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Amalgamation of Tradition and Modernity in Wole Soyinka's The Lion and The Jewel

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Abstract: According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 'tradition' means "passing of belief or customs from one generation to the next" and modern stands for "present or contemporary times". Tradition and modernity look to be poles apart but in this research paper an attempt would be made in order to bring out the amalgamation of tradition and modernity in Wole Soyinka's celebrated play *The Lion and the Jewel*

Keywords: Tradition, Yoruba Culture, Modernity.

INTRODUCTION

The play *The Lion and The Jewel* is set in typical Yoruba village Ilujinle which is ruled by an all-powerful old chief Baroka. Baroka is one with the traditions and is ruling his village in a typical manner. His character has been portrayed and understood by the dialogue he speaks in the 'morning' act. He is the Bale, a prominent figure in the play. He stands for tradition. He portrays himself as simply traditional. He enters the scene and all the villagers who were busy dancing and moving at once got on to their knees for their traditional greetings to Baroka but the westernized teacher Lakunle just bows and wishes good morning to him. This gesture offends Baroka who says, "Guru morin guru morin, ngh-hn! That is all we get from 'alakowe' you call at his house hoping he sends for beer, but all you get is Guru morin. Will guru morin wet my throat?" (*The Lion and The Jewel* 16)

Baroka then enquired of Lakunle why everything stopped when he came. To this, Lakunle replied, "One hardly thinks the bale would have time for such childish nonsense" (16). Hearing this from a western idealist Baroka makes an astonishing statement. He says, "A-ah Mister Lakunle without these things you call nonsense, a Bale's life would be pretty dull" (16). These lines indicate that the bale is rooted in his traditions and the dance, music, and mime had a great effect on his life and his culture. He does not want the modernity to enter into his traditional village set up so he does not allow the railway line to pass through the village. He wants to preserve his traditions but one cannot deny the fact that Baroka was also being selfish and thinking only of his rule in the village. The negative aspect of Baroka's character has also been portrayed by the author.

Modernity is portrayed through the character of Lakunle who is a school teacher and has a tendency to imitate the west. His attire is totally modern but that looks pathetic on his small body. Although he is a believer in the western education system and their ways of life yet he receives a pathetic response from Sidi and others in the play. He is a suitor for Sidi and wants her to be his legally

wedded wife. He thinks of the position of wife to be equal like a companion and a soul mate. He wants the western system of education and development to come to Ilujinle so that people may progress constantly. He wants to get the villagers rid of superstitions and hard and fast rules associated with marriage and other things. His western conceptions are not understood by simple people and thus they term him 'mad'. Lakunle wants an ideal solution to the problems faced by the villagers but ideal things don't really matter in front of real circumstances. He forbids Sidi to carry pails of water on her head and also tells her to wear modest clothes but Sidi wanted him to pay the bride price if he wants her to be his prospective wife.

Sidi is another character who seems drenched in traditional ways of life because she insists on being paid the bride price by Lakunle if he intends to marry her and also wears traditional dresses although Lakunle many times advises her to wear modest clothes. Sidi is very clear in her mind. When Lakunle tells her that women are considered "the weaker sex" she gives a befitting reply:

The weaker sex, is it?

It is a weaker breed who pounds the yam or bends all day to plant the millet with a child strapped to her back? (6)

Sidi is confident about her female self and wants Lakunle to pay the bride-price. She was proud of her virginity and says that if she would not take the bride price then she would be targeted by the villagers and people would think that she might not be a virgin that is why she married without her bride price. This was the sole reason why Sidi wanted a bride price to be paid to her. Sidi was very straight forward in her demand and had a solid reason for asking for it but for Lakunle to give a price meant to buy a commodity and for him, she was not a thing to be purchased.

There is a constant amalgamation of tradition and modernity in this work. People are molding traditions for their personal likings. Baroka, the bale is a corrupt character who bribes the people who wanted to make a railway line. Both tradition (Baroka) and modernity (Lakunle) are fighting for Sidi. Baroka wins this battle because he is able to seduce Sidi willfully and thus wins her as his wife contrary to Lakunle who is idealistically trying to change things. Ashli Watts in her article state:

Not only is there an external conflict between tradition and modernity but there is also an internal conflict in all three of the character. Each of these characters uses both tradition and modernity to their advantage and convenience . . . although she is a traditional maiden, she has absorbed the modern idea of not becoming Baroka property. Baroka's internal conflict is revealed in his use of the stamp machine which is a western innovation. He uses this technology to persuade Sidi to be with him. (3)

To conclude thus the conflict between modernity and tradition is present in the play. Author has satirically portrayed the clashes between modern and tradition. In the context of this play, modernity stands for idealism and tradition stands for reality and idealism falls badly against reality. The ideal situation as the thought of by Lakunle was negated for the real life confrontations of Baroka.

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