

## **Ekwefi's Role in Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe**

Riffaqt Bano

---

**Abstract:** *Ekwefi's character is one of the most significant characters in things fall apart by Chinua Achebe. She possess the qualities which distinguish her of Okonkwo's other wives. Even she seems to have less drawbacks than the protagonist of the novel.*

*In the novel she has been described as beautiful youth and second wife of Okonkwo. Her bold action was as she ran from her previous husband and came to live with Okonkwo, in a patriarchal society. She loved wrestling and it might be the reason that she liked Okonkwo.*

*In society, women were dominated by men. They were fated to be satisfied mens' lust for sex, give birth to children and bring up them. She had suffered much in married life. Nine of her children died in infancy and Ezinma was the tenth of them who was the purpose of her life.*

*Not only she is the most intelligent and confident among Okonkwo's wives but the most strongest character in novel. She chased the priest in darkness for the sake of her daughter and sworn even to stand against the deities.*

*She had heroic qualities and less weak points in her character through out the novel. Sometimes her understanding of things and judgment seem more than Okonkwo.*

**Key Words:** *Bold, Courageous, heroic qualities, intelligent, Judgment*

---

### **I. Literature review**

Ekwefi, the second wife of the Okonkwo was once a village beauty. She had come to live with Okonkwo by her own will and the wisest among all his wives. She had only one child who was Okonkwo's favorite among all his children.

#### **2.1 Patriarchical Society:**

June Chun wrote that Ibo society likened anything strong to man and weak to woman. Okonkwo disliked his son, Nwoye, who reminded him Unoka as woman-like and preferred Ezinma, having a masculine spirit. That was why he wished for several times that his daughter would be a son.

Ekwefi, like Okonkwo's other two wives, suffered quite a bit under his forceful and aggressive rule of the household. Women endurances and dissatisfactions are not heard. They are treated violently when they disobey their husband or do not comply with their wishes.

At one point, just because he was in a bad mood, Okonkwo beat Ekwefi badly and even threatened to kill her with his gun. She had courage to talk back to him when he accused her of killing a banana tree.

Besides in a society of men she had courage to knock on Okonkwo's door at night as it was not liked to run away of a woman while a man can marry several women. During married life, only she could knock Okonkwo's hut. "He knew it must be Ekwefi, of his three wives. Ekwefi was the only one who would have the audacity to bang on his door."

#### **2.2 Ekwefi's Sufferings**

Ekwefi's life had been full of sadness. She had bad luck with bearing children; despite giving birth to ten children, only one had survived. Thus, she nurtured a deep bond with her single daughter, Ezinma. Achebe painted Ekwefi as an extremely devoted mother. Her pain and bitterness in losing nine other children led her to treasure her one daughter even above life itself.

She developed a relation like friends between them. She had removed the generation gap between them as she called her by her name. They had their secrets as eating egg with shut door of their huts building a deep relationship of trust.

#### **2.3. Un-feminine Qualities**

To show courage by any woman was rejected and discarded by society people as well as by the priests and priestess. Michael Hall wrote, "Ekwefi's pursuit of Chielo actually disregards the masculine traditions of the clan." (Osei-Nyame 157-58)

## **II. Heroic Qualities**

We see that Ekwefi has heroic qualities in her character. She is bold, brave and courageous. Her judgment about gun and about sufficient food for feast was correct comparing to her husband, the protagonist of the novel.

### **3.1 Love of wrestling**

Ekwefi seemed fond of wrestling and big fan of Okonkwo as a wrestler. Such things reveal sportsmanship in her character. To face the challenges and practised tolerance are exposed by her character.

To find Okonkwo she left her husband. If he would not be a wrestler she might not prefer to marry him. Her love for Okonkwo was due to her love of wrestling. She listened her heart's voice as living in a society of men it was not allowed.

### **3-2 Self-respect**

"It is true indeed, my dear friend .I cannot yet find a mouth with witch to tell the story". She did not say that he had right to do so .Her words show that she was shameful on it.

Ekwefi had manners. Though she was tired extremely but she sent a message to her hostess "Ekwefi asked Nwoye's mother and Ojiugo to explain to Obierika's wife that she would be late."

When the priestess took her daughter that night she consoled Ezinma "don't be afraid". On turning back she did not mention the horrible things happened last night but she asked her wisely, "have you slept well". On the other hand Okonkwo did not take care of his son and participated in killing of the lad despite of knowing that he was very close to the lad.

### **3-3- Like a warrior**

Though "terror seized her"(91),"her heart beat violently" (91) she chased the priest in dark night. Neither did she care of society, nor the deities. She did not afraid of the possible dangers in deserted paths in darkness. Unpaved paths with weeds or rotten branches could not stop her.

She seems like a warrior who is running for the sake of her daughter's life. Nothing in the world can stop her. She is ready to face the deities and even to sacrificed her life. "She swore if she heard her cry: she would rush into the cave to defend her against the gods in the world .she would die with her." (147)

Regardless, Ekwefi is the most spirited of Okonkwo's wives and frequently stands up to him and talks back. But she also takes her punishment with gritted teeth and without complaint. This kind of strength and boldness has something masculine about it, which emerges even more strongly in her daughter, Ezinma.

### **3-4 Psychological elements**

She is an excellent teacher and educates her daughter. She does train her to say story on turn confidently. Her daughter can ask questions and calls her by name. She has finished the generation gap for better understanding. Ezinma is her only child but she has not spoiled her.

## **III. Interpretation**

She has developed good qualities in her character. She accepts challenges by chasing priest in darkness and in educating her daughter. She does adventure by eloping despite of critical circumstances. Such women causes respect and honor to society. She seems the stronger character in novel. she never loses her temper like Okonkwo nor she commits any false.

### **4-1-Conclusion**

Ekwefi is courageous and wise. Psychologically she treated her daughter successfully. She gave her husband right advice about food for feast and her judgment of gun was also not wrong. She never shows any weak point in her personality through out the novel. She has all qualities which are considered necessary elements for a protagonist in literary work.

## **IV. Recommendation**

Heroic characteristics distinguish her from other characters. She deserves to be called the female protagonist of novel. She loved Okonkwo and left all for the sake of him. Sometimes her judgment is stronger than Okonkwo.

Okonkwo prefers Ezinma and it is Ekwefi who has educated and trained her. As a mother, psychologically she sharpens Ezinma's mind and makes her to be alert about the things .

### References

- [1]. Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart, Longman York Note, Harlow, 1981
- [2]. Michael Hall, 2010, Analysis of Gender Elements in "things fall apart" [www.gencobb.com](http://www.gencobb.com)
- [3]. June Chun, 1990, The Role of Women in Things Fall Apart
- [4]. Leslie, August 28, 2004 Things Fall Apart: A review
- [5]. [www.africaspeaks.com/leslie/2808.html](http://www.africaspeaks.com/leslie/2808.html)