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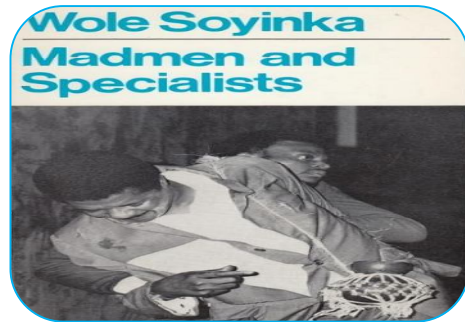
THE EROSION OF HUMANITY REFLECTED IN 'MADMEN AND SPECIALISTS' BY WOLE SOYINKA

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ABSTRACT:

*This paper highlights the erosion of humanity in a well organize highly controlled authoritarian society in postcolonial literature and the traditional ways, especially of African literature, with special reference to Wole Soyinka's play **Madman and Specialists**. The play reveals Wole Soyinka's obsession with evil within man and, with war and violence as its manifestations throughout man's history. Soyinka suggests that permanence of evil is revealed throughout the history of mankind from remote past through the contemporary present to the future. As it was in the beginning, so it is now, and it will be even in the future. For Soyinka the first act of violence is the most crucial because it leads to the insatiable lust for power which encourages the dictators to perpetrate more and more crimes against humanity. The forces of tyranny, thus, crush the individual voices of truth. It is the tragedy in which the good is wiped off by the evil of power. The present research paper deals with how the evils of dictatorship stand most powerfully exposed through the dictators efforts to silence the voice of truth.*



KEYWORDS: Evil, humanity, power, dictatorship, truth.

INTRODUCTION

Madman and Specialists (1970) was written in the year following the dramatist turn of two years solitary confinement during Nigeria-Biafra war, for the sympathies with Biafra. The brutality with the military dictator appears to confirm for him once more that man is destiny to violence; and that the future of mankind is essential a journey from civilization to barbarism.

The play is designed specifically to expose the creed of absolute power on the ideological level. Dr. Bero represents absolute military power when the old man symbolizes the intellectual's resistance to it as the seeker after truth. Action is presented only in the form of conflict of ideas between the two. There is, hence, little action in the traditional sense. Action is limited to Dr. Bero, his father -

the old man, his sister- Si-Bero, two old women- Iya Mate and Iya Agba, and four mendicants- Aafaa, Goyi, Cripple and Blindman. The central even in the play is Dr. Bero's return from war- a specialist doctor, dedicated to the vocation of curing the suffering humanity, now transformed into a tyrant enjoying absolute control over common humanity through his methods of torture, harassment and barbarous killing. It leads to

Si-Bero's disillusionment as she had kept up her brother's medical vocation by working scrupulously to collect rare medicinal herbs under the wise guidance of the old women. Dr.Bero's father-the old man who had joined war after his son to resist his son's dictatorship had struggled to help the disabled patients as the head of 'the Rehabilitation Centre' by encouraging them to think. Dr.Bero plans for his elimination, but orders the mendicants to carry him secretly as a prisoner to his own house so that he may deal with him personally. On the day of his return, he argues with the old man in favour of his own role as tyrant, but his quick to kill him when he finds oldman's exposure of tyranny too real to bear. The old women also withdraw their age-old knowledge from Dr.Bero so that he may not misuse it for poisoning patients, by burning the store of herbs. The forces of tyranny, thus, crush the individual voices of truth. It is the tragedy in which the good is wiped off by the evil of power.

Soyinka tries to explore into the evil of absolute power through the hero in the play. Dr.Bero is a study in the psychology of a tyrant. The choice of Dr.Bero as the most suitable person for heading the Army after the sudden death of the head of the 'Intelligence Section' transforms the man from a doctor in the Medical Corps to a controlling dictator. It is ironic that Dr.Bero believes himself ideologically to be a dutiful servant of his country practicing brutal methods of control only for the sake of the country. He believes himself to be chosen for the difficult task of leading a nation by the common humanity. He sees himself in the image of a noble patriot sacrificing his private interest and perceives for the sake of the community. In the speech of The Blindman, Soyinka achieves the expression to the ideology of comprehensive justification offered by dictators in all fields throughout history all over the world. He parallels military dictator with racialists on the one hand, and with historical colonizers and economic exploiters on the other. The dictators always glorify their role as leaders by imagining themselves as protectors of their own people. For instance, The Blindman argues in his role as a tyrant 'What though the wind change is blowing over this entire continent, our principles tradition- yes, must be maintained for we are threatened'.

But Soyinka contrasts the ideological justification offered by tyrants with their actual practice to explore the myth. Dr.Bero regards mendicants, for instance, employed by him to keep watch over the old man, as 'Sub mental apes'. The mendicants, as men disabled by war and struggling for a livelihood by working for the dictator, are full of bitter memories of war. While trying to pass time before Si-Bero's house under the pretence and waiting to get food from her they enact the horrible scenes of torture. The poor victims are held at the point of the gun and they compelled to praise the tyrants for their gentleness and kindness, before the victims are shocked. The dead bodies are thrown mercilessly to be eaten by vultures. The scenes of trial are hopeless. The so-called criminals are not a loved to argue for themselves but are declared guilty directly. Interestingly, such trials are conveniently interpreted as evidence of the tyrant's sense of impartial justice.

The scene of needle torture impersonated by the mendicants deepens the sense of hypocrisy and the barbarous lust for power among the dictators. They glorify themselves as 'seeker after truth' and regard tortures with cruel emotionlessness as essential method of forcing truths out of the victims. They describe themselves as 'Specialists' and 'lovers' of truth. Though the victim is prevented from satisfying basic human need like those of thirst and toilet, the dictator indulges in a sense of humanity.

The reference to cutting of roots, as a step to cleaning herbs while speaking Si-bero reminds the mendicants of the terrible methods of 'treating' patients in the hospitals during war. Under the pretence of healing the broken parts of the body, the tyrants advise amputation. If the patient groans, he is silenced brutally by cutting his vocal cords as is done with dogs.

In humanity takes the form of absence of concern for human relationships in the case of dictators, Dr.Bero's holdness of response to his sister joy for his return shocks by contrast. Si-Bero's dedication to medical vocation as a means of serving humanity contrasts with his specialist's acknowledgement that the herbs and the laboratory as well as the surgery are equally useful in his new vocation as a tyrant. He prevents her from meeting the oldman and describing him as a dangerous patient. When she inclines to be disobedient for the sake of her father and the old women, he doesn't hesitate even to threaten her. The old women represent the age old wisdom and faith in the principle of life. Dr.Bero regards them to be insignificant and useless creature worthy to be 'thrown out' of the

house. As a dictator, he has black-mailed Mendicant to be served them by tempting them with money and promise of safety. When Aafaa tries to assert his freedom of choice to decide whether to obey the dictator, Dr. Bero mercilessly silences him by cutting him across the face with his swagger stick.

Dr. Bero's deterioration is skillfully revealed by Soyinka through his changing attitude to cannibalism. He had vomited at the first reference to the possibility of eating human flesh suggested by old man in his meeting with war officers. But he has now turned into a regular canimar. He brings dead bodies to home to be used as, food while returning from war. The old priest is delighted for Dr. Bero's returned but has baffled by Bero's recommendation to eat human flesh because "It's quite delicious". Bero has conquered his weakness of mind by training himself to be a hardened dictator through a careful practice of eating human flesh.

The evils of dictatorship stand most powerfully exposed through the dictators efforts to silence the voice of truth. The play is the tragedy of the old man, 'seeker of truth'. The conflict between the old man and Dr. Bero is the conflict between good and evil, truth and hypocrisy, creative and destructive forces of life. The old man stands for the voice of conscience – the sense of guilt – within Dr. Bero, the tyrant. He desires to expose the illusion of absolute power of his son, and bringing back, though remotely possible, to the part of good. He tries to activate the process of self realization and self-knowledge within Dr. Bero, and save him from the clutches of the evil of power. He is the last vestige of the humanness within the tyrant, as is found by his act of help in the sense that he saves his father from ignoring of being cut into pieces and from being hung across the tree in the most humiliating fashion, by bringing him secretly to the house.

The old man is a rebel against all kinds of dictatorship. He believes in the power of intellect and it's essential function to be search for truth on the part of a human being. The rule of terror aims at suppressing man's power to think as an individual and turning the mass into obedient group of animals. The old man is an intellectual who dedicates himself selflessly to the difficult task of encouraging the common humanity to think during the rule of a tyrant in the 'Rehabilitation Centre' for the patient's disabled in war. He struggles to make the Blindman see, to see the truth on the intellectual level in spite of his physical blindness caused by war. He advises the patients to subject even the experience of being bitten by the bugs into the subject for thought. Blindman courts the old man saying "Even if you have nothing left but your vermin discriminate between one bug and the next.

The old man props into the methods of torture used by the dictators in general, but being now practiced on himself during his first meeting with the son Dr. Bero pretends to be willing to allow a paper and a cigarette most generously to the old man while ordering earlier for the oldman's money and pipe to be taken away from him. But the old man points out how the dictator satisfy themselves that they allow the prisoner the right to chose, when it is only " a redundant self-deceptive notion".

The old man's creed of "As" is Soyinka's most satirical way of redialing the ideological illusion of the tyrants. It is the parody of the religion expected to justify the good and prevent the evil. "As" is the name discovered by the old man for the philosophy of the evil of the power which underlies the thinking and practice of the dictators. At the beginning of the second part, Aafaa experiments in a light mood with the exercise of finding term to express the philosophy of "As". The names he selects are aimed at emphasizing the perverted nature of the idealogy of power. The names include in an ironically alphabetical order the terms such as- Acceptance, Blindness, Contentment, Divinity and Destiny, Epilepsy, Farts and Godhead. They suggest have the common humanity enforced into total acceptance of tyranny through making them blind to reality and hypnotizing them with the belief of being contented while the dictators regard themselves as divine powers appointed to lead the common people to their destiny. Man has consistently accepted blindly and contentedly a destiny i.e. condition by the fitful and capricious decisions of individuals that he has helped to elevate to imagine role of divinity. According to Johathan Peter's "Oldman plays on the Foibles of so called them men of power and successfully demonstrates the depths of their inhumanity to them".

The so called religious creed of 'As' is significantly expressed in the rhythmic chant supposed to be offered as a part of worship of 'As' and frequently repeated in the second part –

Even as it was
So shall it be
Even as it was
So shall it be
Even as it was

At the beginning of the act Soyinka suggests that permanence of evil is revealed throughout the history of mankind from remote past through the contemporary present to the future. As it was in the beginning, so it is now, and it will be even in the future. For Soyinka the first act of violence is the most crucial because it leads to the insatiable lust for power which encourages the dictators to perpetrate more and more crimes against humanity. The old man explains it thus, while prophesying that Bero will not hesitate even to kill his own father – “Once you begin there is no stopping..... For those who want to step beyond, there is always one further step.” “As” marks that most crucial step of “Beginning” both grammatically and spiritually.

The tyranny faces the most serious threat of exposure from the intellectuals, the men of vision and insight who dare to question its theory and challenge its practices. Hence, such men are always the victims of the most inhuman tortures on behalf of the tyrants. In the words of the oldman, they are considered as the cyst in all kind of tyrannical systems from the political, economic, scientific, metaphysic, recreative, ethical and sociological fields in the nation. According to him, “As is and the system is its mainstay though it was a hundred masks and thousand out to the world forms.

Those who are dedicated and hence and have argue question, reject or insist, are treated as objects in the laboratory of death, as the victims of experiments on whom the specialists in Absolute Power ‘Practice’ their barbarous methods of torture. The dictators torture the intellectual under the illusion of being impartial judges with good conations. As Aafaa clarifies the inhuman tortures for the intellectual are common in both the fields of religion and politics.

Soyinka projects the totality of Barbarism practiced on intellectual rebels, through metaphors to describe the extremely sinnical attitude of the dictators towards them. Such man is regarded as a “HOLE IN THE ZERO OF NOTHING”. He is like a hole that suggests his role as the breaker of the world of illusion – a world which is only “A zero and a nothing”. The genuine attempts of the individual rebel to declare his protest against the ruler is regarded as a useless act which is compared with the act of a dog daring to raise his “hind quarters” and “cast the scent” of his “ Existence on the lamp – past of Destiny”.

Dr.Bero’s anxiety to understand the nature of the old man’s creed of ‘As’ reflects his inability to search for truth on the intellectual level. Ironically, he expects the creed of ‘As’ to be much more profound than it really is. The oldman simply demonstrates the utter barrenness of their cult of power by giving it an equally batten motto. But the specialists are incapable of realizing the meaninglessness of their own cult of power. As Jonarchan Peter interprets “The inconclusiveness of the creed symbolizes the ultimate meaninglessness of their struggle for power. The specialists search in vain for a vindication of their action and for their inaction with reference to unfulfilled development schemes, as well as, their atrocious acts in the form of executions and torture.

The last scene shows old man in the role of a specialist practising his methods of torture on an intellectual – a victim of a dictator’s fury because of his crime to oppose. The cripple enacts the role of the intellectual, he challenges the specialist symbolically through his calm yet firm answer, “I has a question”. Ironically, he is blamed as a “cyst” “splind” in ‘The Arrow of Arrogance’ ‘The Dog in dogma’ ‘Tick of a Heretic’ ‘The Mock of Democracy’ ‘The Mar of Marxism’ ‘A Fick of the Fanatic’. Soyinka reveals how dictator’s exploit, the social, political, economic, religious and cultural customs to fulfill their lust for power and use intellectuals as a means for that end. The most barbarous nature of tortures practiced by the so called socialists stands fully exposed in the old man’s role as a surgeon ready to cut open the victims chest in order to find where his ‘soul’ is and “what makes a heretic tick.

The play reaches its tragic climax in the death of the old man. Dr.Bero kills him in his pistol. The old man’s analysis of the hypocritic ideology and practice of the tyrants is proved tobe correct as is seen in Dr.Bero’s ruthless murder of his intellectual father. It is significant that old man falls dead on the

same operation table on which he had put the cripple in the scene of the enactment of torture. Most tragically, the old man impersonating the tyrant is himself changed into the victim of the tyrant. Dr. Bero achieves absolute control through ruthless elimination of old man. The old man's murder is accompanied by the burning of the store of valuable medicinal herbs collected by Si-Bero under the guidance of Iya Agba and Iya Mate. The tyranny is grimly successful. The old man's death marks the completion of the process of dehumanization of Dr. Bero. It also reestablishes evil as the permanent destiny of mankind. Soyinka closes the play rightly on the note of joy, on the part of the mendicants themselves the victims of tyranny-singing the song of 'As' -

As it was
So it is now
So even it shall be

Elderly Jones regards the play to be almost pessimistic because "What little hope there is? In the ability of humanity to trial is barred under the physical realities of the repressive regime.

The otherwise pessimistic vision of Soyinka carries an element of Optimism in it. He prophesies the victories of intellectuals over tyrants through his image of an intellectual As octopus. Common people are scared of death but the intellectuals defy death. Dr. Bero reminds the old man of his power to put him to horrible death of different types. But old man reveals the meaninglessness of Dr. Bero's pride as a killer by pointing out now truth cannot be defeated though body may be destroyed. He tells his son "Don't you know yet what I am?" - Octopus, Plenty of reach but nothing to seize on, I recreate my tentacles, so cut away." If old man represents man's intellectual ability to resist tyranny the old woman represents man's spiritual power to resist it. Iya Agba explores Bero's threat to punish the women when she points out "what will you step on young fool even on the road to" damnation a man must rest his food somewhere". She is successful in preventing him from putting herbs to evil uses when she puts the store on fire.

The title of the play 'Madmen and Specialist' interprets symbolically Soyinka's views about tyrants' intellectuals' rebels and common humanity - the three important factors involved in the rule of tyranny. 'Specialist' is a term which describes Dr. Bero. He was originally a specialist from the field of medicine - a dedicated torture and the expert in surgery who used his medical knowledge for the service of common humanity. His transformation into a military dictator during war changes into a cannibalist - a killer and an exploiter gloating over his power to control lives. His clinically dispassionate tortures continue to make him a 'specialist' but to the difference his specialist in the gift of life now turns into a specialist who distributes death. The title thus emphasizes the bitter irony involved in the self-glorifying ideology and practice of the dictators. Removal of the rebels is accomplished with a specialist skill and is compared with removal of cyst to do the body by a surgeon.

'Madmen' is a term discovered by Soyinka to describe among other, the psychology of the tyrants who boast of being with the lust for power. He is also obsessed with the fear of the intellectual who offer resistance to his absolute power. It is illustrated by Dr. Bero's neurotic anxiety to know the purpose of old man's creed of 'As' by his persistently repetitive enquiry, persistently why 'As?' Iya Agba rightly sees Dr. Bero and not old man to be insane. Dr. Bero's sadistic pleasure in eating human flesh emphasizes perfectly his insanity.

The common humanity is also regarded as 'Mad' by Soyinka in their foolish worship of the dictators. The mendicants who represent it in the play are significantly shown as invalids. Blindman symbolizes the people's failure to see the truth about tyrants. The cripple lameness and Goyi's body are physical parallels for mental deformity into which tyranny forces the common people. Afaa is the only man who shows some sign of individuality although Dr. Bero is quick to punish him for it. The mendicants are reduced to blind obedience of animals through systematic methods of torture. They are prevented from making use of their thinking power and are traitor like animals to be pre-occupied only with their physical needs when they enact through memory the needle scene of torture. Si-Bero asks

them, "Are you mad" what appears to be madness for the innocent women is the only condition allowed to the common people by the dictators.

Dr. Bero regards common people as "underdogs" and transforms them at his will into watchdog". In spite of old man's efforts at the Rehabilitation Centre for disabled to train the patients to think, they cannot understand the vital importance of his efforts. They regard old man to be "insane" when they are with the old man and feel of being cured of insanity as obedient servants of Dr. Bero. According to Peter's "Their acceptance of suffering and their designed passivity, as the human sacrificial victims of causes exposed by disdainful, self-indulgent readers who become the capricious God of their destiny are in keeping with Soyinka's view of Gullible humanity.

The death of old man is celebrated by the mendicants- the blind servants of tyranny instead of being mourned because they are themselves dehumanized by the dehumanized dictators.

The barbarous nature of the tyrants is clarified further by the way in which old man is treated. He is declared to be 'insane' because of his proposal to the authorities to make cannibalism legal, because of his creed of 'As' and because of his training to the disabled patients to make them think. Dr. Bero prevents Si-Bero from meeting her father because he has gone dangerously insane. The play shows how it is Dr. Bero himself who suffers from insanity and has grown dangerous. Soyinka, thus, makes it clear how tyrants turned some people into victims of insanity by using humanity to satisfy their own insane lust for power.

CONCLUSION:

Soyinka experiences with technique in order to keep up the intellectual nature of his theme. The mendicants, for instance, are shown on the stage through most action of the play, as a chorus of as commentators as active participants in their own rights and also as actors. As actors, they impersonate since remote in time and place so as to achieve satisfactory analysis of the dictators' ideology and practice on behalf of the dramatist. The indefinite setting of the play indicates that Soyinka does not confine the play either to Nigeria or to Nigerian war. It stands for evil so frequent in the history of mankind.

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