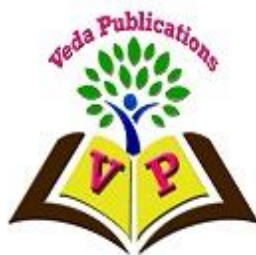


## Cultural Discord and Tradition: With Specific Mention of Wole Soyinks's *The Lion And The Jewel*

A.Mahara Devi

(Assistant Professor, Department of English, E.M.G.Yadava Women's College, Madurai.)

### Abstract



Article Info:

Article Received 22/4/2020

Accepted on: 30/5/2020

Published online: 06/6/2020

The paper centralizes the cultural conflicts and Yoruba tradition in the play, *The Lion and the Jewel*. Wole Soyinka has been widely acknowledged as one of the most famous Nigerian Writers. Wole Soyinka is an ardent onlooker of his own land, culture, customs and his way of expressing the observance in his writings will be distinguished from other writers. Cultural dispute and Yoruba tradition and their custom are clearly bestowed in the play, *The Lion and the Jewel*. The play depicts the inner struggle of the Nigerians who were befuddled whether to move into the future or leave the past behind. The play dispenses social values, environment of Ilujinle, attitudes and attraction and these are the major reasons for the conflicts in culture. The utmost components for the disputes are like, understanding, transmission, generation break and consciousness. Polygamy is an eminent characteristic aspect of this tradition and to have a numerous wives is legitimate in Nigeria. In all the constituent of Soyinka's drama, the encounter between tradition and modernity is absorbed.

**Keywords:** Cultural Dispute, Yoruba tradition, Customs, Modernity, Society, Exploitation.

Wole Soyinka has been widely acknowledged as one of the most famous Nigerian Writers. He was the first African who won the Nobel Prize for his achievements in the field of Literature. His famous play, *The lion and the jewel* was published in 1959. Most of his works located on society's culture, tradition and politics of Africa. Wole Soyinka is an ardent onlooker of his own land, culture, customs and his way of expressing the observance in his writings will be distinguished from other writers. The scenes which are shown in his works are real-life representation of African life, characters, fashion and life is exactly presented as it is in Africa. Likewise, Cultural dispute and Yoruba tradition and their custom are clearly bestowed in the play, *The Lion and the Jewel*.

The play depicts the inner struggle of the Nigerians who were befuddled whether to move into the future or leave the past behind. And one more confusions among the people is that whether to accept modernity or to follow their tradition. The play *The Lion and the Jewel* highly influenced by western modernization. The customs which are emphasized in this play are, bride-price, polygamy, wife wooing girls for her husband and child bearing and Soyinka also focuses on wedding. By using these elements the action of the play was proved.

The play dispenses social values, environment of Ilujinle, attitudes and attraction and these are the major reasons for the conflicts in culture. The people of Ilujinle have created their own norms and not ready to accept the modern way of life. Wole Soyinka depicts the difference of opinion in the character outlook of the major characters. Because the way of thinking is differ from each other. The utmost component for this dispute is like, understanding, transmission, generation break and consciousness.

In the play, Lakunle, the school teacher is fond of modern way of life and he desires the village people of Ilujinle should follow modern way of life and they have to get away from their tradition. From the first scene itself it is understood, that how Lakunle tries to modernize the village. In the beginning of the play, he was teaching the children of Ilujinle. But for Lakunle it was a difficult task. In the opening act, love of Lakunle for Sidi is probable. The main characters in this play are, Sidi, Lakunle and Baroka. Through these characters, the inner and outer conflicts of tradition and modernity are portrayed. So the major clash is between the westernized school teacher, Lakunle and the village head, Baroka. In the title,

*The Lion and the Jewel*, the jewel is Sidi, the village belle, and the village chief Baroka is known as a lion.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Baroka, the village head is very obstinate to follow the old tradition and practice of the society. His supremacy in the society is revealed by his act of suppressing women and humiliating the other gender also. So the word patriarchy is highly expressed through the character of Baroka. On the other side, Lakunle portrayed as a man of western culture taking efforts to show his love to Sidi. When she bringing water on her head, Lakunle tries to get the pail of water which she has been carrying and he says, 'Let me take it.' [Soyinka 1]. From this it is known, that Lakunle wants to break the tradition of a women's task.

The play eminently analyses the morals of Yoruba tradition. The prominent Yoruba tradition is "Bride-Price." And Bride-Price may be a property or money that will be given by the bridegroom to the bride's family. Still this system is followed by the native Africans. It is privilege to the bride who secures a good price. In their culture, if a girl or women married without getting any price, then the villagers assumed that she is not a virgin and not worth enough to marry. But Lakunle's westernized thoughts are never accepted by the villagers. Lakunle's dignity for women is revealed, when he fight against giving bride-price. By saying, 'To pay the price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall, [Soyinka 8] he substantiate his strong disapproval to pay the bride-price.

Whenever, Lakunle talked about modernity, Sidi states that his perspective is full of foolishness. But Lakunle is very eager to devote himself to Sidi. But Sidi always disrespects Lakunle and he discloses his love for her. He states, "Nonsense? Nonsense? Do you hear? Does anybody listen? Can the stones bear to listen to this? Do you call it nonsense that I poured the waters of my soul to wash your feet? [Soyinka 6]". Lakunle's modern thought of concerning and helping wife are deliberately considered as nonsense by Sidi. When Lakunle talking about his love and marriage to Sidi, she only demands him to pay the bride price.

Here, Sidi is extremely a traditional African girl, and she desires to follow her own tradition and culture. So she tries to convince Lakunle and tells the significance of giving bride price and states:

I have told you, and I say it again. I shall marry you today, next week. Or any day you name. But my bride price must be paid. Aha, now you turn away. But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have. The full bride price. Will you make me? A laughing stock? Well, do as you please... But Sidi will not make herself. A cheap bowl for the village spirit. They will say I was no virgin. That I was forced to sell my shame. And marry you without a price [Soyinka 8]

Regarding Yoruba tradition, if a girl marrying a man without bride price, then it is a dishonor to the bride. As a symbol of modernity, Lakunle refused to pay and comments that, Bride Price is “A savage custom, Barbaric, Out-dated, Rejected, Denounced, Accused, Excommunicated, archaic, degrading, Humiliating... unspeakable, redundant, Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable” [Soyinka 9].

The next prominent custom of Yoruba tradition is child bearing. Here it is considered as one of the essential motive of marriage. But for Yoruba tradition, if a couple wants to lead a meaningful and happy life in the society, then should have child of their own. Laretta Ngcoba observes the tradition and comments:

As elsewhere, marriage amongst Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every women is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a women’s fertility to the husband’s family group [141].

As a follower of western culture, Lakunle says that, one who follows western values, they never encourage the custom of child bearing as a necessity one. According to Lakunle, Child bearing is, “An ignorable custom, infamous, ignominious, shaming our heritage before the world... To fetch and carry, To cook and scrub. To bring forth children by the gross....’ [Soyinka 9]

Another salient feature of Yoruba tradition, which Soyinka pictures in this play is Polygamous society. Polygamy is an eminent characteristic aspect of this tradition and to have a numerous wives is legitimate in Nigeria. Regarding Yoruba custom having many wives and concubines are treated as an honorable wealth of a person. So the act of an old man

marrying a young girl, who will be equal age of his daughter is also welcomed there. To increase their agrarian occupation, they want to have multiple wives.

The custom of widow heritage is prevailing, where a man can marry the widow of the dead person. In the same way, in the play *Sadaiku* one of the wives of Baroka, tells Sidi that the Bale is very old, and he may die at any time. So if Sidi accepts to marry the Bale, then after his death, she will be the senior wife of the next successor. Then she will become the senior and obtain all the honors in the family. In Yoruba culture, it is accepted that the Bale can have as much as wife he wants. But as a Bale he has to pursue certain law. He has to treat all his wives equally and has to disperse the property uniformly to all the wives and children. Because there should not be any kind of discrimination between the wives and children. Here it is the duty of the first wife of Bale to woo girls for her husband. So Sadaiku persuade Sidi and convince her to marry her husband. In the following way, Sadaiku entice Sidi:

Sidi, have you considered what a life of bliss awaits you? Baroka swears to take no other wife after you. Do you know what it is to be the Bale's last wife? I'll tell you, when he dies... it means that you will have the honor of being the senior wife of the new Bale... No living in the outhouses for you, my girl. Your place will always be in the palace; first as the latest bride, and afterwards as the head of the new harom... It is a rich life, Sidi. I know. I have been in that position for forty-one years [Soyinka 20]

Wedding is another part which also plays a major event in Yoruba custom. Before the marriage, the bride has to pack her clothes and trinkets and has to oil herself as a bride. Next the bride will be accompanied by her close relations and will go to the bridegroom's house with a large group of musicians and dancers of the village. Soyinka explores the wedding custom of Yoruba and describes Sidi in the wedding look in the following manner, [*Sidi now enters. In one hand she holds a bundle, done up in a richly embroidered cloth: in the other the magazine. She is radiant, jeweled, lightly clothed and wears light leather-thong sandals...*] [Soyinka 57-58]. Through this it is understood that, because of culture and customs, women are oppressed by the men. Women are highly exploited by their culture. They are treated as an object in the hands of men. It is accepted that a man can have lot of wives for his pleasure and they never give importance to the feelings of women. So the major women characters like Sidi, Sadaiku are highly suppressed by the society. They are

represented as a symbol of self-marginality. Naveen Kumar observes Sidi's condition and states that:

...she never allows any traditional idea into her mind, which is advised by Lakunle... greatly supports and argues for her society and its tradition. She does not want to come out of the conventional ideologies. She does not know that he is marginalizing herself for the ideologies of the society [46].

The play *The Lion and the Jewel* explores the clash between tradition and modernity and describes Yoruba tradition. Because of these elements, people in Ilujinle are facing advantages and disadvantages in their life. And they are not in the position to show their inner emotions, feelings and wishes or desires towards their life. They are acting under the name of tradition and customs. For their personal advantages, the characters in this play expresses their inner struggle when they are using the concepts like, culture, customs and modernity. If the people of Ilujinle want to pursue something modernized, at the moment itself they will be dragged towards their culture. So to lead a peaceful life the only way for them is to obey and follow their tradition. So the concepts like discrimination, oppression, suppression, humiliation and exploitation are staged at an extreme level. In all the constituent of Soyinka's drama, the encounter between tradition and modernity is absorbed.

### References

- Kumar, Naveen. (2010), "Marginalization in the Select Plays of Wole Soyinka." Critical Responses to Commonwealth Literature, Authors Press, New Delhi, pp.41-48.
- Ngcob, Laurretta. (1988), "African Motherhood- Myth and Reality", Criticism and Ideology, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala. Pp.140-147.
- Soyinka, Wole. (1974), "Collected Plays II". Oxford University Press, London.