

**ENCROACHMENT OF SOCIETY'S IRRATIONALITY ON HUMAN'S
REASONING PROPENSITY IN CHIGOZIE OBIOMA'S**

THE FISHERMEN

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ABSTRACT

The Fishermen is Nigerian novel written by Chigozie Obioma. Ikenna is the first son of the family. When the novel begins he is fifteen years old boy. His father is a strict person and he never allows his sons to enjoy their life. One day he is transferred to Yola town which is far from Akure. Ikenna and his brothers have freedom to enjoy their life. In the company of their friend in the neighborhood they go fishing every evening without the knowledge of their mother. Ikenna leads his brothers. One day he encounters a madman and this, over a period of time, leads to his tragic end. The novel describes the blind belief of society and its impact on the thinking ability of individual. Irrationality of people plays a vital role in the novel.

KEY WORDS: Ikenna, strict person, thinking ability, blind belief, irrationality.

Nigeria has more than five hundred languages. English is the official language of Nigeria. The major native languages are Yoruba, Igbo and the Hausa language. Nigerian culture bears similarity with the culture of Indian people. They have close attachment with their family and children. Being patriarchal in nature, men have total control over women,

who are denied or not exposed to education. They work for more number of hours than men in the farm in order to augment their income to run the family.

The Fishermen is first novel and it was shortlisted for Man Booker Prize 2015. Obioma takes the theme from his own family to write the novel. The story of the four brothers highlights the culture, situation and tradition of the Nigerian people. The character Ikenna plays a major role in the novel. He is affected by his society and their beliefs. Finally he meets a heart rending end.

Akure is a town in the west of Nigeria. A family has six children; four of them play a vital role in the novel. They start fishing for their pleasure and every evening they go out fishing without their parent's knowledge. They claim themselves to be fishermen. Their father has great vision and ambition for his children. He wants his first son Ikenna to be a pilot, the second son Boja to be a lawyer, the third son Obembe to be a doctor and the fourth son Benjamin to be a professor. Omi-Ala is the name of the river. It is a dreadful river where the boys go fishing. One day they meet a madman named Abulu. He is one of the reasons for the tragedy in the family. He makes a prophecy that Ikenna will be killed by a fisherman. Fearing that the prophecy may come true, Ikenna keeps aloof from his brothers. People believe that whatever Abulu says is likely to come true. His tongue is compared to the sting of scorpion. People are in state of fear as many of his prophecies have come to pass. On one occasion Boja and Ikenna have heated exchange of words which finally results in a fight in which Ikenna is killed. Thus the prophecy of the madman comes true. Boja went missing and his parents lodged a complaint with the police. Soon a woman comes to fetch water in their well. It is she who finds Boja's body floating in the water. Obembe, the third son of family, believes that Abulu is largely responsible for death of his brothers and he makes several plans to kill the madman. He confides his plan to his brother Benjamin. The two of them hatch a plan to kill Abulu and succeed in killing him by using fishing hooks. Obembe plans to run

away from his home. He wants Benjamin to accompany him but Benjamin declines his offer. Obembe leaves home. Benjamin is arrested by the police for Abulu's death and sentenced to a six-year imprisonment in jail.

Ikenna is the protagonist of the novel. He is the eldest son and a boy of fifteen years. He is a brave, intelligent, and responsible boy in his family. At that tender age he has taken upon himself the responsibility of shaping his three younger brothers. Ikenna and his brothers go fishing for pleasure. One day they meet a madman called Abulu. People of Akure believe that he is an evil person and his prophecies come true do much harm. Hence, they avoid the madman. On one occasion he makes prophecy that Ikenna will be killed by one of his own brothers. "Ike, you will be bound like a bird on the day you shall die. Ikenna, you shall die like a cock dies. You shall die by the hands of a fisherman"(Obioma, 90). The words of madman give rise to much tragic confusion in the mind of Ikenna. He is totally confused and cannot see the truth. The mad man's words strike terror in his heart and the fear of death grips him.

Ikenna clearly understands that he will die at the hands of a fisherman. He begins to believe he belongs to the society of people who have blind faith in the words of the madman. He fails to use his own knowledge to analyze the reality. Ikenna himself says to his brothers that, "He saw a vision that one of you will kill me" (94). When Ikenna hears the prophecy, he totally destroyed and undergoes a change in his character. The fear of death takes deep roots in his mind. He becomes paranoid, a psychological disorder that grows worse with passage of time. He maintains distance from his family and brothers. Negative affect plays a vital role in his life. He has done many good things to his brothers and family and has always stood by them. He was almost a father-like figure for his younger and he never allows others to criticize his brothers, but all that changed radically after the pronouncement of the madman. Ikenna, who once guided his brothers, now gets into needless arguments with them, resulting

in violent fights with them, particularly with his second brother, Boja. A clear hint that he is living in a state of self-made fear and terror.

Ikenna's father is a bank officer and he has a great vision for his sons' future. He wants Ikenna to be a pilot in the future. His father's hopes are shattered, all because of madman's words. It is indeed surprising that Ikenna, an intelligent boy, should fall a pray to superstitious beliefs of his community. The mad man is not God to make such predictions, but the local community gives more credit than he deserves. But somehow the words of the town people have mesmerized him and Ikenna lives in fear and terror. It was Ikenna who once had the power to manage difficult situations and used them to his advantage.

Cognitive process is important to all humans. Once it fails to work properly, it creates many problems. It leads to mental illness. Ikenna's cognitive process failed and that is why he has taken the prophecy so seriously. The main reason for this problem is beliefs and traditions of the society. Akure people have seen the madman as an evil power of the place. He is a madman; he does not know to lead his own life. People fail to use their cognitive power. The blind beliefs of society continue in the country. Ikenna also proves that he belongs to that society. An adult and an educated boy, Ikenna somehow loses his balance of mind and begins to give credit to the words of the village idiot. This only goes to show that no amount of education can get rid of superstitions. He creates his own storm and it affects all of his family members. He often quarrels with Boja and during one such quarrel Boja kills Ikenna. Realizing his folly, Boja commits suicide. Ikenna's third brother Obembe plans to kill the madman. He thinks that the madman is the reason for his brothers' death. So he hatches a plan to kill the madman with the help of his brother Benjamin. They kill the madman as the planned and Obembe escapes from the family and Benjamin imprisoned for six years, resulting in the destruction of the family, and all because of superstitious beliefs.

Obioma has seven brothers and first two elder brothers have fistfights. He takes the theme from his own life. He writes about the blind beliefs of society and their tradition. The book depicts the superstitious beliefs of the people. They believe that madmen have powers of prophecy. The author tries to convey the foolishness of these people.

Most of the authors write about their own country's fame and name, but Chigozie criticizes the country and its blind belief. He has patriotism towards his country. He believes that British people's colonization is the reason for their obstacles.

Fear of death comes to the character because of the blind beliefs of society. Every individual has his/her own life. Society will not provide anything to the individual. It teaches the way of living. An individual must learn the ways to live in society. Everyone must learn lessons from the mistakes of others. The usage of own knowledge is important to lead happy and steady life.

Every human in the world faces sufferings. Mental illness plays a vital role. It comes out of negative feelings and emotions. The sufferings are come under Affect theory. When people are affected by negative feelings and emotions, they cannot lead their daily life. It creates many problems in their progress. Faith is important to human being, but it fails him during the time of crisis. Confidence gives one the power to survive in the society but it fails to help one, when one is facing problems. The affect theory has three attributes. They are positive, neutral, and negative. Positive emotions do not harm an individual or people. They provide happiness and enjoyment. Neutral emotions provide neither happiness nor sadness. Finally negative emotions create problems in the life of individuals. They have the power to destroy not only the life of an individual but society itself. The individual harms the family and this comes under the society.

Death is inevitable to living creatures in the world. Being born, they must die, although people may wish to live for long period. Even the old desire longevity. As death approaches them, they lose the balance of their mind. They need some people to provide the healing touch by encouraging them to come to terms with what is inevitable. The fear of death affects the people of all ages. Even the young are terribly disturbed when death stares them in the face. They become a problem to both the family and the society. Youngsters do not have enough maturity to think about reality. They are not fully aware of death. They have many desires in their life and they plan for their future. They cannot tolerate the news of death. They automatically lose their thinking ability.

Once Nigeria was a beautiful country and it had good traditions and culture. But once the British people entered the country, they systematically destroyed the culture of country. The author indirectly mentions the role of the British people in the destruction of Nigeria. Just as the British converted the local people to their way of thinking, in the same way the madman has influence Ikenna to his way of thinking. When all is said and done, it is the British people who destroyed the native life which is simple and traditional.

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