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**CULTURAL CONFLICT IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE LION AND THE JEWEL* –
A CONTRAPUNTAL READING**

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ABSTRACT

Wole Soyinka is an eminent playwright in Nigerian literature, whose work reveals the major conflict in the post-colonial concepts like oppression, subjugation, and search for identity. This paper is an attempt to examine of how Wole Soyinka's play 'The Lion and the Jewel' traces the conflict between cultures in Nigeria and Western society. Wole Soyinka is Africa's noted playwright, who won the Noble Prize in 1986. Soyinka with his most radical and powerful voice played a significant role in sketching the consciousness of the world. Thus he can create the characters who can challenge themselves with the defenders of modernity on one side and with those who are deeply rooted in the tradition and the customs on the other side. The central idea of this study is to show how Soyinka through his themes, plot and characters finds out the conflict between the cultures, further the study concludes by proving to the world thoughts and condition of culture.

Keywords: Culture, Tradition, Oppressed, Conflict, Consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian writer, who explores the cultures and traditions of Yoruba, a Nigerian culture in this play "*The Lion and the Jewel*". The main aim of this study is to evaluate Soyinka's play. Soyinka tries to bring out the conflict between the tradition and the western culture. The concept of Post colonialism is clearly depicted in the character of Baroka, whose character represents the attitude of a Lion. The complete play occurs in a single day. Within this short time of period Soyinka explains us how the domination of a single person affects the group of people in the Illunjile village. He also insisted the character Lakunle, a modernized school teacher who is straight opposite to the character Baroka. Sidi is the central female character, an eighteen years old girl, attracts both traditional Baroka and westernized Lakunle. The main confrontation between North Pole and South

Pole exist till the end of the play due to the character Sidi. Sadiku, the first wife of Baroka eagerly involved herself in marrying Sidi. This explains the old tradition of marriage where age difference is not given much importance.

In the play there was a various conflict which portrays the colonialism. This play beholds the themes of oppression, subjugation, domination, lack of identity. Sidi demands for the bride price, Baroka's continuous marriage, Sadiku's compulsion over Sidi regarding marriage, village girl's dance on a lost traveler delivers the culture of tradition. Lakunle's refusal for bride price and his intention to make an Illunjile village as a civilized one brings out the concept of westerners. Soyinka expressed the complete Nigerian culture and traditions in this play. Sidi's strong decision on marrying a man, who offers her bride price, extended the conflict throughout the play. He concluded the play with a

sarcastic tone by showing that tradition won't last in the decision of Sidi's approval for her marriage with Baroka.

DISCUSSION

Yoruba culture is a culture of a small group of people. Soyinka deals with the Yoruba culture in this drama. Yoruba people have certain restrictions in their lifestyle regarding their religion, laws, marriage, community etc. This is one of the most popular Nigerian cultures. The concept of bride price is one of the cultures of Yoruba, which was often expressed by the female protagonist Sidi. It is strictly followed by the people of Illunlile especially by the females their virginity before marriage. Culture and tradition is strictly followed by the Yoruba people. Colonialism is not only pain and sufferings forced by the colonizers to the natives. Here Soyinka also explains that colonialism is a kind of an emotion, which every human soul feels once in their life not physically, but psychologically.

Every character in this play faced the suppression, oppression, especially, Sidi the jewel of this play suffered a lot to maintain her virginity throughout the play, from the starting scene she demands for bride price in order to enhance and prove that she is a fresh and virgin girl. Later her decision made the turning point as well as a very great conclusion which clearly demonstrates the truth that she underwent several psychological pains. And if we keenly notice her character from the first we never suspect this end, but we can criticize easily that she is affected by suppression, she lost her dreams everything. Sadiku as a first wife of Baroka searched a wife for her own husband, even though he is lost his manhood. Though she portrayed as a character who is very much interested in searching a girl for her husband but as a woman. This situation torments her a lot which is not exposed by Soyinka.

In the very first scene, itself the conversation between Lakunle and Sidi reveals that Lakunle is a person who is totally impressed by Western culture. Lakunle as a village school teacher traces the influence of Britain, who colonized several European countries. His style of dressing portrays his intention that he wants to be a more civilized person. In each and every scene of this play

Lakunle's appearance delivers some information that he has planned to make this uncivilized village into a civilized village. Lakunle has a deep love for Sidi. He expressed his love for her several times. Sidi continuously demands for bride-price. She thinks that it is the only treasure of a girl to analyze her whether she is a virgin or not. This is one of the prominent Nigerian cultures a man should pay some amount as bride price to whom he marries. This culture is followed by many religions especially by the Muslim as referred in their holy book Quran.

Lakunle as a civilized person refused, when Sidi demands for bride-price by saying that it is an old foolish tradition followed by the Yoruba people. He explains that we have to change ourselves according to the modern world. But Sidi is very much strong in her decision. She revealed that she will not marry a person who rejects bride-price. Lakunle scolds Sidi for showing her cleavage and he warns her not to carry a water pot on her head. He says,

"I have told you not to carry loads –on your head, but you are as stubborn as an illiterate goat. It is bad for your spine and it shortens your neck, so that very soon you will not have neck at all. Do you wish to look squashed like my pupil's drawings" (*The Lion and the Jewel* 4).

He loves her a lot not only because of her beauty but because of her smartness. He thinks that Sidi is the only person who could understand and support him in his obstacles. Lakunle always believes in a western concept of love. When Sadiku approaches Sidi for her marriage with Baroka, Lakunle anxiously warns Sidi not to accept this proposal. He tried his level best to save the life of the village belle. Lakunle's interest on 'love marriage' explains the westernized culture of marriage. He also explains that 'love doesn't need money to show the power of it'. He thinks this culture of collecting money from a groom is the culture of bribing for love in a relationship. Lakunle's thinks that he does not want to pay bride price which is similar to buying a property or something else.

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, Lakunle, I must have the full bride price. Will you make me a laughing stock? Well, do as you please. But Sidi will not make herself a cheap bowl for the village spit.... They will say I was no virgin. Ignorant girl, Can you not understand? To pay the price would be. To buy a heifer off the market stall. You'd be my chattel, my mere property. (8)

Lakunle explains her about his view on bride price. Lakunle does not want to follow the culture and tradition of African society in customs of marriage. He deliberately loves the tradition of modern society. Even Sidi has some interest on him; on the other hand she cannot leave her tradition. She says, "They will say I was no virgin. That I was forced to sell my shame and marry you without a price" (8). Lakunle as a westernized person he wants to marry Sidi to be 'a soul companion', 'a friend' and he demands that he will provide an equal right for her throughout their lovable life. But she believes in tradition and values of life: "Heaven forgive you; do you now scorn? Child-bearing in a wife?" (9).

Then if we focus on the play, it is clearly expressed that *The Lion and the Jewel* has depicted the culture of polygamy. This polygamy is a pain for a female in which their husbands are allowed to marry many girls. They will use that girl for only physical pleasure and they will avoid that girl. After some period of time they will search for a new one. This polygamy was practiced in the play through the character Baroka. He proudly explains that it enhances their heritage. He says even in the age of sixties he has given birth to a child, this shows the male domination and pride in their manhood. On the other hand he does not want to destroy his culture by introducing modern activities inside his Illunjile village. "Yes yes.....it is five full months since I took a wife.... five full months" (18).

The head of the village or the bale Barokais not only a 'lion' but also his character portrays a cunning egoistic character like a 'fox'. He deliberately expressed his urge for new wife. And also he claims that he needs to marry a woman then and there. On the other hand he cannot tolerate his photograph in a magazine shared with one of the

village common latrines and on the other side 'a normal girl's reputation is higher than him' when Sidi appears in a front page of that magazine. This appearance of Sidi's photograph in a magazine made her to enhance her reputation. In order to destroy her reputation and to feel her physical body Baroka, a sixty two years old man planned to make Sidi as his wife. This shows the Baroka's male chauvinistic thought towards women. "Compare my image and that of your lord...an age of a difference.... See how water glistens my face... but he is like a leather piece torn rudely from the saddle of his horse" (22). "I am the twinkle of a jewel. But he is the hind quarters of a lion!" (23)

Sidi refused the proposal of Sadiku without any hesitation by delivering that 'he is too old' for her young age. She boldly compares her young with his image saying that 'he will not suit for her anymore'. Then in order to convince her Sadiku happily reveals that, Baroka feels shame and blames it on himself when he hears that he is rejected by the village 'jewel'. He says, "My man hood ended a week ago" (26). In this scene, Sadiku tries her level best to convince Sidi and she invites her to join in the celebrations. Sidi goes to see Baroka by knowing that he cannot do anything with her. Baroka tries to impress Sidi with his wrestling power and Sidi acts like that she is too smart, she continuously mocks and drags him down in their conversation. But unexpectedly Baroka seduced her virginity and he won Lakunle in all the direction.

Another conflict is also raised in this play, that is there are contradictable point of views and opinions between every individual, this is known as individual's conflict. Actually, this difference exists in various characters in this play under study. There are two opposite poles: one pole is an old people and the other is young people. Each of them has diverse ways of learning, traditions, beliefs, norms and education. The space between the new and old generation is vastly wide. The old generation always focused to customs, traditions, and old aged culture, on the other hand, the new generation found this old tradition is useless and it does not have any meaning, because they stick to modern and high-tech life. Same situations occurs in this play, Lakunle, a modern school teacher, tries hard to turn

his village into modern town using modern lifestyle. But, he failed in this process because there is a conflict between him and Baroka, a representative of old tradition. It is fact, that a modern thinking people will not show more interest or accept the old traditions very easily. They will always stick to modernity in every stage of their life. It is not that they cannot live in old tradition but they need to change the society, it is their optimistic thought to change the world. Communication is used to learn other's culture and traditions. It connects the people who have different groups or individual with various language and various origins. LeBaron (1993) explained about culture and its activities, he says,

“Culture is inextricable from conflict, though it does not cause it. When differences surface in families, organizations, or communities, culture is always present, shaping perceptions, attitudes, behaviors and outcomes” (*Conflict and Culture: Research in Five Communities in British Columbia, Canada* 1).

In fact, clash is the prominent cause for cultural conflict. We are very much clear that conflict exists constantly throughout the play, which is between the new culture and the colonizing, the dominant (old) culture. But, when we analyze the play in a deeper level, we must clearly assimilate that people cannot grab other culture easily. Even though the conflict rose between two cultures, the main reason for this conflict is they cannot come out from their own culture. Lakunle's sight on old culture and tradition is different from the Baroka's sight on his own (old) culture. Thus, the difference in their points of view begins the great conflict between them. So it is quite different and difficult to adapt into the culture which is not acceptable by our own soul. Thus Lakunle cannot leave his modern thought and Baroka cannot grab into the new culture and tradition. Here another critic Madzingira (2001) views on culture,

Culture is the totality of human endeavors in a given time and place. People are constructs of their culture. Culture gives people their identity and dignity. It is every day expression and future aspirations.

Culture and development are intertwined because culture underpins development and reinforces it (*Culture, Communication and Development in Africa* 5).

Society builds its dignity only through what culture they followed. Culture has everything language, habits, religion, and norms, etc. Culture is the main thing which is responsible for the people's identity and dignity. Soyinka depicted the customs and values of traditional Yoruba culture against the westernized creations or innovations. Lakunle, an optimistic school teacher fails to follow his own native culture and he strongly believes in modern ideas and he accepts them without understanding clearly about it. On the other side Baroka, the village bale sticks to his old tradition and he thinks that modernity will spoil their village as well as he thinks modern thoughts as a hazard to his mastery. These two contradictable thought brings out the two sides of the prominent social and political issue in Africa. This play is totally characterized by conflicts in culture. The lion Baroka has two intentions one is to win the village jewel Sidi, as a wife and other one is to win Lakunle's intention in making Illunjile as a civilized village. This play is about a beautiful young girl Sidi who is in a central position to choose her husband between young chap, Lakunle and the old village chief, Baroka. This is the major conflict in the character Sidi who strives to live in a Yoruba tradition and also throughout the play she strives hard to save her virginity. Here, Soyinka reveals that Sidi's identity was totally grabbed by the village bale. Even Lakunle who loves her a lot fails to respect her point view in virginity. At first she makes fun of the village bale, at last she surrenders herself under him due to her lost virginity. Soyinka raised a question on Sidi in her last decision whether she will marry Baroka a representative of old culture or she will choose Lakunle, a representative of new culture.

At last, Sidi's decision on choosing her husband gives unexpected conclusion. Even Lakunle's agrees to marry Sidi after known that she was seduced by Baroka, but Sidi refused Lakunle and gives her hand to Baroka, the lion. Lakunle indicated Baroka that “You tried to steal our village maidenhead” (*The Lion and The Jewel* 38). Sethuraman (1985) comments on Sidi's decision

regarding her marriage "Sidi is fleetingly metamorphosed into the glittering girl of the magazine by the Western photographer, although common sense prevails on her in the end" (*The Role of Women in the Plays of Wole Soyinka* 224).

Bride price is an important custom in the Yoruba culture where a girl can prove her virginity as well as a man can know the 'values of a girl', thus Soyinka tries to reveal that old tradition has gained the victory through proving that it provides values and goodness throughout the life.

CONCLUSION

The Lion and the Jewel presents a clash between an old cultured man Baroka, a chief of the village and a young school teacher. This is an entertaining play which portrays some moral values to the society. Soyinka wonderfully portrayed the story with contrast ideas. In which, he portrayed the cultural conflict and post-colonial concepts. He successfully explained the conflict between two poles, and also he has given a wonderful solution in the climax. This play also expressed the Nigerian culture. As a Nigerian writer he penned his culture and tradition in a successful manner through this play. His point of view on Lakunle explores is that western culture cannot overcome the old tradition. Soyinka also explained the fact that 'tradition helps to know the real values of life, whereas western helps to grow our knowledge but it has a tendency to make ourselves to forget about our past'. *The Lion and the Jewel* indicates the vision of Wole Soyinka, which is clearly expressed through the character Baroka, who explores his thoughts with the inner voice of Soyinka, Bale says: "The old must flow into the new, Sidi. Not blind itself or stand foolishly", (54).

The lifestyle of a man should have both old and new tradition. But if they want to succeed in their life one must follow the old tradition as well as modern traditions. They must have a clear path way. They should respect and know the values of the old tradition and culture without fully neglecting it. One can gain knowledge through modern lifestyle, and they should not indulge themselves fully in western culture. Soyinka points out the lifestyle of a modern Africans who totally indulged themselves in modern world and who completely neglects the old tradition

as meaningless tradition, this point of view is purely portrayed in the character, Lakunle.

Soyinka's works could be analyzed in a various perspective. This play can also criticized in a feminist view, because this play portrayed the 'women as a second sex' who is considered as an object which provides satisfaction to men only in physical and biological perspectives. Soyinka convinced the audience with love, humor, sensual power, emotions, unexpected climax etc.,

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