



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-
Journal

www.j.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

Role of western influence in Plays of Wole Soyinka

Jignesh. J. Tank

Research Scholar at Bhakta Kavi Narsinh Mehta University, Junagadh

Dr I. G. Purohit

Principal, Ku. Anya Binoybhai Gardi Gramvidhya Shardagram- Mangrol



Abstract:

Title: Role of western influence in Plays of Wole Soyinka

Missionaries major developed works in colonized area were utilized health service, industries and western philosophy in education, they includes their own vernacular of literature in local people for instance Bible translation in local language. They established new schools and church in west Nigeria, they includes religious teaching in syllabus so local Nigerian students learn western religion, which helpful to make more Anglicans, children of Anglicans majority got their education in Christian schools or universities.

Wole Soyinka is well known dramatist of Nigeria, he has heredity of Yoruba culture, except his formal education leads him to contact with European world. He completed his education in Christian missionary school so he learns Christian religion from childhood days. His parent was converted Christian so he brought up under the influence of both the cultures, his Yoruba traditional culture and Christianity; he has immense attachment to Yoruba culture yet some his works have contexts from Bible or Christianity for instance in woks like *Jero's Metamorphosis*, *The Trial of Brother Jero*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Road* and *The Strong Breed*. In which he uses more or less elements from western.

The paper majorly focuses on Influence of Christianity in dramas of Wole Soyinka.

Keywords: Influence, Christianity, Yoruba Culture, Religion, Western,



Introduction:

Wole Soyinka is first noble laureate of Africa, who born in Anglican family; his father was a head master in St. Peters school for the reason that Soyinka completed his primary education in St. Peters school, in colonial period, missionaries were spreading their vernacular literature in local language, Soyinka passes his childhood in western Africa, he moves to Ibadan for further secondary education where he started work in medical store for eight months, where his life twist when he get admission in British university of Leeds. He finished graduation degree with second class. During this period, he met G.Wilson Knight, who was dramatic critic, Soyinka has influenced of him, he learn the aspects of dramatic form used in western literature, later he joint Royal Court Theatre as play reader.

He is versatile personality; he is dramatist, translator, politician, novelist, professor, critic, actor and publisher, after sending six years in European countries, he return his home land on Nigerian independence, he started to studies Yoruba tradition with the help of government grant, which he represents aspect of tradition in modern dramatic form, dramatic form was not broadly used in Africa. There were traditional types of dramas like 'traditional drama' and 'ritual drama', after independence, which try to keep alive step by step new dramatic form. Soyinka created group named 'The 1960 Masks' by support of Nigerian dramatist, group started to perform the play for instance Dance of the Forest fruitfully performed, which was written by Soyinka.

Soyinka wrote many famous plays like *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958), *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), *The Trails of Brother Zero*, *A Dance of the Forests* (1950), *The Strong Breed* (1964), *Kongi's Harvest* (1964), *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). In which he used traditional elements like rituals, customs, songs, ceremonies of Yoruba in new dramatic form. His translated works are *The Forest a Thousand Demons: A Hunter's Saga* (1968) and *In the Forest of Olodumare* (2010), which were chosen from western literature.



Role of western influence in 'The Lion and the Jewel' (1959):

This play majorly focuses on rapid moderation in Nigeria, as title suggest the lion symbol is used for Broka, a chieftain of Ilujinle, who is sixty-two years old, even he want to marry Sidi, the symbol jewel is used for her, she is a belle of village, 'belle' means young most beautiful and charming woman, she want to marry Lakunle, he is a school teacher but he is western educated man, he has western influence so he deprived to traditional custom of bride price, as per traditional custom of Yoruba, he want marry and live with her as western people live.

Lakunle: a prophet has honour except

In his own home. Wise men have been called mad

Before me and after, many more shall be

So abused. But to answer you, the measure

Is not entirely of my own coinage.

What I boast is know in Lagos, that city

Of magic, in Badagry where Saro women bathe

In gold, even in smaller towns less than

Twelve miles from here.... (Soyinka, *The Lion and* 6)

Lakunle want to live high profile class life in city, while Sidi is a traditional village girl, so she is not standing to marry him without bride-price because marriage without bride price is rises question of girl's chastity.

Sidi: They will say I was no virgin

That I was forced to sell my shame

And marry you without a price. (Soyinka, *The Lion and* 8)

As Lakunle replied,

Lakunle: [with a sudden shout.]:

An ignoble custom, infamous, ignominious

Shaming our heritage before the world.



Sidi, I do not seek a wife

To fetch and carry,

To cook and scrub,

To bring forth children by the gross.... (Soyinka, *The Lion and* 8-9)

By the character of Lakunle, Soyinka silently put their opinion on unkind aspects of tradition for instance bride price; lakunle is modern man, who fights against tradition.

Lakunle: A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,

Rejected, denounced, accused,

Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,

Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant,

Restrogrative, remarkable, unpalatable. (Soyinka, *The Lion and* 8)

He is civilized man; he is considered bride price as age-old custom so he discarded to pay bride-price, at the end of play sidi refers to marry Baroka, who already have many wives,

Role of western influence in 'Death and the King's Horseman' (1975):

This play is based on the ritual of suicide, it narrates historical event, which happened in Nigerian during colonial rule, there is brutal ritual in Yoruba tribe that after the death of king, his dog, horse horse man should commit suicide before his burial, people belief that after the death of king his spirit need the protection so house man will have to follow the path of king. During this period missionaries maintain law and order in colonised countries, Elesin is a horse man of king, who has pride of house man family, before the ritual of suicide colonial officer order to arrest the Elesin.

People take the pride of king's horse man; Elesin has pride for his horse man family.

Elesin Oh you mothers of beautiful brides! (*The Dancing stops. They turn and see him, and object in his hands. Iyaloja approaches and greatly takes the cloth from him.*) Take it no mere virgin stain, but the union of life and the seeds of passage. My vital flow, the last from this flesh is intermingled with the promise of future life. All is prepared. Listen! (*A steady drumbeat from the distance.*) Yes. It is nearly time. The



king's dog has been killed. The king's favourite horse is about to follow his master. My brother chiefs know their task and perform it well. (*He listens again.*)

Soyinka depicts brutality of tradition, his magnitude of writing is that he is not believer of system, he generates situation where spectator could grasp that what is good or bad. By the Use of ritual suicide, he reveals brutality of community. He uses some western characters, they tries to change some ancient, out dated practice.

Pilkings Amusa's report. Listen 'I have to report that it come to my information that one prominent chief, namely, the Elesin Oba, is to commit death tonight as a result of native custom. Because this is criminal offence I await further instruction at charge office. Sergeant Amusa.' (Soyinka, *Death and the 326*)

Pilkings is a colonial office; his responsibility is to maintain law so he forcefully stops the native custom, because to commit suicide is considered the criminal offence in European countries. Yet Elesin's son follows the ritual of suicide, who studied medicine in Europe. Soyinka considered suicide is redundant for community.

Role of western influence in other dramas:

The Trial of Brother Jero is satirical play; it attacks on religious frauds, Brother Jero is a fake beach prophet, his intension reveals in one dialogue in beginning of play.

Jeroboam: ... and I grew to love the trade. It used to be a very respectable one in those days and competition was dignified. But in the last few years, the beach has become fashionable, and the struggle for land has turned the profession into a thing of ridicule. Some prophets I could name gained their present beaches by getting women penitents to shake their bosoms in spiritual ecstasy. This prejudiced the councillors who came to divide the beach among us.... (Soyinka 2, *The Trial of Bro* 145)

Soyinka grow up in evangelical family in Nigeria, he learn western religion from childhood, he reveal religious hierocracy in church, missionaries major focus on the new establishment of church, they appointed their people to increase follower of their religion day by day in colonized Nigeria, Soyinka depicts deception in Christian religion.



Jero's Metamorphosis is chronicle of Christian religion leader. It exposes the tricky activities of some leaders in church and satire on hypocrisy in Christian religion. Play begins with Jero's order to his secretary that give invitation letter to other prophets for functional beach meeting, he has government five years plan to transformation of beach in to tourist centre, on meeting day, he train his secretary to give alcoholic drink to all prophets, because of alcoholic drinks prophets are not conscious to take any decision, they are agreed in government plan. Soyinka depicts lust of politician power in some spiritual leaders.

The Swamp Dwellers model may take from Synge play *Riders to the Sea*. Synge represents location of a typical village of Aran Islands in *Riders to the Sea*, as same Soyinka represents village of Niger delta in *The Swamp Dwellers*. He represents people's transformation of village to city by the character of Awuchike, who left their village and parent before ten years, at the present he is rich man in city.

Conclusion:

Soyinka born and brought up in Christian convert family, he learn many aspects of western culture, he took his most of his education in missionaries school so it may say that he has been learning western culture from days of childhood, these university educational contents were based on Christian- European, he spend his six years in England and America, where he studied the western culture and literature, he had work four years in Royal Theatre, where he studies dramatic form of literature, he adopted some model from western dramatist for instance *The Swamp Dwellers* from Synge's play *Riders to the Sea*. There is great influenced of Christ on Soyinka, he used many references from Bible i.e. use of Esau and Jacob story in *The Interpreter*, other reference in *The Strong Breed*, struggle of Eman might similar to Christ.

He starts campaigning against the social custom for instance ritual of suicide from *Death and the King's Horseman*, human sacrifice is avoidable for community, one more petrifying aspect reveal by use of 'the carrier tradition' in *The Strong Breed*. He made situation, spectators will decide what is bad or good. He didn't use only western literary form; he uses western philosophy also in his works.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-
Journal

www.j.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

References:

Figueiredo, Rosa. "The Drama of Existence: Myths and Rituals in Wole Soyinka's Theatre."

International journal of Arts and Science (2011):9.

Manjula, V.N. "A song for the Road Wole Soyinka's Imagery and Tradition." Diss. NGM
U, 2012.

Soyinka, Wole. *Collected plays 1*. Oxford University Press, 1973.

Soyinka, Wole. *Collected plays 2*. Oxford University Press, 1971.

Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Houseman*. Methuen Publishing Limited, 1999.

Rajkumar, K. *Wole Soyinka: As a Play-writer*. Creative Books, 2007.

Agarwalla, Shyam. S. *The African Poetry and Drama*, Prestige Books, 2000.