

Vol 5 Issue 4 Jan 2016

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

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SATIRE ON FEMALE CHARACTERS IN WOLE SOYINKA'S PLAYS : A DANCE OF A FOREST AND OPERA WONYOSI



Dete Sachin Sahebrao

ABSTRACT

Through literature writer presents various approaches towards society or human being, such as humanistic, realistic, religious, didactic etc. Wole Soyinka as a South African dramatist also presents above approaches through his writings. He presents reality as it is and also wishes to improve situation or alter dire reality of contemporary African society. And he does very well through various female characters in his dramas such as Sidi, Iyaloja and Sadiku, the Rolas and the Madam Tortoise, De Madams and the bevy of prostitutes etc. In this research paper female characters are taken for the purpose of study from A Dance of the Forests and Opera Wonyosi such as Rola (Madam Tortoise) and Madam Cecilia Anikura, Sukie and Lucy respectively.

KEYWORDS: humanistic, society, Mothers of Brides'.

INTRODUCTION

Soyinka's description of women in his works into three major groups: The foolish Virgins – Sidi in The Lion and the Jewel and the beautiful submissive Virgin in Death and the King's Horseman come under this group; 'Mothers of Brides' – characters such as Iyaloja and Sadiku re-echo here; and the third group is "The Queen Bees". The Queen Bees is the group to which the femme fatale image in Soyinka's work belongs. And this is the group he makes the object of his satirical attack – the Rolas and the Madam Tortoise of A Dance of the Forests and most especially the De Madams and the bevy of prostitutes in Opera Wonyosi.

In his *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka presents Rola as an example of a dangerous woman in the human community. This play which deals with both the present and past lives of the characters presents Rola in the present as a courtesan and Rola of the past – Madame Tortoise – the queen in Mata Kharibu's court as a notorious whore. In both existences she has been a dreadful woman. She has regained the name by which they knew her centuries before – "MADAM TORTOISE". In her current existence, she repudiates the extended family business sickens me. Let everybody lead their own lives". Obaneji observes that the "family business" never used to be a problem in those days. But Rola insists: "It is now", and really finds family hospitality an ennumbrance.

The whole sentimentality cloys in my face. That is why I fled. The whole town reeks of it... The gathering of the tribes! Do you know how many old and forgotten relations came to celebrate?

Besides her disregard for the African family system. She has a penchant for wealthy male lovers. She would rather prefer to die making love to one of her men than to die, for example, in a road accident. In spite of her relationship with men, she nevertheless, has no regard for them, including her elders. In an argument between her and Obaneji, her brazen nature is uncompromisingly exposed. Demoke tries to tell a story to mellow down the quarrelsome two, but Rola shouts him down: "Shut up. It is he who ought to tell us a story". Adenebi is surprised: "Really, this is too much. A lady shouldn't.... As the scene progresses, more of Rola's evil nature is being revealed. Obaneji insinuates that graveyards are filled with Rola's numerous lovers and that she looks like "the type who would drive men to madness and self destruction". True to the situation, two men have already died in their attempt to possess Rola's love. Utterly unsympathetic with the situation, she mocks: "I regret nothing. They were fools, fools, to think they were something better than ...the other men. My other men". Devoid of shame she refuses to wallow in self-disgust, "I was n't made the way you think women are". She is clearly exposed through dialogues between Obaneji and Rola.

ADENEBI : Men ! Some of them were hardly grown up. We heard you liked them young, really young.

ROLA : I regret nothing. You men are conceited fools. Nothing was ever done on my account, Nothing. What you do is boost yourselves all the time. By every action. When that one killed the other, was it on my account? When he killed himself, could he claim that he did it for me? He was only big with himself, so leave me out of it.

ADENEBI : I suppose you didn't really run merely because you were beset by your relations. They simply didn't, leave you room to entertain your lovers. And this could have been a profitable season. A generous season.

ROLA : Draw your filthy conclusions... I am wealthy, and I know where my wealth came from.

ADENEBI : Oh yes, you ruined countless, Young and old. Old, peaceful ones who had never even set eyes on you: who simply did not know what their son was up to ; didn't know he was draining the home away-for you.

ROLA : Fool ! What is it to me ? When your business men ruin the lesser ones, do you go crying for them ? I also have no pity for the one who invested foolishly. Investors, that is all they ever were- to me.

This shows that Rola at the pinnacle of her profession as a hardened prostitute. She lacks shame and treats her customers with disrespect. Her body is an investment house where the "investors" never reap profit but loss all the time.

In part two of *A Dance of a Forests*, Rola is examined by the satirist as Madame Tortoise of the past and is presented as being cunning. The choice of her name is of interest as she indeed resembles

the legendary West African folkloric trickster- the tortoise . Soyinka's Madame Tortoise is indeed a real tortoise. She is not only full of tricks, but she is also completely "unsexed". The Dead Woman excludes her from womanhood: " I am certain she had no womb, but I think it was a woman".In this section of the play, she is Mata Kharibu 's queen , surrounded in splendour but cruel in her coquetry. In A Dance of the Forests, the old themes of women'sdeception, vanity , domination and cuckoldry find expression in the character of Madame Tortoise. Just like she jilted her farmer husband , she presently planning to jilt Mata Kharibu worse still , the man she wants this time is the her husband's purporeted enemy , Warrior.

In the portrayal of Rola and Madame Tortoise in the play women's sensuality a perennial topic of satire is dealt with details by Soyinka.

The next play of Soyinka , which satirises the uncanny nature of women, is Opera Wonyosi . In the play, Soyinka brings us face to face on caricatures. What we see is for real, a parade of prostitutes and adulterous women. In prostitution, the author is not condemning mere lust or sexual promiscuity but the conversion of wanton sex drives into a commodity that can be exchanged for political, social and economic adavantage. Madam Cecilia Anikura, better known as De Madam is the first major victim of Soyinka's satire in Opera Wonyosi . In his introduction Anikura refers to her as , "my consort and right hand-man –and woman rolled in one. Word " consort " refers if De Madam is Anikura's wife or pass time woman in the company of his criminal establishment – school or beggars . As the play progresses, it is discovered that De Madam , in her craze for illegal business venture, has established the Play-Boy Club , a notorious whore- house in Bangui and made herself the proprietress. Soyinka caricatures her as a mother who condones and encourages the daughter's waywardness.

The satirist points out that there are basic analogies between the prostitutes and the criminal. They are both unproductive and threfore antisocial .The other notorious prostitutes in the play are Sukie and Lucy. Their role is that of decoration and for emphasis on the useless trade going on around the brothel. Prostitution in the play reveals the feminine form of vagrancy and the absence of marality in the individual. In line with satire's aim , Soyinka ridicules bad women and the abuse of sex to effect a change. Satire is a form of appeal and the playwright in a way is appealing to the women-folk to dread what is criminally and socially intolerable in society.

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