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Portrait of Native Culture in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

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The development of mankind from its origin and its journey towards the unknown future is marked by a number of developments in every aspect of life. Man witnessed various terrors of nature like volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, storms, glaciers and extinction of forests. The development of human life includes increasing the physical power and enrichment the mind through various discoveries and inventions. Man tried to make the various forces of nature to serve him and fulfill his purpose. When man witnesses the power of nature he understands that for survival of his race co-operation is necessary. Survival and mutual protection, we can say are the two major reasons which led man to adopt community life. Community life of man helps him innovating new cultures, arts, literature, inventions and creating history. Thus, we can say that evolution of man led to origin of different culture.

The term culture refers to elements, which are shared by people such as beliefs, values, language, norms, customs and tradition to live in a particular society. As Matsumoto says it is "shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next" (16). According to Kroeber, culture consists of

patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action. □ (Adler 14)

It is cultural system or culture which develops human's thinking, knowledge, feelings. It is culture which decides values, practices, and way of living of human being. Culture of individual is depends on group which he belongs, his potential is realized in society where he belongs. Culture can be distinguished in to different aspects. The main culture or dominant culture is the culture which is shared and accepted by the majority of the people. The culture of the small groups within the society is referred as subculture. The authentic culture which is rooted in the experiences and beliefs of everyday life of the ordinary people such as folk songs, storytelling and folk dance includes the folk culture. The elements of culture which consist of a lasting artistic or literary value, aimed for the upper and the middle class of the society is what high culture deals with. The other important form of culture is the popular culture, which refers to the everyday, simple, appealing to masses and easy to understand.

While talking particularly about African culture, is somewhat like Indian culture. There are many tribes with different cultures of their own. When British people colonized Africa, they try to vanish the local culture. As colonizers came with bible in one hand and sward in other, they were succeed in demolishing the local realign, language, and values. After the centuries

writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugie Wa Thingo and Wole Soyinka tries to bring cultural values back.

The racial group of people who, live in south-western Nigeria is known as Yorubas. According Gbagbe the population of Yoruba people in the world is “Of over forty million” (8). Yoruba is the common language spoken among these people. As talking about occupation, farming is the main occupation of Yoruba. Along with farming Yoruba people do other businesses like dyeing, weaving, smiting and trading. There are number of myths about creation of world in Yoruba’s. According to Yoruba people Olodumare is the creator of human race or mankind. They believe that Olodumare sent Orisa or Obatula to established human race on earth.

Myths plays important role in Yoruba culture. They use these myths and mythological stories to teach their pupils morals as, puritans use biblical stories as a tool to teach their children moral and keep them away from doing sins and ultimately keep them away from hell. According to Hountonji Yoruba myths “are not only theoretical explanations of the origin of things, they also serve as a guideline for the daily behavior of men as well as they command religious principles” (14). Yoruba society has preliterate culture so much of their literature is come with a word of mouth in the form of orature. It peculates from one generation to another in the form of folklore or folk literature.

Akunwande Oluwole Soyinka was born on 13th July 1934 in Ijebu Isara. He went to Ubadan for secondary education. He had his higher education from the University of Leeds. He presented his first play named “The Swamp Dwellers” during the London drama festival. Because of this play he becomes one of the leading young writers of Nigeria. As Rajkumar says:

Soon after his arrival, he acted in Bertolt Brecht’s „Caucasion Chalk Circle“, worked on his first major play A Dance of the Forests and wrote The Trials of Brother Jero, which was produced in spring 1960 at the Arts Theatre, Ibadan. Between 1960 and 1963 he not only wrote plays and acted, but formed acting company. (36)

In 1960’s folk operas become famous in world. It brings traditional themes with that of modern theatre. Civil war and political problems in Nigeria forced Soyinka to change his writing from plays, poetry to reviewer and critic. He attacks on social and political wrongs in Nigeria. Soyinka took part in the political struggle to avoid civil war but as a result of this he was arrested and sentenced two years of solitary confinement. We can find his experience of prison in his autobiography. His autobiography “The Man Died” mainly focuses on his experience in prison. In 1986 Wole Soyinka awarded with Nobel Prize for literature. Soyinka has written a number of plays like *The Jero Plays* (1960,1966), *The Road* (1963), *The Lion And The Jewel* (1966), *The Madmen and Specialists* (1971), *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (1991), *From Zia ,With Love* (1992) and *The Beatification of the Area Boy* (1995). His collections of poems are *Idanre* (1967), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), *Mandela’s Earth* (1990) and the latest collection *Samarkhand and Other Markets I have Known* (2002).

Soyinka’s works focuses on society, culture, tradition, and politics. There are many realistic scenes in his writing. There are many customs and traditions of Yoruba culture which reflects in his writing. Soyinka uses tradition and customs as a tool to express human emotion, sentiments and his sufferings.

The Lion and The Jewel is the famous play by Wole Soyinka. It was published in 1962. The play was performed at the Ibadan theatre in 1959 before its publication. The play 'The Lion and The Jewel' is based on traditional Yoruba poetry. The first part of play has influence of Charlie Chaplin's Episode.

The play is divided into three parts i.e. Morning, Noon and Night. It is the story of conflict between modernity and tradition. The title itself indicates the traditional values of Yoruba. Lion is considered as a symbol of greatness in all over Africa and Jewel is valued among women. It is precious thing for women. In the play Baroka is referred as Lion and Sidi symbolized Jewel.

In this play Soyinka uses his major characters as a representation of society. 'Baroka', who is village bale (i.e. Head), his wife 'Sadiku' and heroine 'Sidi' stands for Yoruba culture while on the other hand 'Lukunle', who is school teacher stands for modernity. The play is successful representation of Yoruba heritage and culture. Play emphasizes on tribal traditions and customs. When Lukunle puts proposal of marriage in front of Sidi, she asks bribe price to prove her virginity.

SIDI. I shall marry you today, next week Or any day you name. But my bride price must first be paid... Lakunle, I must have the full bride -price. Will you make A laughing stock? ... Sidi will say I was no virgin that I was forced to sell my shame. And marry you without a price. (CPH 9)

Above conversation between Lukunle and Sidi signifies the importance of bribe or dowry system in Yoruba culture. Sidi signifies her stand behind bribe price. Soyinka focuses on another Yoruba custom in this play. When Sadiku, wife of Baroka puts proposal of marriage to Sidi she says:

SADIKU. 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 honour of being the senior wife of the new Bale. (20)

In Yoruba society the last wife bale (i.e. of head of tribe) becomes or honored as senior wife of his successor who, usually becomes his eldest son. There is another tradition glimpse in this scene. It is Sadiku who puts marriage proposal in front of Sidi it is like wife in search of another woman for her husband. Polygamy or having more wives is the honored thing in Yoruba society. In 11th and 12th century due to wars between tribes many women become widows. The remaining men in tribe used to marry with those widows to keep them safe. Now the time and situation has changed but the custom of polygamy remains same. For Broka It becomes matter of pride.

Songs plays very crucial role in plays of Soyinka. Edward Jones mentions that "Soyinka uses mime, songs, and dance to make an easy transition from the present into recent history, and this device gives depth to the play" (54). In The 'Lion and The Jewel' Soyinka uses song to show joyful mood of girls after seeing Lagos based photographer.

[bending down over Lakunle who has been seated forcible On the platform]:

*You are dressed like him
You look like him
You speak his tounge*

*You think like him
You're just as clumsy
In Your Lagos ways-
You'll do for him. (14)*

Marriage is an important event in the Yoruba Society in which singing, dancing makes it more colourful and cherishable. It carries number of ceremonies expose materialization in marriage.

The Lion and The Jewel is the conflict between two cultures i.e. between traditional African culture and modern western culture. Lukunle represents modernity and Sidi and Baroka represents traditionalism. Soyinka has affection towards native Yoruba culture. We can it through decision of Sidi to marry with Baroka instead of Lukunle. Thus, the play highlights on many social, cultural issues of society.

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