**AIMAN COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE FOR WOMEN**

**TRICHY.**

**PH: 0431-2459493**

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**NAME OF THE STAFF: M.Y.SHABNA**

**DESIGNATION: ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**UNIT FIVE- FICTION**

**THINGS FALL APART by CHINUA ACHEBE**

**What Does the Ending Mean?**

*Things Fall Apart* ends with two related tragedies. The first tragedy is Okonkwo’s death. Following an outburst of unsanctioned violence in which he kills a European messenger who tries to stop a meeting among clan elders, Okonkwo realizes that he is no longer in sync with his society. No one applauds his action, and Okonkwo sees that he alone wishes to go to war with the Europeans. Caught between his rage that the nine villages would succumb to European rule and the futility of fighting the Europeans alone, Okonkwo retreats to his compound and hangs himself. With this act, Okonkwo lives up to his role as a tragic hero whose struggles with society ultimately lead to death. Okonkwo’s death also has another, culturally specific implication. As the narrator explains, the Igbo consider suicide a “feminine” rather than a “masculine” crime. Okonkwo’s suicide is an unspeakable act that strips him of all honor and denies him the right to an honorable burial. Okonkwo dies an outcast, banished from the very society he fought to protect.

The novel’s second tragedy occurs on the broader level of history. Achebe signals this second tragedy by ending the novel with a shift from an African to a European perspective. In the novel’s final two pages, the District Commissioner reflects on how he will depict the events surrounding Okonkwo’s death in the book he’s working on, titled *The Pacification of the Tribes of the Lower Niger*. The District Commissioner threatens to erase the specificity of Okonkwo’s tragedy by removing the events from their context and simplifying them into a tale meant to entertain his readers: “The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading.” Even more troubling, the District Commissioner threatens to reduce Okonkwo’s story to a fleeting anecdote in the European history of conquest: “One could almost write a whole chapter on [this man]. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate.” Decontextualized and stripped of all complexity and nuance, Okonkwo’s story will be tragically lost to history.