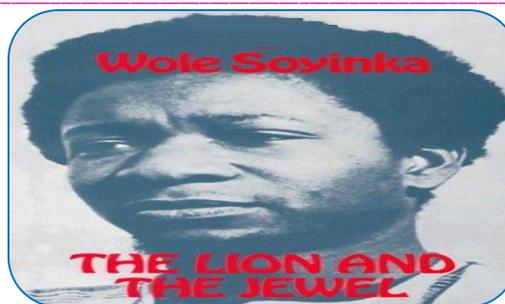




CONFLICT BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN WOLE SOYINKA, "THE LION AND THE JEWEL"

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ABSTRACT:

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian Playwright, Poet and Essayist. He was awarded the 1980 Nobel Prize in literature, the first African to be honored in that category. A deep chasm divided the African life and the materialistic modern life, which the Africans have assimilated. In Wole Soyinka's, 'The Lion and the Jewel,' Baroka the lion fights with modern Lakunle over the right to marry Sidi. The conflict between modernity and tradition has been clearly delineated through the European tongue. It presents the conflict between Baroka the lion and Lakunle, the school master. The most prominent theme of this story is the rapid modernization of Africa, coupled with the rapid evangelistic of the population. Modernity is always for the reformation of the world oddities and misconceptions. Lakunle is portrayed as the civilized antithesis of Baroka and unilaterally attempts to modernize the community and change its social conventions for no reason other than the fact that he can. There is a clear cut clash between tradition and modernity. Lakunle, the village schoolmaster stands for modernity, westernization, newness and progress. Sidi stands for tradition and beauty and Baroka stands for power, strength, tradition and cunningness. It presents the conflict between Baroka the lion and Lakunle, the school master.

KEYWORDS: Nigerian Playwright, Poet and Essayist.

INTRODUCTION:

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian Playwright, Poet and Essayist. He was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in literature, the first African to be honored in that category. African literature has drawn much attention from different parts of the world. The African societies were in deep identity crisis. A deep chasm divided the African life and the materialistic modern life, which the Africans have assimilated.

In Wole Soyinka's, 'The Lion and the Jewel,' Baroka the lion fights with modern Lakunle over the right to marry Sidi. The conflict between modernity and tradition has been clearly delineated through the European tongue - Lakunle is portrayed as the civilized antithesis of Baroka and unilaterally attempts to modernize the community and change its social conventions for no reason other than the fact that he can. There is a clear cut clash between tradition and modernity. Lakunle, the village schoolmaster stands for modernity, westernization, newness and progress. Sidi stands for tradition and beauty and Baroka stands for power, strength, tradition and cunningness. It presents the conflict between Baroka the lion and Lakunle, the village school master.

The most prominent theme of this story is the rapid modernization of Africa, coupled with the rapid evangelisation of the population. This has driven a wedge between the traditionalistic who seek to nullify the changes done in the name of progress due to vested interests or simply not liking the result of progress, and the modernists who want to seek the last of outdated traditional beliefs at all cost.

The lion and the Jewel develop a meaning almost classical in its validity with the juxtaposition of two set of values creating vital domestic conflicts. Soyinka's preoccupations has always been with

symbols signifying more than what the surface provides the Lion and the Jewel has the genuine flavor of African village life at the precise stage at which the concept of progress begins to undergo a radical change.

Lakunle is dressed in an old style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, cleaned but not ironed, obviously a size or too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waist coat. He wears three inch bottom trousers, and blanco-white tennis shoes. This shows the influence of westernization among the Africans who are growing up. Comparatively Sidi an unlettered village nymph is dressed in a traditional village dress. Around her is wrapped the familiar broad cloth which is folded just above her breast leaving the shoulders bare. She feels all the more amused when Lakunle dodges the issue in the name of modernism. He would like her to become fashionable in dress, and not in a way she carries herself. The village people like Sidi, don't want to change themselves and also it is too much to expect of men women to understand the significance of great truth. The play shows that he is as much modernized as it is possible for a Nigerian to be. When Lakunle explains to her the scientific truth that women has lighter brain than men, and that they are considered to be the weaker sex, she explodes

The weaker sex is it? It is a weaker bread who bounds the yam or bends all day to plant the millet with a child strapped on her back?

Lakunle's words show a modern man's thinking of a modern woman. Baroka had the same thinking about women, but he doesn't explain this is his voice and his action catches this very easily to gain victory against Sidiku and Sidi.

Modernity is always for the reformation of the world oddities and misconceptions. Sidi is the peak point for the conflict of tradition and modernity. She mostly wants to stick on to tradition for some time and something. She wants to change her mind, she is however serious when he mentions marriage and is willing, provided he honors the costume of paying bride price. She feels all the more amused when he dodges the issue in the name of modernism.

Sidi does not understand what other possible reasons a man could have for seeking a wife. He fails to grasp how modernism holds even child bearing as a matter of contempt on the part of a wife. He wants to give equal status to the women as it is done in the western world. He begins to have romance in a civilized way and wishes Sidi to become a modern wife and explains -

When we are wed, you shall not walk or sit tethered, as it were, to my direct heels together we shall sit at table, not on floor, like civilized beings.

Lakunle dreams the image of an ideal modern married couple -

I want to walk beside you in the streets side by side and arm in arm, just like the lagos couple. I have seen high-heeled shoes for the lady, red paint on her lips, and her hair is stretched like a magazine photo.

This passage implies contempt for the shallow brain which defines modernism in terms of what is breakable. He speaks enthusiastically of the dignity of womanhood, of the equality between husband and wife and of the sacredness of monogamy. He is torch bearer of modernity in his community.

Next Baroka, the deep-rooted representative of tradition, is the other side of the play. He strongly wields any external force that comes forth to project his traditional bound characteristics all through the play. Baroka the cunning old fox is quit convincing throughout in his stealthy warfare against modernism, and in the firm but sly methods adopted to perpetuate polygamy. The play suggests that Baroka is foxlike rather than a fox by all means under a well contrived veil of a lion's hide. Baroka has many nicknames and titles which throw light on his character. He is a lion, a fox of the undergrowth, the panther of trees and living God among men. He has the strength and courage of the lion and also the cunningness of the fox. He opposes the introductions of modern ideas and preserves them by his traditional privileges and tyrannical powers.

When Sidi earns fame through the magazine photography, he gets jealous of her and contrives to have Sidi and add her to his harem. This shows that he is mean by nature for he cannot stomach anyone touching the boundaries of fame.

Sidi with a bent to ridicule abuses and teases Baroka and comes to him at the end of the play. In one of her attempts to humble him she says that Lakunle speaks and admires her just the same as Baroka seems to be shaming before her. This may be the hint of her interest in Lakunle in her heart of heart. Baroka becomes restless and scorns at repeated re-entries of modernity through Lakunle's exposition and the study becomes regular evolutionary growth of his own person.

Lakunle tries his best to be the prophet of his own conceptions. Though there seems not to any perspicuous triumph by his consolidated efforts he has stood strongly to his promises. All through the play he aspires that Sidi should be his spouse with the flavor of modernity with which she herself is in love.

Sidi is infatuated towards the photographs of her image on the stamps, which is a symbol of modernity. She has an everlonging heart to get all that she aspires. She opts for Baroka and Lakunle empathizes with Sidi and wants to welcome her with wide spread arms. Baroka is not an admirable figure in this play for he always cajoles everyone at his disposal whatever the victory he gets. It has become only through the backdrop of modernity.

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