



Informative Essay

Human Right Infringement in Things Fall Apart

The United for Human Rights states the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with Thirty Articles to protect human rights. According to the United Nations, human rights are based on the fact that human beings require dignity and to be treated in respect. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, though a novel written in 1958 with a late 1800 pre and post colonial setting, there is a lot to be seen in terms of violation of human rights with is a part largely played by culture in addition to the transition that took place during post colonialism. These rights include Article 1 Right to equality at birth, Article 4 No Slavery, Article 5 No torture or cruel inhuman punishment, Article 9 No subjection to arbitrary arrest detention or exile, Article 10 Equality to a fair and public hearing, Article 13 Freedom to move, Article 17 Right to property ownership with no arbitrary deprivation of property, Article 18 Freedom of thought, religion and belief and Article 19 Freedom of expression.

Right to equality at birth is violated for Ezinma, Ekwefi's daughter. Okwonko constantly wishes Ezinma would have been a son as girls have lesser value to girls and she would have been good "replacement" for his weak and lazy son Nwoye. Okwonkwo's father Unoka is also referred to as an Agbala translating to a woman simply because he is lazy and unproductive (Achebe 10). Women could also be replaced even after death. Achebe states (20) how Udo's wife was replaced by a virgin from a neighboring village where his wife was killed. This is demeaning to the female fraternity.

Article 4 of no slavery to any person is violated when Ikemefuna is snatched from his family and taken away by Okwonko as a village property who is to be under Okwonkwo's custody as a servant (Achebe 11). Article 5 of no torture and cruel inhumane punishment is seen in wife beating (Achebe 21) together with violation of freedom of movement as Okwonkwo's beats his wife because she had gone to make

her hair and had not cooked food for him. Ikemefuna is also killed by Okwonkwo a fatherly figure to the boy simply because of traditions (Achebe 66). Both are sad happenings that should not happen to people especially from close family members.

The violation of Article 9 on being taken to exile and Article 10 on right to public and fair hearing hits Okwonko when he commits a female crime as he kills a man when his gun goes off in a salutation burial ceremony (Achebe 87). He is soon sent to exile in his mother's homeland for 7 years and the property he lives behind is burnt thus violating Article 13 and 17 on right to freedom to move and arbitrary deprivation of property. The violation of Article 18 Freedom of thought, religion and belief is witnessed in the second setting of post colonialism where there is conflict in the community brought about by Christian missionaries who are preaching Christianity and making African religion look inferior. With such fears of the unknown, the protagonist finally commits suicide for a sense of not fitting in to the new society whereby he has lived all his life observing traditions. Women are rarely allowed to exercise Article 19 Freedom of expression. Achebe states (11) when Ikemefuna was being taken away from his father's house his mum was not consulted or even allowed to talk but could only weep bitterly. The virgin given to Udo as wife replacement could also only take orders from the village elders.

Measures that can be taken to ensure human rights are not violated include creating awareness to citizens on their rights, setting up bodies that handle human rights issues, formulating laws and getting into strong international organizations and adopting standards, conventions and declarations that are binding or adopted in modification. Truth commissions and international war crimes tribunals can also be set up to handle occurrences. Areas of conflict must also be given humanitarian aid and developmental assistance. These include peace keeping missions and creating safe havens for refugees.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heineman, 1958.
United for Human Rights. *Making Human Rights a Fact*. 2017 Web. 28 September 2017