

Tradition and Modernity at Crossroads: A Study of Wole Soyinka's "The Lion and the Jewel"

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Abstract

The play "The Lion and Jewel" is written by Wole Soyinka He is Nigerian writer. He emphasises the African Yoruba culture. He follows Yoruba tradition in the play "The Lion and Jewel". Yoruba Land is in the South western Nigeria and adjoining parts of Benin and Togo. " The Lion and the Jewel" portrays the tradition and modernity at crossroads. The play sets in the village of Ilunjunle.where the younger generation follow the modern trend and the old are rooted in their own tradition. The old generation is not interested in following the colonisers culture.

Key Words: Tradition, Modern ,Culture, Lion, Jewel.

Wole Soyinka's works are mostly based on culture, politics, and tradition. It extends the social realities. His work "The Lion and Jewel" depicts the culture of Yoruba. In this play the author symbolizes the characters Baroka as Lion ,and Sidi as Jewel. Boroka was the chief of the village Ilunjunle. He was around sixty two. He married many women and was a wrestler, by using the power of his position he made use of women. He was considered as Lion in the play. He was not willing to accept the modern technology to arrive in the village. Lakunle, who loved Sidi ,the Virgin in the village could not marry her because he was unable to pay the bride price. He wanted to improve the village through modernization. He accepted the railroad system. He was a teacher in the village and taught his students also to be modern. He was against the old traditional culture.

Sidi was the youngest and beautiful girl and Lakunle the modernist falls in love with Sidi. He courts her in the westernized way, but is not ready to pay the bride price. He denies to pay the bride price as part of his modern thinking. He refuses and justifies his view as, “To pay the price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall” (897). But Sidi is adamant in her way of thinking in receiving the bride price, she reveals to him that she refuses to marry him just because he is not ready to pay the bride price, she did not want to be a “cheap bowl for the village to spit” (896). On his repeated proposals she tells him,

Sidi : 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 first be paid
 But I tell you, Luknel, I must have
 The full bride price, will you make me
 A laughing – stock ? well, do as you please. (896)

The play wright insists upon women who were fickle –minded in the play. Both Baroka and Lakunle want to get the hand of Sidi. This confronts tradition and modernity. Sidi wants to follow her own tradition at any cost. She was cheated by Borako. He informed her that she was equal to him and he was happy with his previous wives. He flatters her and finally seduces her. Luknel wanted to show his modernization by marrying Sidi even though she was seduced by Borako. But Sidi who is rooted in the traditional way of living was not ready.

The play conveys the Yoruba culture and tradition. Yoruba culture consists of cultural philosophy, religion and folk tales. The Yoruba people are good at weaving, embroidering etc. They have prominent place for sculptors, and famous for their terra cotta works through out the twelfth and fourteenth century.

The entire story brings out the conflict between Baroka and Lakunle for Sidi’s hand in marriage. This shows the conflict between the tradition and modernity. Lakunle follows the western culture and Baroka follows the Yoruba tradition. The villagers of Ilunjinle followed the old generations restrictions and refuses. They were not literate and not willing to accept the modernization. They have difference in their communication, dialects. There is a difference in generation gap. The old age people believe in old tradition and rules. They impose it to the

younger generation to follow. But the younger generation are attracted by the western culture. Here Lakunle is interested in western culture . The younger generation accepted the modern technology. They believe in western ideas and modernity without understanding. The elder generation believe that the modern ideas are a threat to their authority.

In this play “The Lion and the Jewel” the villagers were against the European innovation. The African society followed old traditional culture that the bride price was honoured to the bride. So Sidi waiting for the bride price.

The main theme of the play is Tradition verses Modernity. Soyinka declares the custom of Yoruba, bride price, polygamy etc. The Yoruba people follows the polygamy custom to marry more than one wife. Baroka wants to marry Sidi. It was also this tradition to search new wife for her husband. So Sadiku the first wife of Baroka advised Sidi to marry her husband. Baroka had many wives being old he wished to marry young girl Sidi. Baroko’s first wife Sadiku advised Sidi to marry Baroka. He was attracted by her beauty, even though he was old he wished to marry Sidi a young and beautiful girl.

The old generation people could not accept the western innovation and ideas. In this play Barako was against to get railway. “ Trade, progress, adventure, success civilization, Fame, international conspicuously.....” (907). Barako prevents to get railway because it was modernity. Lukunle, the school teacher in the village of Ilunjunle wears twenty three-inch bottom trousers and blanco-white tennis shoe. He starts with a missionary interest to transform the village from tradition to modernity.

Sidi declares that his speech is nonsense. Lukunle says,

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 fact? (897)

Thus Soyinka portrays the conflict between tradition and modernity, some cling on to the old tradition, while the younger generation who follow the colonizers wish to bring a change in the traditions which are useless and to a certain does not do good to the people. This modern

thought is not welcomed by many, only a minority tend to follow the modern way of thinking. Hence tradition and modernity are at crossroads.

Works Cited:

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