” (Ch.1, pp. 7)

The Tamil word 'ஊமையன்' ('Oomaiyan') is a common noun which refers to a person, who is dumb and cannot speak. Here the Tamil poet made it a proper noun by applying it to a character. Oomaiyan was also a well-known man in the hamlet of the poet for his physical strength. But here his physical strength was used not for war or wrestling but for helping people. He helped the people in the village with his physical strength and so he was the 'go-to man' in his village. Sirpi Balasubramaniam writes,

"ஆழச் சேற்றில் பாரவண்டி

அலை மோதுகிறதா?

'ஊமையனைக் கூப்பிடு'

கலியாண வீட்டில்

வெண்கல உருளியை

அலாக்காகத் தூக்க வேண்டுமா?

'ஊமையனைக் கூப்பிடு'

வேப்ப மரம் கூரைமேல் விழாமல்

வெட்ட வேண்டுமா?

'ஊமையனைக் கூப்பிடு.' “ (p.64 – 65) <sup>2</sup>

English Translation of the quoted Tamil poem done by the author of this paper for the understanding of those readers who do not know Tamil.

“Oomaiyan can be called

If a cart is caught in the mud

If heavy vessels need to be carried

<sup>2</sup> சிற்பி, ஒரு கிராமத்து நதி (1998), கவிதா வெளியீடு, சென்னை, 2002, ப.64-65.

இனி வரும் அனைத்து மேற்கோள்களும் இப்பதிப்பிலிருந்து எடுக்கப்பட்டவை.

All the quotes of the Tamil poem lines used in the article have been taken from this particular publication and edition. Balasubramaniam, Sirpi. *Oru Gramathu Nadhi*. Chennai: Kavitha Publications, 2002.

If a large tree needs to be chopped.”

### The Physique of Okonkwo and Oomaiyan

Okonkwo and Oomaiyan both had attained fame because of their physical strength and it was well described in the works by the respective authors. Achebe describes Okonkwo,

“He was tall and huge and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs as if he was going to pounce on somebody.” (Ch.1, pp.3-4)

Sirpi Balasubramaniam describes Oomaiyan,

“அசோகர் காலத்து இரும்புத்தாணையும்

ஐந்நூறு வருடத்து தேக்கு மரத்தையும்

காணாத கண்களுக்கு ஓர் ஆறுதல்

இவன்.

நின்றால் கூரைகள் குனியும்

படுத்தால் திண்ணைகள் குறுகும்

நடந்தால் வீதிகள் குழியும்

அப்படி ஓர் ஆகிருதி

'கதை' எடுக்காத இந்த பீமனுக்கு.

முக்காமல் முனகாமல்

மூன்று கல் தூரம்

முழு அரிசி மூட்டையைச் சுமப்பான்.” (p. 64)

English Translation of the quoted Tamil poem done by the author of this paper for the understanding of those readers who do not know Tamil.

“No need to see the pillar of Ashoka

And teak of five hundred years old

If he (Oomaiyan) is seen.

His body and strength is that of the Bheema of Mahabaratha

His stride would make pits in street

His standing would make tall roofs small

His sprawling would make lengthy porch short

He would carry a sack of rice

Without an effort to three meters.”

### The Fate of Okonkwo and Oomaiyan

After an act of defiance, towards the white human beings, which goes unsupported with the aid of his human beings, Okonkwo gives in to depression. He kills himself, partially in order that he's going to no longer be done under the white man's legal guidelines and partly because he's grieving for the demise of his human beings.

“Then they came to the tree from which Oknokwo’s body was dangling, and they stopped dead.” (Ch. 25, pp. 186)

In the case of Oomaiyan, it was rumored that he was killed, using witchcraft, by the lover boy of Krishnaveni – a lady who lived in the same village and with whom once he tried to have a relationship.

“தேவாத்தாளும் சடைச்சியும்

கிககிசுத்துக் கொண்டு போனார்கள்

"ஒரு நா ராத்திரி

கல்லாங்காட்டு முண்டனப் பிராணி

கிட்டணவேணி கிட்ட

வாலாட்டிட்டானாமா...

மலையாளத்து மந்திரவாதி கிட்ட

மருந்து வாங்கி வெச்சுட்டானாமா

அவளை வச்சுருக்கிற காளியப்பன்...” (p. 66)

English Translation of the quoted Tamil poem done by author of this paper for the understanding of those readers who do not know Tamil.

“Devathal and Sadaichi gossiped

Oomaiyan was killed by Malayalam witchcraft

Arranged by the lover-boy of Krishnaveni

As he once misbehaved with her.”

Both Okonkwo and Oomaiyan met a tragic end. End of both the heroes of the local village is a tragic and piteous one. Okonkwo killed himself while Oomaiyan was believed to be killed by witchcraft.

## CONCLUSIONS

By comparing and contrasting these two characters, this study has brought out the resemblances and differences between them. It also highlights the fact that in literature similitude happens without the consciousness of authors and across the art forms of literature. It happens because literature registers universal human emotions and sufferings.

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