



Ecofeminist Awareness and Its Relevance to Sustainable Development: A Study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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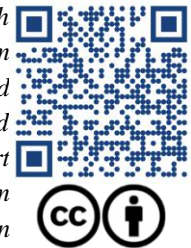
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Abstract— Gender imbalance and environment degradation are two major global concerns today which together form a huge barrier to the sustainability of the Earth's environment. This paper originates from the contemplation if literature could help raising or enhancing consciousness to prevent those social and artificial ills spread over the world more or less. It studies the synergy between women and ecology found in the prominent cultural postcolonialist Chinua Achebe's history re-writing novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). It is a widely studied novel focusing mainly on the process and consequence of British colonialism in Nigeria; however, it is indispensable to examine whether its focus on ethnic women and their relation with surrounding ecospheres could provide some in-depth insight into the above mentioned hindrances to sustainable world. Henceforth, the primary objective of this study is to explore how the indigenous beliefs, value system and practices of the Igbo community incorporates ecofeminist awareness, capable of providing some prominent gateways to sustainable development of Nigeria in particular and the world as a whole. The study is entirely qualitative and it employs textual analysis methods to closely examine the narrative and the contexts, i.e., historical, political, and socio-cultural, it is set in. Ecofeminism necessarily provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study. However, certain ecowomanist concepts, with particular reference to Alice Walker, are also drawn.

Keywords— Ecofeminist Awareness; Sustainable Development; Mother-Earth; Chinua Achebe; *Things Fall Apart*



I. INTRODUCTION

If we attempt to trace some major global concerns of the twenty first century world, gender imbalance and environment degradation will perhaps host the list. On the one hand, the long rooted gender discrimination has devalued almost half of the human species and been an immense impediment to social and economic growth and wellbeing. On the other, the extreme dependency of civilisation upon machines has threatened our life support vis-a-vis environment. These apparently disparate threats, in fact, are intertwined and have unitedly formed a huge

back-wheelers to the Earth itself. Chu and Karr identify impoverishment of environment or living systems as humanity's greatest challenge for the 21st century (278). It is claimed that we are living in a time of most sophisticated scientific development and looking forward to furthering it while paying less attention to humanity and sustainable development. This paper, attempts comprehending if literature could raise or enhance some kind of visionary consciousness to prevent those social and artificial ills spread all over the world more or less. To examine the issue, it operates a study on the prominent

cultural postcolonialist Chinua Achebe's history re-writing novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which draws on issues like women, earth and environment. It is a widely studied novel focusing mainly on the process and consequence of British colonialism in Nigeria; however, it is indispensable to examine whether its focus on *Igbo* (an ethnic community in Eastern Nigeria in around 1890s) women and their relation with surrounding ecospheres could provide some in-depth insight into the above mentioned hindrances to sustainable development.

There is an accumulating body of research showing the unique impacts that women face due to a wide range of environmental issues (Austin & Banashek 259). In their reading of *Things Fall Apart*, Jane and Emmanuel assert that the subjugation and oppression of women is linked to the exploitation of ecology (Nkechi and Asika 33-40). In fact, a substantial number of studies on the novel have examined the diverse and equal connections between environment and people that have been disrupted by colonial aggression and illustrated the strategies of African writers to portray a complementary homeostatic relationship between the environment and humans in order to achieving environmental justice even before the birth of ecocriticism (Bondunde 35-38; Priyanka and Kumaraswamy 118-124; Alam 1-13). Some studies are found to emphasise the strategy of ecological resilience and strategies for adapting to contemporary complex that the novel suggests (O'Brien 1-10). However, unless those ecocritical viewpoints are endorsed with feminist lens and related with the twenty first century global objective for a sustainable Earth, the novel's focus upon the synergy between women and nature will remain unexplored. This study intends to illustrate the novel's ability to express a contemporary crisis, whose devastation touches some places more than others, but whose scope is global.

Comprehending the necessity of sustainable development on the façade of ongoing urbanisation and industrialisation all over the world, in 1915 the United Nations set seventeen goals, including gender equity (SDG 5) and climate action (SDG 13), which highlight the three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e., the economy, the social development and the environment. According to United Nations General Assembly, sustainable development is the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (43). It can also be defined as an approach to the economic development of a country without compromising with the quality of the environment for future generations (Dernbach J. C. 20). This paper asserts that the study of *Things Fall Apart* is indispensable for awareness building and championing the global objectives of promoting women empowerment and

discouraging deforestation and climate change. In the novel, Achebe appears to contemplate on the intricate connections between gender dynamics and environment. The novel clearly bears significant awareness in its portrayal of the relationship between the *Igbo* and nature. Most of the cultural, religious, and ethical practices of the *Igbo* revolve around nature and women. The interconnectedness of cultural, religious, and ethical practices with nature as well as the central role of women in maintaining this connection informs a deep ecofeminist awareness. The novel gives recognition to women and nature in relevant situations and underscores the parallel between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment. By weaving these elements into the narrative, Achebe seems to highlight the importance of ecofeminist consciousness in promoting environmental conservation and sustainable development in Nigeria and elsewhere. Moreover, the emphasis on the *Igbo*'s sincere maternal devotion to nature in the novel underscores the nurturing aspect of the relationship between women and the environment. In this way, Achebe not only portrays the cultural dynamics of the *Igbo* but also incorporates a nuanced ecofeminist lens, inviting readers to consider the profound implications of the interconnectedness between gender roles and environmental sustainability.

Henceforth, the primary objective of this study is to explore how the indigenous beliefs, value system and practices of the *Igbo* community in *Things Fall Apart* incorporates ecofeminist awareness, capable of providing some prominent formula to sustainable development of Nigeria in particular and the world as a whole. On its course, the paper will explore how Achebe connects women and ecology, consciously or unconsciously, by presenting women as epitome of uncanny power, productivity, sustenance, fertility, and continuity upon which the peace, prosperity, and survival of the community depends. It will also draw on the synergy between women and nature which constitutes the core of their cultural beliefs, reinforcing the transcendental dissolution of the western binary distinction between women (human) and nature. Correspondingly, the study will discover how the novel reflects an inextricable relationship between the oppression of the *Igbo* women and the exploitation of the environment. Women in the story often embody a harmonious relationship with nature, and their roles are intricately tied to the land. The disruption caused by colonialism disrupts this balance, illustrating a parallel between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. Finally, the research will study how the women characters with different powers carry subtle implications to the sacred beliefs or religion of the *Igbo*. The *Igbo*'s belief in women

as the embodiment of Mother-Earth and her nature-centered religious culture, replete with totems and tents, places women as sacred figures and religious personals.

II. METHODOLOGY

Methods

The study is entirely qualitative and it employs textual analysis methods to closely examine the narrative and the contexts, i.e., historical, political, and socio-cultural, it is set in. The primary source of the study is Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* while scholarly studies on it recount its secondary source. The study will identify significant ecofeminist contents from the novel and relates those to the global objective of sustainable development. Necessarily, it will draw on the interconnectedness of ecocriticism and feminism to analyse women's long-termed connection with nurture and nature. Ecowomanism, with particular reference to Alice Walker, will also be drawn at certain points. Therefore, ecofeminism and ecowomanism together provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study.

Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism is a movement that explores the intersections between environmentalism and feminism. It highlights the links between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment, often emphasising the parallels in the way both are treated as resources to be dominated and controlled. Ecofeminists advocate for social and ecological justice, seeking to address issues such as gender inequality, environmental degradation, and the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues. It was first used by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne and hailed from third wave feminism. The concept was further developed in 1976 by Ynestra King who focused primarily on the interconnections between ecology and peace, environmental justice and social justice. She asserts, "Ecofeminist 'peace' is understood as being connected to a new definition of national and planetary security which includes societies free from violence, with nature-friendly technologies and sustainable economics that are respectful of place and culture" (King 15). Though environmental justice and social justice are two different things with different concerns and goals, ecofeminists believe that they have common cause which is the Western binary or hierarchical thinking or framework. In Western thought, everything is set at two different binary poles. Men, white, and human are thought to be superior whereas women, non-white, and nature are considered to be inferior because of the inherent differences between them. Ecofeminists argue that these binary distinctions promote discriminatory perceptions of each animate and inanimate object and

create a form of value inequality. In other words, such hierarchical thinking also infects the way people see and think about the world.

According to Karren J. Warren, basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions about the Western world and its inhabitants are shaped by a patriarchal oppressive conceptual framework that aims to explain, justify, and maintain relations of dominance and subordination in general and men's in particular. Through this logic of dominance, hierarchical 'othering' occurs. Warren asserts that "Sexism and the exploitation of the environment are parallel forms of domination" (Warren 1). The ecofeminist viewpoint sheds light on the undeniable fact that environmental degradation has a profound impact on women, especially in the context of colonial invasions and conflicts between humans and nature. For example, the degradation of their ecology along with the colonial invasion has exacerbated the conflict of human-nature which has not only affected the local communities but also the women lived there. Ecofeminism, thus, offers an analytical framework for understanding the same situation in *Things Fall Apart*.

Ecofeminism also provides an alternative tool to interpret the power of women's and nature's interconnectedness for a sustainable Earth. Vandana asserts that "one of the tasks of ecofeminism is to retell how societies must look at yield and activity of both women and nature that have mistakenly been believed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used" (Vennila 2087). She emphasises the undervalued connection between women and the environment, urging a reevaluation of societal perceptions towards the roles of women and nature, challenging the misconception of passivity and advocating for a more harmonious relationship. It is also related to the concept of 'animism' and *Gaia* (concepts also related to ecospirituality). *Gaia* envisages that the earth is a living organism and human beings and natural elements are part of it (animism). Organism interacts with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a synergist, self-regulatory, complex system. This complex system maintains the synergy of life on the planet, and human beings should not harm the living environment and the living earth. The *Gaia* concept and 'animism' are instrumental to analyse *Igbo* cultural, religious and ethical view of the cosmos where the nature is considered as living entity representing feminine attributes of nurturing and regenerating.

Alice Walker, earnestly an ecowomanist, recognises the inherent relationship between nature and gender, which came to be known as ecowomanism today. Walker advocates for the resistance of the ecosystem for the well-being of women of caste and mankind. She suggests that deforestation, environmental contamination, and global

warming can be remedied by developing a true ecowomanist consciousness (Hasanthi 160). Her ecowomanist concept are particularly meaningful for interpreting the cases of women of colour and non-white (colonised) women regarding this study.

III. DISCUSSION

Things Fall Apart is a novel which shows how a well-organised, culturally enriched, peace loving, and prosperous ethnic community in Nigeria disintegrates and loses everything of their own due to British colonial aggression on the land. Bringing out old beliefs and value system, ways of life, and rich cultural ethos on the one hand and colonial oppression on the other in the novel, Achebe offers a scope to compare between and comprehend constructive or spiritual indigenous culture and destructive or material colonial culture. The novel states a land called Umuofia which encapsulates a harmonised living system where the people used to live in close contact with nature before colonisation. The narrative is replete with ecofeminist awareness. Achebe connects women and ecology by presenting women as epitome of productivity, sustenance, fertility, and continuity upon which the peace, prosperity, and survival of communities depend. The changing seasons, agricultural cycles, and natural elements play significant roles, reinforcing the cultural and spiritual bonds with the land--power of which also goes to a goddess called Ani. The disruption caused by colonialism disrupts this balance, illustrating a parallel between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. It leads to the metaphorical unraveling of the traditional way of life, as symbolised by the title, *Things Fall Apart*. The novel portrays Mother Africa not only as a physical landscape but also as a source of cultural identity and resilience in the face of external forces. Ecofeminists are often critical of Western binary system of knowledge which promotes discriminatory perceptions of each animate and inanimate object and create a form of value inequality. In this respect, ecofeminist Ynestra King asserts although social and environmental injustices are apparently different, they have common cause of hierarchical thinking (King 15). Achebe also seems to be aware of this Western epistemological politics and mend up some conventional gender discriminations through women's power positions as well as cultural practices in the society. The community the novel portrays is undoubtedly patriarchal. The narrative emphasises how social structures present men in a position where they can dominate and rule women. Women also accept subjugation by accepting men's control over their lives. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel and representative of aggression and masculinity of patriarchy,

controls the entire family like other members of *Igbo* clan. It is mentioned in the novel, "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children" (Achebe 12). However, despite his stern demeanor, there are instances where women posit in significant positions in the nature-based cultural and religious arenas of the society. For example, Chika and Chielo, the priestesses of Agbala (The Oracle of Hills and Caves) are addressed as sacred experts, eyes of God and 'religious authorities'. They can transform as a medium between supernatural spirits and earthly beings. They are powerful, dauntless, fearless personalities with social prowess. Okonkwo, the *Igbo* leader with name and fame, had to adhere to Agbala which demonstrates a nuanced perspective on gender dynamics in the novel. She exerts her voice on Okonkwo: "Beware Okonkwo!" she warned. "Beware of exchanging words with Agbala. Does a man speak when a god speaks? Beware!" (Achebe 89). Consolidating women's place as sacred figures and religious leaders, strong feminist characterisation of female characters in the novel legitimises women's changing position. Okonkwo's first wife is portrayed as a confident for *Igbo* that she was given the responsibility of Ikemefuna, a child the *Igbo* wins from the defeated clan as a sign of victory. Ekwefi, the second wife of Okonkwo, is an unconventional *Igbo* woman who rejects the traditional system of marriage by choosing the groom of her choice. She is the representative of strength, bravery, resilience, freedom: "Of his three wives Ekwefi was the only one who would have the audacity to bang on his door" (Achebe 67). She goes beyond religious and cultural dogma and embraces her freedom of action and decision making. Moreover, women, in *Igbo* society, share their status with male counterparts. Their role as educators has a great significance as children are introduced to basic knowledge about religion, customs, social norms, code of conduct by their mothers. They teach morals by telling fables of various animals and trees of the nature. Although women are relatively in a subordinate position in society, women's earth-based spiritual strength, maternal qualities, cultural religious values re-establish their esteem.

The position of women in *Things Fall Apart* is analogous to current feminist campaign of women's empowerment as well as United Nations' objectives, SDG-5, which advocates for gender equity. As it is stated earlier in the study, the goals United Nations sets for sustainable development accumulate the dimensions of economy, environment and social development (83). It could be perceived that keeping half of the people away from economy, education, and policy making, sustainable development can never be achieved. In the *Igbo* village of

Umuofia, women are presented as responsible, hardworking, productive, creative, resourceful and industrious. They are the symbol of economic prosperity. For example, the number of wives of a man is synonymous to the amount of land the person possesses. Okonkwo is glorified for having four wives since it implies that it requires that number of labour force to cultivate Okonkwo's land. Women's procreative power is also appreciated in that society. It is elucidated, "The birth of her children,... should be a woman's crowning glory" (Achebe 67). When the present world is threatened with women's sterility for a wide variety of reasons including nuclear war and environmental degradation, such glorification of 'motherhood' is, in fact, futuristic. It is true that recognising women's potentiality merely for farming and giving birth may devalue the women today in many societies; however, if we consider the time and place the narrative is set in, it will be different. The exemplary advancement and contribution of women to the mainstream economy of the *Igbo* could be championed today. Ecofeminist and activist Vandana Shiva writes that women have a special connection with the environment through their daily interactions but this connection is undervalued. "One crucial aspect that distinguishes the experience of Black women is their hard labor in field to grow vegetables and food crops" (Biswas 5). Shiva makes it clear that "ecofeminism is to retell how societies must look at yield and activity of both women and nature that have mistakenly been believed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used" (Vennila and Gejeswari 2087). Urging a reevaluation of societal perceptions towards the roles of women and nature, Shiva challenges the misconception of passivity that stereotypes women. If the parallel advancement of men and women found in *Igbo* community would prevail everywhere, women's position could have been different today.

The ecofeminists express a strong assertion on the synergic relationship between women and nature. In her study, the ecofeminist Karren J Warren claims "Nature is a feminist issue" (1). The ecofeminist view of women's close contact with nature and advocacy for the conservation of both align with the goals of sustainable development the study focus on. From the reading of *Things Fall Apart*, it gets apparent that the *Igbo* religion is nature based where earth, particularly Africa, is often personified as a female spirit. The *Igbo* people attribute feminine qualities to nature of Africa, seeing them as nurturing and life-giving forces. This connection between Africa and femininity underscores the *Igbo* worldview, emphasising harmony and balance with the environment as essential aspects of their spiritual beliefs. This connection is evident in the depiction of female deities and spirits associated with

natural elements in *Igbo* cosmology. Achebe uses the character of Ani, the goddess of earth, to express the link between women and ecology in terms of productivity and fertility. Nkechi and Emmanuel examine, "Women in the novel were seen as the emblem of productivity, sustenance, fertility and continuity on whom the peace, prosperity and survival of the community heavily rest upon. Nature worked hand in hand to ensure the peace, stability and fertility of the whole community" (35). For the ecofeminists, "Peace' is understood as being connected to a new definition of national and planetary security which includes societies free from violence, with nature-friendly technologies and sustainable economics that are respectful of place and culture" (King 15). The *Igbo*'s dependency on nature for their agriculture and their indigenous knowledge of its cycle implies that Achebe, consciously or unconsciously, advocates for a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the environment.

Things Fall Apart clearly concedes that the concept of 'Mother Earth' is embedded in the *Igbo* religious and cultural beliefs. Instances of such *Igbo* beliefs found in the novel align with ecofeminism as well as United Nations' goals of sustainable development as it underscores the nexus between the feminine, nature, and the struggles faced by both women and the environment. The earth goddess, Ani, is a manifestation of 'Mother Earth' in the novel. This figure symbolises fertility, sustenance, bearing the ancestors by storing them in her womb, and the cyclical nature of life. The *Igbo* people's reverence for Ani reflects a deep ecofeminist consciousness, acknowledging the importance of nurturing and preserving the earth. Being an agrarian society, the *Igbo* community are dependent on the grace of the earth goddess for their survival in this world. Their earth goddess is a mother figure to them as she cares for them, guides them, nurtures them and when necessary punishes their misdeeds to maintain favour in *Igbo* society. She is committed to upholding justice and maintaining societal order by taking a firm stance against wrongdoing. This earth goddess governs all aspects of their lives, be it personal or social, and the *Igbos* are always loyal to her. The earth goddess blesses the land with nurture and nourishment which symbolises growth and rejuvenation which is important for environmental sustainability. Achebe states, "When the rain finally came, it was in large, solid drops of frozen water which the people called 'the nuts of the water of heaven! ... The earth quickly came to life and the birds in the forests filtered around and chipped merrily.... all were happily, refreshed and thankful" (Achebe 114). Ani nourishes and rejuvenates the environment by sending rain to the land. She is the spiritual incarnation of earth with the

values of life-affirming, procreative and nurturing which are the same as women's. Dealing with ecospirituality, this is how Achebe connects woman and nature. As mothers protect their children, so does Ani who protects her worldly offspring.

In fact, the entire life-style of the *Igbo*, i.e., their beliefs and practices, seems to be shaped by certain kinds of wisdom and knowledge which advocate for saving women and conserving nature. According to *Igbo* religious cultural belief, every crime can either be female or male. Any offence against mother earth is female crime. When Okonkwo accidentally killed Ezeudu's son, it was considered as female crime because every natural being is the responsibility of Ani. Since all Umuofians are beloved children of Mother Earth, killing some kindred is considered killing one of Ani's children. The consequences of this offence are considered very serious. Okonkwo, a model Umuofian, accepted seven years of exile in Ani's honour. Okonkwo, who loves his clan dearly, accepts such punishment without question. Then, in honour of the Earth Goddess, the *Igbo* people organise several ceremonies and observe them with deep respect and reverence. This reverence is reflected in rituals, ceremonies, and the everyday lives of the characters. One of the most significant rituals is the 'Week of Peace' dedicated to Ani. In those days any crime against women and nature would be unforgivable. Even, hitting the ground with a plow for cultivation would be an offensive activity. When Okonkwo, a great leader with several titles, broke the week's peace by beating his wife, Ojiugo, he had to bear heavy reparations as penance. The priest of Ani, Ezeani reprimanded Okonkwo by reminding him of the implications of this abominable crime. Beating wife in the 'Week of Peace' is such a violation of the Earth goddess that she may stop producing crops for the entire clan (Achebe 27). This analogy between women and Earth Mother calls for ecofeminism in its interpretation. The exploitations of women and nature stem from the same hierarchical framework of the western world which promotes polarising and "othering" the "others"--both animate and inanimate. According to Karren J. Warren, basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions about the Western world and its inhabitants are shaped by a patriarchal oppressive conceptual framework that aims to explain, justify, and maintain relations of dominance and subordination in general and men's in particular. Through this logic of dominance, hierarchical othering occurs. Warren asserts that "Sexism and the exploitation of the environment are parallel forms of domination" (Warren 1). She adds, "Ecological feminist claims that there are important connections between the unjustified domination of women, people of colour, children, and the poor and the

unjustified domination of nature" (Warren 1). While *Igbo* society exhibits a somewhat patriarchal approach to nature, the novel illustrates the interrelationship between ecology and women through characters like Ani.

The concept of 'Mother Earth' bridges environmental and social justice as King asserts in her study (15). One of the ideals of ecofeminism is to raise awareness of the protection and preservation of women's and environmental rights by connecting environmental injustice and social injustice, especially women's injustice. The graphic description of the *Igbo* devotion to the mother earth exemplifies *Igbo's* ecofeminist perspective. *Igbo* ecofeminism values indigenous knowledge and practices related to the environment. By preserving and promoting these traditions, it resists the erasure of local knowledge systems that occurred during colonisation. Mother Earth is a physical and metaphysical embodiment of the divine 'Ani' herself is a female goddess who plays a role in establishing a strong bond between women and nature. The exploitation of women and the degradation of nature parallels the disobedience and disrespect of the mother earth. This parallelism creates an ecofeminist trend in the novel that promotes both the freedom of women and the freedom of nature by observing them through the ecofeministic lens. Human killing, animal killing (sacred python), abuse of women are all blasphemy and dishonour to the earth goddess which are severely punishable in *Igbo* society. Since the earth goddess represents the whole of nature, the degradation of nature is her degradation. Ani is, thus, an important influence on the ecofeminist concept of the novel. The concept of 'Mother Earth' reinforces the novel's ecofeminist spirit by highlighting the *Igbos'* predilection for women.

For gender equity, women's empowerment is strongly recommended not only by the feminists but also by many policy making institutions. Empowering somebody involves the capacity of that person to execute particular jobs. The concept of women's empowerment, therefore, acknowledges and asserts women's potentiality, a resemblance to which is found in an *Igbo* word, Nneka, which means "Mother is Supreme". This presentation of Mother along with the Mothers' association with the Earth in the figure of Ani stated above reflects a deep spiritual connection that underscores the importance of respecting and coexisting with the natural world, viewing it as a source of life and sustenance. This interplay between the mother figure and ecofeminist consciousness underscores the importance of recognising and respecting the symbiotic relationship between women and the environment. The character Nneka is not a specific character in the novel but rather a cultural concept that underscores the significance of mothers. The idea of Nneka is closely tied to the

broader themes of family, kinship, and the interconnectedness of the community. The supremacy of motherhood and maternal environment is evident in *Igbo* worldview. According to which the maternal environment and maternal home will not leave anyone in time of need. When Okonkwo is banished from his land for murdering a clansman, he takes refuge in his mother's land. This nurturing capacity as well as the supremacy of the Mother is illustrated by Ayuk-Etang as in two ways: "Firstly, in the love the woman shares with the children, and secondly through the symbol of the goddess. This brings in the concept of ecospirituality, which links the woman's spiritually to nature" (Ayuk-Etang 20). Alice Walker recognises the inherent relationship between nature and gender, which came to be known as ecowomanism. She suggests that deforestation, environmental contamination, and global warming can be remedied by developing a true eco-womanist consciousness (Hasanthi 160). She advocates this ecowomanist worldview that this consciousness alone can bring down patriarchal hierarchies, ensure ecological justice and woman justice, and preserve the interests of women and the environment. Achebe presents the same worldview and portrays the novel as a microcosm of ecofeminist consciousness which promotes women empowerment and sustenance of the Earth's environment.

The bond Achebe makes among women, nature and earth not merely shares certain goals of sustainable development. It encapsulates a broader philosophy of the entire cosmos, imbued with in-depth insight into the universe, creation and entire existence to which SDGs are just corporeal. According to *Igbo* cosmic philosophy, the universe appears as an organic whole or a living organogram where every human and non-human is highly valued because everything in the nature possesses a unique spiritual essence or soul. The instances of natural catastrophes in Umuofia one after another after the deforestation of the 'Evil Forest' on the façade of colonial usurpation and the death of the person who killed the Royal Python inform some uncanny incidences which is comprehensible if the universe is considered as a living thing and every elements as carrying the universal soul. Such a worldview embraces the ecofeminist idea of 'Gaia' and 'animism'. The concept of 'animism' believes spirit in every object of nature whereas 'Gaia' envisages that the earth is a living organism which interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a synergist, self-regulatory, complex system. This complex system maintains the nexus of life on the planet and human beings should not harm the living environment and the living earth. The holistic worldview reflecting from the *Igbo* way of life not only underscores the interconnectedness of

human and non-human elements but also debunks breaking the hierarchical universal order of Western metaphysics that imposes an ontological difference between man/woman, human/Nature, human/God, and God/Nature (Dieke n.p.). This deep interconnectedness between humans and the natural environment, reinforcing the transcendental dissolution of the binary distinction between nature and women. It aligns with the idea that both women and nature deserve equal rights and respect.

When the colonisers intrude into the land of the *Igbo*, its indigenous culture, religion and social system collapse and the entire community disintegrates. In a study, Banani Biswas, using Roland Barthes' concept of *proairetic code*, discusses how the Western hierarchical worldview operates in human unconscious to shape it in ways we know as 'universal' (210). One reason behind the disruption of the *Igbo* community was its failure in conserving own cultural elements due to the colonial strategies of cultivating Western ideologies onto the minds of the *Igbos*. Another one was the forceful aggression of the colonisers with arms to usurp their land and power. For, establishing schools, colleges, churches, markets, or in other words, for urbanising the indigenous villages living amidst woods in close contact with nature, they deforest the land which destroys natural harmony. Since the religious culture of the *Igbo* people was nature based, one of the chief goals of the European leaders was the decentralisation of ecospirituality of indigenous religious culture. The monotheistic Christiana religiosity had a conflict with polytheistic religiosity of the indigenous people. To reinforce the sustainability of their epistemological ideologies, the colonialism tried to influence the religious value of the colonised territory. The tribal culture and societal structure were stridently shaped and controlled by the ecospirituality and pantheistic sensibility. To transfer indigenous' reliability from nature to their self-constructed epistemologies, the colonisers used the religiosity as a catalyst. As an agrarian society which socially and culturally nature-centric, the *Igbo* place their faith in gods and goddesses associated with the natural world. Their religious ideologies, beliefs and practices reinforce ecospirituality and ecofeminist consciousness. But colonial incursions into Umuofia brought self-constructed manipulating religious ideologies to influence tribal nature-religion. It seeks to re-establish the traditional grand Great Chain of Being that affirms the position of God, spirituality and man above nature. *Igbos'* religious ideology rejects anthropocentric epistemology and reshuffles the Great Chain of Being, aligning nature with spirituality. The colonial religiosity abdicates the polytheistic worldview of *Igbo* and navigates the ecospiritual sensibilities and ecofeminist consciousness.

Rejecting ecofeminism's relativism to ecospirituality, colonial religion abandons women and environmental ties and alienates women from nature in the name of urbanisation. They introduced machines, domestic tools, institutions to bridge the gap between ecology and nature. As Elisabeth assters, "This feminine prominence is gradually challenged with the infiltration of westernization (government, courts, judges, court messengers and more)" (Ayuk-Etang 17). Thus, many Umuofians, who had problems with the *Igbo* religion, comforted themselves converting to Christianity. The whites brought schools, courts, churches, trading stores to use as catalysts to exacerbate the pace of manipulation to convert the Umuofian clan to Christianity. Before the establishment of the school, nature was the traditional school of the *Igbos*, they were students of nature. It can be seen that the *Igbo* hierarchy of gods is partially similar to the ecclesiastical system of Christianity. Both them believe in a supreme God to whom all prayers ultimately go. But the main difference is the ecospiritual beliefs that the *Igbo* have but the Christians do not. Christians do not recognise the metaphysical presence of spiritual beings on earth. Colonial Christianity aims to detach people from an ecocentric worldview and force them into an anthropocentric sensibility. Achebe gives a strong message how the attack on nature and nature-centric religion culminates in the destruction of the entire community which, in other words, advocates for ecofeminist worldview for sustainable Earth.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study examines how Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* engages with ecofeminist awareness, illustrating the profound connections between gender, society, and the natural world in the context of historical and cultural transformations when the present world is looking for a sustainable development after many scars on it. The intricate interplay between gender, culture, and nature in the novel provides a lens through which to explore the broader theme of environmental consciousness and gender equity. Achebe's portrayal of the *Igbo* society underscores the parallel struggles of women and the environment, emphasising the significance of ecofeminist awareness in fostering sustainable relationships with both.

Throughout the narratives, Achebe appears to weave a message for the current world which is in need of a sustainable development to survive artificial perils. Achebe presents the story of women, whether physical or spiritual. In the religious view of the *Igbo*, the earth is the quintessential embodiment of the nature-based female consciousness, imbued with a combination of feminine and

naturalistic attributes. Mother Earth's domain is a phenomenal aspect where women and nature interact. *Igbo* women live in close connection with nature because of their gender-specific roles. As an agrarian group, they spend most of their time with nature. Their values, morals, customs are inextricably linked with their surroundings. Women are also given the highest esteem in the society out of respect for the Mother-Earth.

While *Igbo* society exhibits a somewhat patriarchal approach to nature, the novel illustrates the interrelationship between ecology and women. The *Igbo* belief in women as the embodiment of the natural being gives rise to the sacred and religious consciousness towards women and nature. The novel also reflects a connection between the oppression of the *Igbo* women and the exploitation of the environment. Women in the story often embody a harmonious relationship with nature, and their roles are intricately tied to the land. The disruption caused by colonialism disrupts this balance, illustrating a parallel between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. Achebe subtly explores ecofeminist themes, suggesting a complex interplay between gender, culture, and the environment. Gender and environment, falling into the junction of ecofeminism, provides guidelines today for a sustainable Earth's environment. Like the United Nations, Achebe fictionally calls for sustainability of Earth through insightful means.

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