

**Soyinka's Vision of Life
as
Projected in His Major Works**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled *Soyinka's Vision of Life As Projected in His Major Works* submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Doctor of Philosophy is a record of bona fide research carried out by Sudha K. P. under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma or other similar title before.

Place: Ernakulam

Date: 19-9-2004



Dr. Mohamed Elias

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Soyinka's Vision of Life As Projected in His Major Works* is a record of the bona fide research carried out by me and that no part of it has previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title.

Place: Thrissur

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Chapter I

Introduction

Like any great writer, who is bound to be a visionary of some kind or other, Wole Soyinka is a pathmaker and a torch bearer for humanity in general and Africa in particular. He has remarked in one of his interviews with Karen Morell that “First of all, I believe implicitly that any work of art which opens out the horizons of the human mind, the human intellect is by its very nature a force for change, a medium for change” (3). In these insightful words Soyinka emphasizes the focal position of the artist in society. A speculative thinker, a dreamer of a better world order and a man of creative energy, he has persistently called up on African writers to demonstrate that they have a vision. Here is a writer who consistently and continuously reminded the artists of the delightfully burdensome responsibility they owe their societies. Every writer is committed to something beyond his art, to a statement of value not purely aesthetic, to a criticism of life. Soyinka considered the artists redeemers and their function to be all encompassing.

The artist can perform his redeeming function, according to Soyinka, only if he asserts his direct and vitalizing connection with the long, rich tradition he has inherited. He has to blend the best from the past and the present in order to give a better vision of the future. In a paper read in a literary conference in Sweden in 1967 titled “The Writer in a Modern

African State”, Soyinka declared that “the artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experiences of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time” (21).

Reflecting on the responsibility of an African writer to his society, Soyinka wrote in “The Writer in a Modern African state”: “The test of the narrowness or the breadth of his vision, however, is whether it is his accidental situations which he tries to stretch to embrace his society and race with fundamental truths of his country which inform his vision and enable him to acquire even a prophetic insight into the evolution of that society” (17). Obviously, Soyinka makes a sharp distinction between an African writer who carries his personal experience or personal likes and dislikes to the society, and another one who deeply feels the social reality to generate his art. Genuine nation building, he believes, is a collaborative affair: the politician and the artist contribute in erecting a healthy social order. A writer is not just a dreamer of day-dreams. He is a practical visionary.

The plays, the poems and the novels of Wole Soyinka reflect this direction of his connections. He is aware of the validity of the past. As a visionary among the people and as one endowed with creative skill and imaginative power, the writer, Soyinka claimed, should ensure that his works foster the growth of his country along the path of truth, freedom and justice. To accomplish this he should use his craft to create a literature which “recognizes the past, not for the purpose of enshrinement but for the logical creative glimpse and statement of the ideal future”(Ogungbesan, *The Past* 175). In this way, the works of committed writers are guided by their vision towards the growth of a nation based on principles of justice and equality. In

order to discharge such a contemporary responsibility, and unmask society's self deception by revealing to it its own nature, the artist has to be endowed with an extraordinary awareness of the interdependence between the past, the present and the future. As he explains in "The Writer in Modern African State," "The true African sensibility establishes that the past exists in the present, it is co-existent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future" (19). Soyinka's writings, which are mainly myth informed, demonstrated this ideal interdependence between past, present and future as a main theme. They do serve as a forceful media for change and do project a vision, which is remarkably bold and deep.

Literature is a medium through which the artist projects the various aspects of social structure in terms of fictional characters. We find in the literatures of the postcolonial period, attempts to return to one's own past and fix one's identity. Ashcroft *et al* have remarked that "literature was made essential to the cultural enterprise of empire as the monarchy was to its political formation" (*Empire* 3). The task of the artist is to arrange his characters in such a way that they project and uphold new values and meanings in the social world. And a proper study of literature should try to unravel the hidden meaning and the cultural perspective embedded in the work. The writer's vision is like the vision of a great saint, impartial, value based and welfare oriented. What it reveals is a realm which remains closed to the average and the ordinary and therefore it may prove to be highly prophetic. The vision of the writer does not remain confined to the narrow grooves of the socio-cultural pattern surrounding him. As a social seer, he is capable of presenting the shape of the future as well as the pangs and sufferings of the people caught up in the transitional phase of changing

times: tradition to modernity or past to present, colonialism to neocolonialism and to new age. The writer, without any hesitation or wavering, urges the need to absorb new ideas and move into a glorious future, retaining at the same time the essence of the rich cultural heritage.

A writer cannot be always studied mainly for the formal or the so-called enduring qualities of their works like epic structure, narrative skill, dramatic art, descriptive skill and universality. A writer's commitment to his own life and time is almost axiomatic and as relevant as the formal qualities. Both permanent values and contemporary relevance in the works of a writer are of equal relevance. This is more true of the writers belonging to post-colonial literature, especially of the writers belonging to the recently liberated and still developing countries of Africa, Asia and elsewhere. They have a dual function to perform: respond to the immediate facts around them and make their work relevant for the readers all over the world. How significant is the contribution of the writers to their own country's resurgence, how much do their works succeed in highlighting problems of the much exploited native race - these can be valid standards to measure the greatness of a work of art. Thus, the work of art a postcolonial writer produces becomes specially significant. It is the inevitable record of the artist's struggle to achieve imaginative freedom within the framework of his country's freedom movement. It is the attempt to transcend limitation of a national theme or national expansion, which the writer shares through his art with the help of the imaginative freedom he has attained. The vision the writer builds up through his works is basically limited to the national issues. However, it is made sharable for the readers across the world through his immortal craft

Post colonial reading of texts is a conscious exercise in reading texts in relation to their historical, social and cultural contexts rather than accepting them as expressions of universally acknowledged moral principles or aesthetic value. It is a reading that takes into account many dominant issues leading to discussions of the socio-political situations prevailing at the time the text was written. As John Macloed puts it in *Beginning Postcolonialism*, “to read a text in its historical, social and cultural contexts is to attend to the ways it dynamically deals with the issues it raises. And in a colonial context it is also perhaps to refute the dominant way of teaching literature as expressing lasting moral truths contradictorily deemed at once timeless and yet specifically characteristic of the colonising nation” (19). Chinua Achebe through his influential work, “Colonialist Criticism” called for a rejection of the term ‘universal’ as applied to African literature, arguing that the term simply masked ‘the narrow, self-serving parochialism in Europe” (59). Dennis Walder, an eminent scholar on postcolonial theory, remarks that Postcolonial literatures in English have focussed upon “matters of broad yet immediate interest – matters of history, language, race, gender, identity, migration and cultural exchange” (24).

In this context, the works of Wole Soyinka, perhaps, Africa’s greatest writer and certainly one of the world’s most important dramatists, are of great importance. To quote Femi Osofisan, a prominent writer belonging to the younger generation of African writers from “Wole Soyinka, And a Living Dramatist”,

Without dispute Soyinka is today the greatest living African dramatist –alas! Like the great Hugo, Soyinka stands in the world

of letters like a giant elephant, massive in his productivity and colossal in his artistic vision. Endlessly fertile and endlessly inventive, he has also been active in all the literary genres, as well as on the print and the electronic media. (44).

Since it became obvious after reading Wole Soyinka's plays that they can be analysed and interpreted from within the framework of postcolonial theory, a brief survey of all the relevant definitions given by the theorists of postcolonialism will not be irrelevant in this context. Since postcolonialism and postcolonial literatures and postcolonial theory are certain terms of academic discourse which have risen to ascendancy successively over the last two or three decades, Wole Soyinka's stance as a postcolonial writer ought to be given a serious consideration. An attempt is made therefore in the following chapters to analyse how Soyinka's works - his plays, poems, novels, and other articles – serve the purpose of literature being a decolonizing mechanism. I propose to place Wole Soyinka in the map of postcolonial literatures in the global context in the light of his achievements as a postcolonial African writer though my reading is not exclusively from the postcolonial angle because such an exclusive reading may impose powerful limitations in my response to his plays. At the same time, it is also an attempt to explore how Soyinka has employed his writings – novels, plays, poems as well as autobiographical ~~works~~ – to resist the typification of Africans as passive objects of discourses.

Postcolonialism is a much debated and discussed term. It has provoked a range of analyses and critiques. It has inspired some challenging and remarkably great academic work in recent years. But still it remains an

elusive and contested term. Its complexity is described thus in *Postcolonial Criticism*.” It designates at one and the same time a chronological moment, a political movement, and an intellectual activity, and it is this multiple status that makes exact definition difficult. Post-colonialism occupies the central position among the different areas of study” (Moore-Gilbert 1).

European colonialism had affected the world in various ways. The impact of European colonialism was a complex process. Though colonial rule had a constructive and modernizing effect on the colonized like the introduction of railways, building of schools and hospitals to the rediscovery and revitalization of cultures, most of its influence was damaging to the colonized people. “Colonialism was a denial of all culture, history and value outside the colonizer’s frame” (Walder 30). The West constructed a sense of superiority and mastery over the colonized. The colonized were slowly forced to accept a sense of resentment. Great damage was done to the indigenous cultures. As Fanon describes it in his famous work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, in short, colonialism was “a systematic negation of the other person” (200).

The establishment of British empire had made two types of territories. Those like Canada, Newzealand and Australia which the English people colonized and where they settled and established their culture and those like India and Nigeria where they were rulers by force and imposed their institutions and norms. By the middle of 1960s many British held colonies became independent. Nigeria became independent in 1960. The gaining of independence by India in 1947 marked the new era, a transition obvious from British domination of postcolonial period. Dennis Walder explains the

beginning of postcolonial period: “Indian independence marked the new postcolonial era. Over the next 15 years, 40 countries with a population of 800 million won their independence from European colonizers. Never before in the whole human history had so revolutionary a reversal occurred with such rapidity” (45).

The gaining of independence of colonized nations and rising of the flags of independent nations do not mean the end of colonial occupation. There is bound to be psychological resistance to inherited colonial value systems among the colonized people. A meaningful discussion on postcolonialism and postcolonial literatures can begin with a brief discussion of Mahatma Gandhi and his work, *Hind Swaraj* especially in the context of the postcolonial situation of Africa. It is as Leela Gandhi puts it, “a polemical critique of Western civilisation written in 1909” (19). *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Coming* was originally written in Gujarati in 1909 and was first published in “Indian Opinion” in South Africa serially. Even though the book lacks a sophisticated literary style, it is obvious that Gandhiji correctly diagnosed the roots of colonialism in India. He warned the people to be aware of conscious or unconscious adoption of modern civilisation the British brought with them. This is an aspect which Soyinka selfconsciously handled in his plays. Gandhiji warned the people about the fascination of Indians towards Western civilization. This is what he implies when he says, “The English have not taken India, we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength but because we keep them” (22). Leela Gandhi refers to Gandhiji’s words in *Hind Swaraj*, where he emphasised the importance of both ‘Swaraj’ and ‘Satyagraha’. Gandhiji invoked his countrymen with this suggestion that “a nation was not merely a political

entity, it was not synonymous with religion but was vested in cultural commonalty”(Gandhi 25). This is another link between the postcolonial views of Soyinka and Soyinka’s later concerns. So his emphasis on the idea of self and commonalty of culture together led to the concept of a secular nationhood. The greatness of Mahatma and the significance of his principles have been pointed out in a recent article by Anil Nauriya in *Times of India*, 31, August, 1998 which is apt in this context:

Over emphasis, specially in Anglo-centric writings, on Gandhi’s religiosity has sometimes blinded scholars to the fact that Gandhi’s definition of nation is emphatically non religious, non-denominational and secular in every sense of the term and is shared by millions of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and others... (6).

In 1950, there emerged many important works from different parts of the world which tried to record the psychological damage suffered by colonised people. Among these writers, most prominent one was Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist based in Algeria. He wrote passionately about the damaging effects of French colonialism upon the millions of people who suffered its power. He wrote from the perspective of a colonial subject addressing another colonial subject. His publications include two important works – *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. As a Psychiatrist, Fanon very well understood the psychological effects of colonialism. He could reflect the feelings of the colonized people well. He exclaims, in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and

to help to build it together” (112-113). Perhaps its significance is best explained by in *Postcolonial Criticism*” “Fanon’s early work is situated at the interface between radical psychology and colonial critique, and his linking of mental disorders with imperialist domination is one of his most important contributions to contemporary debates around Postcolonialism” (Moore-Gilbert 12).

A brief discussion of Fanon’s ideas will throw light on Soyinka’s subtle presentation of similar ideas in the play. *The Wretched of the Earth* is another powerful work by Fanon which also emphasises the opposition and conflict between colonizer and colonized. The significant position occupied by the work in the postcolonial literatures has been explained by Dennis Walder:

Various anti-colonial critical theories have been influential among the oppressed peoples of the world; but *The Wretched of the Earth* has spoken more directly, profoundly and lastingly than any other single anticolonial work on behalf of and to the colonized, with the result that many writers and critics, whether or not they agree with Fanon’s assumptions or conclusions, consider that his work deserves repeated re-reading (73).

It is in *Black Skin, White Masks* that we have the famous definition of the colonized people. They are the people ‘in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality.’ (Fanon 18). The coloniser is considered as inferior and marginalised men. “They were represented as lesser, less human, less civilized as a child or Savage, wild animal, or headless mass” (Boehmer 78). Some of these issues

have been taken up though indirectly by Soyinka in his plays, especially in *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Black Skin White Masks is written in a fragmentary style whereas *The Wretched Of the Earth* is written in a coherent style. The ideas contained in these works have attracted a large range of thinkers likes Sartre, Marx, Freud and Lacan. Perhaps the significant role Fanon plays while discussing postcolonial Literatures is succinctly explained by Dennis Walder: “Fanon offered a vision, not a programme: and whether or not readers were taken along by his rhetoric, he provided subversive insights into the cultural aspect of the postcolonial condition which he repeatedly redefined” (76). Perhaps no other writer has expressed so briefly and yet so effectively about Fanon’s achievements as Sartre: “Here (in *The Wretched Of the Earth*), the third world finds itself and speaks to itself through his voice” (12).

Fanon was concerned with the psychological ill-effects of colonialism. He was equally concerned about anti-colonial activities. Fanon’s nationalism was ‘critical nationalism’ as Edward Said had defined in his *Culture and Imperialism*. Said has explained the concept of national consciousness as seen in Fanon in his *Culture and Imperialism*: “Fanon’s notion was that unless national consciousness at its moment of success was somehow changed into social consciousness, the future would not hold liberation but an extension of imperialism” (323). This is exactly Soyinka’s concern running through his writings.

Reading Fanon and Gandhiji reveals that both of them were suspicious of the directions and intentions of the national elite. The resistance offered by the elite is often not matched by a well-meant and

socially aware nationalism. Both Gandhiji and Fanon are against a nostalgic and uncritical return to the pre-colonial past. To quote Leela Gandhi, “Both men treat the project of national liberation as an imaginative pretext for cultural self-differentiation from Europe and thereby as an attempt to exceed, surpass the claims of Western civilisation” (20).

Orientalism (1978) by Edward Said, a Christian Arab is another important work in this area. He also discussed the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. But there was a difference between him and Fanon. *Orientalism* shows how “the Western image of the Orient has been constructed by generations of writers and scholars, who thereby legitimated imperial penetration and control”, (McLeod 21) Said explained how the West found justification for holding their views of the orient “as inferior and as a mythic place of exoticism, moral laxity and sexual degeneracy” (McLeod 22). Perhaps the difference in the approach of Fanon and Said is best explained by John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism*: “Empires colonise imagination. Fanon shows how this works at a psychological level for the oppressed, while Said demonstrates the legitimization of Empire for the oppressor” (22).

Culture and imperialism, another important work by Said, is in some ways more ambitious than *Orientalism*. What marks it different from *Orientalism* is that in it, Said has paid much more attention to anti-colonial and postcolonial cultural production. *Culture and Imperialism* is considered as a sequel to *Orientalism*.

What *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* are about is summed up in *Postcolonial Criticism*: “While *Orientalism* sees current and future

global relations as inevitably soured by the histories of colonialism, and the current era as one in which colonialism has simply reconstituted itself as neo-colonialism, the latter (*Culture and Imperialism*) has a much more optimistic vision of the possibilities of reconciliation and an end to domination and confrontation between West and non-West” (Moore-Gilbert 25). Soyinka’s literary works and autobiographical writing echo the same aforementioned ideas.

Gayathri Spivak is the second influential member of ‘the Holy Trinity’ the others being Said and Bhaba. She is described as “a feminist Marxist deconstructivist” (qtd. in Moore-Gilbert 27). Her name stands as the first figure in the field to consistently “inflect post colonial criticism with a feminist agenda” (Moore-Gilbert 28). The longest and arguably the most important essay “Can Subaltern Speak?” discusses the principal concern of Gayathri Spivak whether the subaltern can speak for him or herself.

Gayathri Spivak, along with Homi Bhaba, another cultural theorist, pursued the issue of re-reading the texts ‘against the grain’ and discovering in them the moments of resistance represented by the colonized subject. Homi Bhaba is the prominent postcolonial theorist who has made the following remark regarding postcolonial perspectives, in his enlightening article, “Postcolonial Criticism”,

Postcolonial perspective emerges from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of ‘minorities’ within the geo-political divisions of east and west, north and south. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority and political discrimination in order to

reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the ‘rationalizations of modernity (438).

In the wake of *Orientalism* three forms of textual analyses became popular. One was re-reading of canonical English literature in the postcolonial context. The other was a reinterpretation of the texts to find the moments of resistance. The third form of analysis dealt with writing back to the centre. They posed direct challenges to the colonial centre. This approach is crystallized in the book, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*, coauthored by three critics from Australia: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. It is a synoptically useful and widely discussed handbook on postcolonialism. The study of the controlling power of representation in the colonized societies has led to the development of what came to be called colonialist discourse in the works of critics such as Gayathri Spivak and Homi Bhaba. The unique position occupied by *The Empire Writes Back* is explained by John Mcleod in *Beginning Postcolonialism*. “*The Empire Writes Back* has made a valuable contribution to literary studies in the field. It shifted the approach towards a more politicized approach which analysed texts primarily within historical and geographical contexts” (26).

In the closing decades of the 20th century, the term postcolonialism has gained so much popularity that it has eclipsed terms like post-modernism, poststructuralism and so on. Since an attempt has been made in the following chapters to explore the works of Soyinka as expressing resistance to the colonial control against the backdrop of deep political, and social upheaval in Nigeria various definitions and interpretations of the term ‘postcolonialism’ may be touched upon. The rapidity with which

postcolonial studies have developed in the last decade has resulted in a proliferation of debates around not only the key issues but also the very term itself. Hence I would like to explicate the term postcolonialism and briefly quote a few theorists of postcolonial literature as a way of defining and describing the term before proceeding to Wole Soyinka and his postcolonial perspective.

As Linda Hutcheon puts it, “according to both its theorists and its cultural activists, postcolonial criticism has positioned itself as a broad anti-imperialist emancipatory project and has there added a more overtly politicized dimension to related work in the field of commonwealth studies. . . as well as in various national-language literary disciplines” (“Colonialism” 7-8). In their highly influential work *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft *et al* stress that the common ground in the literature from different countries is that “they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (2). They have defined the term ‘postcolonial’ as one covering “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2).

According to Joanne Tompkins, “Post-colonialism is often too narrowly defined. The term is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept meaning the time after colonisation has ceased, or the time following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state”(2). Gilbert and Tompkins quote Alan Lawson in the same work. Pointing out that a theory of postcolonialism is not ‘a mere chronological construction of post-

independence' and more than 'just the discursive experience of imperialism', Alan Lawson says that, "postcolonialism, is a politically motivated historical-analytical movement (which) engages with, resists and seeks to dismantle political, pedagogical, discursive and textual domains" (qtd. in Gilbert and Tompkins 2).

According to Harish Trivedi, "Postcolonialism has outdistanced in circulation its many namesakes: Post modernism, post structuralism, post-cold war, post-Marxism, Post-apartheid, post-soviet, post-Ford, post-Feminism, post-national, post-historical and even post-contemporary. Altogether it seems to have gone clean 'past the last post' (Adam and Tiffin)" (119).

It is obvious that critics have defined the term from varying angles and with differing orientation. In the recent book published on postcolonialism, *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* by Bill Ashcroft it is defined thus:

"Post-colonialism (often postcolonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as the post-colonial state, 'post-colonial' had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However from the late 1970s, the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization" (186).

Arif Dirlik in his article 'The Post Colonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism' has analysed the various meanings of the term postcolonialism . He speaks about the three uses of the term;

- (a) as a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies, in which case the term has concrete referents as in postcolonial societies or postcolonial intellectuals (b) as a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism, in which case the usage is some what more abstract and less concrete in reference, comparable in its vagueness to the earlier term Third World for which it is intended as a substitute and (c) as a description of a discourse on the above named conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientalism that are products of those conditions (332-333).

Under the pressure of globalization, many ex-colonies are still under the control of super powers like the U.S., the process which is understood by the term “neo-colonialism’. So, a country may be postcolonial and neocolonial at the same time.

‘Post coloniality’ is defined by Elleke Boehmer as that “condition in which colonized people seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise as historical subjects” (3). She distinguishes the term from the conventional hyphenated term post-colonial which she assigns to a post second world war era. Serious interpretations and discussions have led to various definitions of the term Postcolonialism based on the presence or absence of the hyphen. It is obvious that the hyphen and the absence of it in the term ‘postcolonialism’ have attracted much debate among scholars. Even though a close scrutiny of these definitions is not attempted here, a quotation from John Macleod, however will definitely contribute a great deal in solving the issue. John Macleod gives a justification also for the term ‘postcolonialism’ as it is used in his work *Beginning Postcolonialism*.

Through out *Beginning Postcolonialism* we will not use the hyphen but spell to term as a singleword 'Postcolonialism'. There is a particular reason for this choice of spelling and it concerns the different meaning of 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial.' The hyphenated term postcolonial seems more appropriate to denote a particular historical period or epoch, like those suggested by phases such as 'after colonialism', 'after independence or 'after the end of empire.' However, for much of this book, we will be thinking about postcolonialism not just in terms of strict historical periodisation, but as referring to disparate forms of 'representatiions' 'reading practices' and 'values'. These can articulate across the barrier between colonial rule and national independence (33).

The ongoing discussion on the hyphen is often stretching the less important too far. It is not the hyphen that is important. The significant aspects are (1) the slow disappearing of nationalization (2) the irrecoverable state of the value of the past (3) The realization of the meaning of the loss (4) lack of proper direction in recapturing the past. All these are important in the process of decolonization. So in all works, the reactions to the European colonialist histories remain fundamental. Whatever be the debates around the use of prefix, "the grounding of the term in European colonialist histories and institutional practices, and the responses (resistant or otherwise) to these practices on the part of all colonized people, remain fundamental" (Ashcroft *et al*, *Key concepts* 189).

In its both forms, the hyphenated and without the hyphen, the term is indeed a unique one in literary studies. It designates a cultural area, a

historical period; it includes in itself critical practices and literary conventions and ideological assumptions. An evaluation of the literatures from multiple angles proves that a major theme in all of them is what man has done to man under various disguises. The human enterprise and activities over more than a period of three centuries are re-evaluated in an altogether new perspective by the writers.

It is apparent from the brief survey of the interpretations and definitions discussed above that the term 'postcolonialism' has evoked a great deal of interest, anger, resentment and a range of analyses and critiques: perhaps, the graph of progress of postcolonial theory is precisely and exactly summed up by Jasbir Puar like this: "There is an attempt at definition in *The Empire Writes Back*, an analysis of oppression, its nature and impact in *The Wretched Of the Earth*, an explanation of the process of imperialism and the connection between knowledge and power in *Orientalism*, an exploration of the psychological formation of the self in psychological terms in Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy*" (Introduction 13).

Postcolonial literature is a collective term for the literatures emanating from the Third World countries which share certain formal and discursive features like resistance, subversion of the imperial center, the decentering of Eurocentrism. Meenakshi Mukerji talking about the significance of 'postcolonialism' to those people outside the Western world in "Interrogating postcolonialism", defines it as "an emancipatory project" which enables students "to interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling not only to read our own

texts in our own terms but also re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location. (3-4).

While discussing many issues coming under the term 'postcolonialism', it is very important to consider the issue of language which Ashcroft *et al* have called a "fundamental site of struggle for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language" (*Reader* 283). While accepting the fact that many writers and theorists of the postcolonial period use English, it is also clear that it is not only Queen's standard English that we find here but other English or varieties of English which may be regarded as dialects of the Queen's English. Making a distinction between the standard British English inherited from the centre and the 'English' to which it has been transformed and subverted in the postcolonial countries, Bill Ashcroft remarks that "the potential reality is that English sets itself apart from all other "lesser" variants and so demands to be interrogated about its claims to this special status. In practice, the history of this distinction between English and English has been between the claims of a powerful 'centre' and a multitude of intersecting usages designated as 'peripheries' (*The Empire* 8). They further point out that there is a second process that involves the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, a process by which language is remoulded to new usages. So the

Postcolonial literature is therefore always written out of the tension between the abrogation of the received English which speaks from the centre, and the act of appropriation which brings it under the influence of vernacular tongues, the complex speech habits which characterize the local language, or even the evolving

and disintguishing local English of a monolingual society trying to establish its link with place (*The Empire* 39).

Perhaps this situation was so clear to Chinua Achebe that he had made a remark about the importance of English as the medium of communication of the postcolonial writers in 1964 in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, with particular reference to Africa.

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. . . . But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit the new African surroundings(61-62).

Achebe might have said this in defence of his own practice as a writer. But still these words reflect his ideas regarding the language issue of the writers of the former British colonies. Maybe, the justification of Dennis Walder explains it all.

The most important point to emerge from any discussion of the language issue as an aspect of postcolonial literature is this. Whatever the generalizations, suspicions and admonitions of critics, politicians, theorists and legislators, the writers are eager to go on writing whether in their new borrowed' tongue, or in the old original (54).

We have thus African English, Indian English, Canadian English and so on, the writers creating new "Englishes' through various strategies. They did this by using untranslated words into the texts, by using structures derived from

other languages, or by glossing over seemingly obscure terms. In all these writers we find “mastery, appropriation, abrogation and nativisation” (Sharma 72) of the language of the colonizer. The texts written in the language of the Britishers often demonstrate a self-confidence and sureness in “appraising, describing and even interrogating England and Englishness.” (Sharma 72).

From the foregoing analyses of the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘post colonial literature’ we are able to discern certain dominant characteristics prevalent in all these works. If colonialism involves two types of imperialism – political and cultural, postcolonialism overcomes them by resisting and subverting the former colonizer. Hence myth and history, landscape and language, self and the other become the ingredients of postcolonialism. The emphasis on national identity, landscape, rituals, tradition and national culture forms the core of postcolonial literature, especially that of Nigerian and Indian writings.

Elleke Boehmer has defined postcolonial literature as “a writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives” (3). She further says:

To give expression to colonized experience, post colonial writers sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization the myths of power, the race classifications, the imaging of subordination. Post-colonial literature, therefore, is deeply marked by experiences of cultural exclusion and division under empire (3).

The critics and theorists have come to conclude that different countries experience colonization at different times. But the forms of decolonisation

differ from countries to countries. It will not be inappropriate to consider postcolonialism as a historical marker, a generalizing term and an aesthetic critical practice.

While we reinterpret a text from the postcolonial perspective, an attempt is made to analyse the effect of colonization on the ideas in the formation and construction of it. Another aim of the reader is to explore and find out how the text has approached the controversial issues of the day. Does it applaud or resist the dominant views of the world? To quote John Mcleod from *Beginning PostColonialism*. "Reading a text in relation to its contexts involves doing two things simultaneously: first, identifying how such contexts are made present or absent in a text, and second, exploring how the text itself may intervene in the debates of its day and applaud or resist dominant views of the world" (144).

What becomes obvious from various definitions cited above is that the most important basic claim implied by the use of postcolonial in relation to literatures is that it asserts the need to analyse and resist continuing colonial attitudes. Gaining independence nominally does not naturally lead to cultural self-determination. Even after many years, the struggle is still perceivable for defining as well as asserting the authentic identity by the colonized people. As Edward Said points out, "the assertion of identity is by no means a ceremonial matter in the contemporary world" (*Culture* 42). Because of absolute domination, the European colonizers of Africa had succeeded in reducing the consciousness of its peoples into the acceptance of their own being an inferior category. Colonialists were so selfish that they trained Africans to serve their selfish needs. Frantz Fanon has aptly remarked in his landmark text, *The Wretched of the Earth*: "Colonialism is

not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the natives' brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (169). But Western education, though begun with only the idea of equipping the natives with the colonizers' language, led to the creation of a sense of retrospection and introspection among African intellectuals. The self-knowledge which they gained as a consequence led them to question such aspects as identity, commitment, and freedom in social, political and economic terms. In such a situation, literature as a part of cultural praxis becomes an important weapon in the hands of African intellectuals like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and James Ngugi. The dramatists used the stage to define as well as assert their people's cultural personality. They have used various means like recovering the past, exposing the forces that still obstruct liberation, whether they be the white colonizers or the ruling indigenous elite people. A sensible and responsible writer cannot but be aware of the political, social and cultural turmoil in his country. As we go through the works written by the African writers of the 1960s and 1970s we see that the works written about pre-colonial Africa as well as the works written during colonial and postcolonial Africa reflect the social and political changes that happened in those years. The inevitability of the African writer's immersion in the social and political crisis of his people was expressed by Chinua Achebe thus, in "The African writers and the Biafran cause": "It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames." (78).

A detailed analysis of the African literatures produced after 1950s proves that in Africa, the Western techniques and dramaturgical models have very often been combined with the familiar living traditions drawn from ritual and popular theatres of the African people. We find almost all the writers of postcolonial literatures preoccupied with many recurring themes. Brain Crow in his *Introduction to Postcolonial Literature* has named a few of them like “the relationship of language and power, the struggle to find a voice to articulate one’s experience, the sense of being a victim of history determined from outside, the continuing power of the ritualistic and mythic, the introspective concern with the nature and functions of art and the artists in a subordinated society” (29).

Soyinka’s plays deal with many of the major themes cited above. In addition, his works represent very realistically the predicaments, faced by his countrymen after the colonial days. His childhood memories and personal experiences of cultural domination and racial discrimination have wielded a strong influence on his writings. They have not only helped him in realistically portraying the contemporary situation but they have also succeeded in envisioning a better social order.

It is noteworthy that traditionally, the artist in Africa has many roles. He is often sculptor, poet, musician, critic and historian. Thus, writers like Senghor, Achebe and Soyinka have fulfilled their roles with versatility in the development of West African literature. So before plunging into the deep intricacies of the plays of Soyinka, it may be quite enlightening to survey the broad range of the author’s interests as manifested in the different roles that Soyinka has played in the cultural scene of Africa.

James Gibbs, in his *Introduction to Critical Perspectives* introduces Soyinka as “a Yoruba, as an academic, as a man of the theatre, as a political activist and as a writer. Soyinka as a writer brings together the Soyinkas we have glimpsed so far” (3). It is also significant that Soyinka himself never approved the idea of categorizing his works into novels, plays and poems. In an interview at Seattle, Washington, he answered the question of a seminar participant in this humorous way.

PARTICIPANT. You seem to wear three caps, the poet, the playwright and the novelist. Is there any conflict between the three? And which do you prefer?

SOYINKA. Yes, well, there were more than three caps. One which you omitted to mention is that first and foremost I wear the cap of a human being. And therefore the other three caps are really very minor. You know rain covers, sunshields and things like that (qtd. in Gibbs, *Introduction* 3).

James Gibbs too was aware of the need to avoid oversimplification which he made in the five categories as evident from his comments on this aspect: “My categories do not seek to eliminate the human being, or control the fluid operations of the creative mind, but rather to provide a context in which the man can be seen at work, to describe briefly the rain covers, sunshields and things like that” (Introduction 3). This elaboration will certainly help the student to form an idea of the strong current of life present in Soyinka’s works. An analysis of his works often makes us aware that Soyinka, the human being, contains within himself Soyinka, the mythopoeist, Soyinka the artist, Soyinka, the political activist. All these different categories or

eddies, merge into a complex and deep river to form just one current. Bernth Lindfors has remarked thus: “His imagination, vision and craft distinguish him as a creative artist of the first rank, as a writer of world stature. Some would say he is the only original literary genius that Africa has yet produced.” He is a great dramatist, poet, novelist, memoirist, translator, a vocal social critic, polemicist, an accomplished academic, a principled politician, a visionary, an honest administrator, an avowed humanist and an effective spokesman of the Black race.

The achievements of Wole Soyinka and the vision of life projected by him through his works become highly significant at a period of history like the post-colonial period because they give us a “perceptive, utterly honest, and often anguished reflection of the complex reality of Africa Today” (Gibbs 4). His efforts have been recognized as it is clear from that he was awarded the Nobel prize in literature for 1986. This is a thoroughly deserved prize because it is a recognition not only of his merits and versatile genius but also of the emerging new literatures which belonged to the former colonies of the British empire. As it has been described,

Soyinka’s prize is significant above all because it is the first Nobel Prize awarded to an African writer or to any writer from the new literatures in English that have emerged in the former colonies of British Empire Soyinka’s Nobel Prize is a celebration of the recognition of the vitality of not only his works but of all emerging literatures (Dasenbrock 5).

It has to be remembered at this juncture that for the postcolonial playwright, “theatre has meant both the traditional indigenous performance and the theatre

that the colonists brought with them". (Crow and Banskfield 21). The Post colonial dramatist's dependence on the traditional modes of performance led them to the recognition of the theatre as a means of cultural recuperation. Traditional modes of performance with their dances rituals, songs and mimes were indeed contrasted with the Western tragic drama which Soyinka calls "a mundane reflection", (*Myth XV*) a pale shadow of the ritual performances. It is at this juncture that the significance of myths, rituals and other folklore of Africans becomes evident. Especially the relevance of the Ogun myth in the works of Soyinka becomes clear after this. It is obvious that myths do play a significant role in reviving the traditional culture of a country. "The myths do refer to a society's traditional ability to live with cultural diversities and use them to building psychological and even metaphysical defenses against cultural erosion" (Vijayasree 39).

Among the writers who have made use of myths and rituals along with Western dramaturgical models in order to defend the cultural erosions Wole Soyinka occupies a major role. To quote Crow "No African dramatist has wrought such fusions more often in such prolific stylistic variety, or to greater intellectual and aesthetic effect, than the Nigerian Yoruba playwright -, poet, novelist, and political activist, Wole Soyinka" (Introduction 31). He has used the theatre as a medium for articulating the need for the restoration of African cultural personality. So, theatre, for Soyinka has very often been the weapon for exploring and affirming the cultural substance. According to Soyinka, the simplest solution for expressing resistance and emphasizing self assertion in order to give some sort of recognition to "the fragmented and even distorted consciousness of the black people in the midst of a domineering culture" is a return to the roots in the quest for 'racial self-

retrieval', 'the recovery of an authentic cultural existence" (*Art* 52). These remarks may echo the ideas of Frantz Fanon, the Algerian psychiatrist.

Fanon is a radical critic of colonialism. He saw national cultures as playing an important role in the gaining of independence. He argued that culture which defines one's own self, and politics which lead to the determined actions are the two sides of the same coins. As is revealed from the major works of Soyinka, we know that he is pointing at the idea of cultural return in a positive way. What Soyinka suggests is that the subordinated people have, as an essential part of decolonisation, to recuperate their own histories, their cultural traditions, their own narratives and discourses. Soyinka aims at communicating a collective self apprehension. This self apprehension achieved by means of 'return to roots' will be very effective. What makes his use of myths unique is that it succeeds in reinterpreting "those elements which render a society unique in its own being, with a potential for its progressive transformation rather than ideologically convenient mythology" (*Art* 183)

From an analysis of his works, it is clear that, Soyinka, like his contemporary writers, was aware of the problems of colonialism. Yet he reacted against Negritude as is famous from his quip about tiger- tigrityde. Negritude which was a movement labelled as a reaction against Western imperialism and a rejection of the political moral and social domination of the West assumed the total consciousness of belonging to the black race. But Soyinka argued against this theory. He emphasized the need to recover the essence of the past rather than blindly going back to the stage of savagery and irrationality. He does not condemn his country's past as is obvious from

the fact that that he draws on African myths, including those of Yoruba culture. By drawing thus the essence of the past, Soyinka is in fact defining Negritude in the best possible sense. His works might show the dominant influence of Western dramaturgical modes. But the content of much of his work deals with the subjects prevalent in the Negritude movement.

But we might detect a difference between Soyinka and the postcolonial writers of other countries. This difference is not only due to differing personal, imaginative orientations but also because of the cultural aspects that have nourished him. Because of the nature of colonialism that was practised in Western Nigeria, the traditional rituals, myths and practice have remained as an everyday reality. They have provided a rich and immediate source for Soyinka's dramatic imagination. For him no conscious or deliberate effort is needed to return to roots. May be the best way to explain this aspect is by means of a quotation from Jorge Luis Borges:

Some days past, I have found a curious confirmation of the fact that what is truly native, can and often dispense with local colour; I found this confirmation in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon observes that in the Arabian book par excellence, in the Koran, there are no camels: I believe if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran, their absence of camels would be sufficient to prove it is an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammad, and Mohammad, as an Arab had no reason to know that camels were essentially Arabian. For him they were a part of reality, he had no reason to emphasize them; on the other hand, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do is to have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on

every page: but Mohammed, as an Arab was unconcerned: he knew he could be an Arab without camels (Borges 181).

Soyinka stands distinct from other postcolonial writers in this aspect. We do not find a romantic glorification of the past. We find in him an unwillingness to completely reject the West. Soyinka's pessimism about the intricate world is not only a result of oppression but also a criticism of progress. It is an unwillingness to completely reject the West and the use of colonial influence to broaden the context and definitions around which the African literary tradition exists that earn Soyinka a place in the literary canon. But this is not the case with writers like Derek Walcott and others. To quote Brian Crow, "For Derek Walcott, a greater effort of reclamation is needed and the need to restore that heritage is a crucial theme of their writing whereas they are not in Soyinka" (73). The same idea has been expressed by Bruce King too: "Soyinka is a conscious but not a self-conscious artist- this explains his impatience with too much philosophizing about being an African." (Introduction 320)

Consequently, a glance at the dramatist's family and academic background will not be a misplaced intrusion at this point. Biographical details at times serve as a very reliable source of information which will help the readers to come to grips with the playwright's insights, ideologies and perspective. A brief look into the literary achievements of this lion of African letters and jewel of English stage helps us to get acquainted with the multi-faceted personality of Wole Soyinka.

Born on July 13, 1934 at Abeokuta, Western Nigeria as Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka, the Nobel laureate is the second child of Samuel Ayodele and Grace Eniola Soyinka. After spending his childhood and young

manhood in Lagos and Ibadan, Soyinka began his university education at Ibadan. From 1954 to 1959 he studied English at the University of Leeds in Great Britain. At Leeds he found a mentor in the noted drama scholar G. Wilson Knight. Under Knight's guidance, Soyinka became aware of the European dramatic tradition.

All the works of Soyinka show an attempt to fuse European tradition with Yoruba culture. He wrote two plays during this time, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and Jewel*. *The Swamp Dwellers* is an efficient and well staged piece. An old villager, his wife and a fat, selfish priest are opposed by a blind beggar and the son of the couple. It is the beggar, who though blind, is gifted with the inner vision and optimism necessary to achieve social regeneration. *The Lion and the Jewel* is a hilarious comedy. It is the story of a pretentious and ineffective advocate of progress, a village school master Lakune who loses the village beauty Sidi, the girl he would wed, to a wily polygamous chief. Even in this light hearted play is discernible the playwright's anger, pessimism and devotion to political themes. As Eldred Jones remarks, in "The Essential Soyinka," "Soyinka's ideas matured early" (132).

Soyinka had moved to London in 1958, but after Nigeria's independence in 1960, returned home to take up his career as a dramatist, director and Professor of Literature. He established the acting company, the 1960 masks. His most elaborate play *A Dance of the Forests* was performed as part of Nigerian Independence Day activities on Oct 1st 1960. A complex play, it employs the figure of dance to unify the three different phases - past represented by Mata Kharibu's empire, present in the activities of Demoke

and others and future through the half-child. In the same year, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, a satire on the corruption in religion and politics was produced. It was during this time that Soyinka became the central figure in the controversy regarding negritude, a nostalgic and indiscriminate glorification of the black African past which ignores the potential benefits of modernization. To quote Eldred Jones' remarks from "The Essential Soyinka" again, "If Wole had never written another line, he would probably always be remembered in one version or another of his duiker duikritude, tiger tigritude, Negro-negritude quip" (114).

Soyinka was arrested for the first time in 1965. He was wrongly accused for making an illegal broadcast in which an unidentified speaker declared that the elections had been rigged and the results were false. He remained in prison for three months. Intensive protest and desperate appeal, from a host of celebrities like Robert Lowell and Lionel Trilling finally succeeded in the releasing of Soyinka. *The Road* was published in the same year. The play is exasperating at times but finally the effect is scintillating. At its centre is the Professor who runs the Aksident store. He is in a quest for 'the word' which will reveal the mystery of death to him. *The Interpreters*, Soyinka's first novel was published the same year. It focuses on a group of intellectuals who have accepted the role of interpreters. They interpret not only themselves but a society in transition.

During 1967, Civil War broke out in Nigeria. Soyinka was once again imprisoned at Kaduna for 27 months for his position on Biafran war. He was held in solitary confinement, chained and confined in a cell that measured four by eight feet, Deprived of human contact, medical attention, books and

paper Soyinka feared that he will lose his mental balance. He managed to acquire some toilet paper, cigarette packets and wrote on them. He mentions in his prison memoir *The Man Died* that he could survive as a man and as a mind only because he was able to write. “It was crucial; That saved my sanity, just to be able to scribble some thing from time to time. And I think that would be true of most writers.” (38).

Each poem or fragment of a line that he managed to send to the outside world became a literary event and a reassurance to Soyinka’s supporters that he still lived. Published as *The Man Died. Prison notes of Wole Soyinka*, the author’s diary constitutes the most important work that has been written about the Biafran War. “*The Man Died* is not so much of the story of Wole Soyinka’s own temporary death during the Nigerian Civil war but a personified account of Nigeria’s fall from sanity, documented by one of the country’s leading intellectuals” (Larson, “Wole Soyinka” 7).

He prepared this after the torturing experience of the prison where he was imprisoned for two years. It is an autobiographical account of his detention experiences. Imprisoned in the Kaduna prison, denied of the company of men and books, Soyinka was afraid that prison will make him a stranger to himself. He was imprisoned in 1967 for allegedly conspiring in the Nigerian Civil War.

At the outbreak of the massacre of Ibos during the Nigerian civil war, Soyinka attempted practical action. He was convinced that the whole war was taking place on a ground and that it was irrelevant to the urgent problems confronting the nation. The result of the war would only intensify ethnic rivalry, corruption and multiple dictatorships. Soyinka travelled North

to create a united front against violence among individuals. His attempt was not successful. His visit to the secessionist region was described as clandestine. But he says he went deliberately in order to bring reconciliation between the two warring groups. He tells Louis Gates in an interview:

I went there to present definite political alternative which had been worked out by quite a number of contributions. It could very well have been another individual entirely who paid the visit. But, for particular reasons, I was in a position to present these alternatives to the secessionist's regime. And I went (33.)

He was imprisoned for 26 months (August 1967 to October 1969). Soyinka believes that “The man dies in all of us who keep silent in the face of tyranny” (18). This was the reaction when he received a cablegram stating that a Nigerian journalist was dead on being beaten severely at the order of General Yakub Gowon, the Nigerian military ruler. This inspired him to provide the title *The Man Died* to his prison notes. Through his own example before and after the years of imprisonment Soyinka confirms that a man must not die spiritually or mentally in the face of tyranny.

Soyinka was released on the 26th of 1969 as part of independent Anniversary Amnesty. After this, when General Yakub Gowon sent a message to Soyinka, “Tell him I said, Bygones be Bygones,” Soyinka replied, “My arse”! (Larson 472). In a press conference he gave a twist to the wording of the national rallying cry from ‘To keep Nigeria one a task must be done’ to “To keep Nigeria one justice must be done” (Larson 485).

The Man Died along with *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Season of Anomy* and *The Shuttle in the Crypt* forms a quartet. Each of these works

deals with the consequence of war; *Madmen and Specialists* written in 1970 is Soyinka's most pessimistic play. It deals with man's inhumanity and pervasive corruption in structures of power. Cannibalism provides a metaphor and a perverse ritual in this play. *The Season of Anomy* (1973) is a finely structured disturbing novel, in which Soyinka unflinchingly depicts the atrocities of war as well as injustice meted out by man to man. *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972) again is a poignant depiction of the experiences in the prison. The crypt is Soyinka's ironical name for his cell, the shuttle is the restless, creative mind at work. After 1972, he left Nigeria and went into a self imposed exile.

During the next few years he published three important plays. *The Bachae of Euripides*, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Jero's Metamorphoses*. *The Bachae* emphasizes the theme of social upheaval, liberation and regeneration. The play is remarkable for being a practical demonstration of the theory of drama outlined in *Myth, Literature and African World*. *Death and the King's Horseman* is a poignant play which combines ritualistic elements with Western stage techniques to give life to real event that had happened in Oyo in 1946. *Jero's Metamorphoses* is an attack on military regimes.

Soyinka returned to Nigeria after a coup which deposed President Gowon in 1975. During the 1970's and throughout the next decade, he was a force in the field of politics. He also served as a visiting professor at numerous universities. '*Ake the years of childhood*', Soyinka's childhood memoirs was published in 1981.

Soyinka became the first African writer to receive the Nobel prize in 1986. The Swedish academy described him as “one of the finest poetical playwrights that have written in English” (Jelso, *Reflections*). Critic, Stanley Master exclaimed, “His drama and fiction have challenged the West to broaden its aesthetic and accept African standards of art and literature”. But Soyinka was very much conscious of his responsibilities as a Nobel prize Winner. He considered it as a “mixed blessing” “Everybody wants something as a result of that prize. It has such a prestige and such a hold on people’s imagination in all corners and on all levels that you become the property of the world. I don’t reject it, don’t misunderstand me, but it is mixed blessing”. He knows that as a Nobel laureate everybody expects something. There will never be an end for these demands. To quote him once again”, “They never do. I met Garcia Marquez in Cuba shortly after my prize and he looked at me sympathetically and asked me how I was coping. And I said, ‘I’ll survive. I’ve made up my mind that I have to undergo it and be quite stoical. Fortunately the year is nearly over, a new beauty Queen will be anointed and I can go rest.’ And he laughed and said, ‘it never ends, my brother”. And he was right, it never ends” (Gates, interview 34).

Kongi’s Harvest, *Opera Wonyosi* and *A Play of Giants* are Soyinka’s most political plays *Kongi’s Harvest* is an attack on the dictators of the Government. *Opera Wonyosi* (1981) is an adaptation of Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera*. *A Play of Giants* (1984) openly satirizes four military dictators of Africa-Bokassa, Idi Amin, Nguema, and Mobuto Sese. They are denied, due to their monstrous nature, a place in human society and history. *A Scourge of Hyacinth* (1992), *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995) and *From Zia With Love* are some of his later plays.

Then, once again Soyinka was accused, with 14 others, of having made Bomb attacks against the army between the years 1996-97. So he did not come back to his country until 1998. As he says “some people think the Nobel prize makes you bullet proof. I never had that illusion”. “*The Open Sore of the Continent : A personal Nigerian Narrative of the Crisis*’ published in 1996 presents an impassioned examination of the political unrest in his country. Soyinka, in this narrative, focuses on a single day. June 23, 1993 and one man, the brutal dictator of Nigeria, Sani Abacha. June 23 is important since it was on that date that the nation’s free and fair election, held about two weeks earlier, were annulled and the victor Moshood Abiola was imprisoned. “Under a dictatorship, a nation ceases to exist” (15), Soyinka cries in *The Open Sore*. His latest play is *King Baabu*. The title refers to the play of Alfred Jarry, *UBU Roi* (1896). Like the other political plays, *King Baabu* is also an attack on dictatorship and injustice that prevail among the rulers.

Professor Soyinka has been honoured with many awards both at the national and international levels as a sign of recognition of his literary as well as social achievements. Among other awards, the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred on him on June 12th 2001 by the University of Alberta. Once again his creative talents and intellectual pursuits have been recognized. He has established himself as a respected social crusader, a consistent advocate of democracy, a progressive humanist, an opponent of military dictatorship and a Nobel Laureate of exceptional stature.

It is very difficult to summarise the voluminous works of Soyinka. Besides the plays, novels and poems, his major contribution to the world of

literature includes numerous thought provoking essays like, “The Critic and Society” “This Past must Address the Present” and “Art, Outrage and Dialogue”. There are many key themes to be found running through his works. The creative destructive duality in man, the recurring cycle of human stupidity and violence, a preoccupation with military dictators and the theme of death are some of the general themes found pervading the works of Wole Soyinka. Soyinka’s plays deal with serious topics. As Eldred Jones points out in “Wole Soyinka, Critical Approaches”,

Soyinka is a serious dramatist in the Aristotlean sense; his plays deal with things that matter; things that are worth troubling about. They are concerned eventually with the fate of man in his environment; the struggle for survival; the cost of survival; the real meaning of progress; the necessity for sacrifice if man is to make any progress; the role of death-even the necessity for death in man’s life (65).

The plays, poems and novels of Soyinka show a deep indebtedness to Yoruba culture, Yoruba mythology and religion. It is true that Soyinka’s spiritual heritage is a twin heritage. He had spent his early childhood within a traditional non-western framework. But living at a time when Africa was being pressurized by her coloniser to alter its traditional beliefs, Soyinka had no other way but that of being influenced by that too. He was educated under the British system. He turned to biblical sources for some of his imagery. He shows the deep influence of Western authors, from Greek to modern European and American writers. But he proves himself to be more a devotee of his own culture than of Western culture. His literature as well as his

theory of drama are drawn from the mythology of his people, especially from the myth of his favourite deity Ogun. No other writer has shown such a profound understanding about African myths in general and Ogun myth in particular as Soyinka. In *Myth, Literature and African World*, a collection of essays, Soyinka has analysed and explicated the Ogun mystery to his readers. In this context a reference to his seminal essay, “The Fourth Stage” and *Myth, Literature and African World* becomes relevant.

In the above discussion of Soyinka’s achievements as a writer, *Myth, Literature and African World* was not included because it deserves special attention. *Myth, Literature and African World* is Soyinka’s quintessential document in literary criticism. Here he analyses, as the title suggests, the interconnecting worlds of myth, ritual and literature in Africa. Maduakor’s remarks are explicit in establishing the link between this African writer’s theory and practice. He remarks in his article, “Soyinka as a Literary Critic”: “The title is suggestive of Soyinka’s major critical preoccupation. He is fascinated with myth as a phenomenon that exercises an unlimited appeal for the human imagination, manifesting itself in the literature, culture, folklore and world-view of a people” (23). *Myth, Literature and African World*, is the first book length presentation of Soyinka’s literary philosophy. Though it is packed with somewhat provocative ideas, it does help the reader in understanding the works of Soyinka written in the mythic mode.

Wole Soyinka has his roots in Yoruba culture as has been mentioned earlier. Indeed he was born a member of the Yoruba tribe. Besides he has taken deep scholarly interest in the culture of his people. His sustained interest in the Yoruba metaphysics and the in depth study made by him in it

led to the formulation of an eclectic theory of drama, his theory of tragedy. This theory of tragedy was first explained in one of his enlightening articles, “The Fourth Stage.” It was first published in honour of Professor G. Wilson Knight and later appeared as an Appendix to his famous work *Myth, Literature and African World*. He referred to the relevant aspects of this dramatic theory in one of his lectures in the University of Washington in 1975, “Drama and the Revolutionary Ideal”. The aesthetic insights of the essay and the speech constitute a coherent theory only when the two are correlated. Maduakor in “Soyinka as a Literary Critic” quotes Biodun Jeyifo: “The Fourth Stage,” according to Biodun Jeyifo is “the finest document of modern African Idealist philosophy” (qtd. in Maduakor 27) Much praised for the lyrical and explosive language used in it, “The Fourth Stage” attempts a redefinition of modern tragedy through a synthesis of Yoruba and Western tragic forms.

Soyinka develops a theory of Yoruba tragedy by examining the ideas underlying Yoruba theology. All his works flow from the knowledge he has attained about Yoruba culture and Yoruba myth. He employs the Yoruba myths in his works in order to convey certain concerns of humanity in the form of a vision. He exhibits a vitality and dynamism in his explication of the myth. Myths are representations of experience and phenomena in the imagination of the whole mass of people. They serve two purposes in the case of Soyinka. His immersion in mythology provides imaginative depth to his writing. At the same time, they give him an opportunity to retain a relation with the collective tradition. Moreover, Wole Soyinka has projected his notion of the nature of the artist as visionary. Accordingly, in the following chapters of this thesis, an attempt will be made to analyse the kind

of visionary voice that sounds from his own writing regarding art, artist, life and politics as exemplified through the myth of Ogun and conceptualised in the dramatic theory of Wole Soyinka which he has presented in *Myth, Literature and African World*.

At this juncture, it will not be inappropriate to consider the possible reasons behind the recent upsurge of interest in ancient myths. We can see that twentieth century writers and artists have shown great interest in myths of the past. Many causes have been suggested for this preoccupation with myth, the chief among them being the modern man's deep awareness of a loss of spiritual value in his life. In order to give meaning to this life which has been devoid of spirituality, people turn to the vast reservoirs of myth and rituals inherited from older cultures such as classical antiquity. However, according to the classic Greek concept, myth refers either to a true or an invented story or plot. On the other hand the purpose of myths in the modern view is to give a rational explanation to different social customs. It also tries to explain the rules by which people conduct their lives. M.H. Abrams has tried to define mythology like this:

In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology- a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives (169).

In a common tradition of analysis, myth is, above all, explanatory. The popularity of myths is mainly because of their apparent spontaneity and collectivity. The evident universality and timelessness of myths and their success in giving lasting and satisfying accounts of the riddles of existence can be considered as another reason for their popularity. Many attempts have been made to provide a general key to all mythologies. Of these, James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie L Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* have gained great importance.

The repeated occurrence of basic myth formulas like the presence of a tantalizing hero and his adventures or of motifs of animal or nature are the main elements which have led to the thought provoking works of Frazer as well as those of the myth critic, Northrop Frye. An attempt seen in Frye to explain myths by referring to fertility rites of animal and vegetable life has led to the assignment of an appropriate place to all myths in the seasonal cycle on the basis of sterility, growth and fertility. Thus the four main narrative genres like comedy, romance, tragedy and satire belong to spring, summer, autumn and winter respectively.

Among more up to date and less literary approaches to myth, the most recent one is that conducted with references to the work of Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss is an anthropologist whose interest in myth overlaps with that of literary theory. He departed from the traditional views. His argument is that myth is a language designed to communicate thought. The properties common to all myths are not to be sought at the level of content but at the level of a structure which is necessary to all forms of communication. According to him, myths are treated as 'composed of signs. They are to be

identified and interpreted on the model of the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure': (Abrahams 170).

Levi Strauss has acknowledged his debt to Structuralism by speaking about four basic ideas he has borrowed from linguistics: They are signifying as an unconscious process, the importance of system, relations rather than individual terms as basic units of meaning and the search for general rules. His work on myth further extends the notion of structural analysis. He begins with mythologies as they have been collected in empirical field work. He proceeds to uncover the structure of particular myths. He is also concerned with revealing a common structure to a range of particular myths that belong to different cultures. The known myths are but a manifestation of the underlying structure. So a myth becomes a combination of meaningful elements, which can be combined together according to a limited set of laws. To quote from "*Cultural Theory, The Key Thinkers*, "Myth is an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable, one and multiplicity, identity and difference, life and death, belief and reality" (Edgar and Sidge 142).

This brief account of the varied but scholarly discussions regarding myths supports the view point that mythology still remains a fertile area of investigations for writers. It may be recalled that Plato in 4th century BC used invented myths to project philosophical speculation. Later German writers like Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel state the importance of developing a unified mythology. From Plato to Yeats, we see the writers insisting on the essentiality of an integrative mythology whether inherited or invented for literature. Now-a-days, the writers and artists use myths as a technique to

refer to the contemporaneous realities and to derive their perception of art. To quote Mary David, from *Wole Soyinka, A Quest for Renewal*,

While anthropologists, psychologists, and ethnographers came up with numerous definitions of myth and explanations of what Levi-Strauss has described as ‘unexpected affinities in the dispersed corpus of myth’, writers and artists resorted to the use of myths as technique as a new way of responding to reality and ordering their perception of it (31).

At this point it is relevant to consider what Clarence Hugh Holman et al have to say about myths. In their landmark work, *A Handbook to Literature* they distinguish between the traditional definition of myth and its modification made by the modern age. In myths, as defined in the traditional sense, we find “anonymous stories having their roots in the primitive folk beliefs of races or nations and presenting supernatural episodes as a means of interpreting natural events in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view” (Holman 298).

In the modern sense it is redefined as containing “vestiges of primordial ritual and ceremony, or the repository of racial memories or a structure of unconsciously held value systems, or an expression of the general beliefs of a race, social class or nation or a unique embodiment of a cosmic view” (Holman 298). These two definitions are relevant to Soyinka’s use of the term myth. Even though Soyinka does not proffer a concrete definition of myth in his work *Myth, Literature and African World*, the title is suggestive of his fascination with myth. Myths were always appealing to the human imagination. This interest in myth can be seen manifested in the

literature, culture, folklore and world-view of his people. From Soyinka's critical utterances it becomes obvious that myths connote a people's world view and the moral system that sustains that world view as it is reflected in their stories of the origin of the world, of gods and man.

It is in the active and dynamic integration of traditional myth and practice with contemporary concerns that Soyinka's distinctive contribution lies. Soyinka felt so fully at ease with the rich cultural history of his nation that he turned towards it confidently. However, no desperate need for support from the myths is seen in him. Not for him the disillusionment of Blake whose words are quoted in *A Glossary* by M.H. Abrams: 'I must create a system or be enslaved by another main' (171). Obviously, the rich cultural heritage of his Yoruba religion provided him with such a vast reservoir of myth and ritual that he could draw inspiration from it quite naturally and spontaneously. He turned to Western authors as well as Yoruba mythology for inspiration. He turned to biblical sources too. But instead of borrowing from these foreign cultures blindly, Soyinka has imbibed the best from them and uses them for his artistic purpose.

Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek cultures decisively influenced Soyinka. *Birth of Tragedy* in particular helped him to gain profound insight into the Yoruba mythology. He finds a significant resemblance to the characteristics of Dionysius and Apollo in his favourite deity Ogun. This resemblance is elaborated in the so called 'Ritual essays' (Maduakor 6.). These essays include "The Fourth Stage", "Morality and Aesthetics in the ritual Archetypes" and 'Drama and the African World View. where Soyinka attempts to define the origin and meaning of the tragic

myth in the context of the Yoruban world view. Thus, even though Soyinka's concept is Yorubacentric it draws its inspiration from Nietzsche and classical drama.

Soyinka's theory of drama is formed on the terms of previous ritual approaches to drama, the theories of Nietzsche and Wilson Knight. They in turn, appear to have formulated their concepts of tragedy and ritual by a reconsideration of Aristotle's ideas as stated in the *Poetics*. Aristotle traces the link between tragedy and ritual to the historical origin of tragedy in the dithyramb. But Nietzsche extends this idea further to argue that ritual dithyramb becomes symbolic of universal and individual conflicts. Unlike Nietzsche who is concerned with Greek ritual and drama, G. Wilsons Knight deals with Elizabethan and modern drama. Soyinka further differs from these writers in the sense that his theory of drama has a contemporary focus. As pointed out by Ann B Davis, "His theory is a theory of drama which focuses on contemporary drama, while Nietzsche develops a theory of Greek tragedy, and Knight develops a theory of drama based on a reconsideration of Greek Tragedy" (148).

Soyinka makes use of a much broader definition of ritual to discuss its connection with drama. In "Drama and Revolutionary Ideal" he defines ritual as the language of Masses" (87). He terms it a 'Universal idiom', (87). Ritual is a confusing term in Soyinka's theoretical writing. However, in his 1975 lecture "Drama and the Revolutionay ideal" at the University of Washington, he demonstrates that a play's explanation of what it is should be contained within its own terms. A play is explained not by the external aspects but by its inner and internal structures like ritual. As Derek Wright explains: in his

article, "Ritual and Revolution, Soyinka's Dramatic Theory", "Its (A play's) vision should be validated by its own internal, cohesive, self-sustaining structures and not resolved by recourse to concepts external and alien to its own autonomous, self apprehended world. Ritual is one such cohesive structure and provider of a play's inner formal consistency or integrity" (46).

Soyinka correlates the idea of ritual with a set of assumptions regarding the nature of the experience of ritual. These assumptions are formed from Soyinka's interpretation of Yoruba rite. He shows resemblance to the viewpoint of Nietzsche when he considers ritual experience in terms of the experience of self as individual and the experience of self as part of a community. But the difference is that it is developed from Yoruba metaphysics. Yoruba Metaphysics emphasizes three major areas of existence - the world of living, the world of the unborn and the world of the dead. To these words, Soyinka adds a fourth mediatory world, the area of transition. Soyinka explains it thus: in his article, "The Fourth Stage": "The past is the ancestors, the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws... The fourth area of experience (is) the immeasurable gulf of transition" (148.) The Fourth Stage stands somewhere between the two kinds of existence - neither human life nor spiritual existence. This area lies in the spaces between worlds - the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn. This is a kind of fourth dimension or twilight zone, an area of transition in which are found all the raw, uncreated essences, all of the things that can be seen as unfinished, improperly formed, or arrested in development, whether physically or mentally" (Wright, "Transition" 21). Discussing this fourth zone in his interview with Karen

Morell, Soyinka remarks that they are not really sick persons and that they represent ‘a special, numinous area of awareness, and a consciousness which is closed to the normal human being, and there is a feeling of them not being quite of this world’ (“In Person” 118). He explains how this idea of fourth area occurred to him. To quote his words, “... there was the phenomena of this strange daughter of theirs, (his neighbours) who was the child of two worlds, this twilight child who used to just go into a kind of trance. And I think, that aspect, that sort of contribution from their family was the most important in shaping my sense of the metaphysical world. That’s a kind of Yoruba mythology” (In Person 119). It is also the state of the gods as they undertake their dangerous journey from heaven to earth. It is with reference to the daring plunge taken by the gods that the discussion of the Ogun myth becomes relevant.

According to Soyinka, tragedy originated in the Yoruba world view from the god’s consciousness of their own incompleteness. The Yorubas believe that gods lived on earth, once upon a time, with human beings in perfect harmony. But gradually they got estranged. In religious terms, this estrangement is symbolized as the thick undergrowth of matter and non matter. Soyinka uses the term ‘chthonic realm’ to indicate this, a phrase which he borrowed from Nietzsche. The leader of the gods, who first cleared the way and fashioned the bridge was Ogun. He wanted to reestablish the principle of complementarity. As Soyinka interprets it in “The Fourth Stage” “Into this Universal womb, plunged and emerged Ogun, the first actor disintegrating within the abyss” (121). Ogun’s pathway through this abyss is called ‘the gulf of transition’ (149). It was an act of courage. It was an act of will done for the sake of both gods and human beings. There was a risk of

disintegration; but he successfully came out of the chaos with the power of his will. Thus Ogun, the god of forge, becomes the symbol of creation, of poetry.

Ogun's pathway is the fourth stage. Ogun is the first actor in the Yoruba drama. The first act was tragic art. The fourth stage is a connecting link between the three areas of existence defined by Yoruba ontology as the world of the ancestor, the living and the unborn. Ogun is the symbol of destructive principle as well. In a drunken state, he kills both friend and foe. Andrew Gurr also speaks about Ogun's prominence in the works and life of Soyinka, in his informative article, "Third World Drama, Soyinka and Tragedy": "Ogun is Soyinka's favourite, the god of dynamic forces in societies and above all, of the creative and suffering artist. He distinguishes Ogun as the god of creativity rather than of war, a dynamic principle where Obatala is the figure of fertile place. Ogun commands war, has iron for instrument and includes craftsmanship in his sphere of influence." (46).

The act of Ogun, daring risks and taking a plunge into chthonic realm, reassembling himself using his will after he was torn asunder becomes the archetype of regeneration of all those who undergo ordeals. So Ogun becomes a paradigm for all those who, overcoming the moment of despair, arise from the total fragmentation of the mind and succeed in putting themselves together to arise energetic and powerful as ever. "The protagonist in a drama that draws from ritual experience enters the abyss, the inner world of primal reality and brings back its essence which he or she communicates to the choric participants of this rites - the community' (Gurr 48).

Even though the myth on which Soyinka's thinking is based is African, he finds parallel in other mythologies, of which his reading of Nietzsche's Apollonian - Dionysian balancing act is the prime example. Soyinka, in his myth, has emphasized the centrality of Obatala and Ogun. Critics, finding similarities between these two sets of deities compare Ogun with Dionysius and Obatala with Apollo. He invests duality of construction and destruction in Ogun. This is the hallmark of the Ogunnian essence. In the journey of Ogun, Soyinka pictures the role of the contemporary artist in the postcolonial milieu undergoing the terrifying experience of self-disintegration in the abyss, facing the challenge of the transitional world, experiencing disintegration and emerging after attaining achievement or gaining a vision.

A critical analysis of Soyinka's works proves that they can be analysed and interpreted using the dramatic theory centered on the myth of Ogun. Ann. B. Davis in her article, "The dramatic Theory of Wole Soyinka," points out four stages in the movement through the passage. "First one must risk change, second one must find a symbolic parallel to this risk in which change is achieved, third, one must celebrate the successful change in the symbolic parallel and fourth by celebration one achieves change" (150). Further more, the Ogun myth reaffirms Soyinka's belief that in order to bring about change, the hero must lose his precious sense of self in communal consciousness. In the end, he develops a new self by organizing the awareness gained by the self from communal consciousness.

It is true that general readers may find some difficulty in understanding this theory for which they will have to read many articles in

addition to “The Fourth Stage” and ‘Drama and the Revolutionary ideal’ where Soyinka has discussed several issues and made many valid points. In addition, there are the complexity of style, varied allusions, connotative meanings and ambiguous usages which contribute to the obscurity of Soyinka’s works. Soyinka has been vehemently criticized for the obscurity of his works. The school of critics known as “the decolonizers of African literature” has criticized Soyinka severely. They accuse Soyinka for not reviving the African literary tradition. They have charged him for using a language which is ambiguous and opaque. He has been accused of being over-dependent on Western forms and traditions. James Booth was so provoked by the obscurity of Soyinka’s style which can never be on the same level of the ordinary reader’s assimilative capacity. Soyinka’s answer to all this is evident in his works. The three plays selected for analysis *A Dance of the Forests*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *Death and the King’s Horseman* provide clear answers to these accusations. Soyinka was not in the least worried about these criticisms: He remarks: “everybody obtains from a work of art very many different things at many different levels and one should never worry unduly that a certain selection of one’s... readership is not appreciating it” (qtd. in Booth 123-24).

Soyinka has interwoven into the text of his plays numerous other aspects like language, myth, symbolism and allegory which in their own way, have made a major contribution to the complexity of his works. The sophistication in his style, linguistic complexity and introspective mood of his ~~works~~ have often beguiled the unwary critic into placing him entirely in the tradition of modern Western fiction. But from an analysis of his plays, it becomes obvious that Soyinka has not deliberately tried to ignore the

ordinary readers. On the other hand, his complexity and obscurity become part of a greater purpose and he emerges as an African writer of unique distinction for the following reasons. As explained by Mr. Rajeswar. “The ideological and mythical dimension of Wole Soyinka’s works, the minute analysis of society and deep insights into the African psyche and his exploitation of the resourcefulness of the English language lend his works variety and depth besides earning them universal acceptability and acclaim. In this process, Soyinka emerges an African writer of unique distinctions” (28).

It remains a fact that, despite these hurdles, the theory contributes a lot to the ritual school of drama and dramatic theory generally. It is highly relevant for the study of modern drama and the condition of modern man. Ann Davis, who has best expressed the real significance and relevance of the dramatic theory of Wole Soyinka, finds that

On the basis of a study of Soyinka’s dramatic theory it is apparent that Soyinka must not only be considered a leading contemporary dramatist but also an outstanding dramatic theorist, whose contribution to the ritual theory of drama is an assertion of its relevance to world drama and the understanding of contemporary dramatic experience (147).

Soyinka has invested all his heroes with the will of Ogun and it is possible to interpret the actions of all his heroes as re-enactments of Ogun’s mythical ordeals. They are typically the embodiments of social and communal will. Critics have even discerned a point of resemblance between Soyinka himself and his favourite deity, Ogun. Adrew Peek calls him “Soyinka, the child of

Ogun' (1). Biodun Jeyifo in his article, "What is the will of Ogun? Reflections on Soyinka's Nobel Prize and the African Literary Tradition": captures the real significance of the use of Ogun myth in Soyinka's works:

His (Soyinka's) prolific and sustained creativity, the diversity and range of his literary output, the ferocity of his opposition to tyranny and injustice, his penchant for mysticism and the esoteric arts, the robustness, vitality and lyrical power of much of his writings, all these collectively approximate convincingly to the array of significations which Soyinka has assigned to the Ogun essence. It is through the use of Ogun myth that Soyinka displays a wide cultural perspective and with a style to match Ogun's grandeur and mythic tradition, makes statements on human existence (19).

Soyinka has created strong characters in his works. His characters are endowed with the creative destructive principle of Ogun. Demoke in *A Dance of the Forests*, Elesin in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Professor in *The Road*, Dionysus in *The Bacchae*, Eman in *The Strong Breed*-all are both creative as well as destructive. They all succeed in bridging the gulf just as their mentor Ogun did in his role as the first victim hero of Yoruba tragic rites. Exactly as Ogun's vitality stems from his contradictory essences the protagonists of Soyinka's works display a vitality from their creative - destructive duality.

An analysis of Soyinka's major works reveals, that he is preoccupied with certain key themes. His plays deal with serious themes like death, necessity of death in life, creative destructive duality in man, recurring cycle

of human stupidity and violence, the brutality of military dictatorships. Death holds a unique place in Soyinka's works. *The Road, A Dance of the Forests, Death and the King's Horseman, The Strong Breed* and many other plays deal with death. In almost all the plays, death is a phenomenon of transition and a ritual process. His plays emphasise the importance of rituals and rites of passages in order to cross from one stage to another.

In the plays of Soyinka it is not mainly death of the main character that causes tragedy. It depends mainly on the hazardous journey undertaken by the protagonist to face the challenges in the gulf of transition. Ogun and Soyinka are both tragic artists. Ogun has done the great daring deed of immersing himself in the seething cauldron of the dark world and will, to fashion a bridge between worlds of gods and men. "Only the battle of the will is thus primally creative, from its spiritual stress springs the soul's despairing cry which proves its own solace, which alone reverberating within the cosmic vaults usurps the power of the abyss" (Fourth Stage 146).

Significantly, Soyinka's plays deal with the theme of recurring cycle of human stupidity. The human beings refuse to accept the fact that crime and violence have been present amongst them ever since they were created by god. This cycle of violence will persist until it is broken by the act of will of a courageous individual. This theme brings out the philosophy of despair of the author. There can never be a change in human nature. Cycle of bestiality, misery and cannibalism will hover around the world of human beings. His vision of life thus finds expression in a satire which is thoroughly pessimistic. *A Dance of the Forests* was "the first announcement of Soyinka's tragic imagination" (Moore 29). It is the most complex satirical

play of Soyinka where he employs the weapon of satire to warn people of betrayal, exploitation, violence, philistinism and injustice. The satire is all the more sharp because it is aimed at a newborn nation. In the midst of celebrations all on a sudden, people are given warnings about the grim future. From *A Dance of the Forests* through *The Road, Madmen and Specialists* and *Death and the Kings Horseman* to the latest play *King Baabu*, satire has been at the service of his vision. All the plays give the warning that the human race is permanently and incessantly threatened by exploitative tendency of the powerful. The tyrannical appetite of men in power is satirized in many of his works. This vision is based on the mysteries of god Ogun, the creator-destroyer and on the Yoruba myth of a snake, which eats its tail eternally representing life and death cycle. Soyinka has deliberately introduced a 'mobilus strip' which can be considered as a symbol of change and hope. But the general idea that emerges out of his plays is one of pessimism. He notices a bestial nature in all human being. It is this dark, violent, evil side of human nature, that fascinates him and repels him.

Literary interest in plays, which are notable for their tragic vision, has always been intense. As individual works, they often excite the attention of the scholars to such an extent that comparatively little has been done to explain in general terms what the vision is in itself. All works, whether tragedy or comedy present some kind of vision. Obviously, tragic is not the only vision projected by any serious literature or philosophy. Nor is it the profoundest vision. But it can be considered the most spectacular and the most expressive of the crisis mentality of our time. Therefore an attempt is made here to give a general meaning of the term and then to conduct

exploratory operations on three selected plays of Wole Soyinka. It is interesting to show how far these meanings can be found relevant in their application to the works of Soyinka.

The highest comedy has in it the possibility of the profoundest tragedy. Without a sense of the tragic, comedy may become unimpressive. Similarly a tragedy is made all the more effective when it is interspersed with touches of comedy. As Richard B. Sewall observes,

the highest comedy gains its power from its tragic possibility, and the profoundest tragedy presents a full if fleeting vision, through the temporary disorder of an ordered universe to which the comedy is witness. Without a sense of the tragic, comedy loses heart. It becomes brittle, it has animation but no life. Without a recognition of truths of comedy tragedy becomes bleak and intolerable (5).

Tragedy has exerted on artists of all generations a compelling influence. Tragedy requires from the artists an independent radical vision. It is so vital to tragedy that its lack is very fatal. We can see that writers from early ages to the present age have used the tragedy to express their vision. Elizabethans also chose tragedy to suit their expressive needs. It can be taken as the sum of insights, intuitions, and feelings to which we can apply the words like 'vision' or 'view' or 'sense of life'. The tragic vision or sense of life can be explained as an attitude towards life which is present in every man and which can be evoked by experience.

The tragic vision in its first phase is primal or primitive. It is so because it calls out of the depths, the first of all questions, the question of

existence - what does it mean to be? “It sees man as the questioner, naked, unaccommodated, alone, facing mysterious devilish forces in his own nature and outside, and the irreducible facts of suffering and death (Sewall 5).

From this definition it is clear that the vision of life peculiar to the mystic, the pious, the confirmed optimist or the confirmed pessimist cannot be tragic. The tragic vision is not for those who cannot live with unsolved questions or unresolved doubts. Again it is not enough that the hero accepts the unresolved questions, the feelings of guilt, anxiety, suffering or happiness passively and does nothing. He has to challenge the destiny, fight against the odds and present his case. To quote Richard B. Sewall, ‘the tragic vision impels the man of action to fight against destiny, kick against pricks and state his case before God or his fellows’ (5).

The artist is showing his reaction to the challenging forces, he is taking his own action, he is defying destiny when he writes a tragedy. So we find in the great tragedies a sense of the artist’s own involvement which is missing in comedy. From this initial phase of the tragic vision the artist moves to the more complicated dialectic as he contemplates the thrust and counter thrust of man against destiny. His case is one with the philosophers. But unlike the philosophers he focusses on the man in action rather than the thinking man. Richard Sewall distinguishes between the artists on the one hand and the philosophers and moralists on the other:

Where the philosophers and moralists would generalize on experience, find unity in multiplicity, and reduce experience to viable categories and prescriptions the tragic artist explores each experience directly. For whatever it may reveal about man’s

capacities and possibilities whatever he finds man capable of in actions or under extremist pressure is to him the truth whether it be abject miserable or sublime and redeeming. This truth constitutes the discovery of tragedy (Sewall 7).

So the conflict between man and destiny is there always. Each age has different tensions and terrors, but they open on the same wide abyss. Each artist learns from his experience and observations. What his ancestors have contributed also provides a source for him and for his vision. It is true that the new vision changes its direction and expands its compass. So tragedy refers to an object's literary form and the tragic vision a subject's psychology, his view and vision of reality.

Since tragic vision is the expression of the view of the artist, especially as revealed at a crisis, literature of that type should deal with a man of exceptional quality. Murray Krieger expresses this idea clearly in his *"The Tragic Vision"*

The tragic vision, a product of crisis and of shock, is an expression of man only in an extreme situation, never in a normal or routine one. Literature dealing with it frequently dwells on the exceptional man; and when it does choose a normal man it does so only to convert him, by way of the extremity he lives through, into the exceptional man. The tragic vision is, a vision of extreme cases, a distillate of the rebellion, the godlessness which, once induced by crisis purifies itself by rejecting all palliatives. And the tragic visionary is the extremist who finds himself transformed from character to parable (20).

With these general notions about tragic vision, it is possible to examine Soyinka's views on tragedy, life, politics and art. Tragic vision in the literary outlook of an African writer like Wole Soyinka may be expected to embody new insights of contemporary relevance for us in our post colonial milieu. It is absolutely certain that an analysis of three major plays of Wole Soyinka using his own theory of drama based on the myth of Ogun would throw more light on the fascinating complexes that are supposedly involved.

Soyinka shows absolute faith in the individuals whose singular acts of courage may save a humanity on the verge of self destruction. The individual chosen to perform this act of will undergoes many critical as well as shocking experiences. He, a normal man, is converted into an exceptional man by way of the extremity he lives through. His acts of will are capable of saving the human race in general even though it may bring death to him.

For Soyinka, individualization and commitment form an integral part of his artistic creations. Individual heroes play a significant role in Soyinka's concept of social reconstruction. All his plays have examples of individualized heroes. Demoke in *A Dance of the Forests* is the artist endowed with a great responsibility. Eman in *The Strong Breed* is the man chosen to become the carrier of sins even after knowing all its terrors. In *The Road*, the professor is a strong individualist. It may be argued that he is a forger of license. But Soyinka elevates him by describing him as a person on a meta-physical quest after the Word. Igwezu in *The Swamp Dwellers* is the daring voice to question both tradition and religion. In *Kongi's Harvest* and *Madmen and Specialists* he projects the negative side of individualism. Kongi and Dr. Bero represent lust for power in *Kongi's Harvest* and

Madmen and Specialists respectively. Daodu and the Old Man stand for the life principle.

An analysis of the works of Soyinka proves that he is a great mythopoeist.. He was deeply rooted in the literature and philosophy of Yoruba world. He seeks the possibilities of a living mythic vision in the contemporary world. He has made use of myth and ritual from the beginning of his carrier. During his solitary confinement, myth and ritual seem to have attained a deeper significance for him. It was only because of his immersion in myth that he could retain the essence of his mind. They worked as “plinths against unreason,” to quote his own lines from his poem ‘*A Shuttle in the Crypt*’ On being awarded the Nobel prize, Soyinka proclaimed that it was a sign of acceptance of the culture of his country and people. “ I have not been able to accept the prize on a personal level. I accept it as a tribute to the heritage of African literature, which is very little known in the West. I regard it is a statement of respect and acknowledgment of the long years and centuries of disintegration and ignorance of the heritage. It’s on this level that I accept it” (qtd. in Jeyifo, *Reflections* 145).

Soyinka has always made it clear that he believed in using art to evaluate the world around him and to influence it. He assigned an important role to the artist or writer. A close reading of plays, novels and other writings by him, indicates that, for him, art had several functions to serve. It should destroy old social forms, which were no longer functioning. It should be used as a medium for purgation; it can be used cathartically; it must serve its revolutionary use by provoking the audience to change intellectually and emotionally and to become, like Ogun, creative. More than anything, he

emphasizes the need for artistic freedom. He persistently urged the necessity of the writer guiding the society to a beautiful future by leading it with the help of the inner light which he possesses. He continuously addressed the African writers and asked them to assure the outside world that they have a vision. He saw the literary artist as a redeemer.

Soyinka sees society as being in continual need of salvation from itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act; it comes out through the vision and rededication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision in spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save. They frequently end up as the victims of the society which benefits from their vision (Jones *The Writing* 11).

Soyinka's sense of the writer's vision and responsibilities is aggressively different. His vision is drawn from an individual's experience, which begins with self-apprehension. Retrieving and reassessing the past and making the past operative in the present so that a better future may be created is a recurrent concern of Soyinka and the same preoccupation is evident in his Nobel Lecture titled significantly enough, "This past must address the Present". Soyinka, in 1967 stated in his essay, "The Writer in a Modern African State," that it was time the African writer stopped being a mere chronicler, and understood also that part of his essential purpose was to write with a very definite vision. "He must also at least begin by exposing the future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present' (20).

Soyinka has clearly expressed his own sense of social responsibility in his creative as well as his critical works. One remarkable feature of this is the consistency of his vision. This consistency can be traced from his earliest

work, *The Invention and other Tales* to his latest published *King Baabu*. This consistency of vision has been interpreted as an example of the stagnation of his political vision by some critics of Soyinka. But it has been repeatedly proved that rather than being at all stagnant and trapped in a particular kind of vision, this vision should be recognized as the special mark of Soyinka, the artist and the man turning and refining the most basic concerns of human life from the 1960s to 1970's. The process spanned over a period of time, is surmised by Eldred Jones in "The Essential Soyinka": "Soyinka's ideas natured early. The seeds of his essential ideas are seen in his earlier work, and he has remained consistent throughout. They can be seen in works of small compass and light tone, as well as in longer and more sombre works" (114).

A noticeable change is evident in the tone and attitudes of Soyinka in his writings after his imprisonment in 1967. On many occasions Soyinka has expressed his desire to remain indifferent to politics. But he serves as a living reminder that writers in some parts of the world do not get to choose whether their work will be political. That is a privilege enjoyed by those who happen to be born into stable and peaceful societies. The writer, like a sensitive needle, registers accurately and successfully the general changes and conflicts in his society. Similarly Soyinka also could not but respond to the political turmoil and military coups that occurred in Nigeria one after another. But unlike many other writers, Soyinka is seen even in the midst of utter chaos fighting for the principles he represents - principles of fundamental human decency, justice and freedom. We find in all of Soyinka's works, the author speaking up for the fundamental rights of man. 'For me, justice is the first condition of humanity.' (Soyinka, "Secular

Humanist 32). So he had no other choice but to respond to the collapse of Nigeria.

At the beginning of his career Soyinka tried to avoid commitment in writing, at least political commitment. He had reacted against Negritude with great vigour and energy. "The less self-conscious the African is and the more innately his individual qualities appear in his writing, the more seriously will he be taken as an artist of exciting dignity". (Soyinka, "The Future" 28). But the disillusioning events which happened in the country, the devastating civil war, the military coups, the exploitative tendency of the dictators turned him desperate and he found himself in a position where it was impossible to remain uncommitted. He cries out in great anguish that he would prefer to remain just a writer exercising the most comfortable form of creativity. But as a human being he could not but respond to the inhuman tendencies of the ruthless dictators. The remarks made by Soyinka are quoted by Hans Zell. "For many years now I have lived with the knowledge that I could lose my liberty at any time. For reasons which I don't understand and cannot help I am incapable of any peace of mind under certain social situations. There is nothing I can do about it, I can't change. Before one is a writer I suppose one is a person." (Zell and Silver 192).

His bitter experience in the prison at Kaduna as well as the mental agony and moral indignation compelled him to reconsider his outlook on society, history and commitment. His role as an artist - moralist was transformed into that of artist-activist. He became directly involved in politics after 1967, he stopped being the mere conscience of society to being

a political activist. But never does he sacrifice his artistic values to political consideration. The observations made by Martin Banham are significant:

Soyinka is a political playwright, but rather than being didactic, his work demonstrates the dialectic within the term 'political art.' He thinks politically, and can see no other way of thinking as an artist in Africa today. Thus the greater Soyinka's commitment to his art, the more political it becomes, and the greater his commitment to praxis, the more aesthetically compelling are the plays which come out of his experience (87).

Many complex political works that followed clearly indicate Soyinka, the writer taking a definite turn from the usual method of employing myths and rituals. He has shown a tendency to write political commentary and memoir. *The Man Died*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Season of Anomy*, *The Open Sore* and the latest play *King Baabu* record the brutality and cannibalism prevailing among human beings especially among power mongers. His works, his ritualistic plays included, prove that they are politically and socially meaningful, and they indicate that his is a mind very sensitive to the environment. Soyinka always insisted that art can never have an independent existence from the people, their culture, and their language that create it. The committed artist is a socially conscious being. He can never set to work in a vacuum. Each writer should treat literature as a cultural necessity giving considerable regard to their myths and rituals. He has remarked in "The Fourth Stage" that "Man exists, however, in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context, the African world, like any other world is unique" (136).

Now, The purpose of this thesis is to examine three major plays of Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, *Madmen and Specialists* and *Death and the King's Horseman* in the chronological order - and to analyse how they have set forth the vision of the writer concerning different aspects of life like art, culture, politics, death and life itself. In this investigation, an attempt is made to look into the metaphysical social and political aspects of the plays as it would help us to understand the writer's perspective. This analysis is naturally based on the dramatic theory formulated by Soyinka which is largely centered on the myth of Ogun. A corollary aim of the dissertation is to prove that Soyinka's use of the Ogun myth in his plays is an invigorating development in contemporary drama. On this myth rests much of the weight of the argument about the nature of Yoruba tragedy. Taking full account of Soyinka's rootedness in Yoruba culture, cosmology and world view this dissertation begins by scrutinising the dramatic theory of Soyinka, particularly as enunciated in "The Fourth Stage." From theoretical frames established here, the subsequent chapters explore the metaphysical, historical, sociological and political dimension of Soyinka's vision of life as revealed in *A Dance of the Forests*, *Madmen and Specialists* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. A brief review is made about postcolonial theorists and their definitions about postcolonialism. How Soyinka has used literature as a means of decolonisation by recouring to myths and using tradition as a means of resistance has also been analysed. Further, the thesis also aims to offer an approach to the works of Soyinka as belonging to the postcolonial literatures in English. Although Wole Soyinka's works have been studied critically, an interpretation of his works in terms of the dramatic theory

popularized by him which in turn reveals his postcolonial perspective is a novel enterprise.

Using the myth of Ogun, Soyinka has created works which are remarkable not only for their metaphysical aspects but also for their post colonial overtones. His works, whether metaphysical or political, are corrective of African viewpoints. Besides urging the need for decolonising the African mind, his works also emphasise the need for internal correction. From his early works to the latest, we can never find a total acceptance of Africa. Neither is there a total rejection of West. The dissertation argues that it is a kind of dialogue between Africa and Europe that we find here. Hence it can be argued that his plays reveal a kind of an eclectic vision.

Yoruba myths and African rites which are the powerful conditioning elements and controlling devices in the plays by Soyinka, cannot be profitably studied in a kind of exclusiveness because his powerful responses lie inseparable from the myths and the rites. Similarly, Soyinka's critical reactions to contemporary social realities lie intertwined with the basic patterns of African myths and rites. Indeed his craftsmanship is of a special kind that he has combined them in such a way that the past is interpreted through the present and the present is depicted through the patterns of the past embedded in the myths. Therefore, any exclusive attention on any one of these two elements in his plays is bound to give only a partial and distorted picture. The resistance his plays build up and the postcolonial attitude emerging from them can be captured and depicted only through taking these double layers together for interpretation. Other elements like his

tragic vision, his concept of creative destructive duality in man and so on are steeped in this unified structure.

This dissertation is a reading of select plays from Soyinka corpus of writing with an intention to prove that his craft combines the myths of the past with the realities of the present and that he uses such a semiotic construct as a resistance medium to decolonize as well as to effect reforming his contemporaries. I have decided to focus on three plays of Soyinka because he is essentially known as a dramatist in spite of his valuable contribution to other genres such as poetry and novel. Although known for his poems and two novels, the most substantial part of his oeuvre are his plays which demonstrate his immersion in Yoruba myth, his consistent social commitment despite periods of political disillusionment within his own country. The second chapter focuses on *A Dance of the Forests*, a complex play which is the first grim warning given by the playwright during Nigeria's independence celebrations - about the exploitative tendency, selfishness and greed which threaten the existence of human beings. It is a timely warning given to African people who awaited independence with deep anticipation as a time of virtual rebirth for all Africa. He predicted a future which, he warned, will be worse than imperialism. *Madmen and Specialists* depicts the devastating effects of the Nigerian civil war - for that matter any war - upon the human race. It further projects this view that as the years pass, the tragic vulturism of man also will increase relentlessly and as a result the human race degenerates abysmally. The play has cannibalism as its main theme and gives the message that the country has to be very cautious about not only the enemy outside but also the enemy within. The third chapter, focuses on *Death and the King's Horseman*, a purely ritualistic

play which very clearly demonstrates the powers of the Fourth Stage, the area of transition, as explained in “The Fourth Stage.” It also tells about colonial encounter from the African perspective.

In writing this dissertation I have been benefited by the insights of several Soyinkan Scholars. Particular mention must be made of Eldred Jones, Gerald Moore, Adrian Roscoe, Jonathan Peters, Mary David and Oyin Ogunba. *Wole Soyinka* by Gerald Moore is the earliest among the book length criticism of Soyinka Eldred Jone’s *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* succeeds in analyzing all his plays and a novel *The Interpreters. Mother is Gold* by Adrain Rosce, and *A Dance of Masks* by Jonathan A Peters all illuminating works on Soyinka In addition, a host of critical writings by various authors have also been highly helpful in analyzing his plays. *Wole Soyinka, A Quest for Renewal* by Mary David very systematically analyses the Yoruba as well as Christian heritage of Soyinka and probes into the theme of resurrection in his works.

Besides, for the structure of this thesis and the selection of material, several books on postcolonial literature and postcolonial theory have proved to be helpful. The most important books among them are two works by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffins – *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post Colonial Literatures* and *Key Concepts in Post-colonial studies*. Works like *Postcolonial Literatures in English-History language, Theory* by Dennis Walder, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* by Ellek Boehmer *Colonialism, Postcolonialism* by A. Loomba, and *Postcolonial Criticism* (edited and introduced by Bart Moore – Gilbert, Gareth Stanlon and Willy Maley). *Post Colonial Theory* by Leela Gandhi, *Contesting*

Postcolonialisms a collection of brilliant essays edited by Jasbir Jain and Veena Singh *Post coloniality* edited by C.T. Indira and Meenakshi Sevaram have proved to be useful in tracing postcolonial characteristics in Soyinka's works. The reading of the works by Frantz Fanon – *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin and White Masks* and Edward Said - *Orientalism : Western Conception of the Orient* and *Culture and Imperialism* has been extremely rewarding. Many other works by renowned authors like Gayathri Spivak and Homi Bhaba, have also proved to be beneficial. All these books have been mentioned in the Bibliography.

I have selected these three plays *A Dance of the Forests*, *Madmen and Specialists* and *Death and the King's Horseman* from Soyinka's corpus of writing because they can be regarded as representing the three stages of his career as a writer. The above mentioned plays can be considered as his landmark works. *A Dance of the Forests* represents the period immediately after the gaining of independence by Nigeria. *Madmen and Specialists* was written soon after the Nigerian Biafran war. *Death and the King's Horseman* was published when there was a need to recreate an awareness in the people about the need for cultural retrieval, at a time when the country was suffering from the aftermath of colonialism. These three works do project his genuine commitment to human freedom – both political and cultural and his insistence on the cultural substance and long term value of literature. Besides, they are plays of exceptional quality capable of producing a great impact in the readers' minds.

Chapter II

Ambivalence in A Dance of the Forests

A Dance of the Forests was written for the independence celebrations of Nigeria in 1960. As a mythopoeist, Soyinka feels committed to put the rich, usable African past into perspective as the source of an ongoing process of continuity and growth. He dedicates himself to enlighten the hearts of his readers, whether African or not, by exploring into the world of African mythology, especially, the myth of Ogun. The play significantly reveals, for the first time, the playwright's political inclinations, the anxiety he had about life in general and the future of his nation in particular. The play emphasises the need to restore the African cultural identity as a major element of social development. Nigeria, like Kenya, and any other colonized countries, is a creation of British imperialism. We can see in Nigeria, the forcible amalgamation of different people with different languages and widely diverse cultures. Gifted with the power of foreseeing the future of his country, Soyinka warns his people of the impending class and factional conflicts, economic crises and political chaos. He warns the natives about the fragile arena of the nation state that has gained independence. Though one of the most fearless among the political activists of African writers involved in some of the most deadly events in Nigeria, Africa and the world and one who has suffered terribly from activism, Soyinka has often tried to separate his commitment to political causes from what he considers to be his artistic vocation. He has never presented his art as a part of this activism. Still in *A*

Dance of the Forests is discernible the political commitment which leads to the exposure of the corrupt politicians who destroy the country's unity, integrity as well as development. In this chapter it is proposed to view *A Dance Of The Forests* as a work that projects his dynamic mythic vision, which also embodies for the first time, his political philosophy. This philosophy very clearly reveals his philosophy of life. It also gives a broad hint as to what role a postcolonial citizen shall play to lead his country to progress.

In his most complex satirical play, *A Dance Of The Forests*, Soyinka displays his obsession with truth by talking about death, despair and disillusionment that await this new-born nation at a time of the highly joyous occasion of its independence. We find here a stroke of bold imagination which points at the depth and sincerity of Soyinka's vision. Adrian Roscoe has stressed this aspect in his *Mother is Gold* "Here indeed was a stroke of bold imagination that pointed up the breadth, depth and sincerity of vision; for in a play offered to a nation on the euphoric occasion of its independence, the immediate victim of the satire is that nation itself; in a play ostensibly celebrating a country's birth, the talk is all of death, delusion and betrayal" (220). An intermingling of traditional and Western elements, a juxtaposing of materials from all cultures; the Christian and the Yoruba myths for the purpose of illustrating his arguments can be observed in the play *A Dance of the Forests* is an aesthetic expression of Soyinkas' philosophical ambivalence, which is actually the pivot of the eclecticism of his theatre.

As in other works, the use of ritual decides the ultimate meaning of *A Dance of the Forests*. It proclaims Soyinka's unrelenting obsession with the

Ogun myth and its complicated reenactments through ritual. It convincingly proves that his is a mythic imagination. As Stanley Macebuh points out: "Soyinka is first and foremost a mythopoeist; his imagination is in a quite fundamental sense a mythic imagination" (210). Soyinka's works in general, and *A Dance of the Forests* in particular, have the reputation of being ambiguous, dense and opaque. This reputation for ambiguity is all the more complicated by his effort to proffer mythic explanations and resolutions for social problems. This way of viewing life is not something new. Joseph Campbell convincingly explains in "The Historical Development of Mythology" that, "No human society has yet been found in which such mythological motifs have not been rehearsed in liturgies, interpreted by seers, poets, theologians or philosophers; presented in art, magnified in song, and ecstatically experienced in life-empowering visions" (19). The Yoruba cosmology has always been central to his works and has provided incentive for growth to his artistic development. His works do succeed in emphatically asserting that he values the traditional system which functions as a sort of frame work to all his plays. This traditional system allows him to explore creation and existence from a philosophical base. It is this attitude that has guided him in his confident interrogation of the principles of Negritude and it lies behind his satiric approach towards the proud arguments of the advocates of Negritude. Soyinka's famous quip, "A tiger does not proclaim its tigritude, he pounces" was quoted and misquoted, attacked and defended throughout the 1960s and the early 70s. But Soyinka was not disturbed, for what he found missing in the Negritudists was a lack of celebration of the essence of the past. There was only a celebration of convenient symbols and trophies from the past. On the other hand Soyinka never renounces the

essence of the past. He reacts to it in the most spontaneous and natural manner. Edward Said, has used a term 'nativism' to indicate the desire "to celebrate and return to a preimperial unsullied past by rejecting the tradition of the colonizer". (Kildahl 973). This return to the pre-imperial unsullied past is an inevitable development in recovering from the oppression and humiliation of colonialism. But too much veneration of the past is indeed an obstacle for achieving true liberation. "To remain at a stage of nativism is to accept the consequences of imperialism, the rural, the religious and political divisions imposed by imperialism itself. To reevaluate the hierarchy is no escape from hierarchical and 'us versus them' thinking" (Kildahl 973).

Soyinka wants to overcome the obstacles of too much adoration of the past. Thus he is often seen raising an eyebrow at the unquestioned acceptance of the past and blind admirations for the ancient rulers. For Soyinka, the ancients were in no way superior just because they built huge empires. They were capable of frightening monstrosities and shocking selfishness too. He even questions the decisions of the Gods who are very callous and harsh in their dealings with men. Mata Kharibu, the hypocrite ruler and Madame Tortoise, the characterless queen do not stand for an enviably smooth and glorious past and they do not belong to the past only. As Eldred Jones has pointed out in his "The Essential Soyinka", "Both men and gods are arraignment in *A Dance of the Forests*. Of both the past and the present, of both men and gods, Soyinka is apt to raise the most embarrassing questions. This is where his greatest value lies – and his greatest personal danger; he is an irritant to complacency and a wet blanket to romance." (11). Soyinka would appear to have anticipated what postcolonial theorists like Gayathri Spivak and V.Y. Mudimbe were to announce years later. His quip

against Negritude and the much discussed *A Dance of the Forests* are indicative of this. His essays like “The Future of West African Writing”, “From a Common Cloth” and his plays like *Madmen and Specialists* also articulate the argument that “independence does not necessarily mean that the colonial episteme has been ruptured” (Olaniyan 494).

Africa had to suffer under colonial rule for decades. It has not freed itself fully from the vestiges of colonialism yet. African nationalism has overtaken the colonial powers and has emerged triumphant. But it has yet to give itself a new direction and order to cope with the complications of the colonial legacy. African literature is a representation of the crisis within the African societies which had risen due to the colonial impact. So the writers of Africa, like the writers of other colonized countries were faced with the responsibilities of both dealing with the complications of colonialism as well as representing the crises in their works. But the uniqueness of the African writers lies in their power to overcome the several limitations which they had to face when they took upon themselves the role of the guardians of African conscience. The primary aim of the artist being the depiction of truth about living processes, he might choose as his chief target the exposure and denunciation of falsehood. There definitely will be problem in contemporary Africa in the context of colonial heritage. But moral responsibility lies within the individual as much as in the culture milieu. African literature has depicted the crisis and contradictions faced by the African people. The creative writers of Africa have a clear vision of the ideal society for which they have to combine the best of the old cultural traditions with the enlightened ideas of the modern world. The African writers have also expressed their resentment against corruption in the independent African

states, and they have protested against the authoritarian forces which are trying to misuse the freedom gained from the colonial powers. African poets and writers have pinpointed the mistakes in human history, and contemporary African literature is yet another protest against the totalitarian tendencies and the political groups which hold the humanity in a constant state of peril. *A Dance Of The Forests* shows that the modern society is in no way better than the ancient society, for, in the past as well as in the present, the plight of the artist as well as the common man remains unchanged.

It is obvious that Soyinka's works lack the sense of conventional nostalgia. They never express any sentimentally melancholic recollection of a dying world. Instead, it becomes clear that he does not reject the modern world with its new insights and the scientific knowledge. It is an absorption, adaptation and modern grafting on a strong traditional plant that we see in his works. Adrian Roscoe remarks in his *Mother is Gold* most appropriately:

His education in Nigeria and England has enabled him to absorb much that is modern; he is learned in the modern disciplines and his style itself is of absorption and adaptation. A modern grafting has been performed on a vigorous traditional plant. Or to state in his own way, he has achieved the ideal fusion – to preserve the original uniqueness and yet absorb another essence. (28)

In his expository book, *Myth Literature and African World* Soyinka has discussed the rituals and myths which inspired and conditioned his drama. His use of rituals in drama offers us a way to transcend the temporal and draw upon the resources of primal reality. *A Dance of the Forests*, and *The Road* are mature works which employ ritual elements. The author's aim in

these plays is to establish the metaphysical sense of transition between the present moment and the flux of existence, past, present and future. Soyinka has been naturally tuned to the Yoruba Culture. He has shown great scholarly interest in it, leading to the formation of theory of Yoruba tragedy. His major works, *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *Death and The Kings Horseman* and *The Strong Breed* and *The Bachae of Euripedes* all closely follow the theory of tragedy as developed by him.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to examine *A Dance Of The Forests* as a play modelled on the theory of tragedy, a play where Ogun myth is treated in all seriousness. In *A Dance of the Forests*, a complex work, we find the intelligent and dramatic use of Ogun myth, ritual, mime and dance and spectacle. With the help of these devices, Soyinka excellently communicates to the audience a sense of continuity between past and present, of the relationship between mankind's collective experience and the primeval fears and desires of the individual. Ogun myth is explored in its depth in *A Dance of the Forests*. Ogun is the embodiment of creative will. His descent into the chthonic realm, his daring of the gulf of transition, is the prototype of all true artistic endeavor of which he is the patron. The significance of *A Dance Of The Forests* is that it is the only play where Ogun appears in human form.

Before analyzing how Soyinka explores the myth of Ogun in *A Dance of the Forests* and how closely it follows the theory of tragedy formulated by him, it is useful to restate in a simplified way the relationship he establishes between ritual and drama.

He views ritual as the source of drama because ritual consists in bridging the gulf between the deities and mankind and to him tragedy, in Yoruba traditional drama, is the anguish of this severance, the fragmentation of essence from self. As ritual is the language of the masses, it leads to the liberation of social consciousness” (Richard 69).

Ogun is the central figure in the pantheon of Yoruba gods. He first dared to enter the abyss that separated human beings from their gods, the dead and the unborn. He formed a bridge to span the abyss. It was an act of courage which risked extinction and disintegration of the personality. Wole Soyinka himself has explained the importance of God Ogun to him on many occasions. To quote his own words from an interview with Jeffrey A. Portnoy, “. . . he was the pioneer deity – he was the one who actually plunged into this abyss of transition, to hack through primordial chaos and forge a path to man, that is the world of the living” (2). This was an act of will and the god became the symbol of active creativity. He was the God of war and poetry. He became the God of the destructive and the creative principle thus having in him both the creative and destructive aspects. Ritual drama, then is the retelling of the Ogun myth. Thus the protagonist in a drama which draws from ritual experience “enters the abyss, the inner world of primal reality and brings back its essence which he or she communicates to the choric participants of the rites – the community” (Banks 1041).

As it has been discussed, the myth of Ogun, the god who risked the dangers of the abyss and created a road from the spiritual to the human world, is the key to an understanding of all Soyinka’s work. Soyinka argues

that man has a dual nature whether he be African or American. What makes Soyinka's drama so unique is its metaphysical dimension based on his personal rendering of Yoruba myth. It assumes the compartmentalized existence of three worlds, the world of the dead, the living and the unborn and the existence of another fourth realm called 'the Fourth Stage'. It is this realm which links the living with their ancestors and with the future. Soyinka employs the terms 'transition' for the terrifying experience of the numinous fourth stage. Again to quote from his interview, with Jeffrey A. Portnoy,

The Yoruba recognize three principal worlds : the world of the ancestor, the world of the present – the living – and the world of the unborn. These worlds are interrelated in very vivid and effective ways. It is really an internalized apprehension of reality and of course around these and wearing through these areas of existence is what I call the area of transition through which all the energies pass in the motion between one world and the other (2).

We have seen that it is the story of Ogun that underlies Soyinka's theory and practice of drama. He is the hero-god who created a passage between gods and men out of the primordial chaos. But the battle in which he slew not only his enemies but also his own people in a drunken stupor demonstrated that in spite of his heroism he could belong to their world as a destroyer also. This is the logical explanation of the conviction of Soyinka that human history is a never ending cycle of destruction and creation. Even though new beginnings must be made by heroic individuals, they are all doomed to end in failure. Thus for Soyinka, drama represents "the passage-rites of hero

gods, a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonize with his environment" (*Myth* 36).

Soyinka was so much influenced by his patron god that it can be argued that like Ogun, Soyinka himself has sought "to build a bridge between the philosophy of the West and Yoruba religion and cosmology, in order to demonstrate the latter's universality" (Phelps 8:339). Obviously Soyinka has consistently applied his Yoruba mythology in all his work. He believes that it provides a truer and more comprehensive vision of reality than anything the West can offer. May be, like Olunde of *Death and The Kings Horseman*, Soyinka from his own personal experiences as a student and a teacher at many foreign universities, has understood that his native tradition, Yoruba, is the most inspiring source of meaning and depth when compared to the Western belief system.. The West suffered from "the fragmentation that is the inevitable result of its rationalist and materialist intellectual traditions." (Phelps 8:341). It is difficult for the West to understand and respond to the content and the metaphysical implications of the Yoruba myth because it seems bewilderingly remote to Western modes of thought and feeling. All the plays of Wole Soyinka are remarkable for the rare depiction of both religion and ritual with complete conviction and without strain or artificiality. The key play in this development is *A Dance Of The Forests*. It is highly significant for its exploration of the Ogun myth and the recognition of the three planes of existence the living, the dead and the unborn and of the fantastic unification of both the living and the dead and of the men and gods. Kofi Awonoor comments in "The Breast of the Earth": "The effectiveness of *A Dance Of The Forests* lies in its elaborate use of a

significant segment of the Yoruba pantheon for the purpose of seeking a unity between men and gods and between the living and the dead (35).

In *A Dance of the Forests*, we find the most complex treatment of the chthonic realm of transition. A close reading of this work reveals that a reinterpretation and personal appropriation in terms of Yoruba cosmology is done here. A reinterpretation of the Yoruba cosmology exists in all his works as an authentic mode of vision. He effectively dramatizes Yoruba belief in the mutual dependence of the differing areas of existence. We find a recurrent use of symbols of gods and spirits, myth, ritual, song, dance and mime. Generally, “the plays move from ordinary realism to ritual enactment with the nonverbal elements of dance, song and masquerade receiving increasing prominence as the climax approaches” (Moody 25). *A Dance of the Forests* depends heavily on ritual, with all its accompanying music, mime, dance and masquerade. Lars Gyllensten of the Swedish Academy has commented on Soyinka’s frequent and skilful use of the elements belonging to stage, dance, rites, masques, pantomime, rhythm and the music and theatre within the theatre. They are incorporated into the works of Soyinka so naturally that they never appear as a mask but as an integral part of the plays. “The myths, traditions and rites are integrated as nourishment for his writing, not as a masquerade costume.” (qtd. in Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* 25)

In *A Dance of the Forests*, the concept of the forest as the abode of secret forces always interacting with mortal life and that of the dance as the visible representation of an interplay between one plane of reality and another is changed into an artistic work. The true passage of an entity from one level to another is marked by an indispensable rite of transition.

According to the belief of the Africans, no man can pass directly from one state of life to the next without fully abandoning the old stage. Such a transitional phase may be marked by a sojourn in the secret groves of the forest. This approach adds to the significance of the ritual of sacrifice in *A Dance of the Forests* and the change that happens to Demoke, at the end of the play.

A Dance of the Forests was written and performed for the Nigerian independence celebrations in 1960, an occasion represented in the play as “the Gathering of Tribes.” The play emerged at a significant formative moment in the history of Africa. Thejumola Olaniyan describes that “the purpose of the play is “the celebration of a geopolitical transformation of a stage in the historic encounter between Africa and Western World” (489). It is a highly individualistic play. Its explorations of new visions are as multidimensional and as diversified as the human psyche itself. With the exploration of Yoruba myth, Soyinka tries to convince his audience that they should let go their sleepy state, awaken from their slumber and recover the values of beauty, order, joy, justice and redemption from the abyss of terror, humiliation and despair. Only a vision that transcends all conventional values can lead the country to a healthy future. Gerald Moore remarks in his article “The Use of Myth, An Examination of African Revolutionary Drama” aptly thus: “Through *A Dance of the Forests* Soyinka stresses the need for individual self-discovery and offer a humanistic, syncretic and cross cultural vision capable of transcending stultifying conventional values and enforced discourses”⁽¹⁵³⁾ (3).

In *A Dance of the Forests*, a subtle and complex text is wedded to traditional performance skills and patterns. The play's basic structure is deceptively simple. Since *A Dance Of The Forests* was meant for the occasion of the independence of Nigeria, Soyinka had to choose a theme that was relevant to his country at that point of time. Whenever a country achieves independence, it has to undergo a transitional period in her history marked by the end of the colonial rule and the beginning of postcolonial freedom. Though the nation has been freed of the colonial rule and oppression, it is now entrusted with the new responsibility of building itself along a progressive path by following some great ideals set by the ancestors and gods. In other words, a newly independent nation has to face the dilemma as to whether it has to shape its present in line with the past or to forget the past completely and begin afresh. Wole Soyinka is invoking the self-determining powers of the colonized people. The moment of gaining independence, for any nation in that case, is a historical moment, a rare moment. When India gained independence Jawaharlal Nehru announced the moment as 'historical and rare', 'an earth changing move from an old world into a new' "when the soul of a nation, long suppressed finds utterance" (Ellek Boehmer 181). It is such a moment that is selected by Wole Soyinka for dramatic treatment in *A Dance Of The Forests*. But far from expressing it in a straight forward and transparent manner, he articulates it through the rich and complex African myths. As Tejumola Olaniyan puts it "*A Dance Of The Forests* contains profound explorations of the irksome questions of (the) postcolonial history that (Soyinka) later clarified in plays, essays, and interviews, and for which (he is) known today" (489). A brief outline of the

story of the play at this point would be relevant to the ensuing discussion on the use of Ogun myth and the chthonic realm of transition.

The town dwellers are preparing for a big feast, "The Gathering of the Tribes." It is very much like the commemoration of the newly won political independence bringing together disparate ethnic groups under one nation 'Nigeria.' With the intention of adding grandeur to this celebration, the tribes make a special request to the deities and ancestors to send the illustrious representatives of their majestic past as distinguished guests. They wanted to be reminded of only high deeds and glory. But Aroni and Forest Head decided otherwise and sent them instead two spirits, the Dead ones. It is a "deconstruction of grandiose history" (Olaniyan 494) that takes place here because these two spirits are horrifying pictures which the tribes would rather keep out of focus. They have links with four of the living and these two, representing the true past, came as accusers to remind the living of the violence inherent in human nature. Adenebi, the pompous historian, proclaims that a grand welcome should be given to "the builders of empires", "the descendents of our great nobility", "warriors" "conquerors", Builders, philosophers and Mystics" (16). They await the illustrious ancestors who stand for the accumulated cultural heritage. Instead they are sent, as the Old Man expresses, the wrong people, who are executors and not statesmen.

Thus two worlds, widely separated in time, are joined through the transitional world of the bush of ghosts. The first world is that of modern Nigeria. Such a celebration must invoke not only those who are alive but also their ancestors through their rituals, the ancestors from whom they have descended and whose life still flows through their activities. The past world

Soyinka depicts is based on one of the ancient Sudanic kingdoms from which the contemporary Yoruba descended. Soyinka calls this world the court of Mata Kharibu which parallels the contemporary world of the Yoruba township. It shows that despite their differences ^{in the} past and ^{the} present they share a continuous pattern of human effort, pain, cruelty and achievement. The pattern remains unchanged.

The principal divine actor in the play is Forest Father who appears before the mortals as a man called Obaneji. Through his messenger, Aroni, Forest Father makes it clear that the two representatives from the past – the Dead man and the Dead woman - were in previous life linked in violence and blood with four of the living in the court of Mata Kharibu. These four people are Rola, Demoke, Adnebi and Agboreko, Elder of the Sealed lips. Rola, a prostitute was nicknamed Madame Tortoise eternally. Demoke is a carver now. He was a poet in the empire of Mata Khribu.. Adnebi is the council orator now and then court historian. Agboreko, Elder of the sealed lips, is a type of sooth sayer in both existences.

Dead man was the conscientious warrior in his early life and Dead woman, his pregnant wife. The four are representatives of the living world drawn into the forests by the Forest Head to let the living condemn themselves to face the truths about themselves – that they are “perpetrators, abettors, and accessories of the inhuman order” (Olaniyan 494). They are meant “to underline the continuity of human nature and the repetition of history.” As Eldred Jones puts it, history is viewed “as a nearly cyclical movement.” Contrary to what the living would like to believe the past was not glorious or happy, no more glorious and happy than the present is

Nothing has changed. Society and human beings have remained the same. There was and there is violence. Corruption, pervades. As the Dead Woman remarks, in the play ‘A hundred generations has made no difference / I was a fool to come’ (25).

Demoke, Aroni tells us, has been guilty of killing his apprentice Oremole, the devotee of Oro, god of punishment and the dead. Demoke felt jealous of Oremole because he could climb greater heights. This act places the gods Ogun and Oro, in bitter enmity over Demoke. Ogun is the protector of Demoke. As it is sung, “the lion never allows any body to play with his cub / Ogun will never allow his child to be punished.” Demoke intensifies the anger and hostility of Oro by carving araba tree, the silk cotton tree sacred to Oro, god of punishment and the dead. Hence Oro decides to take revenge upon Demoke through one of his own aspects, Eshuoro, ‘the way ward flesh of Oro.’

The climactic action which gives the play its title is the dance. It is a spectacular masque in which the fate of the woman’s long unborn child, the Half-child, is decided. Through the intervention of Ogun, the half child is restored to the woman thereby redeeming the bloody cycle of history. Demoke takes this challenging decision. His daring action is the climbing of the totem he has carved because he has a fear of heights. Again with Ogun’s help he survives Eshuoro’s attempt at revenge. The play closes with a reunion of the living which hints at a possible human reformation as a result of Demoke’s action. What is suggested is that an individual’s action of daring and courage will definitely save a country from falling into the depths of destruction and damnation. Regeneration is possible through acts of will

and courage. As Mary David remarks “No other context was so apt for the mythopoetic playwright to preach his spiritual lesson in regeneration as this historic moment of a nations’ coming-in-being” (*A Quest*, 63).

The central play-within-the play takes all the characters back to the ancient court of the warrior-king, Mata Kharibu. It draws parallels between each of the crimes committed by the human beings in the present with an ancient equivalent crime committed in a previous life. In the present, Demoke, the carver of trees, has murdered his apprentice out of jealousy for his climbing ability. In the past, as a court poet he was responsible for the death of his novice whom he pushed down from the roof of the palace. Rola, the present day courtesan, responsible for the deaths of two of her lovers, had in her previous incarnation as Madame Tortoise caused similar tragedy among her palace guards. Adenebi accepts a bribe in the present to pass the lorry Incinerator’ as suitable for carrying seventy passengers when it was only designed for forty. In this action, we find the folly being repeated, the folly of his previous life where too he had accepted a bribe from the slave dealer.

As Demoke passionately relives the exultation of the act itself saying thus: ‘Down, down I plucked him, screaming on Oro./ Before he made hard obeisance to his earth./ My axe was executioner at Oro’s neck. Alone./ Alone, I cut the strands that mocked me, till dead. And boastful slave lay side by side, and I Demoke, sat on the shoulders of the tree./ My spirit set free and singing, my hands. My father’s hands possessed by demands of blood” (27).

While, the townsfolk, far away, are intent upon ‘the gathering of the tribes’ the Forest Father is making all necessary arrangements for the self recovery of the dead and the living. There are three parts for the ceremony. First is the enactment of the scene in the empire of the African emperor Mata Kharibu and his Queen Madame Tortoise which took place eight centuries ago. It also reveals the integrity and heroism of the warrior who was emasculated and enslaved for being loyal to his curious concept of honour. This leads to the tragic plight of his faithful wife who collapses hearing about his punishment. The second scene is the questioning of the dead pair. They give an account of themselves and of the reasons for their presence there. The Dead Woman regards herself as a symbol of all mothers cheated by death of her fulfilment: “Wet runnels. / Of the earth brought me hither / call Forest Head. Say someone comes. For all the rest. Say someone asks – / Was it for this, for this. Children plagued their mothers? (60). She is relieved of the burden, but she is delivered of only a half child. The third part of the ceremony is the Dance of welcome of the Dead, which the living have refused to perform. The three mortals are masked and through these masks speak the spirits of the unborn – spirits of the palm, the Darkness and the Waters. They are respectively Rola, Demoke and Adenebi. The Dead Man, Woman and Half-child want to know whether the future ages will offer that gleam of light refused by the past and the present.

Two beautiful poetic passages from Soyinka are worth quoting here.

HALF CHILD. I who yet await a mother

Feel this dread

Feel this dread

I who flee from comb

To branded wombs.

I'll be born dead (64)

DEAD WOMAN. Better not now the bearing

Better not to bear the wearing

I who grow the branded navel

Sudden at the visitation

Shall my breast again be severed

From its rights of sanctity?

child, your hand is pure as sorrow

Free me of the endless burden

Let this gourd, let this gourd

Break beyond my health? (70)

There ensues a scene of great excitement and tension in which the half child is tossed to and fro by the Triplets. It is Demoke who puts an end to this moment by handing the half child to the Dead Woman, thereby hoping to save him from being eternally ground by the wheel of birth and death. The final words of the forest father, as he closes the dance, suggested that Demoke may have opened a way for his own redemption.

FOREST FATHER. Yet I must do this alone, and no more,

Since to intervene is to be guilty of contradictions, and yet to remain. Unfelt is to make my long rumoured. Ineffectuality

complete : hoping that When I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps in new..... beginningsAroni, does Demoke know the meaning of his act? (82, 76)

ARONI. Demoke, you hold a doomed thing in your hand. It is no light matter to reverse the deed that was begun many lives ago. The forest will not betyon pass (82).

In the final scene, the villagers are dancing round a silhouette of the totem carved by Demoke. Eshuoro forces Demoke to climb the carved totem carrying a sacrificial basket on his head. The basket represents the burden of his own guilt. Demoke, as he falls down from the totem, which had been set fire by Esuhuoro, is saved by Ogun. Ogun leaves him on the forestage. Demoke's father comes there to find three chastened mortals just awakening to themselves. The meaning of the central event of the play appears to be ambivalent and Wole Soyinka seems to suggest that the modern Africans need not depend totally on the past and the ancestors, but accept the responsibility of owning up their actions, improving their life independently and shaping their future properly. Soyinka is very ambiguous about the future of the country, because of corruption in bureaucracy, exploitation of countless citizens, etc. The only way to improve the future of the country is through the spiritual awakening and expiation of their sins and crimes.

A Dance Of The Forests, like *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Road*, *The Strong Breed*, and other plays closely follows the theory of tragedy formulated by Soyinka which is centered on the myth of Ogun. This is the only play in which Ogun is given a prominent role to play in the form of a human being. To quote Jonathan A Peters: "Soyinka's fascination with

Ogun is very much in view in *A Dance Of The Forests*, the only play in which the god takes form as a character and an important one, in the unfolding drama” (163).

Perhaps the significance of the play has been summed up by Thomas Banks most vividly:

The play dramatizes (Soyinka’s) inner acceptance of his human nature, his admission of guilt, and his redemption through the saving of Half-child. Soyinka seems to suggest that all salvation is essentially personal and must follow the path of self – awareness, confession and risk – a rite of passage across the abyss’ that separates man and gods. The play thus offers both a tragic vision of life and hope for the future through the courageous acts of individual men. It also identifies the artist as the key provoker of self awareness. Like Demoke, he is closest to the abyss; he possesses the fingers of the dead (1849).

“The Fourth Stage”, an essay that interprets the myth of Ogun, discusses the three stages of Ogun’s nature, ‘the crossing of the primordial marsh’, the disastrous battle on behalf of the people of Ire and his descent and settlement in Ire. In the interpretation of the rituals of Ogun’s worshippers, Soyinka sees the Ogun’s ‘crossing of the primordial marsh’ reenacted. The tragic victim struggles with a sense of disintegration in the abyss. He is also endowed with the power of having visions. He is gifted with an acute awareness of birth and death. Thus he becomes the spokesman of God, ‘the unresisting mouth piece of god (Gibbs, “The Origin” 67) whose action transforms his anguish into creative purpose. He is now totally free from the

destructive despair. Ogun is Soyinka's patron god. So he relates these patterns of Ogun's exploits with his own as a Yoruba tragic dramatist. Soyinka suggests that the dramatist begins with the protagonists "stripped of his excrescences, crushed and robbed of his self consciousness" (*Myth* 151). The protagonist experiences the dissolution of self in the abyss. But by an exercise of will he is able to triumph over subsumption and he emerges with the sensitivity of the artist.

Viewed from this angle, Demoke's nature can be described as echoing all the divine attributes of his guardian and protector Ogun. When Demoke leaps to save the half-child, he is attempting a tragic action in the void. The void is that area which separates one kind of existence from another. When Demoke attempts to climb the araba tree with a sacrificial basket on his head, he is bravely facing the perils of disintegration which assail all those who venture into the gulf of transition. His fall from the burning tree and his snatching up by Ogun may be seen as a symbolic enactment of death and birth. James Gibbs' interpretation of the character of Demoke is worth quoting here.

Demoke reenacts Ogun's 'Crossing of the primordial marsh'. Demoke is first stripped of excrescences or in Forest Head's words, shown 'the mirror of original nakedness'. He has to become aware that like Ogun, he is both creative and destructive, both carver and murderer. He is then drawn into the abyss, in the form of "the welcome of the Dead" at which point he becomes the unresisting mouth piece of the god, symbolic of transitional abyss. During the 'Dance of the Half-child' he asserts his will and

impulsively enters the dance. Moments later during the ‘dance of the Unearthing sacrifice’ he again reasserts himself this time to such good effect that the forces of destruction are thrown into disarray. He falls from the totem, and cleansed by the air is preserved to stand as it were beside himself, observant, understanding, creative, blessed with insight (“The Origin” 67-68).

Whether Demoke has managed to emerge wiser is a matter of interpretation. But he has at least tried to do something creative. This is similar to the promethean instinct of rebellion which will divert anguish into a creative act. This attempt is sufficient to release man from a totally destructive despair. The warning that the play gives is clear: there is danger ahead if nothing is changed. But no more than the Forest Head, can the playwright propose any solution to the spectators: The play ends in uncertainty on both levels. This is intentionally done by the author and he refuses to offer a definite denouement. R. Fraser points out that there are four alternative endings to the play. But no clear message is conveyed as to what should be done. The Forest Head is incapable of taking any decisions for the human beings. The playwright is incapable of deciding for the audience. The only thing they can do is to give an opportunity to the human beings or the spectators to become aware of the need for a change.

Like Ogun, the main protagonist of the play, Demoke combines in him both the creative and the destructive aspects. He is a carver and thereby a creator. When he tries to climb the araba tree with a sacrificial basket on his head, he is facing the dangers of disintegration. By plucking Oremole

down from the araba tree and by murdering him he has proved himself to be a prey to the violent destructive aspects in Ogun. To quote Gerald Moore,

When Demoke leaps to save the Half-child he is attempting a tragic action in the void that separates one area of existence from another. As an artist he shares the ambivalent creative energy of Ogun, an energy which changes the world and which must inevitably bear the seeds of violence within it. Again when Demoke attempts to climb the araba tree with a sacrificial basket on his head, he is dancing the perils of disintegration which assail all those who venture into the gulf of transition. His fall from the burning tree and his being snatched up by Ogun may be seen as a symbolic enactment of death and rebirth or of disintegration and recreation (*Wole Soyinka* 42).

It is appropriate to include Soyinka's own remarks to Peter Enahoro, the journalist as it has been quoted by Rene Richard. Soyinka is trying to elucidate the general meaning of *A Dance of the Forests*. Soyinka told him that "a play does not have to be understood, that it should be responded through the pores of the skin and that the playwrights' ambition should be to propose exciting theatre and if possible to set a riddle which would keep the audience thinking" (qtd. in Richard 80).

Soyinka has tried to define the ultimate purpose of drama in his essay, "Drama and the Idioms of liberation" first published in 1975:

Also since this is the operative technique, this technique of interaction, a technique whose end can only be change, not consolidation (change, however fragmentary, illusory, however

transient, however lacking in concrete, ultimate significance, but nevertheless change') it suggests that theatre is the most revolutionary art form known to man (45).

Soyinka believed that the interaction of the audience and the protagonistic forces on the stage will definitely lead to positive results and that drama will succeed in provoking in the audience "a resumed awareness" of the contemporary situation. The fact is that a certain influence of Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright, and his concept of the epic theatre can be traced in the approach of Soyinka towards his works. The figure of Bertolt Brecht is bound to loom large in any consideration of dramatic theory in the twentieth century. Brecht's theory of the epic theatre and the principle of alienation influenced many writers and theorists of many different schools. He raised the fundamental question of what the theatre was for. He believed in the theory of alienating the audience from the actors on the stage so that their rational, critical faculties are activated. He believed that this will definitely succeed in bringing about the social change he desired. So, instead of accepting any straight forward, ready-made progressive message, the spectators are enabled to objectively evaluate the contemporaneous situations.

By the word 'epic' Brecht signified primarily his attempt to reproduce on the stage "the objectivity of the narration in Homeric epic". By employing a detached narrator and other devices to achieve alienation effects, Brecht "aimed to encourage his audience to criticize and oppose, rather than passively to accept the social conditions and modes of behaviour that the plays represent" (Abrams 153).

The unique feature of ritual drama is that it encourages a kind of spectator response. Soyinka had always shown a preference for a round playing space for his plays. Soyinka believed that in such a space, the community of spectators will participate more, will have more theatre response. Distinguishing between the theatre response and audience participation, it can be said that real audience participation occurs when there is an emotional spiritual and cognitive relationship between the actors and the audience. A true participation does not consist in answering back actively; but “the true activity can not merely be invisible, but also indivisible” (Abrams 79). As contrasted with the Western plays, ritual drama “aims to make the processes of participation conscious and therefore potentially powerful as part of a larger communal project that images liberation from cultural oppression” ... “Such drama is distinct from virtually all contemporary Western plays that involve the more colloquial ritual form of ritualized or repeated events.” (Gilbert and Tompkins 66). So, the plays of Soyinka, though slightly influenced by Brecht, distinctly stand as unique creations that lead to liberation from cultural oppression.

The plays of Soyinka are remarkable for the convergence of Yoruba culture and Brechtian convention is evident. Both men share a common concern with using art to assess and influence the world around them; both address the social conditions and political events of the world in which they exist. The structure of the play as well as the handling of the plot clearly illustrate the influence of Brecht's critical theory where he proposes that the ‘illusion of reality of a work should be deliberately shattered by an episodic plot, by protagonists who do not attract the audience's sympathy, by a striking theatricality in staging and acting, and by other ways of baring the

artifice of drama so as to produce an alienation effect". (Abrams 150). Like Brecht, Soyinka too employs theatricality in staging, a loose episodic plot structure and chooses not a flawless hero but a protagonist who fails to arouse the sympathy of the audience. By producing this alienation effect, Soyinka is able to jerk the audience out of their passive roles; He succeeds in making them critical towards the modern society and encourages an active involvement with the forces in a society which may lead to a change for the better. For him, the future is predicated by the present, the present is clarified by the past. If the present is inadequate, the future will be too.

By staging a play like *A Dance Of The Forests* with its depiction of events from the past, the present and the future, Soyinka is able to create an awareness in the spectators about an urgent need to act. It is very important that the leaders as well as his countrymen should take correct decision at the correct time. By creating protagonists who are not free from follies, Soyinka has succeeded in activating the thinking potentialities of the spectators and in leading them to the awareness of urgent action in order to guide their country to a better future. The play stresses the need of a transition to a more authentic mode of being. It emphasises the role of each individual in the postcolonial milieu.

Written and performed for Nigeria's Independence Day celebrations in 1960 *A Dance of the Forests* suggests that the infant state, like the half-child will require an Ogun – inspired act of heroic and perhaps sacrificial commitment to achieve the communal self awareness. Interpreted broadly, it can be argued that the cultural function of Soyinka's theatre is to bridge the gulf of transition and to restore unity and order. Brian Crow's remark in his

article “Empowering the people: African Theatre and Neocolonialism” is worth quoting here”: “Its cultural function is the supremely important one of providing the means through the skill and will of the actor – protagonist to bridge the gulf of transition for the participant audience and thus to restore to it an experience of disrupted existential unity and order” (78).

In dramatic performance, the actor is the counterpart of the protagonist of traditional ritual. The stage is the abyss where transformation takes place. He is enacting the journey undertaken by Ogun. To quote Brian Crow from “Empowering the people”,

Soyinka makes no essential distinction between theatrical and ritual performance, in each, the stage becomes the dangerous place of transformation in which the performer communicant on behalf of the vicariously participant audience, takes himself to the limits of psychic experience, even risking his psychological integrity as he makes himself the vehicle of contradictions; his body, the cross roads between the worlds of the living, the ancestors and the unborn. In this he is enacting, in ritual – aesthetic performance the primal journey undertaken by the elemental quester Ogun, as he sought to bridge the gulf of transition between the different domains of being (77).

He is also enacting the role of the character created by another explorer disciple of Ogun myth, Again to quote Brian Crow,

And he is also enacting a text created by another Ogun inspired explorer, the dramatist Soyinka, whose tragic plays culminate in a ritual action, which offer the hope of a collective transition to a

more authentic mode of being. When Demoke in the climax of *A Dance of the Forests*, falls from the totem which he has himself carved, his action is symbolic of a willed plunge into the existential abyss which may also be the experience of the spectators (77.)

The spiritual interdependence between the past, the present and the future in the community of Yoruba Cosmology, the interdependence between the three historical actual and prospective planes of entity is also suggested powerfully through *A Dance of the Forests*. According to Soyinka, “the true African sensibility establishes that the past exists in the present, it is co-existent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future” (“The Writer” 19¹¹). Soyinka was not the kind who ignored the past. He was aware of the validity of the past. That is evident enough from his interest in African mythology. But he also believed that the past must address the present and the writer should live in the present and work for the future. Ogunbeshan gives a very relevant comment about this in his article “Wole Soyinka, The Past and the Visionary Writer”:

Soyinka does not attempt to recreate the past for the purpose of enshrinement, nor does he stress merely the cultural continuity. Unlike Achebe who is nostalgic about the past, Soyinka focuses more directly on the dilemmas of the living to enable him to anticipate and safe guard the future which he considers the primary concern of the writer (175).

It will not be inappropriate to point out at this context the aspect of post colonial cultural politics with which Soyinka is concerned: history and

responsibility. *A Dance of the Forests* repeatedly emphasizes the privileged position occupied by the past in the understanding of the present and the construction of future. He warns his people that past should not be observed with detachment. For an African, it is difficult to accept a neutral attitude towards history, to remember it with detachment. Discussing this aspect in *A Dance of The Forests*, and making a comparison between *A Dance of The Forests* and *Drums and Colours* written by Derek Walcott, Tejumola Olaniyan points out certain differences between them. Agreeing that both of them foreground traditional elements like rituals, dances etc. he remarks:

The general tendency of *Drums* appears to be toward a postcoloniality in which history is remembered with little more than detachment. *A Dance*, on the other hand, privileges the past in the understanding of the present and the construction of future. In *A Dance*, history serves as exorcism, surgical and violent, and offers no extenuating apology for the resulting open, gaping wounds. While *A Dance* claims, *Drums* disclaims history and responsibility for the past (490).

In *A Dance of The Forests*, the living do provide a continuity with the past. They can indeed hope to break the sordid pattern of their history through the awareness they gain. But Soyinka seems to give this warning that the pattern remains unchanged. To quote Jonathan A. Peters,

Soyinka emphasises the ingrained similarity rather than the superficial resemblance of the present and future not only in the totem but also in the double lives of the characters, in the acts of

violence they commit and in the complex symbolism of welcoming the Abiku child during the rites of welcome (170).



Rola is adept at driving men to madness and self-destruction. “The yard is filled with her lovers” (22). She is responsible for the deaths of two men in the present life. In her previous life she was the notorious Madame Tortoise who had led many lives including that of the noble warrior to destruction. Similarly Adenebi the councillor is, in essence, a bestial character, an incarnation of all deadly sins like hypocrisy, corruption, authenticity and misplaced values. He has grown “rosy cheeks by bribe and blood” (Olaniyan 497). Demoke, the carver, is the most sensitive of the three. He represents the creative spark for the gathering. In his previous life too he was an artist, a bard, a professional aestheticizer of tyranny in the despotic court of Mata Kharibu. He has scarified in his present life, the life of his apprentice, Oremole. But he later confesses his guilt in a long speech. Demoke symbolizes the role an artist has to play in society. An artist, though guilty of his venial crime, can definitely assist his people in learning from his mistakes and then in opening a pathway towards salvation.

An account of the lives of the three figures, Demoke, Rola and Adenebi runs parallel to the account of the lives of poet, Madame Tortoise and court historian as represented in the kingdom of Mata Kharibu who ruled eight centuries ago. By suggesting that the past was equally inglorious as the present, Soyinka is emphasizing the universal cycle of human violence. The view point upheld by Adenebi and the old man that the past is known for accumulated cultural heritage and that it has only illustrious ancestors creates a feeling of nostalgia. It is an Edenic past that symbolizes all that is noble in

past history. But in actual life, Soyinka suggests, “their assemblage of illustrious people is always equalled by a corresponding gallery of infamous rogues and villains” (Peters 177).

It becomes obvious that even before Soyinka became famous for his tiger – tigritude quip he had expressed in *A Dance Of The Forests* his anger at the preoccupation of his people with past greatness. It is through the agency of Mata Kharibus’ court that Soyinka seeks to demonstrate the inglorious side of the African heritage. We learn that the Dead Man was a warrior who refused to lead men to a war he considered unjust. He has got the courage to tell the physician of the court that the war Kharibu orders him to fight is an unjust war only to recover the trousseau of a stolen wife. His courageous streak becomes most obvious in another conversation with the physician. “Unborn generations will be cannibals, most worshipful physician. Unborn generations will as we have done, eat up one another” (49).

Shocked at this independent nature of the warrior, Kharibu can only refer to it as “thought – cancer” for which neither he nor the court historian can find any precedence. The court historian remarks: “It is unheard of. War is the only consistency that past ages afford us. It is the legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. Soldiers have never questioned bloodshed. The cause is always the accident, your majesty, and war is the Destiny. This Man is a traitor” (57). The warrior’s wife, Dead woman, died of the shock of the punishment inflicted upon her husband: castration and slavery. This is the glorious past which the humans intend to celebrate Jonathan Peters remarks thus: “Kharibu’s unconscionable

indulgence in a futile war lays bare another ignoble aspect of the African past and calls in question the exclusive glorification of the traditional African heritage and culture” (179). It also suggests that in the contemporary scene also there is much scope for meaningless wars. “*A Dance* thus is famous for its exorcism of what the author sees as the ‘boring romanticism of the Negro’” (Soyinka “The Future” 14). It is unsparing in its condemnation of the present too.

Wole Soyinka knew that the present age is also beset by corrupt statesmen and unjust men of justice. Confronted with the impotence of the elite, the corruption of leaders and men of justice, Soyinka did not know where to turn. He preached that lessons should be learned from the past and should be used for the construction of the future.

What Soyinka implies is that Nigeria, in the newly gained independent state, should never deny the past and that each Nigerian should make an inquiry into his role in the postcolonial milieu. To quote Tejumola Olaniyan, “for Soyinka, in this play, the moment of independence is time not for denying, or even simply affirming history. Instead, as part of productive affirmation, it is time for a no-holds-barred inquiring of the post colonial’s own role in the historical trajectory that culminate in that festive occasion” (489).

From what has been analysed in the foregoing pages, it becomes clear that in creating *A Dance Of The Forests*, the political situation of 1960 has played an important role. The present – the gaining of independence – provides an admirable vantage point from which history can be reviewed and reinterpreted. The motivation for such reinterpretation arises out of the need

to understand the present itself, situated as it is in the context of history. This is one of the concerns among many others of what is currently known as “post-colonial discourses” Frantz Fanon through work, *The Wretched of the Earth* has argued that anticolonial movements would fail unless they addressed the issue of the survival after decolonisation. Critically, from both these points of view, the play *A Dance ^of The Forests* does deserve to be listed among the postcolonial New Literatures of the day. It is a key document in the development of the European as well as African awareness of the condition of the colonised as decolonisation proceeded.

A Dance Of The Forests with its chastising of the past, and the exposition of the lust for power excellently proves that Soyinka does not have a blind veneration of the past. He has exposed the hypocrisy of the rulers of the past; he has criticized the new rulers as they ignore the urgent problems of the present on which “the poets have lately taken to gun running and writers are heard of holding up radio stations.” A writer has to gain authenticity through an activism concentrating on the present. Only then he becomes relevant. An African writer has been irrelevant as long as “he was content to turn his eye backwards in time and prospect in archaic fields for forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract the present” (Fruser 563). The writer becomes relevant when he truthfully depicts the present realities and creates a kind of self-awareness in the minds of his people. Soyinka never had a blind nostalgic attitude towards the past. Neither did he think that gaining independence would immediately make the nation free of all exploitative tendencies as shown by the colonizers. He warns his countrymen of the problems which the country has to face. *A Dance ^of The Forests*,

gives a warning to the Africans that the country has to be ready to face problems like hypocrisy, corruption and betrayal from their new rulers too.

It can never be assumed that colonialism ceases to exist when a colony formally achieves its independence. The hoisting of a newly independent colony's flag is indeed a crucial moment for the newly independent nation as a symbolic gesture. It is more important to realize that colonial values do not disappear all on a sudden. Overturning colonialism, then, is not just about handing land back to its dispossessed peoples, or returning power to those who were once ruled by the empire. There is a reversal in the hierarchical order. An attempt is made to represent reality in ways which do not replicate colonial values. As John Mcleod puts it: "if colonialism involves colonising the mind, then resistance to it requires decolonising the mind" (22). There must be a change in the mindset; a desire and a power to challenge the dominant ways of seeing. John Mcleod further remarks: "Indeed in order to challenge the colonial order of things, some of us may need to reexamine our received assumption of what we have been taught as natural or true" (23). Wole Soyinka warns his people through *A Dance of The Forests* about internal colonisation. They are given a chance through Demoke, Rola and Adenebi and through their past incarnations to know that what they have been taught as glorious or true are just the opposite.

Edward Said has pointed out in *Culture and Imperialism* that an attempt to read a text in its colonial context bears witness to "worldliness of culture"(78). Explaining what Said meant by this, John Macleod remarks in *Beginning Post Colonialism* that this term reminds us that "literary texts

emerge from and have complex engagements with the historical, political and social conditions of their time amongst which colonialism is fundamental in the nineteenth century.” (28). This way of approach encourages “contrapuntal readings of literary texts – that which takes account of both processes-that of imperialism and that of resistance” (Said, *Culture* 79).

In *A Dance Of The Forests*, what Soyinka does is to adequately represent a postcolonial society in search of national identity. At the first stage is portrayed “the initial burst of heightened optimism” which the whole nation experiences, now that the British have officially left. But towards the end, this optimism has been completely inverted and has been changed into severe pessimism.

One of the reasons for the failure of the new nation to develop freely into a stable and developed one may be that national resistance to imperialism itself derives its notion of nation from the Western culture it is resisting. As the well renowned colonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak points out, as the product of imperialism, nationalism succeeds only in changing “the geo-political conjuncture from territorial imperialism to neo-colonialism” (“In Other Worlds”, 245). She is aware of the fact that the national governments may, in resisting the imperialist governments, follow the same pattern of socio-political hierarchy which was popularised by colonialist philosophy.

It matters more what the African governments now do than what the colonial governments did. It matters less who the colonizer was than how deep a modernizing impact the colonisers made on the African society. It is important that the new independent nation frees itself from the

impact of colonization. It is here that the significance of the myths comes in. As C. Vijayasree remarks: “The myths do refer to a society’s traditional ability to live with cultural diversities. The myths can be used to build psychological and even metaphysical defence against cultural erosion.” (39).

Soyinka has made clear in *Myth, Literature and African World* the significant role of the myths in shaping the future of a nation. Colonialism definitely causes psychological and cultural distortions. So, as a starting point of the revolutionary processes, in a postcolonial African society, there must be “a reinstatement of the values authentic to that society, modified only by the demands of a contemporary world.” (*Myth X*).

It can be seen that when traditional performance elements are incorporated into a contemporary play, they affect the play’s content, structure and style, and subsequently its overall meaning or effect. As Helen Gilbert puts it, “the folkloric background is represented, reflected on, given a cultural thrust; (and so) raised to the level of consciousness, it emerges as a new form of self critical culture.” (Gilbert and Tompkins 86). This faculty for self-evaluation, and the self-reflective criticism, is one of the prominent traits of postcolonial literature.

Similarly, in the works of African writers too is seen the tendency to employ the native traditions, myths and ritualistic devices. They may be combined with other cultural forms as is seen in Soyinka. He interweaves elements of Western drama with Yoruba ritual. Ritual is given a contemporary relevance too. *A Dance ^oOf The Forests* stands as a concrete example of the fusing of Western techniques and Yoruba rites, rituals and dances. But it can be proved that the play’s deepest inspiration is defiantly

and deliberately African because Soyinka knew well that to decolonize thoroughly meant that the indigenous be forcibly substituted for the alien, in literature as in life. As Ellek Boehmer argues,

Using conceptual structures drawn from local tradition the writers like Soyinka or Christopher Okigbo tried to integrate the cultural life of the past with their postindependence Westernized reality. Writers came to recognise that the gods, dreams, half-children, warriors, and strange beasts of local legend and oral epic still held explanatory power, despite the efforts of missions and schools to eradicate them. Figures from myth could not simply be dismissed as outworn fetishes or heathen embarrassments. They offered a rich resource for cultures seeking redefinition of self (104).

So, we can say that Soyinka has redefined tradition as resistance here.

The critical evaluation of the new African-English literatures that have emerged as a part of post-war cultural developments, makes it clear that they share similar styles and approaches, have dealt with the same basic themes, and gone through much the same phases of development. The most traumatic event in the life of the African people was the European aggression and occupation of Africa. The long years of shame and humiliation under foreign rule, the long strenuous struggle for liberation, experiments of dictatorial governments with self rule after the attainment of independence constitute the three phases of recent African history. These phases of development are important from a postcolonial perspective. As is pointed out by Gilbert Phelps, "These writers move through different phases from initial revulsion against colonialism and passionate reassertion of indigenous

cultural values, through disillusionment with the fruits of independence, and thereafter either to a growing sense of alienation, or to silence, or to further explosion of anger and radicalism” (342). Writers like Achebe or Soyinka illustrate through their works these different stages. To quote Gilbert Phelps again, “Between Achebe and Soyinka they illustrate the whole course of the new literatures, of English-speaking Africa and indeed in many respects those of other parts of the world which have also emerged from the colonial experiences” (8:342). Soyinka’s works do reflect the changes undergone by him as he passed through these different phases. If *The Lion and The Jewel* represents the stage where the works reflect ‘the revulsion against colonialism and a reassertion of indigenous cultural values,’ *A Dance Of The Forests* represents the second phase which expresses the awareness of the disillusioning experiences of independence and the need to go back to one’s cultural roots. *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Season of Anomy* and the other later works of Soyinka stand for the third phase where the author, having grown bitter after the attitude of the new nation builders becomes more pessimistic. Soyinka’s works, as the works of the other African writers, are a reflection of his awareness of the horrifying and destroying colonial experience and its aftermath. They are also a clear reflection of the awareness of the author about the efforts made by the African writers to seek his roots in the pre-colonial past. After a close reading of his works, this fact becomes obvious) ^{he} He was totally against judging African world and its literature using Western theories. He knew that they were derived from the apprehension of Western theories. He knew that they were derived from the apprehension of Western history, their social neuroses and their value

systems. He emphatically insisted upon the need to apprehend a culture whose reference points lie within the culture itself.

It can be strongly argued that *A Dance ^of The Forests* is a work which very clearly reflects the basic themes and the same phases of development as any other work of the postcolonial literatures. It clearly depicts the euphoria of gaining independence from the British rulers along with expressing revulsion against colonialism. It consists of a passionate reassertion of indigenous cultural values. It is a truthful revelation of the disillusionment that awaits the new rulers and the jubilant people who are drunk with excitement. It is also a grim warning of the gruesome future which will definitely threaten people with its sense of alienation and estrangement. It warns them of being drawn to an age of disillusionment, silence or further explosion of anger and radicalism.

Soyinka warned his country men that gaining of independence should not prevent them from realizing the reality of the situation. It is a moment charged with the rhetoric of independence and ecstasy of self-discovery. But they should not forget that they have got a tremendous responsibility of rising up to the expectations of the people. At a time “when an age ends and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance”(Memmi 87) too much expectation of a new world magically emerging from the physical ruins of colonialism will only lead to disillusionment. It is impossible either for the new man or the new world to emerge all on a sudden. To quote Albert Memmi,” And the day oppression ceases, the new man is supposed to emerge before our eyes immediately. Now I do not like to say so but I must, since ^{colo}desalinization has demonstrated it. This is not the way it happens. The

colonized lives for a long time before we see that really new man” (88). Soyinka gives the same message to his country men through the play. His pessimism whether political or personal this explains the postcoloniality as “a historical condition marked by the visible apparatus of freedom and concealed persistence of unfreedom” (Sharma 26).

A Dance ^oOf The Forests is remarkable for the amazing way in which Soyinka has used the theatre to explore and affirm his cultural substance. What strikes one is the radical originality of his approach to liberating black Africa from its crippling legacy of European imperialism. As Brian Crow puts it:

He envisioned a New Africa that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present on to the stock of its own ancient traditions. Native myth, reformulated to accommodate contemporary reality, was to be the foundation of the future, opening the way to ‘self-retrieval, cultural recollection, [and] cultural security’ (*Myth* 80).

Many critics have blamed Soyinka for the density and complexity of his plays. They accuse him of being eurocentric and of writing his plays mainly for European audience. He is severely criticized for the complexity arising out of the use of English and for employing Western techniques in his plays. Even though he has advocated the use of ‘Swahili’ tongue, he has shown his expertise in the handling of the appropriated language of the center. Without overlooking the far reaching effects of the colonial influence it must be observed that many natives had developed a kind of veneration and appreciation for ‘English’ and the English way of life. Helen Tiffin writes in

Post-colonial Literatures and Counter Discourses that ‘once colonial calibans transported the language or had it imposed, they used it to curse and to subvert’ (19). But the English educated group “who spoke the master’s language did not curse like Caliban but praised Prospero for extending Europe into Asia” (Sharp, *Allegories* 58). But the praise suggests an ambivalence too. It is true that writing in the language of the colonizer revealed a hidden appreciation and admiration for England and the British rule. Its culture was both alien and more desirable to the natives than their own. Eventhough they considered their mastery over the language of their masters as a valuable achievement it can be considered as a gesture of resistance too. They thought that by getting an easy access to the culture and language of the Europeans they could make a claim of equality too with the Britishers. The colonizers also will value this claim for equality because the natives were writing in their language. But the advantage of the natives was that they could represent truly African situations, experiences and emotions through their writings. In this way it can be considered as a gesture of resistance. So, Wole Soyinka’s texts are potentially subversive even when he employs the language, vocabulary, forms and norms of English. As Ellek Boehmer says, “Take-over or appropriation was in its way a bold refusal of cultural dependency” (205). Soyinka remains unique in that he has absorbed “the coloniser’s language, literature and culture into the larger and already eclectic tradition of learning and borrowing, tolerance for other cultures, and veneration for learning and books” (Sharma 78).

The remarks made by Brian Crow, once again, are appropriate:

From this perspective, the critics of *A Dance Of The Forests* appear unwitting neocolonialists, their ideas mere replays in African costume of the Wests' own indigenous myths of liberalism, Marxism and regressive racism. Soyinka dreamed instead of a truly decolonized continent, where an autonomous African culture assimilated only those progressive elements of recent history that were consistent with its own authentic identity. (82) .

Without rejecting the West completely Soyinka combined the best of his own culture with some of the techniques of the West. To quote Meenakshi Sharma, "Such appropriation and absorption by grafting upon native traditions is another way of refusal of cultural dependency" (78).

The play dealt with black Africa's "recurrent cycle of stupidities" thematically. The intention of the playwright was to remind the nation of the chronic dishonesty and abuse of power which colonialism had bred in the new generation of political leaders. Stylistically, the play, *A Dance of the Forests* is a fusion of Yoruba festival tradition with European modernism. These two aspects were sufficient enough to invite severe criticism from all quarters. Soyinka's suggestion that there is widespread corruption angered Nigerian authorities. Leftists complained about the play's elitist aesthetics and African chauvinists objected to Soyinka's adaptation of Western techniques. Thus Soyinka had to face severe criticism from both the newly installed leaders of Nigeria as well as his fellow intellectuals.

But Soyinka's critics failed to understand and appreciate the originality in his approach to liberate Africa from the influence of European imperialism. He envisioned a "New Africa" that would escape from the

aftermath of colonialism by combining the technical advances of the present into the stock of its own traditions. He gave this message to his countrymen that only native myth can lay the foundation of the future leading to “self-retrieval, cultural recollection ^{and} ~~to~~ cultural security.” Ofcourse, native myth can be reformulated to accommodate contemporary reality. Through the play, Soyinka projects his dream of a truly decolonized Africa where a perfect blending of African culture with those progressive elements of recent history that were consistent with its own authentic identity has taken place. By revisiting, remembering and critically interrogating the colonial past through the play, Soyinka has projected this idea that a truly decolonized Africa can be created by a blending of African culture with those progressive elements of recent history.

In showing the relationship between the past and the present, Soyinka makes use of several major symbols like bridges, domes, circles and the rainbows. A predominant role is played by festivals too. *The Strong Breed* centers upon the festival of the New Year. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the central action is the gathering of the tribes. In *The Road*, the kernel is an event that happened at the last annual Driver’s festival. *Kongi’s Harvest* is centered around the festival of New Yam. All these plays illustrate the various devices employed by Soyinka to create an emotionally charged atmosphere that helps the spectators to feel to come near God. The principal external features of the festivals are drumming, singing, dancing, feasting and sacrifice. Poetic songs and prayers are sung. Dances are performed, sacrifices are offered and pent up spirits are released. Through these devices he intends to make the effect extremely exciting and very lasting. Robert

Mac Dowel explains Soyinka's stage devices and their effect upon the audience most appropriately:

Soyinka makes use of fascinating devices in his own expressionistic plays: dancing, singing, miming, speeches in verse, flashbacks and characters from the spirit world. He employs techniques familiar at Nigerian festivals and utilizes any poetic methods which enforces the emotional and intellectual impact of his dramas; in short he has no slavish attachment to the merely naturalistic level of presentation (35).

Yoruba festivals play a prominent role in Soyinka's plays. The plays like *A Dance of the Forests*, *Kongi's Harvest*, and *The Strong Breed* have an overall design of a festival. It is typical of a festival that it causes excitement. Celebration as well as tension prevail everywhere. This tension in the atmosphere is increased by such devices like drumming and music. Oyin Ogunba observes,

In each of these plays the prevailing mood is that of the preparation for a celebration of a good event which produces so much excitement or tension in the whole populace that everybody thinks of nothing but the great event. This is the atmosphere that prevails when important ceremonies are performed in traditional Africa and Soyinka in these plays very often catches the essence of the festival mood with the drumming, bustle and other manifestations of a holiday (8).

Obviously it is relevant to consider the Bakhtinian concept of the carnival here. Bakhtin is undisputedly a great theoretician of the literature of the

twentieth century. In spite of the fact that the impact of Bakhtin on literary theory began to be felt only in his later years, he has become highly influential. His influence has extended beyond literary theory and into the general study of texts in nearly every area of humanities. Even though the theory proposed by Bakhtin is applied generally for the interpretation of novels, some of his concepts regarding carnivals can be used for explaining the significance of the festivals in Soyinka's plays. In addition to polyglossia, Bakhtin mentions a second element of decisive importance to the rise of novel : laughter. Carnival is the ancient and medieval festival. Here laughter is elicited and celebrated. Anachronism, the past dialogically rendered as contemporaneous with the present, is the essence of carnival activity and of the drama it inspires. There is a collapse of space and time in the carnivalised event or its literary rendering and the result is, of course, laughter. People do not merely see carnival as a sight to be seen, but they live in it. The two principal weapons used in this onslaught were "the reverse of hierarchy, which is humbling, debunking or debasing of whatever is lofty or lowly and the lowering of all forms of expression in language, art" (Clark and Holquist 309). Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque has its origin in actual carnival. The medieval carnival represented second life for the common people. Its political significance lies in this that it upturned the orthodox hierarchy and positions. Again to quote Katherine Clark, "The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. All were considered equal during carnival. The Utopian ideal and the realistic merged in the carnival experience, unique of its kind" (310).

Thus, during carnival time, there was a temporary suspension of hierarchical rank. So a special type of communication was possible during carnivalization which was impossible in everyday life. Carnival laughter which is directed at all and every one “is affirming and denying and burying and reviving. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of the carnival” (Morris 200). Lacking all the characteristics of official feast like assertion of all that was stable and perennial and the emphasis on the existing hierarchy, the carnival encouraged a free mingling and frank speech. To quote Pam Morris, “Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. The familiar communication of the people in carnival time lacks the essentials, the all-human character, the festivity, utopian meaning, philosophical depth” (199).

A similar pattern can be perceived in Soyinka’s idea of a festival. Again and again we find Soyinka reminding his people not to bask in unreal glories or rejoice complacently. It produces an awareness in the people, a need to see themselves as they are and had always been. As the publication of the play coincided with the celebration of the Nigerian Independence, it was a moment of death for the colonizers and a moment of birth and revival for the colonized. The festive laughter is gay and triumphant. It is at the same time mocking and deriding and is directed at the rulers and the ruled. There is a view that *A Dance of the Forests* does not project very clearly the traditional festival model as his other plays like *Kongis’ Harvest* and *The Strong Breed* do. But the ideas of the welcoming of the Dead, the illustrious ancestors, and the gathering of the Tribes suggest a Yoruba Egungun festival. It is the celebration of a good event, independence, and it produces

great excitement to the whole nation. But here again, as in *Kongi's Harvest*, the underlying hint is that there is nothing to rejoice about. The joyous atmosphere is only superficial. The past has been one of opportunism and the future is also going to be bleak with suffering and death. So the festival is averted and *A Dance of the Forests* which had begun as a celebration of a joyous occasion and a gathering of the tribes rapidly becomes a dance of death.

Bakhtin's concept of carnival as a celebration of the disorder is thus well applicable to *A Dance Of The Forests* where we see assertion, denial, burial and revival. Similarly we find a suspension of all hierarchical rank and privileges and a free mingling and free mixing and frank interaction between people of different ranks and order. The Orthodox hierarchy is suspended and upturned in the community of Yoruba cosmology in which are coeval the three historical, actual and prospective planes of entity. There is the free coexistence of the supernatural, the human beings, the dead ones and even the unborn. We find the human beings intervening in the actions of the gods as Demoke does with Eshuoro or the Gods interfering with human affairs. It is only in such a carnival, a dance of the forests, where a temporary suspension of both real and the ideal hierarchical rank is created that a special communication is possible. To quote Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, "Carnival is thus suitable as a model for post-colonial representations of the body politic that seek to dismantle the hierarchised corpus of imperial culture" (80).

Bakhtin has theorised that carnival is a medium of the multivoiced or polyphonic spirit which very effectively opposes monologic orders such as

colonialism. Viewing critically, Postcolonialism, which recognises both the coloniser and the colonised enables polyphonic dialogue. When applied to postcolonial contexts, carnival perspectives undermine “the self-determining (im) postures of imperialism.” Heterogeneity sets carnival apart. So, Joan Tompkins argues that, the idea of carnival as a subversion of all categories of social privilege is more acceptable. “In this respect, more than the conservative view of carnival as a licensed inversion, the ideas of carnival as a subversion that undermines virtually all categories of social privilege is more enabling and thus prevents their unproblematic reassemblage” (Gilbert and Tompkins 84)

Again, by removing all sorts of social ranks from a celebration, carnival seems to depict the polite people of a society as a rebelling group that threatens to loosen the grip of the authority and move towards equality and uniformity. So in other terms, “the carnival constantly reconstructs the docile (colonised) body as an unruly (resisting) body that threaten to loosen institutionalised authority’s grasp on representation.” (Gilbert and Tompkins 86).

From these interpretations it can be argued that carnival forms strengthen the docile black community whereas it undermines the imperial authority. Carnivals are highly appreciated in the new literatures because they have got a historical suitability as an influential form for postcolonial drama. In addition, carnivals provide a suitable media for asserting the cultural value of a particular tribe because the playwrights do not have to seek means of having access to the costly theatre technology upon which many Western conventions rely. Thus a return to the rituals and myths and

carnivals has great contemporary relevance. It is appropriate to bring in here the words of Gibbon as they are quoted by Gilbert and Tompkins: “In this respect, the representation of ritual and carnival through drama establishes the umbilical link between art and tradition that is necessary for decolonisation” (Gilbert, ^{and} Tompkins 80).

A Dance Of The Forests is remarkable for the use of the devices like masks, dances, songs, drums, rituals, etc. Like rituals which are considered highly sacred, its associated costumes, masks and other paraphernalia are also regarded as sacred. Rituals, masks and other costumes signify many unspoken but evident suggestions and are therefore considered as a powerful tool for postcolonial culture. Masks serve many purposes as a body covering and more importantly as signifying many meanings which are of course specific to the context and culture in which they are used. Masks are used to create archetypes and to help establish ancestral links. Masks are not used in a drama just for aesthetic purposes. It has got considerable spiritual power for the wearer. A mask may conceal the real identity of the wearer. But it reveals many significant meanings like the site of culture, its power and importance outside the context of the play. The use of ritualized mask is highly crucial in the postcolonial context because its usage in African texts signifies a move away from the coloniser and a return to the roots. Perhaps this has been very aptly explained in Postcolonial Theory.

While a mask conceals the face of the actor, it also reveals the site of culture, and the significance and power invested in the mask outside the context of the play. In contemporary African texts, the use of a ritualised mask generally signifies a shift away from

imperial expectations and a return to traditional values, and an overturning of colonising Western influences. It also asserts the continuation of traditional or indigenous ritualised religious practices despite the influence of Christian missionaries (Gilbert and Tompkins 63).

A study of *A Dance of the Forests* presents Soyinka's concept of the privileged position of the artist who is the most creative and sensitive individual within the human community. It is through Demoke that Soyinka provides a moral and symbolic focus for numerous interactions between events past and present and between the characters, human and supernatural. Abiola Irele remarks ⁱⁿ "Traditions and the Yoruba writer, D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka", "The myth of artist as it developed in Soyinka's writings rests on an idea of his role as the mediator of the inner truths that sustain the collective life, and on his function in renewing the fundamental values that govern it." (63).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in his *Homecoming* finds fault with Soyinka the artist for drawing a static picture of the society. As an artist, he should "try to go beyond this, to seek out the sources, the causes and the trends of a revolutionary struggle which have already destroyed the traditional power map drawn up by the colonialist nations" (Thiong'O 66). As the exploited majority all over the world tries to attain freedom, the artist being one among the exploited colonized people 'should give moral direction and vision to a struggle which is continuous in changing the face of 20th century (Thiong'O 66).

Soyinka has envisioned a role for the artist which is of dynamic force. Soyinka believed that the artist lives in a society which is subjected to internal changes. The duty of the artist is to direct this change. The society is to be saved by means of dedication and far-sighted actions of certain individuals. Such individuals may have to risk their own life and may be victimised. But the society may benefit from their vision. So he “sees society as being in continual need for salvation from itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act, it comes about through the vision and dedication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision in spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save. They frequently end up as the victims of the society which benefits from their vision.” (Ogungbesan, “Wole Soyinka and the Novelists’ Responsibility” 6)

Parallels between Fanon’s paradigm about the African intellectuals and Soyinka’s treatment of them are unmistakable. Soyinka and his intellectual heroes seem to correspond to Fanon’s formulations about African intellectuals. Clearly Fanon entrusts the responsibility of analyzing and leading the society upon the intellectuals, especially the writers. Similarly Soyinka has depicted the intellectual of his two complex novels. *The Interpreters* and *The Season of Anomy* and the artists like Demoke as being bestowed with the power of leading the people of their society. They wake up in order to revitalize society. Kola Wole Ogungbesan observes.

Soyinka as a writer deserves to be taken seriously because of his high intellectual position among African writers. A speculative thinker, his persistent call to African writers to demonstrate that they have a vision shows that he sees the literary artist as a

redeemer. He believes that the writer possesses an innerlight unavailable to the mass of people, and that it is his duty to guide his society towards a beautiful future (7-8).

In a traditional African society an artist employs a variety of forms. He stands for a musician, dancer, singer, sculptor, spokesman, critic and conscience of the community. Soyinka's argument is that the modern African writer should possess all these qualities. He should be versatile and at the same time critical. The artist should provide an insight into the nature and existence of the world. Thus the artist is entrusted with a great responsibility. Soyinka's emphasis on the writer's personal responsibility very importantly includes within it the sense of social responsibility.

The writer has to remain true to what he believes in. Only then can he function as the conscience of his society. But this independence of spirit was not encouraged by rulers neither of the past nor of the present. For the despotic rulers, the possession of a questioning mind was like an abominable feature as malignant and killing as "thought-cancer". Soyinka has meaningfully drawn the picture of the empire of Matakharibu, as the shrine of historic magnificence. Such a glorious empire has a whore as a queen and a tyrant as a king. This tyrant fears independent minds and is eager to destroy intellectual powers. He has no principles. Soyinka is now the true artist who with courage raises a questioning eyebrow at the romanticized concept that people have of the past and thereby of the future of their country. So at one level, "the play is a debunking of the nationalistic fervors of the times, with its romanticizing of what the Council Orator refers to as "the accumulated heritage... Mali, Chaki, Songhai, Glory, Empires", where as the flashback

shows Mata Kharibu, one of the most ‘glorious’ of the emperors, as a blood – thirsty tyrant who kills his servants or sells them to slave traders, and wages unjust wars.” (Phelps 8:340).

A section of the dialogue between Mata Kharibu and the sooth sayer is quite expository in its nature.

MATA KHARIBU. I could understand if he aimed at my throne.

But he is not even man for that. What does it mean? What do you see for me in the future? Will there be more like him born with this thought cancer in their heart.

SOOTH SAYER. Mata Kharibu, have you ever seen a smudge on the face of the moon?

MATA KHARIBU. What do you mean?

SOOTH SAYER. And yet it happens. Once in every million years, one of the sheep that trail the moon in its wanderings does dare to wipe its smutty nose on the moon. Once in a million years. But the moon is still and who remembers the envy-ridden sheep.

MATA KHARIBU. So the future holds nothing for men like him?

SOOTH SAYER. Nothing : Nothing at all.

Another purpose behind this reenactment of the glorious palace scene of Mata Kharibu is to emphasize the cyclic pattern of human violence. The present is portrayed in no better a way. Various corruptions are exposed. The Dead man and Dead woman are linked in violence to both the ancient

courtiers of Mata Kharibu and their incarnations of the present generation. The Half-child laments that once again it will be born dead as in the past. The modern idealists and intellectuals alike are found wanting in principles. The cycle of violence is projected from the past through the present to the future. What is suggested is that the history presents an inevitable cycle of evil. The problems of selfishness and corruption are the universal and recurrent features of human nature. The view that is projected is that “the cyclic movement of history churns up very much the same manifestation of evil down the ages” (David 62).

Wole Soyinka seems to be satirising the past which has a powerful influence on the present life. The misuse of power which entails other vices like exploitation, flippancy, lying, cheating, inhumanity and betrayal is exposed and satirised. through the depiction of the proceedings of the court of Mata Kharibu. Highhanded legalisation of illegality, shameless opportunism and selfishness are satirised here. History shows a repetition of absurd follies. Mankind is imprisoned within a cycle of absurd and blind passions.

Eldred Jones in his *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* has graphically explained that “for Soyinka, history is a nearly cyclical movement, any progress being represented by a kink after an evolution and at the start of a new cycle” (33). What is needed to break the cycle and make independence a positive reality is heroic action of a kind beyond conventional notions of good and evil. The spirit of darkness foresees that those who expect too much of independence will be misled. Forest Head declares that nothing is ever altered. Only Demoke the artist, murderer, and follower of Ogun, can be

said to have learned anything - that he must accept his destructive as well as his creative instincts. And his offering to the celebrations is the totem pole which soars upwards. This pole, symbolic of the passage which Ogun had once made between the gods and man, is the only one creation which has any validity.

Like the God Ogun, Demoke is a combination of creativity and destruction. The implied suggestion is that man is mean and noble, evil and good at the same time. Demoke has been archetypally linked with Ogun. He is endowed with the same creative energy and destructive power as his patron God Ogun. The argument is that this contradictory nature in Demoke transforms him into a new artist and provides him with a new insight into things. To quote Abiola Irele,

There is the suggestion that the contradictions of his existence resolve themselves finally into a new insight into his own individual nature and that of his fellow men, a development which transforms him into a true artist, into the live center of the communal consciousness. Art in its deepest sense implies not only a surge of the senses, but also an introspective process (63).

It is relevant to remember that the themes discussed in the works of many works belonging to postcolonial literatures include as a prominent one “the functions of art and artists in a subordinated society” (Crow and Bantfield 19). Wole Soyinka’s major works celebrate the role of intellectuals or artists as leading the people to self-apprehension. The intellectuals are seen, as described in the introduction and *Death and the King’s Horseman*, as undergoing three phases in his role of analysing and leading his society.

These are in keeping with Fanon's concept of the intellectual as is analysed in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The first phase is a period when the intellectual assimilates the culture of the ruling power. After this feeling of estrangement from the native culture, the next phase awakens in him an awareness about the new reality, about the greatness of his culture. The third phase is the fighting phase when the intellectual accepts the role of the awakener. Demoke, like the other artists, undergoes these three stages and finally succeeds in guiding the tribe through the proper way.

Soyinka's vision philosophically ranges far beyond the present. In the frame of his reference is the pasts, the present and the ongoing stream of human existence. At a time when a nation celebrates its independence, the natural reaction is to recall the heroic deeds of the past that will inspire the future generations. But what Soyinka quite unexpectedly does here is to hint that

lurking below all its surface, pomp and majesty are disturbing traits, bestial and violent-of human nature, the whoring of Mata Kharibu's queen, the corruption of his Historian, the selling of the soldier and his sixty men and slaves, the machinations of Madame Tortoise against her new lord and the total lack of feeling and compassion by men of power who engulf their subjects and lesser compatriots in meaningless wars" (Peters 179).

Dead man as a warrior in his previous life in the court of Mata Kharibu predicts about the cannibalistic nature of human beings 'Cannibalism' has become an important metaphor in postcolonial literatures for demonstrating the process by which imperial Europe distinguishes itself from and the

colonized subjects and provides a justification for that expansion.

Cannibalism which has different connotations is present in all aspect of life. Cannibalism is present in the innate wicked nature of human beings; it is present in exploitation, war, betrayal and murder. It is there in “the brother eating – brother” morality in a wicked society. Soyinka has repeatedly emphasized his conviction that human beings are simply cannibals.

In modern age this cannibalistic streak has reached its extreme stage where nations fight among one other for the flimsiest of reasons. In *A Dance Of The Forests* itself there is the example of the historian who insists that war is necessary to reclaim the queen’s wardrobe from her former husband. He says about the history of Troy: “And who was the inspiration of this divine carnage? Helen of Troy, a woman whose honour because is as rare a conception as her beauty. Would Troy, if it were standing today, lay claim to preservation in the annals of history if a thousand had not been slaughtered behind its gates and a hundred thousand Trojans within her walls” (51).

In an interview with Lewis Nkosi, he explains one of the motives behind the creation of *A Dance of the Forests*: “I find that the main thing is my own personal conviction or observation that human beings are simply cannibals all over the world so that their main preoccupation seems to be eating up one another. This I think is the main thing I would say was in the back of my mind when I wrote it” (113). The different portraits of *A Dance Of The Forests* elucidate this argument of the author. The bestial nature and brutality, selfishness and hypocrisy and the lust for power have been satirised

through all the characters present here. Through the ancient emperor Mata Kharibu, the dead warrior, Demoke Adenebi, and Rola – Soyinka conveys this inclination of the human beings to betray one another. Similarly, the ants and *The triplets-End, Greater Cause and Posterity*-also point at the base intentions and self-deception inherent in man. The ants “emphasise the ultimate fragility and futility of human endeavour since man never learns from the lesson of the past” (Peters 168). The vigour with which the historian justifies the war fought for the trousseau of the queen is noticeable in the modern dictators too who resort to war at the slightest provocation. They quote so many utilitarian principles like progress, civilisation, democracy and the like to defend the massacre of the people in a war. But these references to “the good to come” (Peters 178) are yet another indication of “the proneness of human beings to self-deception” (Peters 179). The *Triplets* also reflect man’s “specious justification of his acts of cruelty and savagery”(179). The message that Soyinka conveys through all these character sketches is that the nature of human beings is to exploit the weak and the innocent. Jonathan Peters has expressed it in a single sentence. “And because the high moral force is only a varnish that covers the base intentions underneath, the future will simply be a byproduct of violent past and present” (183). Cannibalism has been made the central theme of many of his works. It has been employed to refer to the cruel streak in human beings by which the weaker and the less powerful are exploited by the stronger. *Madmen and the Specialists* has used this as the central theme of the play.

Soyinka here powerfully satirises the use of political power, especially the military force for justifying the selfish ends. Warmongering happens to be an ally of the political evil. The soothsayer had predicted the

possibility of bloodshed on account of unfavourable stars. But Mata Kharibu persisted and this ended up in a warfare in which soldiers were even sold as slaves. His unscrupulousness and inhumanity have reached an extreme end that nobody can check his callous exploitation of the helpless subordinates of his kingdom.

Again, bribery is another evil practice that goes with political powers. One evil supports and perpetuates another evil in feudal bureaucracy. This was true in the past as it is true in the present. When Mata Kharibu highhandedly decides to sell a few soldiers as slaves to a slave-dealer, the Historian objects to it on the ground that the slave-dealer's bark is too small to contain the large number of slaves. But when the slave-dealer bribes him profusely, he alters his tone. The slave dealer tells the physician: "My new vessel is capable of transporting the whole of Kharibu's court to hell when that time does come. The Honourable Historian here can testify to it. I took him abroad. . . . (Behind his back, he passes a bag of money to the historian, who takes it, feels it and pockets it). . . . only this afternoon and showed him every plank and rope. . . . ask him yourself" (54).

Such official corruption is not special to African past but happens to be a ubiquitous phenomenon. Adenebi, the councillor accepted the bribe and changed the capacity of his incinerator from forty to seventy which ended up in the death of 65 passengers. This is how Obaneji narrates it: "That is why they called it incinerator since yesterday – of the seventy people in it, five escaped. It overwhelmed you see, and the body was built of wood. Dry and brittle in the Hanmattan season too. They were all on their way here to the gathering of the tribes" (18).

The detailed analysis of the play reveals the complexity inherent in the complicated plot of the work. Under the broad enveloping theme of the contradictions of man's nature and the consequence of such contradictions, the playwright has arranged numerous themes. Nature and function of art, political corruption, war, the destruction of natural environment are some of the themes dealt with. To treat this multiplicity of themes, Soyinka has introduced a multiplicity of symbols. Man is the central figure in the play. Man is represented by living men and women like Rola, Demoke, Adenebi. Dead man and woman represent men as victimized by the tyrants and the all powerful. The Half child is the ambiguous symbol of man's uncertain future. *A Dance of Forests* encompasses philosophical themes such as the cycle of repetition, the creative destructive duality of man, war as man's perennial destiny. It includes such individualistic themes like human vanity, the will to knowledge and power, predilection for messianism among priests and leaders, exploitation of man by man and by the environment. These themes are discussed sometimes with a seriousness and at other times with a sense of humour. But, for the most part, it is poignant and bitter. It is appropriate to quote Jonathan Peteres here:

It may seem that Soyinka's purpose in his major works is to denigrate mankind by presenting an unflattering portrait of man's history and destiny. But Soyinka merely wishes to call man to an awareness of himself and his plight so that, through the effort of his will he can alter his present senseless course, fraught with needless pain of suffering, violence, deceit, lies and hypocrisy as prelude to a new era of communication and peace founded on truth and good will (166).

Only a strong sense of determination and will power ~~only~~ can lead the good leaders to their destination. Resistance to the unjust impositions of the rulers by means of political activities as well as by means of creative, literary work can help the people attain that self-awareness and self-realisation as in the case of Demoke and Rola. Soyinka had envisioned a free society. It will not be out of context to relate this to the Indian situation. Gandhi's 'Hind Swaraj' or 'Indian Home Rule' originally written in Gujarathi analyses three major concerns - the opposition between cultures and civilisation, political methodology and the role of the individual. Gandhiji insisted that "progress by means of industrialisation will only enslave men through its seductive comfort." "True civilisation," Gandhi argues, "is that mode of conduct which point out to man the path of duty... To observe morality is to attain. mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves" (Hind Swaraj; 55). Again, 'Swaraj' is viewed as personal will not as political freedom. Jasbir Jain, explains the significance of "Hind Swaraj" succinctly like this: 'Hind Swaraj' defines the concept of freedom, of subjectivity, of civilisation, and projects soul – force as a necessary condition of sustaining a value system. It connects political well-being with individual well being" (Postcoloniality 26). Gandhi gave this important message to Indians through his work: "If man will only realize that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man's tyranny will enslave him. This is the key to self rule or home-rule" (72) What is emphasised is the individual's moral strength.

Soyinka seems to be giving the same message to his country men. He is suggesting that to gain complete self-sufficiency, to achieve absolute freedom the individuals have to rely on their own moral strength which, in its turn, will strengthen them to question unjust laws. Much of Soyinka's

work is inseparable from his activities as a political dissident. Soyinka has stated in his interview with Louis Gates that “I cannot conceive of my existence without political involvement.” (38). He traces his political awakening to 1958, when he met the first generation of Nigeria’s legislators in London and realized that they meant to step into the shoes of the departing white colonialists. He knew then and that “the first enemy was within.” *In A Dance of the Forests*, written for the celebration of the Independence of Nigeria Soyinka has given a critical estimate of his country’s past rulers.

The intention of the playwright has been announced on many occasions. This true portrayal of deceit and treachery inherent in human beings – whether black or white – has been made only to draw our attention to it. It does not mean an acceptance of that situation. He welcomes challenging situations by which, if possible, man can escape from “the present senseless course, fraught with needless pain of suffering, violence deceit, lies and hypocrisy. It should be taken only as a prelude to a new era of communion and peace founded in truth and good will.” (Peters 185).

In an interview held in Zimbabwe Soyinka stated that

A Dance Of The Forests was, of course, triggered by independence, by my knowledge of the leaders who were about to take over the reins of the country. I realized that after independence some of those new rulers were going to act exactly like their forebears did, just exploit the people. I was interested in taking another look at that history and saying “The epigraph should be tempered by the reality of the internal history of

oppression.’ In other words I thought that Independence should be a sobering look at history, not just euphoria and so on (68).

Soyinka warns the countrymen of the ill effects of neocolonialism. It can become the worst form of imperialism. To quote Kwame Nkrumah, “Neocolonialism ... is the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress.”

Like his patron God, Ogun, Soyinka believed in action, in plunging into the abyss and reappearing full of vitality and vigour. Kola Wole Ogung Beshan observes, in his article, “Wole Soyinka. The Past and The Visionary Writer” that in a 1965 essay entitled, ‘And After the Narcissist’, Soyinka had condemned “the usual division between the poet (intellectual) and the politician (Man of action). The essence of Ogun, the Yoruba God of war and the creative principle, best reflects the true essence of the poet as a man of action to discharge his contemporary responsibility” (184). He should either voice the conscience of the country or withdraw to the background. “Soyinka implored African writers to become the conscience of their nations or be forced to withdraw to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon” (Progressive 367).

Quite unwilling to withdraw to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon, Soyinka projects his ideals for a new political order in Nigeria through the chief medium, the dramatic hero. It is obvious that his drama is devoted to the reordering of Nigerian political predicament. His satirical approach towards leaders in *A Dance of the Forests* Kongi’s *Harvest*, *A Play of Giants*, *The Opensore* and *King Baabu* reveals that the

dramatist does not favour the existing type of African leader. Though no man can be perfect, no man can be totally imperfect. Soyinka believed that the African leaders are bent on exploiting the people, are keen only on destroying, not anything else. This is well-illustrated in *A Dance of the Forests*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *A Play of Giants*. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the intention of the writer is to reveal the hypocrisy which threatened to undermine the 1960 celebration of Nigerian Independence. His concern for the political health of the country is obvious from the characters like Rola, Adenebi and Demoke who hold visible positions in the social structure which parallel their position in the past. Critics like Diedre L. Badijo even suggest a link between Demoke and the author himself. Demoke was commissioned to carve a totem to the ancestors where as Soyinka was commissioned to produce a play that will project a glorious tradition. Just as his dramatic hero is 'Ogun incarnate,' his political vision also draws much from the concept of Ogun. Simon Obik Peko Umukro observes,

Soyinka's conception of the dramatic hero derives from the qualities of Ogun, the Yoruba God of Iron and the patron of all people who use iron. . . . Soyinka's dramatic hero is Ogun incarnate, a kind of hero that may appropriately be called 'the Ogun hero'. And the Ogun hero is the main interpreter of Soyinka's political vision because that vision derives from the heroic qualities of Ogun which the incarnate possesses and demonstrates (173).

Again, the quest of the hero for justice is another aspect of Ogun. Ogun hero fights for justice. In *A Dance of the Forests* Demoke is faced with the

difficult question of finding the rightful owner of half-child, the Dead Woman or Eshuoro. He restores justice by giving the child back to its own mother. The interpretation is stretched to the point of comparing the Dead Woman to Nigeria and Eshuoro to the power of Britain. Like Ogun, the Ogun hero, Demoke destroys and creates life. He murders Oremole. He saves the half child from Eshuoro's violence. Though he destroys, he creates. The main motive that inspires the dramatic hero is the restoration of justice. Ogun is eager to dispense with humane, restorative justice. This is a primary concern of Soyinka's dramatic heroes too. 'Moral Scheme' of the hero, which has to do with justice is another aspect of the Ogun hero which offers insight into Soyinka's political vision.

The decision of restoring the child back to its mother is a bold decision, a decision which is risky and at the same time very important. This draws our attention to another aspect of Ogun hero:- his desire to bring victory to his community, "the hero's determination to take prodigious risks to turn defeat into victory for his community" (Umukoro 177).

Soyinka suggests through Demoke, who hands over the child to its mother, that "all creative responses in the postcolonial period needs to be engaged with a process of rehabilitation, of restoration of identity, vitality and creativity and moving from simple protest and resistance, go on to provide an alterity" (Jain, "Post colonial Literature" 25). Since this process has to be historicised and mythicised Soyinka found that only one myth can combat the several myths of empire which promoted hegemonic structures. That was the myth of Ogun, the patron god of Soyinka, who bravely risked

all the challenges of the abyss in order to bring harmony between men and gods.

Demoke gives the half child to the Dead Woman. Hence Soyinka suggests that the suitable political system for Nigeria should not be foreign. It should be indigenous. "Soyinka suggests that for proper political development Nigeria should adopt a political system which is indigenous and primordial; and he charges his compatriots to find that system" (Umukoro 181).

When Nigeria was granted independence in 1960, the political system within Nigeria had some considerable work to do. It was really a difficult task for Africa to change itself into a real nation, The writer who had to voice the conscience of the country, who had to awaken an awareness in the people found himself face to face with a hazardous job. He senses that his fellow Africans are as dangerous or in fact more dangerous than a foreign power. The corruption, folly and hypocrisy of the native rulers will prove more fatal to the future of the country. Alan Jacobs has given an effective explanation: "His (Soyinka's) contempt for 'the colonizing hordes,' whether 'Eurochristian or Arab – Islamic' knows no bounds, but he is equally contemptuous when he turns his gaze on his fellow Africans. Wherever he turns, he sees folly, hypocrisy, medacity, ineptitude, corruption and sadism. He is a humanist disgusted by humanity." (25).

Viewing the play politically, *A Dance of the Forests*, does give us a perceptive though it does not give us every answer to Africa's problems. Asked to produce a play that would reflect the glorious past and forecast a more glorious future, Soyinka created *A Dance of the Forests*. But his play,

instead of glorifying the past, deglamorises the past and instead of forecasting a glorious future warns the people of “a bloody and fanged future”, because he had some doubts regarding the nature of his countrymen. He has expressed himself vividly in one of his interviews:

They (the first set of legislators) could not wait to return home and get a slice of ‘independence cake’, because that was all independence meant to them. Step fast into the shoes of departing whites before other people got there. It was then that I began to write *A Dance of the Forests*, which takes a jaundiced view of the much-vaunted glorious past of Africa. And I suppose since then I have been doing nothing but the dance macabre in this political jungle of ours. (Jeyifo 63)

Soyinka’s play as written for the independence celebration “presents an apocalyptic vision of a dread future” which can be avoided, if it could be avoided only by self sacrifice. He got more and more disillusioned later. Soyinka grew all the more bitter after his experiences in the prison ten years later. He was skeptic about his countrymen’s intentions:

His skepticism of about uncritical glorification of tradition and the honourable intention of the politicians shaped the thematic development of the play. Here the role of the past in shaping the present and the future became crucial because Soyinka raised the questions of whose voices from the past would be heard, those of the victorious of the power structure or those of the power structure itself. Thus the appearance of “the dead pair” at “the Gathering of the Tribes” and the continuous rejection of

communities' uncritical glorification of the past dooms the present and the unborn generations of the future (Badijo 666).

Soyinka's perspective regarding politics underwent no major change even after many years. The civil war, and the long line of despotic rulers who came into power one after another proves the prophetic powers of the author. The play does portray the insecurity that threatens the people of Africa. But there are subtle suggestions as to how to tackle with the internal as well as the external forces that threaten the existence of the nation. In a speech delivered at the recently concluded summit of Nigerian Pro democracy groups held at Johannesburg and in Oslo on Friday to Sunday, 29th to 31st March 1996, Soyinka vehemently stated the possible ways of eliminating these threatening forces.

If they are invaders from outer space, then we must evolve a space-age strategy that will dislodge them and send them spiralling back into the black hole that spewed them. If we discover that they are none other than members of our own nation, endowed with neither the authority of historic conquest nor the voluntary empowerment by the people, then they must be recognized for what they are – common felons, and thieves – for what they have done is to steal from a common resource that was entrusted to them, and convert it into an instrument of subjugation against the collective owners (3)

With these barbs aimed at the power-crazy people of Nigeria who could effect only a reversal of progress, Soyinka tried to attack hypocrisy, self-deceit, and exploitation wherever he found it. The significance of *A Dance*

Of The Forests lies in this that it is here that Soyinka first shows and confirms his political commitment “to the exposure of the maggots who dwell beneath the compost heap” (Badijo 666). Though an attempt is made by the writer not to mingle his political perspective with the aesthetic purpose of the work of art, very strong element of political involvement in his view of life can be seen. The cause is traced for this dominating presence of the political ideologies by Soyinka himself. Politics was thrust upon him because he was born into an unstable and disturbed society. Hence his works contain some of the most powerful critiques of political, social and cultural practices. Throughout we see that similar attempts are made to absorb political and social realities into an imaginative pattern which will give them meaning and at the same time accommodate creativity. When these political ideas enter his major plays, they are reshaped by transplanting them from the everyday references in order to perform a larger universal and moral role in the drama of human freedom. The primary goal of the drama is the rethinking of what it means to be an African in the modern world. He understood that the degradation that has set in among the human beings was not the case of Africa alone. It was visible in all the parts of universe. Simon Gikandi has quoted Soyinka’s words from a key note address that he gave on 12th April, 2000: “The situation in Africa today was the same as in the rest of the world, it is not one of the tragedies that came of isolated human failures but the very collapse of humanity.” Soyinka encourages a detached self-examination which will lead to a self awareness not only for the Africans but for the whole of humanity.

As in other plays, in *A Dance Of The Forests* too, Soyinka makes use of his two literary modes, satire and tragedy. If there is complexity in his

tragedy, his satire delights in paradox. Soyinka observed in 1963, "Satire in the theatre is a weapon not yet fully exploited among the contemporary dramatists of Nigeria, fertile though the social and political scene is for well-aimed barbs by the sharp observant eye." ^{qtd. in Peters} (227). His barb aimed at the corrupt sadist exploiters had the intention of awakening people from the state of despondency in which they were. Listen to his own words spoken to Biodun Jeyifo:

Nobody can say he's never been through moments of intense pain or even of viewing what I've termed a recurrent cycle of stupidities, an expression which distresses those who want human experience to be so obviously and patently, without any qualifications, optimistic. But what Nigerian today, what thinking or feeling Nigerian this very moment that I'm talking looks at his country and does not experience absolute despondency (qtd. in Jeyifo XVII).

These words record Soyinka's anxiety and concern for the political health of the new Nigeria. Eldred Jones has summed up Soyinka's message to the Africans and also to the whole world, in his article "The Essential Soyinka": "The message is to all men whether they fight with words or with nuclear weapons. It is the warning of the court Historian of the court of Mata Kharibu reenacted" (123). It is a warning about the exploitative tendency of man.

Soyinka is primarily a satirist. His gift for satire has been employed mainly at the service of his essentially tragic vision of life. Soyinka uses his weapon very effectively. The satiric turn of mind makes the play interesting

as well as thought provoking. It depicts an atmosphere which is horrifying and pathetic. "Soyinka's satiric vision is a curious affair, partly Swift's, savage indignation, partly the Conradian 'horror' and partly the Wordsworthian lament over what man has made of man" (Peters 227). *A Dance of the Forests* can be termed as the most complex satirical play of Soyinka. Soyinka possesses the satirist's passionate and almost pathological obsession for truth. *A Dance of the Forests* is a message for those who stand in the present and drug themselves with memories of former glories like the Orator Adenebi. He intends the play as a timeless warning for the natives. F. Odun Balogun has remarked like this: "The depiction of repeatedly reincarnating corrupt, selfish, dishonest exploitative leadership from the history of the Tribe was nothing but a prediction of disaster should the post-independence leadership fail to depart radically from the negative pattern of it" (514). But he was not without hopes. No doubt he observes reality. But he never evokes reality to create despair and disillusionment. He evokes reality as a means of provoking positive action against the power syndrome that is at the heart of the reversal of progress.

What Soyinka the artist does here is that he satirises the existing bestial situation of the world and provides a deep awareness in the minds of the people as to the existing situation in the world. For this, he has to assert his will. But there is a slight contradiction in the firm conviction of the assertion of the artists' will and the awareness of the cycle of tyranny. Kolawole Ogungbesan observes,

Soyinka explains only how he is able to function as a citizen when he says that expressions of pessimism in his works are simply a

statement of truth derived from a particular situation, but they do not mean acceptance of that situation, nor do they preclude challenge. As a corollary we can explain his creative efforts as performing a therapeutic function, he attempts to exorcise despair, and obtain mental balance by externalising his tragic awareness in his works of art (Soyinka, "The Past," 187-188).

There is a warning that future prospects of mankind are not very bright. But faint glimmers of hope are noticeable in the otherwise gloomy atmosphere. The stage directions point out that the play ends when "it's fully dawn". Dawn is symbolic of a new day, new cycle and the idea of regeneration. Towards the end of the play, Rola has attained self awareness or liberation to a certain extent. Demoke exemplifies the argument that collective change and salvation can be brought by those individuals who learn how to exercise their free will. Other works of Soyinka also clarify this point. His collection of poems *Idanre* highlights Soyinka's attitude towards life. As Bruce King points out,

While there is a strong pessimistic streak in Soyinka's view of life, it is not the facile pessimism which arises from an easy cynicism. It is very much connected with Ogun, the Yoruba deity to whom Soyinka turned, as European artists have turned to various muses for inspiration and vision. Ogun, God of Iron war, harvest and the creative essence is the subject of Soyinka's long poem. Destruction is necessary if there is to be renewal (6).

Soyinka wanted to enlighten his people about their present situation and to inspire them to work for a democracy.^N My struggle is a democratic struggle

in order to re-empower the people so that they will be the given choice and the opportunity to participate. It is a struggle to terminate the tendency of dictatorship in Nigeria” (Kreisler 10).

It is obvious that Wole Soyinka’s works portray a static society in his works. By showing the interdependence between the past, present and the future and by resorting to devices which are typical of African rituals and traditions, Soyinka does indeed give a moral direction and projects his vision regarding the future of the country. What he recommended, it may be stated, is that a stable and secure future can be constructed only with reference to the past. The past must address the present – The past with its glories as well as evils, the past which was rich with African rituals and myths. But in all the plays of Soyinka from *A Dance Of The Forests* to *King Baabu*, this veneration of the past is never nostalgic or motivated by cultural chauvinism. Rather it is the attempt to discover through traditional features the actual living languages (rituals) by which modern Nigerian consciousness can be shaped. But he advocates a more dynamic use of ritual directed towards change through reintegration. Soyinka was aware of the continuity that existed between the historical roots of ritual and its function both in the community and in the individual who belonged to that community.

Almost all the plays of Soyinka reveal an active and dynamic integration of traditional myth and practice with contemporary concerns. Traditional and modern elements are mixed to create distinctive works. In *A Dance Of The Forests*, Soyinka’s first major play, we find a combination of dancing and singing. The title itself is indicative of the fact that the play is to

take the nature of a dance. The representatives of the ancestors are to be given a welcome for which Arony says “the forests consented to dance for them”. The dance is present from the beginning to the end of the play – the dance of the villagers around the totem, the dance of the Half child, the Dance of the Unwilling sacrifice. Ritual is added to dance. There are modern devices like flash – backs, or a divided stage too.

The ^hHalf-child of *A Dance Of The Forests* has its roots as in *Kongi's Harvest* in the Yoruba myth of the Abiku, the child which is cursed to be born again and again the anguish of the mother. She can neither prevent its conception nor succeed in keeping it alive. The image of the Half-child is not only mythical. It can also be considered as the symbol of the human limitations and frustration that continuously torture human beings. The image of the half child is highly symbolic. Soyinka sees the abiku child as both ‘a metaphor for the phenomenon of creativity’ and ‘an expression of doom’ (“*Climates*” 258). Taking it as a symbol of the ‘doomed embryo’ or the ‘new born, innocence’ the half child represents from a postcolonial perspective “the political immaturity, thwarted idealisms, and aborted nationalism, and the failure of democracy to outlive independence”. (Wright, “Pre-and Post – Modernity” 10). This image of the half child is so suitable to be applied to the newly independent Nigeria. To quote Derek Wright, “in its ambiguous two-way crossing between unborn and living, living and dead, the abiku may signify the independent nation’s passage into either life or death; its unfulfilled promise or its perennial entrapment in a cycle of inherited evils” (10). It is appropriate to quote Gareth Griffiths from *A Double Exile*: “Thus the abiku child image unites with all other devices in the play, including the structural skeleton of the past, present and spirit

worlds of action, as a complex image of the continuity of human limitations and human frustrations in the developing Nigerian Experience” (152).

Archetypes may appear as motifs and images. They may be found in even more complex combinations as genres or types of literature that confirm with the major phases of the seasonal cycle. Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) indicates the corresponding genres for the four seasons as follows: The mythos of Spring: Comedy; The mythos of Summer: Romance; The mythos of fall: Tragedy; The mythos of winter : Irony

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye speaks of Shakerian comedies like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where we find a shift from the normal world of conflict and problems to the 'green world' – the world of forest or fairy haunted wood. It is in this world of nature that the injustices and problems are solved. Frye regards that phenomenon and also other characteristics like a festive conclusion or a feast or dance as evidence that comic plots derive from primitive myths and rituals that celebrated the victory of spring over winter.

In *A Dance of the Forests* too there is a significant change in the setting towards the world of forest where the representatives of the Dead, the living and the ^UUnborn meet to celebrate the gathering of the tribe. It is here that Demoke, Rola and Adenebi undergo a kind of purifying ritual from which Demoke emerges as the cleanest., Rola as the Cleaner and Adenebi as the unchanged one. “The same seaming lightening cleared us all” Later Demoke is saved by Ogun as he falls from heights. Viewed archetypally the play might be interpreted as ending with an optimistic view of life where a

triumph of spring over winter takes place, of creation over destruction takes place. There is a suggestion of the triumph of life over death.

A Dance Of The Forests can be considered as the most difficult and complex among all the plays written by Wole Soyinka on account of its archetypal characters, multiplicity of themes, complicated symbolism and multi dimensional technique. Because of its complexity of theme and technique, the play is likely to baffle the uninitiated reader. It is rather difficult for any critic to decide its meaning equally successfully in all its ramifications. The multiplicity of symbols and complexity of themes in *A Dance Of The Forests* led Margaret Lawrence to remark that “There are moments when the multiplicity of themes creates the feeling that there are a few too many plates spinning in the air – some of them, speed by without being properly seen, and some crash down.” (63)

The play has been criticized for its complexity and obscurity caused by plot-complications and allegorical sketches. But the significant position it occupies among the works of the post colonial period is evident from the remark made by Gareth Griffiths in *A Double Exile*. “In time I am sure that the first production of *A Dance of the Forests* at the independence celebrations in Lagos in October 1960 will come to be seen as a date as important to theatre in Africa as the publications of Achebes’ *Things Fall Apart* has been to African novel” (146). Eldred Jones justifies the density of the plot and multiplicity of themes with this explanation: “Each succeeding reading produces insights which suggest a complete vision on the part of the author. It thus seems very likely that Margaret Lawrence’s expectations of the play will be fulfilled, namely that what is obscure to us ‘may seem

perfectly plain to the next generation of readers and play goers'. (Jones, *The writing* 34). Further more, *A Dance of the Forests* has gained a significant place in the postcolonial literatures. As a work which reinterprets and reviews the past from the admirable vantage point of the present, (the gaining of independence) the play definitely emphasizes the need to understand and critically evaluate the present, situated as it is in the context of history. The reinter pretation of colonial history is also attempted in the play. These two aspects are some of the chief concerns of 'Post colonial discourses.'

In the foregoing analysis of the play an attempt has been made to analyse the play based on the dramatic theory of Wole Soyinka which is centered around the Ogun myth. Additionally, his unmasking and demystifying of the Ogun or ancestors in *A Dance Of The Forests* represent the artists own first plunge into the chthonic realm' that he discusses in *Myth, Literature and African World*. The foregoing analysis of the play *A Dance of the Forests* reveals Soyinka to be deeply rooted in the Yoruba world, particularly in the world of Yoruba myth and philosophy. But their significance lies in this fact that he is more concerned about examining their relevance to contemporary Nigerian society. More than that, his interest lies in exploring the possibility of their integrity and assimilation into the modern world. Above all he uses Yoruba myth of Ogun to interpret and confront present reality. *A Dance of the Forests* analyses deeply certain problems which are particular to Nigeria. But all these problems can be applied to humanity in general too. Themes like injustice, inhumanity, racism inside and outside of his immediate environment which is Nigeria are all discussed in *A Dance of the Forests*. The intention of the playwright is to show the

tragic plight of man in the totality of his experience. This experience includes both physical and spiritual and also the past, the present and the future. As Eldred Jones points out, “*A Dance Of The Forests* presents a comprehensive view of man over a massive span of history; it even looks into the future” (*The Writing* 32).

Like any other works of post colonial literatures, *A Dance of the Forests* too represents the struggles, passions and hopes that lay close to colonised hearts. It also dramatizes moments of indigenous resistance. The playwright knew that the current situation is a tragic situation. With his wisdom and keen foresight, Soyinka predicted that both colonialism and neocolonialism are classically tragic situations. He could foresee that lust for power will definitely lead to a society steeped in injustice. Soyinka warned his men that it is difficult to formulate a system based on justice because the society was used only to practising a ‘just injustice.’

The detailed analysis attempted here seeks to prove that the elements of traditional system are integrated into the writer’s vision through the mediation of a highly conscious art. *A Dance of the Forests* illustrates in the best possible way how the materials of traditional cosmology can be used to articulate an individual point. Yoruba belief in the unity and constant interaction among the living, the dead and the unborn which are the metaphysical points of reference and reincarnation become the vehicles to examine the abuse of power by successive traditional elites. The analysis of the play is conducted throughout with reference to the Ogun myth which has always provided a central theme to his plays. Rightly does Thejumola Olaniyan remark in “Dramatizing Post coloniality” that

If Soyinka's dramatic reputation today is largely as a mythopoeist with an abiding proclivity for the ritual form it was *A Dance* and not such earlier or concurrent plays as *The Strong Breed*, *The Lion and the Jewel* or *The Trial of Brother Jero* that decisively announced this with its deep immersion in and creative plunder of Yoruba lore, mythology, performance traditions and thought systems (490).

A reference also has been made to the influence upon Soyinka of the Brechtian Theatre Theory, the theoretical views which Brecht formulated concerning epic theatre and a non-Aristotelian dramaturgy: Viewed archetypally *A Dance Of The Forests* stands as an illustration of Frye's argument that plot forms of literary genre derive from primitive myths and rituals that celebrated the victory of one season over another. *A Dance of the Forests* like the other major works of Soyinka, *The Road and Madmen and Specialists* "has a brilliant exposition of a profoundly pessimistic view of the human condition." (Roscoe 48). *A Dance Of The Forests* projects the political views that Soyinka had and the play proclaims the first warning to the natives of Africa against the exploitative nature of their leaders. The playwright creates an awareness in the readers of the responsible duty of an artist. Artists are the verbal antennae of a people. The awareness they distill and convert into the dynamics of language is somehow present in the populace at large. We neglect it at our peril.

Chapter III

Ritual as Politics in *Madmen and Specialists*

The hypocrisy of the Africans which threatened to undermine the 1960 celebration of Nigerian independence was highlighted in the detailed analysis of *A Dance of the Forests* attempted in the previous chapter. We came across instances of Soyinka's uncompromising interrogation of history here in the text. Some of the major aspects of the play probed into have been: the significance of *A Dance of the Forests* in articulating for the first time the political philosophy of the author, Soyinka's fascination with Ogun evident in *A Dance of the Forests*, the only play in which the god takes form as an important character. Soyinka's emphatic announcement that tradition, myth and rituals are means of showing resistance to colonial attitudes, the unique position occupied by *A Dance of the Forests* among the dramatic achievements of Soyinka for revealing the pessimistic view of the author and the hunger for power, which is a major theme, found in Soyinka. In the works which followed, Soyinka has continued his preoccupation with "the exposure of the powerful and the power hungry maggots who feed upon the soft underbelly of the powerless" (*The Man* 25).

As is well known, Nigeria had undergone a series of political and economic crises since independence in 1960. Nigeria has the unique distinction of having had more years of military rule after independence than any other African Nation. A writer's work is always political, and nowhere

more so than in the usually unjust social, system of a postcolonial state. Caught in the midst of varying political, economic and cultural turmoil and faced with a deep identity crisis during the period after independence, the writers and the intellectuals were forced to adopt certain techniques which will help the people to retain the African character of African life. At the same time they had to face more challenges from the neocolonialist and imperialist forces. The writers of Africa were faced with the atrocities of the Biafrans - Nigerian civil war – misery, suffering, and great loss of human life – which were caused by the selfish economic and political interests of these forces that created conflicts among people and nations. The writer being the conscience of the society was quite aware of the political and social changes, the corruption and hypocrisy among the powerful ones and they were able to interpret the present reality very accurately. Problems of the sort which confront the political thinker or the imaginative writer in an independent African state are not within the easy comprehension of a European or an American. The rate of change is so quick and the situation is so unpredictable that “there are times when even the most naturally apolitical writer has to confront politics because personal relationships are being shaped, restricted and maintained by them ” (Phelps 8: 343). As might be expected, Soyinka too has responded to the rapid and sometimes drastic political changes that took place indeed in a more urgent and immediate sense than some of the other writers. Moreover, this sincere involvement in the political happenings of the country finally ended up in his imprisonment at Kaduna prison for 27 months. When asked what his role as a writer would be after his release, Soyinka replied :

There are no binding laws of commitment...Each individual discovers sooner or later his own level and areas of commitment. If I had a choice in the matter I'd rather be a writer with no social commitment. That is by far the most comfortable form of creativity. For many years now I have lived with the knowledge that I could lose my liberty at any time. But` for reasons which I don't understand and cannot help, I am incapable of any peace of mind under certain social situation. There is nothing I can do about it I can't change. Before one is a writer I suppose one is a person ("I met" 7).

Soyinka's life inextricably got bound up with politics. We know that a series of oppressive and unjust happenings including the imprisonment, exile, and even the murder of writers forced him to discard the role of being just a writer with a magisterial attitude merely upholding the sanctity of human life and integrity of literary art. He obviously found no peace of mind until he actively started reacting against injustice. As he himself remarked in 1986 in his interview with John A. Stotesbury,

It is difficult (to avoid politics) because literature, the peculiar medium of literature is actually transforming a reality: the reality has to do with people, most of the time. And there is no way in which some of that reality which means human relations, social relation, economic situations, the agonies and anguish of people can be avoided in your writing. Because I deal with human beings I become infinitely involved in attempting to articulate their problems, their fears, their hopes, using my trade to challenge

unacceptable situations in society, using that art as a means in fact of heightening the humane consciousness of people whenever the theme is correct (56).

Notwithstanding these mundane involvements, it must be stated vehemently that the works of such committed writers like Achebe or Soyinka never express any lack of literary talent for imaginative recreation of the facts around them. Such a writer grapples instinctively with the emerging social conditions and political events and endeavor to embody the less imaginative socio - political matters in enduring artistic frame. Political compulsions to draw the material of art and the artistic need to transform the material imaginatively, a difficult task to recreate, can lead a lesser talent to creating rhetorical and declamatory form of writing. Using his art Soyinka strives to assess the world around him and to influence it. The profundity of ideas, the intensity of emotional response and the depth of political concern make the form and the theme of Soyinka's plays unusually vigorous and complex. The ensuing result is the creation of complex, thought provoking and highly artistic works which belong to different genres of literature like plays, poems, novels, articles, etc.

This chapter is intended to probe into the power, the depth, the beauty and the complexity of his dramatic powers as revealed through this multivalent play *Madmen and Specialists*. In particular, it is my aim to identify and classify Soyinka's political vision for Nigeria and other African countries. This chapter will consider the play as a critique of society. The play, *Madmen and Specialists* reveals like *Death and the King's Horseman* or *A Dance of the Forests* how Soyinka asserts the positive values of his

cultural tradition and attempts to prevent the traditional spiritual mode of knowledge and power being exploited for evil ends. Once again, the play is a clear illustration of how fanatically Soyinka has been obsessed with the idea of preserving one's culture and considered it as a powerful means of protecting the country and thereby leading to its regeneration. In order to prevent the society and nation from degenerating, one should respect one's tradition. An attempt is made in this chapter to show how the play serves as a moral critique and protest, attacking the exploitation and injustice of neo-colonialist societies. The recent political developments have proved that neocolonialism is not mere 'hot air' or 'ideal dream' of the former imperialists. It also serves as a strong warning against undemocratic, corrupt and sometimes tyrannical regimes. An attempt will also be made to reveal the attendant formal adjustments, which the creative imagination has made in order to accommodate the change, which has taken place in the author's works as well as in his attitudes after the Nigerian civil war. This chapter also investigates Soyinka's treatment of the theme of transition and Ogun myth and the coeval existence of the three regions of living, the dead and the ancestors. Obviously, the exploration may reveal how this playwright's obsession with ancient myth and ritual undergoes a slight change in his quest of a more secular idiom for conveying the new social concerns and fresh ideological options.

The political crisis in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970 forced Soyinka to become more intimately involved in politics. During the civil war many writers had to shape their outlook, even their thinking in accordance with the directives from the establishment. But Soyinka continued to express himself independently, guided solely by his vision. He was imprisoned for voicing

his opinions, which were against the stand of the whole issue. He questioned both the moral and ideological basis of the civil war. In 1967, Soyinka, though a Yoruba, was arrested by the Federal Government for his pro-Biafran activity. He was held in solitary confinement for nearly 27 months in Kaduna prison, in spite of international plea. But, whenever he got a chance he lashed against injustice, violence, corruption or hypocrisy. He repeatedly proclaimed that it was a writer's duty to try to restore the permanent values of life, justice, freedom, truth and dignity. As one who draws his vision from experience and self-knowledge, the artist was bound to be original by remaining true to himself and his experiences. From his experience as a human being who had undergone much agony, from his experience as a political activist who found the political temper frustrating, Soyinka knew that only a very broadly nationalistic and humanistic stance could bring welfare to the ethnically polarized society. Soyinka repeatedly emphasized the inevitability of a writer upholding independent opinions in order to retain integrity.

Soyinka expressed his opposition against both the federal invasion of Biafra as well as Biafra's secession bid. He warned about the devastation and wastage of war and emphasized the need for a fundamental re-evaluation of the ethical and ideological basis of the Nigerian state and an overhaul of its political and economic structures. In Soyinka's own words,

What is clear, miserably and humiliatingly clear is that a war is being fought without a simultaneous programme of reform and redefinition of social purpose. A war of solidity, for solidity, is a far more accurate word than unity to employ in describing a war

which can only consolidate, the very values that gave rise to the war in the first place, for nowhere and at no time have those values been examined (*The Man* 15).

Soyinka has transposed these firm convictions into art and they have found expression mainly in four works created during his imprisonment: *Madmen and Specialists*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, *Season of Anomy* and *The Man Died*. These four works form a quartet and “have the taste of the purest essence of the poet’s soul, of authenticity of his being. It is a map of the course trodden by the mind not a record of the actual struggle against a vegetable existence” (Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* 45) Taken together, these four works excellently reveal Soyinka’s political ideology. They reveal clearly Soyinka’s sense of commitment. In the post war - writings ‘the Soyink’, the ink made by him while was in prison gets a shade deeper and expresses his deep concern as to the military regimes and other countries becoming more despotic. The satiric edge which was clearly evident in *A Dance of the Forests* becomes sharper in these writings because it was natural for him to respond as a human being to the changes taking place His predicament as a writer has been trenchantly expressed by Alan Jacobs. Soyinka serves as a living reminder that “writers in some parts of the world don’t get to choose whether their work will be political; that is a privilege enjoyed by those who happen to be born into the stable and relatively peaceful societies. Other have politics thrust upon them” (Jacobs 22). Though it is difficult to categorize and define Soyinka’s aesthetics it is easier to see his political stance as part of an intense commitment to human rights. What remains marked characteristics of his writings are his “commitment to his own community his determination to

contribute to its evolution. and his anxiety to identify its positive accomplishments in the past” (Gibbs, *Encyclopedia*, 1529-30)

Madmen and Specialists is the first play that Soyinka wrote after his release from prison. The play is a powerful literary record of the devastating effect of the civil war on the country and its survivors. It is based on the terrifying and humiliating experiences during the imprisonment-verbal abuse, denial of food and sleep, genital abuse, enforced nakedness, enforced standing and electric shocks. Probably conceived while Soyinka was in prison during the Nigerian civil war, the play echoes the humiliating and agonizing experiences that he underwent while in prison. It is advisable to take the plays, *Madmen* and *The Man Died* together because they are a record of the personal experience that had been assimilated into his sensibility. *Madmen and Specialists* is a reaffirmation of the warning that Soyinka gave in *A Dance of the Forests* about the corrupt political leaders and the insecure future towards which the nation was moving. Once again the civil disorder, war, economic hardship and the corruption of the political leaders and drastic consequences of these events made him reassert that history of Nigeria after independence was a recurrent cycle of elite corruption, exploitation of the masses, political and economic chaos and circumvention of freedom through the barrel of the gun. As Jonathan A. Peters puts it in *A Dance of the Masks*, “Soyinka’s prediction (in *A Dance of the Forests*) that the cycle of human violence would continue unbroken into the future was unhappily fulfilled by the outbreak of the Nigeria – Biafran war’ (207).

Almost all the work of Soyinka and notably *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Bachae* employ forms of ritual and deal with the three areas of existence and the fourth stage or the area of transition. His works abound in technical and aesthetic virtuosity, especially in the use of Yoruba myth for structural purpose. Soyinka's fascination with Ogun, the god of destruction and creation, is very much in evidence in all the works. It has already been demonstrated how Soyinka relates his vision of life to that of the myth of Ogun and the Yoruba myth of a snake which represents life and death cycle eternally eating its tail. This Yoruba myth explains very well Soyinka's view of human progress and civilization as a cyclical pattern of folly and violence, which can be altered only when human nature can be altered. The 'mobius skip', the kink in the tail of the snake represents a symbol of optimism.

This loyalty to traditional culture seen through the explication of Ogun myth is visible, in all his works. What is unique in him is that he is capable of adapting it not only to his own needs but also to the needs of his own country. Perhaps it is best explained by Jonathan Peters like this: "Soyinka has had the intellectual capacity to understand and adapt it to his own needs and to the needs of his own country. This has perhaps inevitably led him to the political arena, since his primary concern for human freedom is based largely on the identity of Ogun, the dynamic God of Yoruba mythology" (184).

It will be appropriate at this point, to give a brief sketch of the story of *Madmen and Specialists* before we proceed further. The play is wholly pervaded by the war, and its suspended medium is the abnormal time of war,

the time of waiting. The play takes place in the home surgery of Bero who has recently returned from the wars. Dr. Bero was once a healer, reputed for doing all he could to ensure the preservation of life. But now he is the head of the intelligence section and cares little for the preservation of life. He has been entrusted with the responsibility of ‘sifting through the papers full of lies and knowing how to slap the people around’ (233). He can “analyse, diagnose, prescribe” (237). The Old Man, himself a doctor, having gone after his son was asked to help the wounded readjust the pieces and remnants of their bodies. Instead he began to teach them “to think, think, think!” (242).

According to Bero, the Old Man has committed a treacherous deed by placing “a working mind in a mangled body” (242). Another crime committed by the Old Man is the creation of a new cult of AS. He is mentally collapsed seeing the daily spectacle of man killing man. He becomes a “perverted Salvationist and he becomes the engineer of the preposterous cult of AS” (Peters 214). This cult equalizes, intellectualizes and brutalizes life diseases and death, man and vegetable and animal, past and present and future. The Old Man had even given the warmongers a feast in which he had served human flesh. His intention was to shock them and bring them to recognition of the brutality of war and brutalization of man. He preached cannibalism arguing that “All intelligent animals kill only for food. . . Is there really much difference? So why shouldn’t men eat one another?” (254). But the result was not what he had expected. They lost all inhibitions and started cultivating a new idea of attaining absolute power.

Dr. Bero recapitulates the event:

We thought it was a joke. I'll bless the meat, he said. And then – As was the Beginning. As is now, As ever shall be ... World without ... we said amen with a straight face and sat down to eat. Then afterwards ... He told us . . . But why not? . . . what is one flesh from another? So I tried it again . . . It was the first step to power . . . Power in the purest sense. The end of inhibitions” (241)

They were shocked at first. But afterwards they found human flesh actually delicious.

During the weary war time period Si Bero (Dr. Bero's sister) decided to take the role of the local healer, in her brother's absence. She is hailed as 'the little lady, the courageous one who kept the fort in the absence of brother and father" (235). Two Old Women – Iya Agba and Iya Mate – who are the Earth Mothers, the herbalists teach her the art of healing, using the roots and herbs that she collects. SiBero has absolute faith in them as is evident from these words to her brother. "They held your life together while you were away" (236).

Si Bero like the village priest is quick to understand the change in her brother, she knew that evil existed in wars. She also knew that however blameless her farther or brother were, "guilt contaminates" (241). Now knowing the evil and abomination in her brother, she realizes that she cannot fulfill her promises to the Earth-Mothers: "I swore I was so sure of you, only then would they help me", she tells him. She asks her brother desperately, "what are you trying to be, Bero – evil"? (241).

The surgery where the Old Man is imprisoned provides the arena for the meeting of the father and the son. Although the Old Man is apparently

helpless, there is a tremendous if perverse vivacity about him. Dr. Bero is adamant that the Old Man should reveal the mystery of the cult of As. He wants to extract the mystery of the non-existent As. Si Bero senses the tragedy of the mutual destruction of Brother and Father. She knows that the Earth Mothers will not help her any longer. Iya Agba offers to cure the soul-sickness of Old Man and cure Dr. Bero. But Bero contemptuously asks what the cult of the old woman is. “We move as the Earth moves ... we age as earth ages” (259). She answers and as for her cult, it is nothing that Dr. Bero or science can destroy.

Your mind has run further than the truth. I see it searching, going round and round in darkness. Truth is always too simple for a desperate mind. . . . Don't take for the sound of fear or the smell of hate. Don't take a blood hound with you: we don't mutilate bodies . . . you want the name (eg. of cult)? But how much would it tell you, young man? We put back what we take in one form or another. Or more than we take. It's the only law (257).

If the cult of the Old women can be named ‘Love’, neither the specialist – who is the disciple of the cult of power nor the mad Old Man who is the preacher of the cult of the ultimate absurdity of ^{AS}~~As~~ has any use of for human love.

Iya Agba warns Dr. Bero in vain: “Even in the road to damnation a man must rest his foot somewhere” (260). But he doesn't listen to this advice. He remarks wryly, “we've wetted your good earth with something more potent than that”. He is not even hesitant to offer a poisonous fruit which Si Bero had collected, mistaking it to be a medicinal one. Bero tells

his father grimly, "I brought you some. If you ever get tired and you tell you need a night cap like a certain ancient Greek you were so fond of quoting, Just soak a handful of them in water" (262). What he suggests is that enforced suicide with hemlock as in the case of Socrates will rid Bero of the direct responsibility of killing his father. Suicide or murder, ancient wisdom should be put an end to so that its poisonous twin can flourish in the modern world. The old man reminds his son. . . . I am the last proof of the human in you. . . . The last shadow. . . . Shadows are tough things to be rid of (He chuckles). How does one prove he was never born of man? Of course you could kill me . . ." (253).

Bero gets rid of the shadow by killing his father. The very umbilical cord that had bound him to humanity has been cut. He becomes a symbol of evil so dark that it could never have been born of man. The final link is broken. At the end of the play, Bero frightened and frustrated, shoots his father. The house is turned down by the strange old Earth Mothers. Only Si Bero, Bero's sister, whom the Earth Mothers have taught the art of healing and renewing, the powers of the forces of nature is given the possibility of escape. This final scene where a killing and conflagration take place ends with a premonition and hope, in spite of the fact that hope is rarely given any credence in the play.

Needless to add, this is a bare skeletal description of the story and definitely fails to do justice to this extraordinarily powerful play. A casual reading of *Madmen and Specialists* will bring to light the fact that there is a tendency in the playwright to make a decreasing use of traditional material as his style progressed. Unlike *Death and the King's Horseman*, *A Dance of*

the Forests and *The Road* which deal with mythopoeic motif, *Kongi's Harvest*, *Madmen Specialists* and other later plays exhibit a tendency to abandon myth in quest of a more secular idiom for conveying new social concerns and fresh ideological options. There is a journey from "myth to ideology" as Chidi Amuta argues in his article, "From Myth to Ideology: The Sociopolitical content of Soyinka's War Writings" (117).

Again it has been argued that in *Madmen and Specialists* the whole paraphernalia of transition seems to be evident only superficially and marginally. Among the critics who have proposed such an argument the most notable are Chidi Amuta and Ketu Katrak. Ketu Katrak has exempted the play from the scheme of Ogun usually found in the drama of Soyinka. Katrak writes:

In this play Soyinka has stepped outside the experience of the 4th stage. The usually positive Ogun figure is deranged, thanks to the unnatural situation of war. Old Man's creativity serves purely destructive purposes. The play ends with the death of old Bero which does not bring any constructive benefits to the community (Wole Soyinka 157).

This critic has put forward several arguments to prove her point. The play ends in a holocaust. Any idea of suffering leading to peace, good, growing from evil situation or creation out of destruction cannot be seen in the play. Soyinka himself has confirmed in an interview with John A Stotesbury that "there is less mythology" in the play, and significantly explained that the cripple here represents "the mental cripple, the war cripple, the dissociated personality and a physical, medical and political fact (68).

My first attempt in this chapter is to emphasize the point that it is impossible to consider it as a play without any ritual or mythical overtones. From his own frustrating and agonizing experiences at Kaduna prison and from the pervasiveness of evil all around him Soyinka felt the need for a spiritual regeneration, more urgently in those years than at any other times. For this, he sought the help of symbols and myths in order to reinterpret these experiences in his art. In this context it is relevant to recall a comment by Mary David in her work, *Wole Soyinka, A Quest for Renewal*: “Ritual becomes important as a ‘stay against confusion’ and ritual archetypes and mythical paradigms throng his writing during this period. Even in *Madmen and Specialists*, in spite of its bitterness and seeming cynicism and its naturalism the mythical motifs and their message shine through” (80.)

Soyinka felt the importance of myths in re-stabling the spiritual values in the nation. Hence he became more and more absorbed in myth and ritual during these days. It was this absorption in myth and ritual, the resort to these tools of mythopoeia and his habit of ritualizing experience that helped him to deal with ‘the mind-butchers and the shock orientation techniques’ (*The Man* 45), and to survive their torturing tactics to both contain and destroy his mind. Consequently his plays written during their period are rich with ritual overtones and mythic references. To quote Mary David again, “Though from the beginning of his career Soyinka has made use of myth and ritual, during solitary confinement lasting more than two years, they seem to have assumed a deeper significance to him, sustaining and safeguarding him against hate and the madness that raged around him to engulf him. They were indeed to borrow a phrase from A Shuttle, “plinths against unreason (*Shuttle* 3).”

Obviously, however, *Madmen and Specialists* does not follow the pattern of a ritual play as *A Dance of the Forests* or *Death and the King's Horseman* does. Here the theme of transition seems to be only superficially evident. But a closer and more comprehensive analysis is necessary for the purpose of this study, which would, no doubt, prove that here, as in other plays the idea of transition and the disintegration and reassembling undergone by the protagonist are clearly present. It becomes obvious after a reading of *Death and the King's Horseman* that it foregrounds ritual. But in *Madmen and Specialists*, rather than being the central thematic and structural focus, the ritual supports the action and tends to be used as a means for cultural retrieval or a recuperation of tradition or history. We find that here, such ritual elements are closely linked with the political thrust of the play and succeed in the expression of postcolonial culture. Here the significance of the ritual lies in this point that it prepares the readers and the natives of Africa for the dangers they have to face in the neo-colonial situation. At the same time it adds a spiritual dimension to the whole context thereby emphasizing the inhumanity of the conditions under which they worked. Derek Wright argues that the changes undergone in the old man and the disciples are definitely transitional as anything on Soyinka's stage.

When placed against the black cloth of Soyinka's transitional metaphysics, the chthonic powers are more in evidence in this play than anywhere in Soyinka's writings and that the extreme psyche and physical dismemberments undergone respectively by the Old Man and his disciples are surely as violently and radically transitional as anything on Soyinka's stage, whether the word

‘transition’ is used to describe physical metamorphosis, spiritual turmoil or Psychic disintegration (25)

Madmen and Specialists is also susceptible to explanation according to the mythological scheme of Ogun. Bero can be viewed as the dark, grotesque side of Ogun released by war. Ogun in a fit of drunken battle fury has slaughtered his own soldiers. Similarly Bero, “his mind having run further than the truth”, (257) feeds on his fellow countrymen. In addition to this, it is the usual pattern for a Soyinka’s Ogun figure to undergo a process of physical derangement in order to achieve mental wholeness through the release of knowledge. There may be no immediate outward transition of the world. The reality may not have changed externally but he emerges wiser. Here the emphasis is on purely the intellectual fruits of experience. Derek Wright has explained it convincingly like this:

In the dramatist’s account of Ogun’s transitional exploits in ‘The Fourth stage, the predominant semantics of cognition - he ‘immerses himself’ in ‘the Unconscious’ to ‘understand its nature’ and ‘emerge wiser’-place the emphasis not on act and deed but on the purely intellectual fruits of the experience: on changing the consciousness of reality than reality itself’ (Myth 153). In the light of this, it is not entirely the case [. . .] that Old Man’s creativity serves purely destructive purposes since his creative parodies generate knowledge of important truths which are left behind to the community. (25)

The old man is thus comparable to Demoke whose survival helps him to share with his community a heightened knowledge of the repetitiousness of

history. Similarly through the old man and his tirades, Soyinka is able to drive home the same knowledge, bitter though it may be. The familiar pattern of the cycle of history with its repetitions of horrors and evils may depress us. But Soyinka does not forget to leave a silver lining in this otherwise dark and depressing play. As he explains, in his interview with Biodun Jeyifo,

expressions of pessimism where they crop up-as in *Madmen and Specialists* – are simply a statement of truth which grows from a particular situation but they do not mean acceptance of that situation...Pessimism, in this case simply means taking a very square, sharp look at reality with all its horrors before starting away to clear away the debris (62-63).

Only when the forces of history have been confronted in this way can something be salvaged. Demoke revealed the cyclic nature of human stupidity - The Old Man also did the same but in a hysterical way. The murderous capacities and potential for barbarism inherent in human beings are still very much evident. But this pessimism and the deliberate release of despair in fact do suggest a strategy for trying to create a reopening to this otherwise dark and misleading alley.

The spectators are of course reminded of the murderous capacities and the potential of the cycle of horrors into which the society has allowed itself to be locked in. But interconnected with this knowledge of the complicity with evil is also the hope about the possibility of becoming aware about the moral responsibilities that it entails. In the Yoruba myth, emphasis is given to the belief that everything is bound by a structure of

complementariness. Each thing is an outgrowth from its opposite. Each thing is contained in its opposite. So, according to ritual sacrifice, death leads to birth, destruction to creation. Even the earth has this dual nature. The herbs also are ambiguous, producing both poison and medicine. Ogun, the Yoruba god, epitomizes in him these warring dualities of death and creation. These warring opposites indeed do help in maintaining the equilibrium, as suggested by Derek Wright:

In the dramatist's homemade version of Yoruba metaphysics, it is the total cycle of actions, the external interflow of disturbance and conciliation, of infraction and reparation, of violent rending followed by restored calm-that provides the conduit of transitional energy necessary to recharge the universe, to maintain the cosmic equilibrium, and keep the continuum of existence in tact. In this morally neutral and sometimes disturbingly complacent scheme of cosmic disintegration and restitution, evil (madness, cannibalism, genocide) also has its place (24).

The fourth stage in Soyinka's plays is the space between the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn. It is the area of transition, the twilight zone into which all things, which are physically or mentally deranged, belong. This numinous zone of transition is the ready-made storehouse of grotesques. All those beings, which are slightly different from the normal human being, who are mid-way between life death stages are placed here. They, in spite of being conspicuously different from the other beings, do display a special quality; do transmit a dangerous energy of transition. The half-child in *A Dance of the Forests*, the alive-dead man-god, Murano in *The Road* are

examples of this type. Similarly *Madmen and Specialists* also has a group of grotesque characters - the mendicants, even though they are grotesque not in the numinous, transitional sense.

Like *A Dance of the Forests*, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road*, which are marked by the presence of violent death either exploding or hovering at the end of the completion of a rite, *Kongi's Harvest* or *Madmen and Specialists* is also marked by the presence of a context which is expressive of the prevailing ritual atmosphere of the play. *Madmen and Specialists* at the end picture the violent death of the Old Man, which reminds us of the death of the Professor in *The Road*. The Old Man, surrounded by his gang of professional beggars calls out "Fire! Fire! Riot! Hotline! Armageddon!" (275). Like the Professor, as if in a state of madness, he prepares to operate on the blind man, but he is shot dead by his son. His death is presented as a ritual offering to save the world from utter chaos. The philosophical and aesthetic considerations involved have been explained by Etienne Galle: "This violent death is partially desacralised by the Old man's nihilism. But it has an intensity and the gathered actor's movements are organized in a ballet so neat and pregnant with sense that it is reminiscent of liturgy." (25).

The Old Man is a martyr who dies to save the lives of Earth Mothers, Iya Agba and Iya Mate from his dehumanized son, Dr.Bero, who wants to assert his superhuman posture. Thus he can be considered a martyr. Bero wants to detach himself so absolutely from all bonds with this world that he even offers hemlock to his father in an effort to end his life. The Old Man who finds an urgent need for purification of this earth which is defiled

through bloodshed, according to Mary David, “is indeed a ritual sacrifice in this play,... the symbol of sacrificial scapegoat” (80). Like Demoke, who tries to improve society through the profound self apprehension he achieves during the course of the play, the Old Man tries to torture self-awareness not only out of the mendicants but in his son, Dr. Bero as well through his self sacrifice. So in both plays can we find the attempts made by the author to awaken self-awareness. But there is a indeed a difference between the two plays. Mary David has excellently clarified this:

Unlike the earlier play. *A Dance of the Forests* where the awareness is essentially metaphysical, in *Madmen and Specialists* the awareness is more social. The metaphysical analysis is not so emphasized. In both plays self-apprehension goes well beyond political awareness, and is unavoidable if there is to be genuine social reform. (82)

Derek Wright has convincingly explained how the play serves the purpose of enlightening the spectators through the experiences of Bero and the Old Man – how the play has succeeded in “generating knowledge about certain important truths. [. . .],” “by placing the emphasis not on act and deed but on the purely intellectual truths of the experience; on changing the consciousness of reality rather than reality itself” (25). Comparing the complex metaphysical play *A Dance of the Forests* and *Madmen and Specialists*, Derek Wright argues that “ironically, this sequence of the earlier play’s action is so shrouded and submerged in mime and balletic dance that its meaning is hard to make out, whereas in *Madmen and Specialists* there is hammered home with a relentless clarity, in Old Man’s tirades, this same

bitter knowledge..." (25). Like Ogun and the other protagonists of Soyinka, here also the Old Man "immerses himself, in the unconscious' to understand its nature' and emerges wiser, thereby enlightening the spectators too. If in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka has used African myth and systems of ritual as an effective mode of resistance, in *Madmen and Specialists*, he directs his attention with a narrower focus on the corruption in Nigeria and the mode is more of correction than resistance. The intensity of the materials of ritual in this play is lesser in comparison with *Death and the King's Horseman*. The play may generate a feeling that Soyinka has given up or considerably abandoned African myth and ritual, which find multiple layers of action in *Death and the King's Horseman*. Nevertheless, *Madmen and Specialists* with its overt political tone and direct attack on the corrupt system of governing is a merciless portrayal of the deviation from acceptable norms of conduct in natural life.

Two main literary modes of Soyinka are worth discussing at this juncture-the tragic and the satiric. The dialectic present in the tragic drama of Soyinka is the attainment of self-realization though the experience of disintegration. As explained by Soyinka in "The Fourth Stage", "man attains fulfillment after a journey through the 'no man's land of transition' which involves both annihilation and dissolution of self." (146-148). Reassemblage of personality is for the benefit of the community. But this, as Katrak argues subtly,"does not nullify the tragic experience . . . the community in fact absorbs the experience of tragedy". (Wole Soyinka 153)

For Soyinka, art is a reenactment of Ogun's primal act of will in bridging the gulf of transition between gods and men. He is hailed as 'the

first creative energy, the first challenger and conquerer of transition' in "The Fourth Stage" (145). He is the model when the protagonist has to do acts of choice or commitment. This uniqueness of Ogun is summed up by Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and African World*. " This is the unique essentiality of Ogun in Yoruba metaphysics as embodiment of the social or communal will invested in a protagonist of its choice" (30). He is also described as "the god of war", "the god of resolution in the most contemporary context " (32) The figure of the quester, in the form of a prophet, liminal outsider or a revolutionary, is present in contemporary African works. Usually the writers make frequent use of the myth of a journey, which is present in the African traditions, and tales-the myth of the sacred journey of the man who travels outside, achieves knowledge and comes back. But the contemporary writers invest the ancient myth with a striking new significance. According to Frantz Fanon, who describes three phases of revolutionary literature, the first stage is that of "unqualified assimilation", then turning to the past in search of identity, the third stage "The fighting phase" when the writer became "an awakener of the people...the mouth piece of a new reality in action" (*The Wretched* 179). The writer tries to contribute to the forward rush of national consciousness" either by modernizing old stories from the oral tradition or by creating blueprints of action drawn from contemporary situation. Taking on the role of the traditional shaman, the artist cum writer performs his art as a ritual of transition and helps to lead his society into a desired future. It is in this respect that Soyinka shares Fanon's interest in the way literature can affect consciousness.

At this point it is edifying to quote Campbell, according to whom, the archetypal journey takes place in three stages: separation, limitation and

return. "A hero ventures forth from the world of the common day to a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellowmen"(31). As Campbell further explores the experience," the passage of the mythological hero may be overgrown incidentally. Fundamentally, "it is inward into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost forgotten powers are revived, to be available for the transfiguration of the world"(Campbell 31).

Jung too relates the appearance of such an archetype to a period of crisis David Lodge quotes Jung in his Introduction to *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. "The archetypal image of the wise man, the saviors or redeemer lies buried and dormant in man's unconscious since the dawn of culture; it is awakened whenever the times are out of joint and when a human society is committed to a serious error. When the people go astray, they feel the need of a guide or teacher or even of the physician" (qtd. in Lodge 187). Obviously, in some respects Jungian criticism differs radically from psychoanalytic criticism, since he gives emphasis "to collective unconscious" which is shared by all individuals in all cultures. Jung regards the collective unconscious as the storehouse of 'racial memories' and of primordial images and pattern of experience that he calls archetype. According to him great literature is "an expression of the archetype of collective unconscious. A great author possesses, and provides for readers access to the archetypal images buried in the racial memory, and so succeeds in revitalizing aspects of psyche which are essential both to individual self-integration and to the mental and emotional well-being of the human race" (Abrams 251).

Perhaps the significance of the ritualistic death of the Old Man and its relevance to the neocolonial situation has been nowhere expressed so clearly as in this comment made by Griffiths “The ritual prepares them (the natives) for the dangers they face and adds a spiritual dimension to the strike, emphasizing the inhumanity of the conditions under which they worked” (165). The readers are led into a state of self-awareness – an awareness of their helplessness in the hands of their own countrymen who are more ruthless and exploitative than their white masters. As Fanon remarks in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “During the struggle for liberation, the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today, he uses every means to put them to sleep” (136).

In Soyinka’s play the Old Man has ventured forth, though by means of a brutal and unacceptable method, to prevent Dr. Bero from misusing his power. Further, by making a sacrifice he paves the way for the Earth Mothers to do an irreversible act, which will definitely curb Dr. Bero from misusing the herbs. These acts are indeed performed as a ritual offering for the mental and emotional well-being of the human race. To quote from *Wole Soyinka, A Quest for Renewal*. “The Old Man is indeed a ritual sacrifice in this play where defilement of the earth through bloodshed and the need for purification are important thematic strands” (David 81).

Admittedly, the ritual sacrifice made by the old man does not quite succeed, unlike in the other ritual plays by the author, in ensuring final victory of good over evil. But to Soyinka the heroic gesture is an assertion of will, which has values. It does not matter whether it succeeds or not. Even though the playwright’s pessimistic notion of history as repeating follies and

crimes of the past never allows a rosy view of the heroic vocation, he strongly believed that the hero / artist remains in a much-respected position. It is the hero or artist alone who risks his own experience in order to alter the repetitive cycle of events. This tendency, which projects an individual who undergoes the ordeal survival affirmation pattern, is visible in almost all his works. In many an interview he has clarified his position and has insisted upon the potential of chosen individuals to reactivate stagnant societies.

Superficially at least, the old man's sacrifice may appear to be ineffective, "a desperate revelation of the futility of individual sacrifice in a world inured to carnage" (Wright 26) because he is incapable of acquainting Bero with the horror of the situation, the horror of the change in him. But the Old Man may succeed in providing enlightenment to the world at large about the futility of autocratic regimes like Bero's. They have to live in constant dread of the challenging forces of life, which may threaten their existence and prove dangerous to them. They may temporarily succeed in satiating their lust for power. But never can they succeed. As the old man remarks "I recreate my tentacles, so, cut away" (262).

Madmen and Specialists is an example of a play where 'power' is the central theme. In Dr. Bero, we have the example of an educated African who in his lust for power turns from a healer to a murderer. He is the personified version of 'power-lust', which only seeks to intimidate, to control, to bend nature and culture to its will. He threatens not only the Old Man but also even the old Earth Mothers with the worst if they do not yield to his will. He represents the coercive, punitive will to power, which is antihuman in intent and deeply destructive in operation. Dr. Bero is a typical representative of

the modern specialists who fail to draw the information and guidance from Nature and their understanding of the world around them. He is opposed by the Earthmothers, Iya Agba and Iya Mata who draw their strength from traditional Yoruba healing practices – the gathering of the herbs, the control of nations by ritual act, etc. The attitude of Bero and his fellow specialists is “symbolic of the self destructive and rootless narrowness of many aspects of technological modernity” (Griffiths 162). Even the knowledge the Earth Mother possesses about nature and its herbs are put to danger. But neither the Earth Mothers nor the Old Man can be frightened or controlled absolutely. They represent the creative aspect of Ogun more than the Old Man, the Earth Mothers possess the willpower to resist the demonic powers of Dr. Bero. They represent that force which, as Brian Crow remarks in his article “Empowering the People”, “Ogun-inspired, opposes the will to temporal control and coercion with a metaphysical conception of power as spiritual energy: the will to continue and preserve the race and its organic culture while absorbing beneficial change”(76).

Soyinka appears to have hoped that his audience will appreciate the virtue of the special gifts or the special acts of these rebellious individuals. As he makes itself it is the responsibility of the people of the community “to ensure that these contributions of the individual do not get smothered or submerged by the uniform characteristics of the rest of the society” (David 79). The Old Man, in trying to create an awareness in Dr. Bero, is playing a role equivalent to artists or intellectuals. We do not find an artist figure similar to those like Demoke here in *Madmen and Specialists*. He is well meaning and expresses a sensibility different from the mass. But others label him a mad man especially Dr. Bero for whom the Old Man is planning the

whole thing – a feast of human flesh and a parody of operation on the cripple. He can be considered an awakener, a pathfinder who tries to direct his son and other brutal human beings towards order and peace.

We have to remember that while narrating his first hand experiences at Kaduna prison described in his Memoir, The Man died, Soyinka stressed the necessity to win over the “living death” which he had experienced. Soyinka talks of “the spirit of reaffirmation”, “the affirmation of life” of encouragement for the living. He bursts out in *The Man Died*. “I know why you reach me, you mindless mob. I see myself consigned to a “living death” denied that affirmation “(*The Man* 91). But he warns them that they can only trap his shadow.

This passage is significant in two ways. The author is aware of the awful reality of the imprisonment. His affirmatory spirit is suddenly negated by this renewed awareness. At the same time, he knows that one must undergo a dissolution of self. So this is equal to a negation of the negation, as noted by Stewart Crehan in “The Spirit of Negation in Soyinka's works:” “The affirmatory spirit is suddenly negated by a renewed awareness of the awful reality of imprisonment but buried inside this negation is the realization that one must undergo a dissolution of self, is a social resistance which amounts to a negation of the negation not just a historic denial of the denial” (18). Like the imprisoned Old Man, Soyinka knew that his was a living death. He had served human flesh to the officers, which was indeed a serious crime. But it had a positive aim, though lacking in logic, which was to remind them of the gruesome effect of the war. So the final effect is not a pessimistic one, but a hopeful one. It is a negation of negation, a denial of

the denial. This is the perception that prompts Eldred to remark in *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* that “The play cannot be called really optimistic. The hope is too faint, but it is there” (94).

The chain of events that led to the imprisonment of Soyinka and the series of disillusioning experiences in the prison, which were intended to destroy both his mind and body, had weakened him, both mentally and physically. The interview, which he gave to Harry Kreisler, reveals his disillusionment very vividly.

I was placed in solitary confinement for a year and ten months out of the period which I stayed in prison, which was just over two years. Very conscious of the fact that an effort was being made to destroy my mind, because I was deprived of books, deprived of any means of writing, deprived of human companionship. You never know how much you need it until you're deprived of it. But you have to survive and so you devise all kind of mental exercises and it's amazing. It's not very, very healthy for one to feed entirely on his or her mind without any replenishment from other sources... (what was important was) being able to continue to create in some way or other, being able to recover neglected areas of knowledge (5).

These moods of indulgence and self denial are paralleled in *Madmen and Specialists* by the moods of the Old Man. The physical and mental agony that Soyinka experienced during his detention intensified his historical consciousness and forced him to re-evaluate his outlook on society and history. The most relevant observation that Soyinka made was that a

cleavage had occurred between the artists and committed intellectuals on one hand and professional politicians on the other. This cleavage forced the writers to identify them more closely with the common people who had begun to feel betrayed by the unscrupulous and corrupt politicians and rulers of postcolonial period. So committed writers like Soyinka felt that their role in the political evolution of their country was significant and crucial. It was this awareness that made him repeatedly emphasize the need for “a fundamental re-evaluation of the ethical and ideological bases of the Nigerian state and an overhaul of its political and economic structures” (Amuta 18). *Madmen and Specialists*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and *Season of Anomy* along with his prison diary, *The Man Died* are the important works written immediately after his release from the prison in which are Soyinka’s “most persuasive declarations that reveal an unflagging dedication to justice and morality” (Peters 208). He insisted that the writer should stop being a chronicler and begin exposing the future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present. *Madmen and Specialists* is an eloquent voice of protest against Nigerian authoritarianism and kleptocracy. The play is Soyinka’s proposition that Society’s leaders should teach “egalitarianism as objective and dialectical materialism a method” (Osofisan, “Wole Soyinka and a Living Dramatist” 48).

After reading *Madmen and Specialists*, it becomes clear that no matter where one begins, the confrontation with the colonial experience is inevitable in Soyinka’s works. It is present everywhere, in all his works, plays, poems and novels and other non-dramatic works. Intensely aware of the need to emphasize the significance of the native traditions, which had been sidelined in the colonial period, Soyinka deals in his works, with issues

of literary significance as well as of political and national importance. Almost all of his works deal with issues and assumptions that are fundamental to postcolonial literatures. Just because a text does not explore colonialism as its prominent theme or that it is not set in a colonial location, it does not mean that such texts are free from the effects of British imperialism. *Madmen and Specialists* is an excellent example of that type which does not deal with colonialism apparently but which at the same time is not free from the effects of British imperialism. The play clearly manifests a questioning of and a rebellion against the colonial situation and Western categorizations. It is obvious that he shows influence of Western writers and European conventions. But even when the plays reveal Western influences, we find Soyinka adapting and transporting them to accommodate his cultural stances. To quote Griffiths, Soyinka is a writer “who stands out as an example of those who have explored through a substantial body of works the full implication for the European genres of their transplantation into cultures other than that which shaped them” (144).

Reading a text politically as an ideological utterance and reading a text as a literary product are different exercises. Similarly reading a text politically and saying that a text is about politics are not the same. As Jasbir Jain remarks, “A properly political reading needs to go beyond that and approach the ideology of the text in both what it says, how it says it and what it conceals” (26). This is true as far as Soyinka is concerned.

Few of Soyinka’s works, it may be asserted, lack a political dimension. Politics is indeed there in his aesthetics, religion and philosophy. Yet, even after writing a political play, *A Dance of the Forests* in 1965, Wole Soyinka

chose to remain an uncommitted writer until the Nigerian civil war. His work as a political activist, as an essayist and as a human rights activist took a decisive turn only during the period after the Biafran war.¹⁴ What is a writer to do whose life is bound up with politics, a writer who identifies with a political space in which writers are murdered or jailed or exiled, writer whose sense of being is violated by a state of tyranny?" (Soyinka, "Not mine, Nor yours" 4).

Soyinka has vociferously and repeatedly complained that the present philosophy, the present condition of modern Africa was created by politicians. Soyinka explains the reason for turning towards politics. Making himself clear that it was not his imprisonment that changed him into an activist, he exclaims: "It isn't so much that I became more of an activist after my imprisonment, its rather that the situation in Nigeria deteriorated to such an extent that the degree, the intensity of my activism had to be elevated correspondingly" (Kreisler 9). Moreover, since Soyinka is a man of letters it is only natural that politicians and their abuse of language should become a theme of his plays. The works written after the civil war reflect Soyinka's new awareness of the writer's responsibility within his society. He decided to stop being a chronicler and became a political revolutionary with the intention of creating works which will effectively implement certain changes. The key word for Soyinka is change. Art looks at reality honestly. It is a record of the responses of the human beings to their experiences. Discussing the duties of an African writer Soyinka emphasized the need of a free atmosphere to respond to his or her cultural context.

From this perspective, Soyinka's works remain excellent responses to the cultural context of his country. His experiences during the civil war developed a kind of social commitment and even political activism. Unlike so many other politically tinged artists around the world, he has bewitchingly put his life on the line in defense of the principles he represents: justice and freedom. The object of his writing was to enlighten others about the values of freedom, the freedom to think, and act for the general welfare of society *Madmen and Specialists*: for example, depicts the story of a man who wanted to reestablish justice, freedom and equality. But the means he accepted for this- feeding human flesh to those hypocrites to shock them into realization-can in no way be justified. It was with this intention that the mendicants are taught to think. Ketu Katrak has quoted Soyinka's words: "All individuals are blessed with natural ability to think and adapt to natural environment." (qtd. in Katrak, *Theory* 497-498). The mendicants are taught to question every thing critically. Instead of rehabilitating them, he has placed "a working mind in a mangled body". The old man earned the displeasure of the Government for this act. His argument like that of Soyinka's was that "every human being should exercise his inquiring mind, the exploration of new ways, experimentation and challenges as a means of removing the strap of lead that our own social and intellectual limitations impose upon us as an ideological horizon" (Katrak, *Theory* 499).

Madmen and Specialist deals with the failure of the post-independence generation of the political leaders in Nigeria to transcend the pleasure and corruptions of power. Soyinka has dealt with this theme implicitly or explicitly in all his plays. *A Dance of the Forests*, "a comprehensive and extra ordinarily predictive source work for his canon" (Banham 128)

discusses this issue and predicts clearly the insecurity which is in store for Nigeria. We find the Forest Head talking about those who “celebrate their acquisition of power by turning away from the wisdom of the elders to suck up the privileges of the departing masters” (Banham 128). Such instances of men who are very exploitative greedy and manipulating and who abuse their responsibilities can be seen in all of Soyinka’s works like *The Lion and The Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* to the fierce post detention play *Madmen and Specialists*, the complex metaphysical plays like *A Dance of the Forests* and *Death and Kings Horseman* to his later plays like *The Play of Giants*, *The Open Sore* and *King Baabu*. *Madmen and Specialists* is a play of passionate anger which is a bitter allegory depicting the military rulers of Nigeria as cannibals feasting on the people.

The metaphor of cannibalism pervades throughout his plays. Soyinka is preoccupied with the militarism and vulturism of man on man and this preoccupation finds expression in all his works. In *A Dance of the Forests* there is a play-within-a play in which the warrior (the dead man of the modern scene) makes a declaration about the cannibalistic nature of human beings to a passive physician. This is a truism that Soyinka states – vulturism existed in the past, it exists today and will exist in future too.

As Soyinka himself has expressed in one of his interviews that the play *Madmen and Specialists* and *A Dance of the Forests* were “the realization that human beings are just destructive all over the world. Main thing is my own personal conviction or observation that human beings are simply cannibals all over the world so that their main preoccupations seems to be eating one another” (Mphahlele 173).

The term ‘cannibal’ has got a special connotation in the postcolonial contest. The term has been explained by Bill Ashcraft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their book *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* like this:

This term for an eater of human flesh is of particular interest to post colonial studies for its demonstration of the process by which an imperial Europe distinguishes itself from the subjects of its colonial expansion, while providing a moral justification for that expansion. [. . .] From the time of Columbus, ‘cannibal’ became synonymous with the savage, the primitive, the ‘other’ of Europe, its use a signification of an abased state of being. In this sense the term came to play an important part in the moral justification for imperial rule (29).

An evaluation of Soyinka’s works demonstrates very well that cannibalism is a profound metaphor for human behaviour. Soyinka knew that he was not the first person to note this appalling truth about man’s unremitting evil towards man. In his article “Salutations to the Gut” (1962), an article on Swift, he refers to the way in which the cannibalism was treated with horrifying force by Swift in his article “A Modest Proposal”. Cannibalism is “the palate values of human flesh” (117). Soyinka particularly mentions a sentence where the view is held that “a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled” (qtd. in *Sabor* 47). Swift has given the world the benefit of his own experience “and in thus revealing the appalling truth about man’s unremitting evil towards man he becomes “the Divine Discoverer of new dietetics, Destroyer and Conqueror of old – fashioned abominations”

(Soyinka, "Salutations" 118-119). In his later plays such as *Kongi's Harvest* (1967) and *Madmen and Specialists* (1971) as well as in his autobiography *Ake. The Years of Childhood* (1981), physical cannibalism plays an important role. We find Dr. Bero mimicking Swift's American, who also discriminates among different parts of the body, Dr. Bero informs his shocked sister, "Human flesh is delicious. Of course, not all parts of the body. I prefer the balls myself" (251).

The Old Man had served human flesh in order to draw their attention to the enormity of war. This justification can never be accepted. It is only taking things to insane extremes. The Old Man decides to solve one of the major catastrophies of war-famine by this logic - using another catastrophic product - corpses. The solutions as put by Derek Wright is this - "legalize cannibalism and eliminate unnecessary waste" (27). To the Old Man, this solution is just an extension of the inhumanity and brutality that already exist in the world. But the result of this plan was just the opposite of what the Old Man had anticipated it is the same as what Soyinka had experienced after reporting an incident in the paper. He recollects his own experience after writing an article in a newspaper where he pretended to approve the flogging of women offenders for insulting the political opponents. When Soyinka recommended that 'a film be made of this edifying aspect of Northern Culture' he got many letter from readers agreeing with him. This is how James Gibbs reports the incident in his article "Tear the painted masks" as it appeared in *Daily Express*, 4 November 1963 under the title, "Flogging Women offenders." Soyinka commented on the sentencing of five women to one year in prison and to eighty strokes of the lash for 'insulting behaviour' towards the political opponents. He sarcastically described the punishment as

“an edifying aspect of Northern culture” and recommended that ‘a film be made of the execution of the sentence’ (6). What is to be drawn from these experiences is that the world so “crazed and desensitized by war and terror” has become “doubly impervious to irony” so that “the parody, instead of subtly sharpening perception and awakening indignation, has a tendency to miss its mark. The result is that the plan backfires and promotes that what it must denounce” (Gibbs 26).

The play’s climactic parody is that scene in which the Old Man wearing the robes of his son and playing the role of a physician prepares to operate the cripple, one of the mendicants on the operating table. We find here a reversal of roles, the cripple playing the role of the father and the father that of the son. Old Man wants to convey to his son that he is really a mad man. But here also, the parody fails to sharpen the perception and awaken indignation and misses the target. It might also be that the exorcist, the father, seems to be exorcizing from his own being the spirit of the son whom he has created and for whose actions he is responsible. Bero commits the sin of shooting the mad, humane man who fathered him. Thus Bero cuts his last link with humanity. It is beneficial to read the comments made by Derek Wright from his article “Transition and the Grotesque: Soyinka’s *Madmen and Specialists*”.

Here the world is so crazed and desensitized by war and terror that it is rendered doubly impervious to irony, and the outcome is that parody, instead of subtly sharpening perception and awakening indignation has a tendency to miss its mark. Its hyperbole is taken for literal truth, causing it to backfire and to end up promoting

what it set out to denounce. By using cannibalism as a symbolic test or moral yardstick, the Old Man's banquet actually dares it into existence. After the initial revulsion the officers develop an appetite for human meat and the breaking of the ultimate taboo liberates Bero personally carrying him beyond morality into a terrain where everything is permissible (27).

By using the metaphor of cannibalism, Soyinka is ironically referring to the neocolonial situation. The basic nature of man is noticeable in the dominating brutal and inhumane approach of the Europeans. It is discernible in the neocolonial regimes too. The new nation builders are as corrupt, selfish and hypocritical as the British Imperialists used to be. To quote Gareth Griffiths from *A Double Exile*, "[...] the cannibal myth haunts the European psyche, not the African. It stands as a symbol of the projection of European libidinous fantasies into the African mind. Thus it is doubly ironic that Soyinka should use it as a symbol for the corruption of African values by the individual egotism which, alienated modern man, substitutes for communal loyalties and human intercourse; if the African seeks to recreate himself in the warped image of the modern European 'specialist' he must be ready to accept the whole package, Kurtz along with Conrad" (163).

We discover Soyinka's mastery of satire in *Madmen and Specialists*. He warns his countrymen that colonial values do not simply evaporate on the first day of independence. As Stuart Hill argues in his essay, "When was the Post-colonial Thinking at the Limit?," life after independence in many ways "is characterized by the persistence of many of the effects of colonization" (248). Soyinka brilliantly and skillfully uses his satire "to expose the crimes

and corruption of Nigeria's nation builders, the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and the indifference and ineffectuality of the intellectuals" (Lacy VIII).

Through Dr. Bero, Soyinka exposes how the colonial authority and power continues even after countries became independent. One who should preserve life is bent on taking life. He has internalized the colonizer's set of values. As Fanon had observed years back in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "Spoilt children of yesterday's colonization and of today's national governments, they organize the loot whatever national resources exist" (37). His superiority and cannibalism are solid evidences to prove that unfortunately colonial ways have not disappeared even after the empire has declined. Perhaps Derek Wright is able to understand in all its intensity what Soyinka has been predicting through his play. Like his other major works of Soyinka *Madmen and Specialists* too portrays "the unpredictable postcolonial condition ..., the complex chaos, and recurring crises of the whole postcolonial condition which, in countries like Nigeria, have been continuing seemingly unending [...]." (17).

Cannibalism, which Soyinka had introduced in *A Dance of the Forests*, becomes the major theme in *Madmen and Specialists*, written years later. The instance of flesh eating in the play is a gesture, which dramatizes Soyinka's own belief that the bulk of human beings thrive on inflicting acute pain on others and deriving pleasure out of such most inhuman deeds. The specialist in *Madmen and Specialists*, Dr. Bero, shifts from healer cum physician to intelligence officer when the war starts. He sees that there is accession of more and more power to his elbow, as he learns to bend nature

to his will. He luxuriates in his new found assignment as a 'specialist' in torture and other sadisms. The change in him is shocking and is disgusting. He exchanges that art of healing for the craft of control. He has no respect for humans beings whether it be the village priest or his own father. They are mere pawns in the power-game. As the old man knows about the switchover of his son from healing to intelligence he decides to legalize cannibalism by feeding them with human flesh. Though done with an intention to create recognition in them of the wastage of war Dr. Bero and his friends see it as the first step towards absolute power. As Jonathan A Peters remarks, "Bero evidently considers his eating of human flesh as the ultimate test of strength through the conquest of inhibitions and the first step on to power"(212).

To understand the relevance of serving human flesh by the Old Man, we might listen to Soyinka's own explanation of the term 'Cannibalism' in two contexts. In his introduction to *The Bacchae of Euripides*, Soyinka explains the term like this: "Cannibalism corresponds to the periodic needs of humans to swill, gorge and copulate on a scale as huge as Nature's on her monstrous cycle of regeneration". (X1 -XI1).

He puts it like this in "The Fourth Stage": "Offences even against nature may be part of the exaction by deeper nature from humanity of actions which alone can open up the deeper springs of a man and bring about a constant rejuvenation of the human spirit. Nature in turn benefits by such broken taboos, just as the cosmos by demands made upon its will by man's cosmic affronts" (156).

The Old Man's action is really a grave offense against nature. But he did it with the hope of opening up the deeper springs in his son. Soyinka is

thereby indirectly justifying the deed of Old Man. His urge to purge the human beings of their evil nature and to lead the human race to a better future are reflected in this action. The Old Man's perverted logic may be explained as a desperate attempt made by a tortured soul to create awareness in the minds of the ruthless tyrants about the reality of situations. In the midst of a culture which is dominating, the colonized loses all his practical wisdom and seeks help even in the most perverted methods. Through the Old Man, Soyinka has given expression to "the fragmented and even distorted consciousness of the black people in the midst of a domineering culture" (Art 52).

By emphasizing the cannibalistic streak in man through the character of Dr. Bero, Soyinka is suggesting that there is always the struggle for power among people. This struggle is visible even at the cultural level. The individuals obsessed with the power lust – like Kongi or Dr. Bero do not hesitate "to intimidate, to control, to bend nature and culture to its will" (Crow 76). This lust for power is often associated with "the perversion of nature and the forms and ceremonies of traditional ways of using and reverencing natural forces." (Crow and Banfield 92). Dr. Bero uses his medical knowledge and knowledge about herbs collected by Si Bero under the guidance of the Earth Mothers to exercise absolute power over the people. Arrogant in his military uniform he describes to his sister his change of vocation. "Everything helps control, sister, control. Power comes from bending Nature to your will. The specialist they called me and a specialist is – well – a specialist. You analyse, diagnose, you prescribe" (237). The Old Women, Earth Mothers, are prepared to destroy their rare collection of herbs, their work of considerable labour in the gathering and storing of herbs for

Dr. Bero's medical practice than allow them to fall into his hands. Finding that the efforts of the Old Man had failed in creating an awareness in Dr. Bero, the Earth Mothers, "the primordial powers of Good" (Iyengar 9) decide to destroy their collection of herbs. Here we see the collision between two opposing concepts and two opposing practices of power. One is the expression of power lust, which will not even not hesitate to intimidate and control even nature. The other force, as represented by the Earth Mothers represents the will to preserve the race and culture and lead to changes, which are beneficial for the humanity. By indicating a return to roots, tradition and culture through the Earth Mothers, Soyinka guides the human beings to what is good for them. As he has remarked in one of his interviews, "Humanism for me represents taking the human entity as the center of world perception, of social organization and indeed of ethics, deciding in other words what is primarily of the greatest value for humans as opposed to some remote extra terrestrial or ideological authority. And so from that point of view, I consider myself a humanist" (qtd. in Allen Jr 1). *Madmen and Specialists* has definitely succeeded in articulating the problems, fears, and hopes of the oppressed and in heightening the humane consciousness of people.

It is discernible that Soyinka's plays and novels have in them a collision between two forces – the mythical Ogun inspired protagonist using the resources of traditional wisdom and ritual against the opposing force oppressive power holders. What makes his post-war works distinct from the early work is that this opposition is linked very closely to contemporary, African political phenomena, which is marked specifically by the presence of dictators and power-mongers. These forces, which try to prevent ritual

potency, can be considered as manifestations of the desire for power. Soyinka believed that “the function of literature and art is to attempt to contain and control these anti-humanistic malformations which are produced by the will to power” (Grow and Banfield 86) and his works have definitely succeeded in attaining this goal.

Madmen and Specialists is unique in that it is a depiction of one of these manifestations of power, colonialism, which is only one form of the “omnivorous deforming will to power” (Crow and Banfield 14). It still exercises its influence over the new rulers of African continent. Dr. Bero is a typical example of those neocolonialists who exhibit a greed for power and remain as obstacles to liberation. He represents the vulturistic attitudes ingrained within the oppressed themselves. To oppose these evil forces the people should draw their strength from their culture itself. They should turn to it as the source of renewal and re generation. Soyinka has remarked in his interview with Stotesbury that “the play’s concern is with a problem in my society, the betrayal of vocation for the attraction of power in one form or another (22).

Dr. Bero, the healer betrays his profession to become the killer because he wants to possess power in its absolute sense. He is “the personification of the new spirit of militarism which in the play is an emblem of the total depravity of humanity” (Peters 186). Cannibalism, instead of shocking him out of his mindset becomes an experience which reinforces his belief in one man over another. The system of justice seems to have no effect at all. But the idea is also implied that such military regimes based on injustice and inhumanity are bound to fail. The dictators of such regime may control the

forces of life, commit the dehumanizing act of not feeding the mind. But they are sure to fail.

The colonial impulse is an impulse towards unlimited power. This impulse towards power persists in the tyrants of postcolonial times. Soyinka views the colonial experience and the more contemporary realities in Africa against the points of reference provided by African mythology. It can be argued that tyrants that Soyinka has drawn are modeled on Sango who, in Yoruba myths, is the god who slaughtered all those who dared to defy his authority. The lust for power, which is a prominent theme of Soyinka's work is the desire for unqualified power exhibited by colonial powers; it is the rationale of colonialism and is encoded in mythology. This vehemently justifies Soyinka's application of the Ogun myth in his play. Brian Crow explains it like this, "Seeking to make sense of a contemporary experience and to reaffirm their people's cultural personality, writers naturally explore not just particular myths from their cultures but the pervading sense of the mythic as the expression of an organic and integrated existence which is so often their heritage. The explorations made by postcolonial writers vary from one person to person. In the case of Soyinka, the exploration of a mythic understanding of reality seems to be primarily linked in his drama to his preoccupation with the exercise of power in post-independence Africa." (Crow and Banfield 164).

Here we may recollect Albert Memmi's work. *The Colonizer and The Colonized* where he argues that "the daily humiliation of the colonized, his objective subjugation are not caused merely by economic reasons" (XII) but also by an encounter between two elements, one driven by a lust for power

and the other by a longing for justice. *Madmen and Specialists* is an encounter between Dr. Bero who personifies a lust for power and the Old Man, Si. Bero and the Earth Mothers who represent justice. The Old Man has in him elements of inhumanity. But even then, he is better than his son who is brutal and treacherous. Dr. Bero exemplifies the effect of colonialism on the colonized. As Aime Césaire has put it in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, colonialism dehumanizes and objectifies the colonial subject, which he explains by the stark equation colonization = thingification
 (Loomba 22)

Discussing Dr. Bero's dictatorial dominating nature we are reminded of Fanon's words where he discusses his concept of the nation and its people. He could foresee the change that will happen to the natives once they gained independence Fanon could predict that the new leaders would soon step into the shoes of his imperialist masters and instead of leading the nation to a better future by implementing democratic principles and "restoring the country to the sacred hands of the people the leader will reveal his inner purpose [....]. There gradually develops an inequality in the acquisition of wealth; privileges multiply and corruption triumphs while morality declines" (*The Wretched* 36).

Edward Said expresses his admiration towards Fanon for his power to foresee the corruption in the neocolonialist's forces. To quote from Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, "Fanon was the first major theorist of anti-imperialism to realize that orthodox nationalism followed along the same track hewn out by imperialism, which, [. . .] was really extending its hegemony. To tell a simple national story therefore is to repeat, extend and

also to engender new forms of imperialism” (330). Dr. Bero has degraded himself even below the level of an animal by eating human flesh because even animals do not eat their own kind. Dr. Bero mainly and the Old Man partially are contrasted with the Earth Mothers, who symbolize Truth, Nature and Love. If Dr. Bero “with his science mortgaged to the goal of success, his triple functions of analysis diagnosis, prescription, his ready descent into crater of dehumanization, his lust for power and his contempt for humanity” (Iyengar 9) symbolize the Evil in the world; the Earth Mothers provide an alternative to his perverted values. This world of the Earth Mothers is quite different from Dr. Bero’s world of beliefs and world views. This world is symbolized in the play by the traditional healing arts of Iya Agba and Iya Mata. If the world of Dr. Bero is defined by lust for power, the world of the Earth Mothers is defined by their wholeness and by their central concept of man as the vessel of power and not the creator of it. Bero questions them and their intentions and is keen on giving a label to their power as with AS. But their answers puzzle him more: “You want the name? But how much would it tell you. Young man? We put back what we take, in one form or another. Or more than we take. It’s the only law. What laws do you obey? (260). They warn Dr. Bero that “Even on the road to damnation a man must rest his foot somewhere” (260). What is unique about *Madmen and Specialists* is that here he has “explored the roots of the lust for power and the alliance of the spiritual world of African myth and ritual and the rebellious individual quester, who seems to offer the only consistent opposition to it” (Crow 78). Dr. Bero by being brutal and inhumane personifies power. The Earth Mothers with their insistence on the return to rituals and nature stand for

truth. It is appropriate to quote Soyinka's own words from his interview with Harry Kreisler:

Well, the first thing is that truth and power for me form an antithesis, an antagonism, which will hardly ever be resolved. I can define in fact, the history of human society, the evolution of human society, as a contest between power and freedom. And whether this contest is being performed along ideological lines or along religious lines, ultimately, really what we have is truth versus power. Truth for me is freedom, is self-destination. Power is domination, control and therefore a very selective form of truth which is a lie. And the polarity between these two, in fact forms for me the axis of human striving in the creation of an ethical society (4).

It is clear that the play is highly polarized. Earth Mothers with their precious collection of herbs are absolutely an African concept. But Dr. Bero, with his tendency to use the medical science to torture rather than to cure represents the attitude of the colonizer. They have a tendency to disregard the indigenous culture and methods of the natives. The colonized is never considered in a positive light, but as a series of negations – inferior, backward, outsider, barbaric. He is “a man in the technique and style of Europe” and his deeds are examples of “a succession of negations of man” “an avalanche of murderers” (Fanon, *The Wretched* 252).

In this respect it becomes obvious that *Madmen and Specialists* is important as a play of cultural opposition and cultural conflict. It is true that the original value system of the natives is irrecoverable. Because of the

constant negation and marginalizing done by the colonizers, the native value system might get erased. An attempt is made by the intellectuals and writers to recapture the original value system, to study when, where and how the change occurred. Postcolonial literatures, by making an endless dialogue between the remnant of a native culture and a culture that has subdued a generation, express the awareness created in the writers about the postcolonial situation. This awareness itself is an achievement. Soyinka has succeeded in expressing this awareness and creating the same in the minds of his spectators and readers through his plays – whether they be mythical or overtly political.

The remarks made by Robert J.C. Young can be applied in this context:

While imperialist domination seeks to understand indigenous cultures in order to manipulate, repress and destroy them, the people continue to resist culturally even when their politico-military resistance is destroyed. Even if the elites have become assimilated, the masses who remain largely untouched by a colonial power indifferent towards them, preserve their culture in part through their own agency (283-284).

We can argue that Soyinka through *Madmen and Specialists* has redefined culture as not only a means of resistance but also as a means for liberation too. This condition is applicable to the neocolonial situations also. When the new nation-builders, belonging to different fields of society, start following the heels of their former rulers without any inhibition and use the political as well as social situations to meet their selfish ends, the only force by which the masses can put forth a resistance is through the retrieval of their culture.

That is what happens in *Madmen and Specialists* when the Earth Mothers and Si Bero resist against the dictatorial policy of Dr. Bero.

Through *Madmen and Specialists* Soyinka projects his vision of life which he has gained through his experiences which provided him with a knowledge of the society and the world at large. The vision is made clear through different characters of the play. As Gibbs suggests in *Wole Soyinka*, “I have no doubt that the play conveys a vision which Soyinka was very anxious to communicate. Part of the vision emerges through the mendicants, the Old Man and the use of language, part from the image of the corrupted, which is presented by Bero, and part from the integrity of the uncorrupted Earth Mothers (104).

The ^mMendicants are the living relics of war. Their role is a prominent one in the play. These groups of war –wounded lot, who are racked by poverty, maimed and reduced to beggary, exemplify Soyinka’s potential as a playwright. At first they represent the group which is most abused by the system which Bero upholds and develops. They are crippled, blind - folded and seriously handicapped by a meaningless war. Later they are offered help by the state or the system as a gesture of kindness. These sensitive portrayals have inspired Jonathan Peters to comment that “the creation of the characters reflects Soyinka’s sensibility at its most complex and through them are made manifest Soyinka’s resources as a playwright” (209). Each member of the four-man chorus-blind man, Goyi, Cripple and Aafaa-is strongly characterized not only by their individual affliction but also by their attitudes and responses to war. They form an interesting group all the same, having developed a cheerful philosophy of their own. They are gambling, the

pawns being their remaining healthy limbs. Evil, cunning and deformity function together in these odd remnants of humanity. The Blind man predicts, in a fatalistic tone: “sooner or later we all eat sand” (218). They are, in the present condition, less than complete human beings. Yet they are eager to further lessen themselves by staking whatever remains. They expediate their own total destruction. This scene itself is a symbolic representation of a miniature world where man engineers his own downfall.

The mendicants who are present throughout as a group of commentators, creative participants and actors have a further purpose beyond representing the casualties of war. They represent the common humanity trodden down by the ruthless military machine, the humanity “whose vocal cord is cut before the operation” (Peters 206). As actors, they depict the attitudes and frame of mind of persons like Bero and Old Man who were in charge of serious assignments. But as the victims of their operations, they exhibit the same “morbid self-destructiveness” (Peters 210) which they had shown in gambling away their body parts. Clarifying the power equation, J. A. Peters asserts: “Their acceptance of suffering and their resigned passivity, as the human sacrificial victims of causes espoused by his disdainful, self indulgent leaders who became the capricious gods of their destiny, are in keeping with Soyinka’s view of gullible humanity” (Peters 211). The Old Man teaches the mendicants to think and thereby elevates them above their station by endowing them with the power to question and interpret critically. The blind man recalls the effort made by the Old Man to elevate him from the world of darkness: “ ‘You can see me’, he said ‘you can see me. Look at me with your mind’. I swear I began to see him. Then I knew I was insane”. (243). They are thus taught to forget their deformities

and cast a critical glance at the society itself. They contemptuously enact a skill to mimick tactics wherein the antics of military dictators who threaten to relinquish power if the people would so desire but would arrange their words in such a way as to retain their absolute power. Aafaa, who plays the role of a military chief executive, says: "If there is anyone who dares not approve us, just say so and we quit. I mean we are not here because we like it. We stay at immense sacrifice to ourselves, leisure, our desires, vocations, specialists etcetera, etcetera" (220-221).

The central character of the play *Madmen and Specialists* is the Old Man. As a person who is deeply aware of the scale and magnitude of the crisis which humanity in general and Nigerian society in particular is facing, he has experienced moments of truthfulness and reality. It is the deep knowledge of the graver truth that leads to the mental imbalance of the Old Man. Mad men know more, have experienced, observed so much that cracks develop in their minds. The madness is more metaphoric than real and therefore madness suggests the depth of his knowledge, which his son does not understand. His awareness at multiple levels has developed cracks in his brain. He has been too much aware of, and too much sensitive to the inhuman monstrosities that madness might be the way he discovered to give vent to his repressed fears and complexes. Perhaps Fanon has appropriately explained reason for this kind of behaviour very clearly in his *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The emotional sensitivity of the nature is kept on the surface of his skin like an open sore which flinches from the caustic agent; and the psyche shrinks back, obliterates itself and finds outlet in muscular

demonstrations which have caused certain wiseman to say that the nature is a hysterical type (44).

He knows that his son has betrayed his vocation and will become dangerous to the whole society. The Old Man's case is similar to that of the lunatic in Soyinka's poem "To the Madmen over the Wall."

"Crouched

upon your ledge of space,

do you witness

Ashes of reality drift strangely past?

I fear

Your minds have dared the infinite

And journeyed back

To speak in foreign tongues (18).

The Old Man, by committing two unpardonable crimes – cooking human flesh and placing a working mind in the fangled body of the mendicants – has fallen from the favour of the ruling powers. The Old Man, like Socrates, has 'corrupted' the mendicants into thinking independently. Like Socrates, Galileo, Copernicus or many other wise men who were burnt alive as heretics and had to pay for their wisdom with their life the Old Man too has to sacrifice his own life. He is even provided with poison, like Socrates. Dr. Bero says: "If you ever get tired and feel you need a night cap like a certain ancient Greek you were so fond of quoting, just sink a handful of them in water" (262). The warrior in *A Dance of the Forests* had been punished

severely just for questioning the illogicality behind waging a war on the question of trousseau.

Soyinka, shares many significant attributes with Old Man, the character. The agony and frustration experienced by the Old Man appears to be modeled on the harrowing emotional experience undergone by Soyinka during the period of his imprisonment at Kaduna. The lines found in the poem "Live Burial" which was composed while he was in prison paints clearly the claustrophobic effect and the ensuing feeling of confinement and slavery that Soyinka himself experienced and which the Old Man experiences in the cellar of his son. To quote from his poem,

"Sixteen paces

By twenty-three. They hold

Siege against humanity

And truth

"Employing time to drill through his sanity" (60).

Moreover, throughout the play, the Old Man functions as an artist figure. He is not merely a character in the play but also "the director and the writer of a political play within a political play" (Jones, *The Writing* 92). A playwright creates characters and situations, and has the freedom to expel any character from his dramatic personae appropriately. It is this freedom that the Old Man uses when he decides to do away with the central character himself. As Chris Johnson remarks, "Perhaps it is as a playwright that he is prepared to do away with one of the characters in order to make the point". He further remarks, "the action is in itself art, an imitation of an action rather than the

action itself” (“Performance” 30). Like the Old Man, his creator Soyinka too is restless and active. Both have a clear idea of the defects of the society they live in. As playwrights, actors and directors they employ songs and sketches and use their influence to project their vision to reveal the corruption, vice and malice in the society. As a playwright, the Old Man arranges a grim banquet for his men. But what Soyinka’s gives is a powerful play with a grim assertion of the vulturism of one man over another. The mental torture he experienced from the loss of human contact, the loneliness and the alienation he suffered at Kaduna are all projected into the portrayal of the Old Man who was imprisoned in the surgical ward of Dr. Bero. He is denied all human company including even that of his daughter.

The Old Man, according to Dr. Bero, has committed the unpardonable ‘sin’ of teaching the Mendicants to think. Soyinka projects his own ideas through the Old Man. He has expressed in one of his interviews the importance of having a free mind, and an ability to think, and act free from external oppression. Such a vision which gives importance to freedom – freedom of thought, expression and writing – is not easily attainable to self-centered and indisciplined people. Soyinka believes that “self discipline comes from self knowledge which in the greatest guarantee of human will and freedom” (Soyinka, “Secular Humanist” 4). Dr. Bero, though highly educated, has not attained either self-discipline or self knowledge.

The mendicants and the Old Man frequently employing pantomime to communicate their view of life. They use language extensively and effectively. The mendicants have learned this extensive and effective use of language from the Old Man who has taught them to scrutinize and analyze.

They analyze and dissect the words using the broken bits as windows through which they can see the corrupt, exploitative evil forces at work in the world. They perform satiric sketches where they parody activities of war and totalitarian military regime who have reduced them to their state. They represent maimed humanity. "In their improvised satiric sketches taught them by the mad father in the rehabilitation center, they parody the activities of war and totalitarian military regimes which have reduced them to this state, namely mutilation by torture, castration or amputation [. . .]." (Wright, "Transition" 21). The climax is the scene where the Old Man parodies his son by mimicking the operation on the cripple. The Old Man grabbing the garb of his son, prepares to dissect one of the mendicants, the cripple on the operating table. He wants to find out "what makes the heretic tick" (276). Here the mad Old Man plays the role of the specialist. He had warned his son earlier that only his (The Old Man's) death will rid the son of his father, and the father of his son. But in an unexpected twist the Old Man suddenly becomes the victim and the parody becomes the real thing. To quote Derek Wright from "Transition and Grotesque."

In this last grotesque twist to the filial relationship exorcist and exorcised reverse positions and the parent is cast out by the son; by shooting the mad, humane man who fathered him, Bero severs his last link with humanity. Old Men tells his son 'I am the last proof of the human in you. The last shadow. Shadows are tough things to be rid of' (253).

The activity of teaching the mendicants to think has led to the creating the cult of AS. Part 2. of the play centers around Bero's attempt to extract from

the Old Man, the philosophy of AS Like Soyinka, who does not disclose everything about the ambiguous end of his play, leaving the audience to ponder over and conclude, the Old Man begins his long desperate catechism of the non-existent AS:

AS is and the system in is mainstay though it wear a hundred masks and a thousand outward forms. And because you are within the system, the cyst in the system which irritates, the foul gurgle of the cistern, the expiring function of a faulty cistern end are part of the material for re-formulating the mind of a man into the necessity of the moments' political As, the moments' scientific As, metaphysic As, sociological As, economic, recreate ethical As, you – cannot – es-cape. There is but one constant in the life of the system and that constant is As (275).

The mystery behind AS remains unsolved even though many inferences can be drawn. Like the mystery of the 'death' in *The Road*, the mystery of AS is beyond the scope of words. One interpretation might be that man needs only an institution in the name of which he may abuse his own self and that of others. Gareth Griffiths explains it convincingly like this:

The Old Man in his madness has recognized a profounder 'truth' than that which Bero seeks to wrest from him. Man is capable of any evil if he does it in the name of an image which he can substitute for himself and use to absolve himself from responsibility. As is any metaphoric projection of ego into system, it is the ultimate excuse for the human abuse of self and others: the ultimate weapon against that human wholeness which dissolves

when man divides himself into human and more than human, into priest and victim, into eater and eaten (164).

The Old Man cries out in a hysterical voice:

... You cyst, you cyst, you splint in the arrow of arrogance, the dog in the dogma, tick of a heretic, the tick in politics, the mock of democracy, the mar of Marxism, a tick of the fanatic, the boo in budhism, the ham in Mohammed, the dash in the criss-cross of Christ, a dot in the i of ego, an ass in the mass, the ash in ashram, a boot in Kibbutz, the pee of priesthood, the peepee of perfect priesthood, or how dare you raise your hindquarters you dog of dogma and cast the scent of your existence on the lamp-post of Destiny you HOLE IN THE ZERO OF NOTHING!" (275).

The wisdom that the Old Man reveals is that man is imprisoned in his ^{own} ~~own~~ fantasie^e and projections. In Dr. Bero we have the most coherent portrait of a high-ranking officer who imagines that he is already in the inner sanctorium of power. He is unlike all the others in the play projecting a double personality by revealing his visible changes from a benevolent leader, a humanitarian, a doctor dedicated to the service of humanity to a malevolent intelligence specialist, killer for whom power is everything and all the other principles of life and life itself means nothing. He feels after eating the human flesh that he does not have any inhibitions and he is in possession of absolute power. But little does he understand that he has reached tragically a wrong conclusion. Ironically enough, he is the loneliest of all lonely figures who possesses this insatiable lust for power. Such delusions, Jonathan A Peters suggests, are symptoms of dictators. It "reveals equally well the self

doubt and ultimate impotence and the loneliness of those who try to control the lives of others” (207).

Dr Bero turns vicious and unscrupulous. But he has his own fears about his power and position. It might be one of the reasons why he tortures the Old Man to get the mystery of the nonexistent. To quote Soyinka’s words in this context, “I find power really ridiculous. It can be fatal, it can be vicious and it often is, but really it is a scarecrow. A power scarecrow. Because you have to wrap yourself in so many layers of cocoonery to disguise the shivering nunny within it. The only kind of power which is respectable is no power at all”(5). He is contrasted strongly with his sister Si Bero who represents humanity. When Bero shoots his father in the end, he has taken the final step to dehumanize himself. This is the concluding incident in a series of manifestations by Dr. Bero that complete the process of renunciation of human profession begun earlier through his lack of sympathy with his sister and his aversion to the Earth Mothers.

Dr. Bero and others expect the creed of ‘As’ to be much deeper than it really is. One of the mendicants in the play, Aafaa has made an attempt to categorize the different aspects of As in alphabetic order. Acceptance, blindness, contentment, Divinity, Destiny, Epilepsy, Farts, Godhead, the meaning comes to an end with H-humanity. It should stop at ‘H’ because as is formed on the principle of human expendability. The inconclusiveness and the abrupt end at ‘H’ indicate the ultimate meaninglessness of the creed of power. On Soyinka’s villain, Jonathan A Peters comments; “He has transplanted himself from a base in which he combined the healing power of herbs known to local herbalists with his formal training and experience as a

surgeon for the benefit of the people in his community to a new power base for control and exploitation of men's lives" (212).

Dr. Bero represents man's insatiable quest for power and the desire till the last moment to cling on to power. In the words of Jonathan A Peters "Bero,s only law is the law of gun which for him is a symbol of absolute power"(211). He represents those who control and rule over others. Through Dr Bero, Soyinka's satirizes the inhumanity of these men of power towards the common man. In the final scene where the Old Man attempts an operation on the cripple, it becomes apparent that 'thinking minds' or the questioning voices' have no place in a totalitarian state. The protesting throats will be guillotined.

Soyinka himself has introduced this idea in many of his early works. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the warrior is sold as a eunuch and later murdered just because he questioned the injustice behind waging a war for the trousseau of a lady. This idea is given significance in *The Strong Breed*, *Kongi's Harvest* and his *Jeroplays* as well. But it is in *Madmen and Specialists* that it becomes an overriding theme. "As is just another word for the oppressive leadership, self interest and social injustice practiced by the so-called leaders. 'AS' protects the group interest of a military cartel which Soyinka calls the alliance of a corrupt militarism and rapacious Mafia" (Peters 214). Soyinka's intention is to satirize the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the political power elites.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar has summarized this aspect succinctly in his article, "Soyinka's Latest Play."

The medical specialist Dr. Bero, his science mortgaged to the goal of success, his triple functions of analysis, diagnosis and prescription, his ready descent into the crater of dehumanization, his lust for power and his contempt for humanity, all symbolize the evil in the world. What is 'specialization', with its arrogance and authority and amorality, except the negation of wholeness and wholesomeness of humanity? Dr. Bero is now embodied Evil in a human form (10).

Dr. Bero is the villain of the play. Through him, Soyinka portrays all 'specialists', specialists in ruthless administration who are actually the real embodiment of evil. As Soyinka bursts out, "These men are not merely evil [. . .] They are the mindlessness of evil made flesh" (*The Man* 228). They exercise power not to lead people to democracy or equality. What they do is "the devaluation of power and the abuse of the state apparatus." Soyinka through this play warns his countrymen "one should not ever stumble into their hands but seek the power to destroy them. They are pus, bile, original putrescence of Death in living shapes" (*The Man* 228).

Madmen and Specialists expresses at the same time resistance to both colonialism and neocolonialism. Soyinka knew that neo colonialism is worse than imperialism Kwame Nkrumah's remarks are worth quoting: "For those who practise it it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer, from it, it means exploitation without redress" (qtd. in Crow 79) Soyinka challenges the European images of barbarism through Dr. Bero. Soyinka cherished the principles of freedom, justice and democracy. Warning the people of the dangers from within, Soyinka urged the people to

prevent the nation passing from imperialism to neocolonialism. He has expressed himself clearly in an article, "Posting in U senet Group": "Our destiny rests in no other hands but ours. If that is so, we welcome the distressing signals and their implicit challenge. Our commitment remains the enthronement of genuine democracy, and to the permanent removal of the military from our lives. This we know, is no small task but we are prepared for a marathon" (1).

Among many accusations Soyinka had faced, one was that made by Femi Osofisan who found that the final aim of a theatre in Soyinka's model is "Spiritual homeostasis" (qtd. in Moody 30). But one can clearly prove these charges to be falsely made by taking his plays for illustration. David Moody, talking about two main recurring "refiguring discourses" or "motifs" discusses 'mythopoeic motifs' and 'affiliative motif'. These terms have got significant meanings in the postcolonial theory'.

Edward Said uses the term 'affiliative' "to show how a writer, alienated from a sense of community and continuity, constructs an alternative line of cultural descent". Said has further commented that affiliative bonds are seen in "those who are deemed to be outside cultural family" (Said, "The World" 45). Using the term in a slightly different way, David Moody has used it to describe 'how this motif relates to the affiliative discourse of Nigerian Postcolonial society itself' (29) and how this motif can be used to stress the significance of cultural continuity and tradition. The term 'affiliative discourse' has a crucial role to play in establishing continuity in terms of political and social formations. It is obvious from the way sons are named after their ancestors, and politicians exercise their seniority on the new

comers. What is noticeable in Soyinka's work is that "far from stressing the organic inviolate link between the present and the past, the affiliative discourse foregrounds the extent of the rupture brought by colonialism" (Moody 30). With the advent of colonialism the tension that existed between sons and fathers becomes acute. This tension in the relationship between son and father is portrayed in Soyinka's early plays. It is in a more direct way there: the son is rebellious, confused and disappointed. He is disturbed by the turn of events in his life and he turns against his father who represents traditional social structure and finally goes through some kind of sacrificial ritual to reconnect the links between present and past. As his career progressed, these figures became more complex. As Moody explains, "In some cases, there are multiple father figures to be contended with; in other works, the father is only a powerful absence, and in a third group, the usual equation is inverted, with the father being the rebel against the totally "affiliated" Son" (31). In the early plays, the son builds an affiliative link' and the link is communicated through the use of mythopoeic imagery" (Moody 32). But in the later plays, the son's role is taken by the fathers and the new link is increasingly communicated in the discourse of revolutionary politics. In *The Strong Breed*, *The Swamp Dwellers* and other early plays the son offers ritualistic sacrifice to reforge the link between the present and the past " But in *Mad men and Specialists*, the simple affiliative formula is completely inverted; the father rebels against the son, and the play's female cast (has) undertaken its conclusive action" (35).^{Moody}

In *Madmen and Specialists*, as it has been observed earlier there is an inversion in the affiliative motif. The father - son inversion in *Madmen and Specialists* actually enacts an important critique of the notion of continuity

and development. The father taught the son to be a specialist in giving life and healing. But the son becomes a specialist in killing and torturing. As Moody puts it, “Both father and son are ‘specialists’, and in the father’s commitment to individual rights we can see ‘the will to power’ of the megalomaniac son. In the liberal father there is the tyrannical son: in the colonially educated elder of Independence there is the power-technocrat, Gowan. One generation of elite has been replaced by a more ruthless one.” (35) Hence it can be argued that it is not homeostasis that we find in Soyinka’s plays but an acute awareness of the rupture and alienation experienced by the masses.

Moody has commented: “As Soyinka’s career progresses, the break becomes a chasm; and that ‘a dominant structural characteristic of Soyinka’s work is not homeostasis at all but a profound sense of rupture, chaos and alienation’ (27). His post war plays, particularly *Madmen and Specialists* a very vehemently point at the chaos and alienation and disintegration created by the colonial impact. The imprisonment and the following torture that Soyinka and the Old Man suffer reflect the experience of the colonized as the denied and despised, marginalized, dispossessed and subjugated within their own land. It is equivalent to Europeans considering Africans as inferior.

There are two strands of action – Si Bero and the Earth Mothers on ^{one}side and Dr. Bero on the other side. Si Bero is Dr. Bero’s sister who is “rather a brittle figure of domestic virtue and integrity”, waits and prepares at home for the return from the warfront of her brother Dr. Bero and their father the Old Man” (Gbadamosi 117). The Old Women, Earth Mothers, had promised to teach her the secret of the natural herbs on her word that her brother Dr.

Bero will use it only for the benefit of the society. They had warned her that “this gift is not one you gather in one hand. If your other hand is fouled the first withers also” (275). She does all the work for the Old Women – collecting the herbs, cutting the roots, peeling, slicing, squeezing, picking seeds – and “they in turn teach her the art of healing and wholesomeness, hoping for the best for both the sister and brother.” (Iyengar 9). At one point she feels that she cannot fulfill the pledges she made to the Earth Mothers. “I swore I was so sure of you, only then would they help me,” (234) she tells him Si Bero understands that the Old Women will no longer help her because ‘they sit and fold arms’ (255). She senses that Dr. Bero is incapable of knowing the secret of the ‘Cult’ of the Old Women. “We move as the earth moves... We age as Earth ages” (258). The Earth Mothers feel strongly that the evil generated by him cannot be permitted to go on any longer.

“It’s a good night for settling accounts. Too much has fallen in their hands already. It’s time to take it back. They spat on my hands when I held them out bearing gifts” (260). Disregarding the requests of Si Bero, the Earth Mothers put the store to the fire.

The presence of Si Bero has tremendous effect on those present in the scene. She is the embodiment of infinite love and limitless patience. She represents the path of healing. She is the only one character in the play who gives us some hope regarding the human capacity for tender love and devotion. Every gesture of Si Bero conveys love, diligence dedication and care. Aafaa says “The woman’s herbs are not just herbs. She hoards them and treats them like children. From the cellar to the ceiling it is all full of herb” (221). Perhaps none can make it as clear as the blind man who is

credited with keen insight, typical of the blind. “I can only tell you what I felt in that room where I stood with her. There is more love in there than you will find in the arms of a hundred women” (231). Si Bero together with the Earth Mothers represent the traditional community. They represent humanity.

There is opposition between Si Bero and the Earth Mothers on one hand and Dr. Bero the dehumanized cannibal on the other side. They stand in opposition to Dr. Bero as traditional African community to military government. The traditional African community, represented by the Earth Mothers and Si Bero is an example of the “free human society” envisaged in Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*. Bero on the other hand represents the neocolonial blend of militarism and multi-nationalism. The Earth Mothers – Bero, contrast can be compared with Frye’s two opposed worlds, the apocalyptic and the demonic, the garden and the wasteland. According to Frye, the apocalyptic world represents, the categories of reality in the form of human desire as indicated by the forms they assume under the work of human civilization. The vegetable world is given the form of a garden, farm, park or a grove by the human desire and work. The love, care and duration present in such a work are reflected in the tender care given to the plants by Si Bero. “ The demonic work is typified as having only what the human desire rejects - “the world of perverted wasted work... the hell the man creates on earth” (Abrams 14). Dr. Bero’s hypocrisy, cannibalism and seeming air of omnipotence create a place which lacks protection, security and love. It is a wasted work.

Frye's conclusion that parody is one of the central themes of demonic imagery is relevant in the analysis of *Madmen and Specialists*. We find in Soyinka's stagecraft a mocking of the exuberant play of art. It suggests also imitation of real life. The mocking is what we see in Dr. Bero's regime with its wastelands and commercial cities. The city is changed to a waste land. The wastelands are parody of the world created by Gods. The ruler himself is a mimic man who lays waste the earth by sowing a forest of explosives. What is grown is a crop of armed serpents who lay waste the earth by sowing a forest of bayonets. We find that Soyinka's works are characterized by the use of realism, romance, parody, irony, humour and fantasy. Many of Soyinka's works like *The Lion and the jewel*, *Madmen and Specialists* and *Death and the King's Horseman* can be taken as examples of works where he examines the field of resistance as it operates through apparent imitation and mimicry. It is appropriate to quote Ellek Boehmer in this context.

[...] precisely because they could never be quite white or right enough, native colonials were able to transform the conditions of mimicking the colonizer's moves into a strategy of resistance. Adopting and adapting the white man's tongue, they learned to speak up for themselves [...]. To disavow dominant colonial myth and languages, the colonized had in the first place to inhabit them. European conceptual traditions in history, philosophy, literature and so on, which downgraded that which was non-European had first to be displaced by an act of repetition, even 'slavish copying.' Success lay in the camou flage and subterfuge" (171). Boehmer has further explained that imitation is a kind of 'remaking' not merely creation of a copy but of something subtly but distinctively

new... Mimickers reflected back to the colonizer a distorted image of his world... through ventriloquizing the colonizer's voice, through identifying themselves in the vocabulary of their oppression, they also mixed up and upturned the dominant meanings" (172-73).

When the play begins we find the mendicants engaged in a game of dice; they are seen grotesquely staking their own remaining limbs. We must remember that they have been taught to think by the Old Man. Inspired by his teachings, they parody the activities of war and totalitarian military regimes which have reduced them to this state. They have been reduced to half-men without limbs. They do not have any control over their body movements. They are injured in the war and the profit and loss game in which they gamble away their limbs represents symbolically the hazards of the war. They "are conceived as stylized marionettes who mouth ventriloqually the Old Man's intellectual ravings. [...]" (Wright 22). As Ellek Boehmer tells us, the mendicants mimicking the totalitarian military regimes are trying to upturn the dominant meanings. What they do is indeed presenting a distorted image of the world of the totalitarian regimes. It was by parodying these acts, that they could transform "the conditions of mimicking the colonizer's moves into a strategy of resistance." (Bhaba, "Of Mimicry" 128). These mendicants can be considered as 'the mimic men' (Bhaba, "Of Mimicry" 128). Bhaba has popularized the concept of 'colonial mimicry' which throws light into the 'not quite/not white' ("Of mimicry" 132) world of the educated colonized people. 'Mimic man' who has mastered the art of mimicry is a threat to the colonizer. The mimic man attains a double vision which may disrupt the authority of the colonizers. To

quote the remarks made by Jenny Sharpe, “The mimic man is a contrary figure who simultaneously reinforces colonial authority and disturbs it” (“Figures” 139-140).

The Mendicants, through their parody, really become a threat to the existence of Dr. Bero. They cause a disturbance to the evil dictator who has become the personified form of the lust for power. The Old Man, mimicking Dr. Bero attempts an operation on the cripple. The intention of the Old Man is to exorcize the element of inhumanity in Dr. Bero. But it has a different effect. The son loses the last element of inhumanity and shoots his father. Soyinka conveys this message that brutality, injustice and corruption of contemporary Africa are just the results of the postcolonial condition.

The two Old Women, Iya Mate and Iya Agba are the twin manifestations of the benevolence of Mother Earth. They are cult herbalists: “two long lives spent pecking at secrets grain by grain” (235) They provide a contrast to Dr. Bero. They represent worldly wisdom and goodwill. They advise Si Bero not to destroy the poisonous berries but to keep them because “you don’t learn good things unless you learn evil” (235). In fact, they provide the climax to the play by their decision to turn down the room with herbs. They are particular that the collection of herbs should not go into the hands of Dr. Bero, the agent of evil. They act with anticipation.

The Old Women stand for the Good Force on the earth. To quote Sreenivas Iyengar, “these two herbalists, Earth Mothers, the old women signify perhaps the primordial reserve powers of good” (10). They render a spiritual atmosphere to the play. They had made their own contributions to the collection of the herbs. Dr. Bero, in his efforts to attain absolute power is

ready to misuse the knowledge his sister, Si Bero, has attained from the Old Earth Mothers. The incident of the poisonous berries is invested with high symbolic significance. Si Bero had, by sheer accident collected some poisonous berries mistaking them for medicinal ones, as they were identical in appearance. Iya Agba recognizes it as the poisonous 'twin' of the life-giving variety, always growing together and misleadingly similar. Si Bero reassures herself and others that even poison has curative effects if used properly. Creative and destructive properties grow together. Life and death co-exist. Bero's character is conveyed through this dual aspect of the berries. He is changed from the life-giving physician to death inflicting Intelligence Officer. He is the poisonous twin of the life-giving sister Si Bero. This irreverence towards traditional curative method of the herbs is excusable in the case of a white colonizer. But in the case of an African, well accustomed with the rich cultural heritage of his ancestors, this contempt and misuse of the natural herbs is unpardonable. He finds another use for the poisonous berries collected by his sister – that of killing his own father. He persuades his father to taste them if he feels he ever needs a break.

Towards the end of the play, only the old women are left on the stage. This is symbolic because the end does not suggest total destruction. A new beginning is implied from this image, which is not one of total destructiveness. The old women have destroyed the store of herbs by burning them. The fire at the end is both a reality as well as a ritual event. It is an actual event, which put an end to the stage performance. It can also be taken as ritual enactment of the war. War leads immediately to a dark alley and it has only famine and scarcity to offer. On another level, a new kind of life has to grow out of these sufferings and pain that men have undergone. But a

reintegration of the destroyed images with a wider perception is needed to create out of this experience that possibility of regeneration. Perhaps Gareth Griffiths in *A Double Exile* gives it a very good interpretation.

Viewed ritually the war which is the informing image of the play can be shown to lead not only to madness and cruelty, the blindness and destruction of its immediate consequence but also to a possible perception of the whole existence which can grow out of the suffering and consuming pain men have experienced (169).

The war is what we have seen because men have made it in the images we have seen destroyed.

The role of the Earth Mothers in the play is highly significant because they give the world a different interpretation of the destruction and pain caused by the war (167). They destroy the store of herbs towards the end of the play by throwing the embers into them. The fire is the actual event on the stage, which draws the play to a conclusion. But interpreted ritualistically, it is the ritual enactment of war. What is suggested is that the play with its central image of war gives a few hints about the wastages of war – madness, cruelty and destruction. It also suggests the wholeness of existence. Gareth Griffiths remarks:

Viewed in the context of the whole culture it can be seen as a means to regeneration, a purgation or cleaning which can image forth man's rejection of the past and his acceptance of the need for new beginnings, different, yet founded in an acceptance of his wholeness through past, present and future (167).

War usually suggests calamities and suffering, brutality and inhumanity. But if we can, from these disintegrated arena of a battlefield, reassemble the images and visualize the creation of another world without these images of destruction where only the cult of love of the Earth Mothers serves as the law, then there definitely is a scope for regeneration. Again to quote Gareth Griffiths, “If they can re-integrate those images (we have seen destroyed) with the wider perceptions the modern mind has neglected and cast aside then perhaps they can create out of this experience that possibility of regeneration which Soyinka sees as the essential and only goal of art and life” (171).

This argument very convincingly proves that the play has mythology, in it. Like the Ogun – Inspired protagonist the spectators are also permitted to re-integrate the scattered and destroyed images and come out inspired energized and strengthened by the cult of Love preached by the Earth Mothers. Soyinka’s words to John Agetua in his interview, “When The Man Died: Views, Reviews and Interview on Wole Soyinkas’ Controversial Book”, are worth quoting here:

You must know of course about my fascination with the symbol figure of my society – Ogun. He represents this duality of man, the creative destructive aspect. And I think this is the reality of society, the reality of man, and that one would be foolish not to recognize this. I cannot sentimentalize revolution, I recognize the fact that it very often represents loss. But at the same time I affirm that it is necessary to accept the confrontations which society

creates, to anticipate them and try to plan a programme in advance before them (7).

Madmen and Specialists is an excellent example of the influence Brechtian epic theatre had on Soyinka. *Madmen and Specialists* is closest to the Brechtian concept of alienation in a theatrical work. Brecht was interested not merely in interpreting the world but changing it for the better. He considered the theatre as the right medium for implementing justice and imparting freedom. He believed less in the cathartic use of the theatre and more in its revolutionary use. Similarly Soyinka has explained the revolutionary use of theatre in his interview like this.” Theatre by awakening the individual and opening up to him the very possibility of participating creatively in the life around him serves a more revolutionary purpose than the text. Soyinka achieves this purpose to the maximum degree in *Madmen and Specialists*, which has the power to make people participate creatively. The intention of the theatrical devices is to shake the audience from their slumber, activate their energies and open up the audience to a new experience. This questioning attitude affects the response of the people to external social realities. Instead of leaving the audience in an uncertain state of mind or developing in them an attitude, which is ‘anti-life’, the spectators feel strongly vibrant and restless. The play leaves them “restless, mercurial and strongly masculine, often humorous, never satisfied with answers always alive to incongruity, and contradiction and highly sensitized to the ambiguities, indeterminacies and reversing polarities of existence” (Crehan 17).

The aim of the playwright in writing such a gruesome play was thus clearly to shock the audience into the awareness of the savage atrocities of war, hypocrisy and exploitation by man over man. We do not find any rigid plot or portrayal of static characters in his plays. Even the story as such is very slight. Instead, the play may be moving around a particular situation from which it radiates into wider situations. Time and place may become abstract. Lacking a conventional plot and story proper, what this play offers to us is a situation which is also macabre. It holds a mirror to the horrifying experiences which the human beings undergo. Perhaps the use of ritual, which characterizes Soyinka's works, may seem slightly incongruous to the Brechtian conventions. Trying to position Soyinka's use of ritual in terms of a connection to Brechtian dramatic theory, Ketu Katrak observes.

The aim of Brecht's epic theatre like the communal purposefulness of Yoruba tragedy is to inspire social change, social justice Brecht's theory may seem radically different from the kind of involvement that the ritual actor senses with regard to his role and responsibility to his people. Yet by different routes, Brecht and Soyinka's come to the same dramatic ends: in ritual, the actor is not just an individual but also a representative of the people (Katrak Wole Soyinka 52-54)

Soyinka believed in the dynamic quality the theatre had in its power to respond to the atmosphere, to the environment and to the situation. Speaking about the advantage of the theatre over the other art forms like the painting or music, Soyinka made this statement in an interview to Harry Kreisler.

“Well, let’s take a painting for instance. You go into a gallery and you respond to the art works in the gallery but it is one to one. Yes, you can discuss a painting with a nearby observer or afterwards. And that is quite normal, in that sense there is a social extension of this individual communication between a painting and an individual. A concert, the same thing happens. There’s a kind of absorption by every individual on different levels of emotion in a response to a concert. But theater, because of its nature, has a wider base of communication with an audience. That is why I call it the most social of the various art forms. (Kreisler 3).

What Brecht as well as Soyinka expected was an active and creative kind of response from the audience to the dynamics of any situation. *Madmen and Specialists* succeeds in arousing the interest of the audience to the particular argument of the play, the meaning or meaninglessness of war. Instead of weeping with the characters the spectators are led into a particular kind of response, they are reawakened into a new kind of approach to the external social realities. The audience is made alert to the bitter fact that wars are reflections of “man’s militarism on man”: The bestiality and the beastliness that were exhibited in the civil war is just an indication that it will continue for ever. Men are re-awakened to recognize the truth that violence is an ingrained characteristic of human nature and human society. The bitterness and the speed with which this nature of man is attacked provide a cutting edge to the play which challenges audiences and keeps them alert. The ultimate aim might have been one like that of the Old Man in *Madmen and Specialists*, to produce a collective guilt and thereby lead them to a cleansing and salvation. Femi Osofisan has expressed the same idea in his article published in Wole Soyinka An Appraisal.

Madmen and Specialists is not a conventional play, It does not narrate a story as such its main purpose is to narrate a historical situation, one that is macabre, and immediately frightening by animating it with graphic and telling illustrations. Its goal is not catharsis, but shock and psychic wounding, an attempt to confront the audience with its own mirror of horror, to immerse it in the excretions of its own prevailing brutalities; you could not say what the play was about, only what it did to your psyche and to your mind. You could not summarize it you could only experience it. Soyinka's intention was to raise the audience to the savage atrocities of the war and the inhumanity of war leaders-perhaps with the hope of provoking a collective guilt that would lead ultimately to the demand for cleansing and atonement (53).

We find that Soyinka has succeeded in inviting active participation from the readers as well as the spectators intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Even though the participation here may not be overtly expressed, he has done his best. He had always desired to use words as weapons Willfried F. Feuser quotes Soyinka's remarks in an interview in his article, "Wole Soyinka: The Problem of Autothencity". He wanted "to use words and style when we have the opportunity – to arrest the ears of normally complacent people, we must make sure explode something inside them which is a parallel of the sordidness which they ignore outside" (qtd. in Feuser 567). Once again, Soyinka has used the theatre to explore and affirm the cultural substance of Africans. Even though an attempt is made by the neocolonialist forces to exercise their power in such a way as to lead to cultural subordination, the writers like Soyinka used the theatre to protest against

such practices and to assert the importance of the theatre in liberating the country from cultural oppression. The situation that Soyinka portrays in *Madmen and Specialists* is not only a postcolonial situation but a neocolonial context. The theatre has been used in such contexts for different types of cultural functions. The stage has been used “to define and affirm their peoples cultural personality”. (Crow and Banfield 10) which has been continuously questioned and challenged by a series of economic and political forces. The dramatists, using theatre, tried to expose these forces that obstruct liberation. These forces vary from the dominant white society to the ruling indigenous elite. They are the most powerful and the most difficult antagonists because it reflects the attitude and behaviour ingrained within the oppressed themselves. The theatre has a vital role here to play as a powerful medium through which the dominant white men, the oppressed natives, the ruling indigenous elite and the artist are given a chance to look inward and question the real nature of things and come to a reasonable conclusion. To quote Brian Crow,

Serious theatre in Africa has characteristically been one of moral critique and protest, attacking the blatant exploitation and injustice of neo-colonialist societies protesting against undemocratic, corrupt and sometimes tyrannical regimes..... No African writer has more uncompromisingly asserted the centrality of theatre's function in African cultural life than its Nobel Laureate and undoubtedly leading exponent, the Nigerian Wole Soyinka”, (Crow 75).

Madmen and Specialists like *The Road* is sometimes labelled as an absurd play. The 'Absurd' plays and the works that come under the category of 'absurd' usually emphasise the absurdity of the human condition and meaninglessness of human existence. Man finds himself totally alienated from other man, his environment and situation. He finds himself completely uprooted. Human being is viewed "as an isolated existant who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, values or meaning and to represent human life-in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning as it moves from the nothingness when it came toward the nothingness where it must end-as an existence which is both anguished and absurd" (Abrams 1). The existence of man in a country ravaged by war and exploited by power mongers is both anguished and absurd. Dr. Bero, the central character is devoid of any inherent truth, values or integrity. Each and every human being feels like an isolated person cast into an alien universe.

Madmen and Speicialists is Soyinka's most unlocalized play. The names of the characters also look unfamiliar creating an aura of strangeness around the setting as well as location and people. The names used like GOYI, Aafaa, Bero. Iya Agba and Iya Mate do not strike any associative chords. Others do not have names but only representative labels like blind man, Cripple, priest and the Old Man. They are "repulsively distorted and monstrously ugly", (Wright, "Transition" 21). Their appearance, their repulsive movements and gestures are appropriate enough to give a running commentary on the action. Besides they do belong to the groups of grotesque figures looking odd and fantstic. They are half creatures, without any control over their limits or senses or body movements. At the beginning of the play they are gambling away the remnant part of their body in a game of dice.

Soyinka has abandoned the traditional concern with plot and the portrayal of fixed characters as mentioned above. There is no story as such here either, but only a situation from which the play moves into wider and larger situations. Equally significant is the fact that no specific time or place is mentioned. Eldred Jones has remarked: "In *Madmen and Specialists* the whole structure is far more fluid, and there is continual fading back and forth so that time and place become almost abstract. There are few references to time and even these only serve to blur the time system" (Jones, *The Writing* 90).

Very often, the comparison of *Madmen and Specialists* with the theatre of the absurd may look inappropriate. Clean logic is there behind every action and word of the characters in the play. They can be considered more as "self consciously theatrical and therefore selfdetermining creatures" than as really grotesque beings. The mendicants are grotesque in the sense that "they are engaged in a kind of linguistic dismemberment which renders them not numinously and transitionally grotesque but verbally and deconstructively grotesque" (Wright, "Transition" 23). The mendicants are physically handicapped people. They tell their stories also in fragments and broken bits of words. We find strange combinations or changes in the use of words: a change from elections to electrodes, pruned plants to severed vocal cords and plastic surgery. In the play we find the language being operated, the words are broken into syllabi components which do have a meaning. What is intended here is nothing else but an attempt to expose the debasement of language by political inhumanity. It is also an attempt to reveal the contradictions inherent in all idea systems. To quote Derek Wright,

The play performs an operation in its own language, collapsing words into syllabic components in a series of semantic implosions that expose the debasement of language by political inhumanity and lay bare the contradictions inherent in all idea systems: as the Old Man puts it, ‘the dog in dogma, tick of a heretic, the mock of democracy, ... the ham in Mohammed (275)’ and one might add, the gun in Ogun (23).

So logic runs through each utterance of the characters. It has a significant theme and has connection with reality.

Soyinka had a definite purpose in writing this play. There is also a clear message emerging through the play. Soyinka believed that the primary aim of art is to tell the truth, to expose and denounce falsehood. His work, from the broadest farce to the metaphysical and political works, provide not merely entertainment but also a clear picture of the religious social or political leaders who make a mockery of human freedom. *Madmen and Specialists* is also a powerful critique of society and such leaders who mock human freedom. The characters are not abstract. They represent certain value system, the play as a whole is a suggestion of the continuation of the colonial mindset and the use of the colonial political machinery in Africa. As argued by Eldred Jones:

Though insulated from everyday reality with *Madmen and Specialists* the connection with this reality is fairly made. With reasonable attention, the seemingly disjointed and illogical dialogue reveals a tough strand of its own internal logic running through and although words seem to be batted about as

meaningless counters, this itself is thematically significant, it is a representative of the verbiage which in real life is a mere smokescreen for the actions of the societies in many parts of the world” (91).

Soyinka might use Brechtian conventions. His work might show the influence Nietzsche, Christian mythology and classic Greek drama. His work has been compared to Beckett, Shakespeare, Synge, Yeats and the Modernists. But they do not in anyway mar the authenticity and uniqueness of the writer. To quote David Moody, “such comparisons do not threaten Soyinka’s authenticity; rather, they point to the ‘hybride’ reality in which the postcolonial culture finds itself”. The apparent structure of absurdism should not mislead a reader from realizing the actual strength of the play, which is politically and culturally suggestive to the native readers. The postcolonial tone of the play is not as it is in *A Dance of the Forests* or *Death and the King’s Horseman* or *The Road*. But the thrust and the orientation is certainly anticolonial with modified form.

We find Soyinka forcefully urging the postcolonial world to respect one’s tradition to prevent the society and nation from degenerating. In the political plays like *Madmen and Specialists*, *A Play of Giants* or *Opera Wonyosi* we find that the imperial power imposing its system and culture is absent. On the other hand, a more dangerous ruling body has come to the front – that of the power hungry native rulers who blindly mimic the alien cultures and compulsorily alienate the natives from their tradition. Soyinka conveys this message through *Madmen and Specialists* that when democracy and freedom are constantly threatened by the power hungry, tyrannical

autocrats like Dr. Bero of *Madmen and Specialists* or Idi Amin of real life, only the rich cultural heritage that they possess can become their saviour. In *Madmen and Speiclaists* Soyinka pleads to preserve the culture and says, “it was our duty and a historical necessity. It is our duty and a historical beauty. It shall always be. What we have, we hold. What though the wind of change is blowing over this entire continent, our principles and traditions – yes, must be maintained. For we are threatened, yes, we are indeed threatened” (5).

Soyinka realized the importance of acknowledging one’s roots which has only dignity, glory and solemnity in it. By thus recovering the past we must work for a better future. We must meet our enemies within with the same determination with which we faced the foriegners. We find an echo of Fanon’s ideas here: “We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent and resolute.” (*The Wretched* 250). He knew that if these new dictators are not handled in a firm and determined way, they would be doing nothing but following the route of the Europeans. As Fanon remarks in *The Wretched of the Earth*, ‘we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe’ (250). We find that Soyinka, better than any other dramatists of Africa, has successfully embraced the conflicts and tensions of contemporary African realities and “has successfully articulated the African condition through the medium of aesthetic essences derived from the timeless cultural history of his people” (Feuser 569).

What is portrayed mainly in the post war writings of Soyinka is the obsession of the power crazy leaders to use all kinds of tactics to preserve their power. He himself had expressed in his prison memoir the over

importance attached to attainment of power and indifference towards the erosion of human values by the power maniacs from his experiences during the civil war. So without any inhibition he dramatically represents the negative aspects of war. The satire is aimed also at the new leaders who try to preserve their power at any cost. Without doubt *Madmen and Specialists* is a play “about the holocaust that must overwhelm civilization when grace is mocked and power plays at omnipotence” (Iyenger17).

We perceive that Soyinka’s cardinal preoccupation in his war writings is the question of leadership. Without any reserve he satirized openly the misrule of the elite rulers who represented the military class and questioned unhesitatingly the moral credibility of such a leadership. In *The Man Died* Soyinka writes his plain indictment. The present dictatorship is a degrading imposition. That Soyinka had understood the tyrannical nature of the tyrants and the newly crowned rulers is evident from the depiction of Dr. Bero. That he found the same conditions being repeated more intensely even in 2000 is obvious from the remarks he made in an interview with NPQ. To quote,

“A wave of anomie, even a breakdown of humanity, is sweeping across the continent that must be particularly galling to those who so confidently trumpeted on “African renaissance.” What we see today is the opposite: a reversal of the progress. At the heart of this reversal is the power syndrome. Certainly in Africa today the terrible suffering is not caused by external enemies, but from within. African leaders have created one another as their own worst enemies. And they are dragging their populations down into

the abyss as they seek to establish their own individual domination”(8).

It is additionally humiliating because it exceeds “a thousand fold in brutish arrogances in repressiveness, in material corruption and in systematic reversal of all original revolutionary purpose, the worst excesses of the pre-1966 government of the civilians” (8).

The undependable nature of the leaders and the unreliable nature of their manifestoes and promises are also artistically satirized through the main action of the play as well as through the language employed. The words never remain in any fixed and rigid framework. They have a slippery nature conveying new meanings in new contexts giving the play new dimensions. The slipperiness of the words used in the play suggests the hollow, false promises the leaders offer to the common people. Look at the promises made by Dr. Bero to the Old Man and the easy way in which it is denied. Bero asserts, “I promised you the best of everything and this will prove to you what I mean” (251). But the proof turns out to be a refusal of the man’s wish for his pipe. But the Old Man refuses to be deceived like the rest of the humanity. What ensues from an unnecessary war is not only the waste of all kinds of resources-human as well as material-but also the creation of an alienated and stigmatized citizenry. The mendicants who are handicapped live only a half-life. The old women, Iya Agba and Iya Mata are in charge of the medicinal herbs, which are used to revitalize community. They stand as mediators between Bero and the Old Man. They are fully confident about the revitalizing nature of the natural herbs, even of the poisonous herbs. “You can cure with poison if you use it right or Kill” (225) Soyinka’s deep

disgust with the insensitive political leadership, his loss of confidence in the particular state apparatus that sustained the war resulted in his recourse to nature for a revitalizing ethic.

Madmen and Specialists is against all human institutions. In particular, it severely criticizes the Nigerian wartime establishment “the systems.” The system is so debased that it is not even bothered about the meanness of the means employed to attain absolute power. So it finds justification for the legalisations of cannibalism: “The system is so debased in its obsession with power that cannibalism, routine amputations and the ability to inflict mental torture became different rungs on the ladder to power” (Amuta119). Dr. Bero, the villain of the play very efficiently practises sadism and mindless bestiality. But the Old Man knows the wastage of the war and values the principles of justice and tolerance.

Soyinka it may be recalled, had prophesied years ago this animalism in Mata Kharibu’s empire in *A Dance of the Forests*. Things have progressed in an ironical sense from *A Dance of the Forests* to *Madmen and Specialists*. From the concept that man or Ogun has to destroy in order to create Soyinka’s has made a change. In *Madmen and Specialists* this dualism is virtually extinct. What we have to conclude is that his miserable experiences in the prison once again strengthened his distrust of human nature. Jonathan Peters remarks: “apart from its formation as a philosophy and indeed as a religious catechism this doctrines of violence as a symptoms of the barbarism inherent in human civilization is a brutal crystallization of the castigation of main persistent and injurious folly through the ages” (214).

The Old Man has however been led to recognize that evil is the negative pole in the compass of human values. Given this recognition, the Old Man makes use of his wartime assignment to project his connections into a philosophical system – the philosophy of “AS”. “As” is a re-affirmation of the pervasiveness of evil in human society as well as its instrumentality in the historical process. Soyinka through the Old Man repeatedly emphasizes the need for the freedom of an individual from oppressive leadership, about the necessity to think and act free from external oppression. As a result, Oyin Ogunba finds that “Soyinka. has the reputation in certain circles in Nigeria of being the artist par excellence in an ultramodern twentieth century sense, a man against establishment, a firm believer in the absolute freedom of the individual.” (6)

Satire as well as and social and political commentary has always been the chief elements in almost all works of Soyinka. All his works reveal anger, pessimism and a devotion to political themes. His works also do exhibit a discernible change. From the early gentle satires of the 1960s his works have developed into fiercer statements of truth during the 1970s. His satire remains incisive and witty still. But they are also violent and bitter. In *Madmen and Specialists* the satire is sharp, pointed and witty at times. But, here, more than in many other earlier works, it should be taken as a comment by him upon his own immediate experience in the Nigerian civil war. At the same time it is a fearful study of the corruption of mankind as well. Using theatre as a platform for pronouncing his views on politics and power mongers he repeatedly denounces the succession of military run governments that have appeared in Nigeria. *Kongi's Harvest* is a general indictment of authoritarianism. In *Opera Wonyosi* and *A Play of Giants*, he

aims his barbs at particular leaders of Africa like Jean Baptist Bokkasa, Idi Amin and other notorious statesmen. Soyinka has vehemently satirized religion and the self proclaimed messiahs in all his major works. What we see in his works generally, in his novels, memoirs and plays is a movement from Christianity to secularism, to a recovery of indigenous belief. We find many allusions to Christianity in his works. But the key symbol is that of messianism. Messianism is embodied in Eman's willing self-sacrifice. On another level we have false messiahs depicted in many of his works. Brother Jero Bam of the Trials of Brother Jero is the earliest example of Soyinka's false messiah. The professor who is searching for the word in *The Road* is the most fully realized false messiah. Kongi of the *Kongi's Harvest* is the most sinister and most topical ruler in post-independent Africa. They claim sainthood and superiority over the rest of humanity. But this pretension is more often a blind for their own exploitative designs on humanity. Soyinka's deep disgust with these hypocritical priests is clear from the usage of the word 'priest – scavengers' in the poem "Hunt of the stone" from *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (53). This exploitative tendency is common to religious as well as political priesthood. Oyin Ogunba analyses this aversion as originating from a basic contradiction: "Soyinka does not seem to like messiahs – whether they are ascetic or epicurean – for each kind indulges in some ridiculous excess which undermines the very principles on which the idea is based" (8)

On a more mundane level, all these so called leaders are possessed with a lust for power as well as a love for one's own self. It is this preoccupation with power and self-adoration that leads to idea of godhead and divinity. The human being is gifted with a unique force – the power of will - that Ogun used benevolently, to bridge the gap between god and man- but Ogun

inspired protagonist may use it either for good or for evil. Professor Kongi and Dr. Bero make an unholy attempt to bend divine power with human essence. Since they are too obsessed with power and self worship they display some characteristics of their violent aspects of demonic will.

References made in the play to religion are pointedly in the form of irreverent analogies. Aafaa speaks of the blackmailing of one Christ into showing off once in a while” (262). Another instance is the Old Man’s remark that, “We are done with the flood. [...] These midges try to recreate the flood but they lack the power At least god had a reason. A damnable reason but at least he had a reason” (265). From these satiric attacks one inference made evident is that no intrinsic disparity can be discerned between religious and political hierarchies. People who enjoy their elevated status as questers, dictators or religious leaders or warmongers head both religion and politics. They develop a psychotic lust for power and desire for immortality. They see themselves omni-potent and others, as impotent Dr. Bero is one such character that represents the last stage of “self aggrandizement when megalomaniacs overreach themselves in the exhibition of their base humanity through a refinement of the inhuman art of torture” (Peters 166). The cult of As is significant in that it includes in it the spiritual, the political and all other subsidiary manifestations.

Man is trapped in the deceased system which the society follows. There is no escape for him from repressive measures. The grim terrifying and disjointed world of *Madmen and Specialists* reflects the uncertain fate of the crippled helpless masses of people who are at the mercy of despotic rulers. This interpretation provides logic to the final scene which otherwise

may seem illogical. It is the tendency of rulers whether they belong to religion or politics to justify their senseless violence and caprice after putting them into some sort of framework of religious sounding credos that is satirized here. AS is a satiric portrayal at both political leaders as well as orthodox religion. “The meaninglessness of AS, however exposes not only the military leaders and healers like Dr. Bero who has now become an executioner, but also the incompetence and corruption which led to the ousting of civilian leaders. As a doctrine the creed also travesties orthodox religion” (214)

Soyinka’s potent metaphor for this corrupt leadership in Africa is cannibalism. Political leaders indulging in the politics of cannibalism without any ethics are present in all his works. We can definitely include Dr. Bero also in the list of those corrupt leaders cum killers like Bokassa, Macias, Nguema, Idi amin who “supped from their cannibal larder”. they unflinchingly exercise subversion of all human and humane values. Dr. Bero’s prescription for curing is killing. They have gone beyond the pale of culture and ethical values and have become embodiment of absolute corruption and injustice.

Satire has figured as an important element in exposing the innate nature of the corrupt leaders in the plays of Soyinka. He believes that satire in the theater has not yet been fully exploited as a weapon among the contemporary dramatists of Nigeria. From *A Dance of the Forests* to King Baabu, his latest play Soyinka has never missed an opportunity to attack social injustice and hypocrisy. He has made quite a lot of enemies too. As

one of the few leaders of thought, Soyinka could predict the grim future which was awaiting Nigeria.

This situation is not merely the condition of Nigeria but of the whole world. Anne Marie Hay Wood in this case has emphasized the archetypal significance of the drama:

Madmen and Specialists is not anchored to any special locale: it could be set in the hinter land of any modern ideological war. The Earth Mothers, chorus of unformed minds sin deformed bodies, intelligence officers in search of power and control and Socratic teacher/therapist are modern archetypes and could be translated into any location” (8).

We find that what Soyinka has depicted in *Madmen and Specialists* is most relevant with reference to the present situation of the world. Social relations degenerate further and the task and strategy of rebuilding the world continues to elude not only the African statesmen and intellectuals but also the statesmen of the whole world. In the beginning there was hope for the much-awaited dawn and a sun-led promise of bright future marked by the earth's forgiveness. As events so overwhelmed both the artist and his society, the artist knew there was not much room for hope. He became quite pessimistic and closed the door for all time. “AS IS, NOW AS EVER SHALL BE, WORLD WITHOUT” (253). He knew that the bestial nature of powerful human beings was the root cause for all the trouble in the world. To quote Soyinka's remarks from his interview with Nathan Gardels, “The note of despair is all too clear in Soyinka's warning that the mindlessness is a

very dangerous failing of humanity, and it threatens us all wherever we are” (16).

Madmen and Specialists is a remarkable index of Soyinka’s political philosophy, which grows out of his general sense of pessimism. In the nihilistic philosophy of AS, he states that eternal futility of human action. This philosophy “AS IS NOW AS EVER SHALL BE” is a philosophy of despair. It is an assertion of the author’s belief that human nature remains unchanged. In the play when the Old Man is killed by his power crazy son, we are not shown a bright new horizon. Instead another cycle of human misery and cannibalism is hinted.

Interestingly enough, Soyinka’s explanation is that his so-called philosophical pessimism is just a result of a realistic observation. The reality of Nigeria since independence is nothing but a recurrent cycle of corruption, deceit, exploitation of the masses, political and economic chaos and freedom exercised only through barrel of the gun. This is the prevailing way of the world. Tracing the history of the world, one is shocked by brutality as well as disillusionment experienced during the First World War. But these experiences did not prevent the Second World War. Even after that the leading nations were engaged in the acquisition of weapons with overkill capacities. Besides, numerous local wars are forever raging all over the globe and threatening to provoke a third war. As for the highly tense atmosphere in Nigeria itself, there were compelling reasons. The danger was not entirely external. The source of danger was very much within. Soyinka was worried about the fact that his country was “suffering a fate worse than imperialism” (NPQ 58). We find Soyinka indicting not only the colonial oppression of the

Nigeria but also the oppression by black leadership, the postcolonial exploitation made by corrupt locals, collaborating in a conspiracy to make freedom an empty word. Of the two enemies, the British and the black dictator the British ruler was an easier target than the black dictator because the white man was a common enemy and could be confronted with the unanimous loyalty of the Black patriots. Any writer sent to prison by the white regime was confident about the support of the whole country waiting for him outside. But the other tyranny, that of the black dictators, was the enemy from within and very difficult to deal with. So the final result is the feeling of despondency and hopelessness. As Soyinka himself exclaimed in one his interviews with Biodun Jeyifo, “what Nigerian today, what thinking or feeling Nigerian looks at his country and does not experience absolute despondency?” (62).

What Soyinka is disillusioned about is indeed the general wastefulness of war whether fought against an external force or with an enemy within. The warring factions invariably failed to learn from their reactionary predecessors, that ultimately no force on earth could stop people once they are intended to destroy exploitation. The Earth Mothers understood this reality. That is what the Earth Mothers do thereby tragically setting on fire their rare collection of herbs. They have united to destroy Bero’s exploitations of these herbs.

Madmen and Specialists, like other serious plays of Soyinka, has however been severely criticized for its complexity and incoherence. It has been called ‘a multifaceted cryptograph’ by Lindfors. Lindfors has been very merciless in accusing Soyinka of writing a play with a growing tendency

towards meaningless frivolity Anne Mary Haywood has referred to the accusation made by Lindfors in her article. He wonders for whom Soyinka had written these plays - “just for westernized Yoruba eggheads or for a cosmopolitan international elite or simply for himself”? (qtd. in Haywood). In fact, he has underestimated the political message emerging through Soyinka’s plays, which he dismisses, as frivolous. In a fast altering worldview due to the impact of postcolonialism, Soyinka’s plays have much to offer that will offer help in the reconstruction of Nigeria after foreign domination and cultural degradation. Also the fact that this play has influenced many contemporary playwrights from Nigeria emphasize its relevance to the contemporary situations of the world. It is time that Soyinka through the *Madmen and Specialists* the other works written and produced immediately after his detention has staked his own security. His daring attacks have created a strong breed of enemies. But it has also created a group of strong admirers. Many writers consciously model themselves on him, and obviously follow Soyinka in their theatre mechanics. Young Funmi Joshua’s first major play, *Theme For Music* very clearly shows the influence of the structural and linguistic technique of *Madmen and Specialists*. Another play, *The Chattering and the Song* by Femi Osofisan also shows the influence of *Madmen and Specialists* in depicting the ultimate chaos and pathos of the relationships and the effects of the social and cultural disorder upon a group of sensitive youths.

In the above analysis of the play, an attempt has been made to place *Madmen and Specialists* in the gallery of Soyinka’s literary works as a significant dramatic creation. An attempt has also been made to examine the significance of the area of transition and the fourth stage. The play serves to

indicate the direction which Soyinka was to take after the civil war and suggests how his works become less and less metaphysical and more and more political. If in *Death and the King's Horse^{man} Man*, Soyinka has used African myth and systems of ritual as an effective mode of resistance, in *Madmen and Specialists* he directs his attention with a narrower focus on the corruption inside Nigeria and the mode is more of correction than resistance. The raging impulse to expose the designs of the climbers to power, in utter disregard of human values, finds a theme in Dr. Bero and his father, the Old Man. The loss of value systems of Africa, mainly through direct colonialism and also, and to a lesser degree, through those who are the inheritors of colonial values, is shocking. Although irrecoverably lost, a sense of value system gives a glimmer of hope. This play, like, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *A Dance of the Forests* and other plays is a dialogue between the sense of the vague value system of the past, which can never be retrieved, and the horror perpetrated through the mindless inheritors of alien forms of governing the people.

The intensity of the material of ritual in this play is lesser in comparison with *A Dance of the Forests* or *Death and the King's Horseman*. The play may generate a feeling that Soyinka has given up or considerably abandoned African myth and ritual which find multiple layers of action in his ritual based plays. As Chidi Amuta states, "if it turns out that Soyinka never returns to the groves of Yoruba gods for further myths to explore, the explanation is most likely to be found in his traumatic experiences during the Nigerian Civil War" (128). Nevertheless, the significance of *Madmen and Specialists* lies in this that with its overt political tone and direct attack on

the corrupt system of governing it is a merciless portrayal of the deviation from the acceptable norms of conduct in national life.

It has become apparent through this play that Soyinka deeply felt the impact of significant issues in Nigeria. What is significant is that the subjects which he handles and the predictions that he makes, have got contemporary relevance even beyond Nigeria. Most of us will recognize the familiar parallels of Soyinka's Nigeria in the contemporary world situation.

Dr. Bero along with Kharibu and Professor and other sketches reflect the attitude of the modern leaders and sycophants. They are incapable of recognizing the fact that the armed struggle between man and man will finally end up in utter tragedy. What has been appreciated is the creative life-giving sources and what has been deprecated is the destructive killing forces. As Eldred Jones says "Soyinka's work celebrate life, and deprecates its opposite. This opposite includes minor internal repression; but it also embraces the general wastefulness of war. This is an aspect of Soyinka's work that is most obviously relevant to the whole modern world" (12). The supreme merit of the play lies in the fact that it can still exert a profound effect on theatre audiences as well as readers as a play articulating a grave warning to mankind about the holocaust that will overwhelm civilization when political power game goes out of control. Most importantly their political message is conveyed in aesthetic terms of moving sensitivity and consummate stagecraft.

Chapter IV

Ritual of Transition in

Death and The King's Horseman

A prominent mention has been made of *Death and The King's Horseman*, Wole Soyinka's 1975 tragic play, in the 1986 Nobel citation by the awarding committee. Indeed, this play is central to the development of the author's technique in blending ritual and stagecraft for the projection of a unique vision of life that has proved to be remarkably effective in contemporary theatre. As a spurious tragedy, which deals with a profound and complex theme, *Death and The King's Horseman* is exemplary in its material, origin and resonance. The worldwide appeal of the author is consolidated by his vibrant use of stage devices. No doubt his aim is to ensure that the play is adequately charged with all the vitality inherent in the ritual origin of tragedy.

Through the use of the rituals in the play, *Death and The King's Horseman* is designed to demonstrate the possibilities for articulating resistance to colonialism. The rituals serve as significant agents in inspiring not only the actors on the stage but the spectators in the audience. The ritual "has a regenerative effect for all its participants: it reinforces the community on stage and, in turn, the community in the audience who are also exhorted to fight colonialism" (Gilbert and Tompkins 65). Rituals get enacted with the clear purpose to resist the sway of Western cultural codes and hence they are deliberately structured and consciously designed.

To begin with, it would be worthwhile to recapitulate briefly some of the salient features of the theory relating to the ritual origin of drama, as evident in the work of Africa's finest dramatist, Wole Soyinka, with particular reference to his critically acclaimed play *Death and The King's Horseman*. Though, there are peripheral divergences of views among scholars, a more or less coherent account of the ritual origin of drama has emerged from two widely influential volumes of anthropological research : James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jane Harrison's *Themis*. They have inspired an unending succession of works in literary aesthetics that have proved helpful in widening and deepening our understanding of drama through the use of myth and ritual. *The Origin of The Attic Comedy* by F.M. Cornford, *From Ritual to Romance* by Jessie L. Weston, *Myth and Ritual* by S.H. Hooke; *The Gate of Horn* by R. Levy, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell, *Anatomy of criticism* by Northrop Frye, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* by O.B. Hardison are a few important works that need to be mentioned. With varying emphasis and orientations, all these books discuss the relationship among myth, ritual and literary experiences.

All religions possess certain significant features of myth and ritual in common. From an analysis of the rituals a common pattern becomes clear: they embody a passage from one way of life to another and carry subtle expressions of desire for transformation. They are indeed vaguely mapping out the paths of transition. They also assure the individual and the community, a victory over the forces of chaos. To quote Gassner and Quinn from *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*, "Not only do these rituals symbolize the passage from death to life and from one way of life to another,

but they are the actual means of achieving the change over, they mark the transition by which through the process of separation, regeneration and return on a higher level, both the individual and the community are assured their victory over the forces of chaos, which are kept under control” (714).

Myth and ritual provide man an effective weapon by which he could overpower those hostile forces that threaten him endlessly. But the obvious pattern of the early rituals and myths offered only “an uneasy truce” between man and chaos. There was the obvious suggestion that the cycle might return to its beginnings that man, in spite of his temporary victory over the forces of chaos and disorder, would again be defeated. So in the myth and ritual pattern was discernible the presence of the melancholy notes of despair and pessimism. The Hebraic Christian tradition also utilized the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth to conquer chaos and disorder, But it remains unique in that man is given a chance of defeating chaos and disorder by a single supreme act of human will.

Gassner and Quinn points out the important relation of tragedy with myth and ritual in this statement: “In the myth and ritual pattern is the seed bed of tragedy (714)” But they emphasize the difference in their method of achieving their purposes: “If we describe the myth and ritual pattern as the passage from ignorance to understanding through suffering mimetically and at first then we must describe tragedy as a passage from ignorance to understanding through suffering symbolically and at a distance” (713). A structure of the tragic form as derived from their dependence on and difference from rituals and myths consists in the tragic protagonist engaging in conflict with the forces of darkness and evil, meeting with a temporary

defeat but finally emerging triumphant as the symbol of the victory of light and goodness. To quote Gassner and Quinn again “The tragic protagonist in whom is subsumed the well being of the people and the welfare of the state..... after shame and suffering emerges triumphant as the symbol of the victory of light and good over darkness and evil (and) reaffirms the well being of the people and the welfare of the state.” (715). What can be argued, after a study of the use of rituals is that rituals are expressions of human desires and needs. They are used as a means for satisfying such needs of desires. To quote Adebayo Williams, “rituals are expressions of human needs and desires; they are also instrumental in satisfying such needs and desires since human needs are varied, there will be several prototypes of rituals to take care of them” (68).

Such generalized views regarding the interconnectedness between rituals and drama, however generalized they may be, generate acute problems in the context of African situation. The origin of drama in the African context cannot be simply explained away with notions of rituals because there are many opinions about the origin of drama in Africa. Besides, there are numerous cultures and heritages within Africa. There are more than eight hundred different languages too. The abundance of cultural variations regarding the intersections between rituals and drama makes it difficult to accept a generalized view. Even though certain similarities can be traced between ritual and drama, they do not inseparably merge. Ritual in postcolonial plays can be associated with at least one of the two different categories of drama. In the first type of drama, ritual determines and structures the action with its style of performance, it acts as a significant agency and has a regenerative effect for all its participants. It reinforces the

community on stage and in turn the community in the audience who are also exhorted to fight apartheid and maintain their honor. In the second category, instead of being employed “as the central thematic or structural focus,” it is used as “an expression of hybridization” (Gilbert and Tompkins 72). In both cases it becomes obvious that the ritual serves another purpose rather than keeping the audience aesthetically engaged. It is linked with the political thrust of the play. So it demands some kind of active response from the audience. They are employed to undermine the assumptions regarding the assumed superiority of western culture; Rituals used in some major writers like Chinua Achebe, “are nothing less than deployment of ritual in a desperate cultural offensive” (Gilbert and Tompkins 83). Some other African writers mythicise historical events and certain prominent figures to rediscover an authentic African heritage.

A discussion regarding the role of ritual in theatre can never be fruitful without a consideration of Soyinka’s works because he is one of the most well equipped writers who has effectively used rituals in his play to resist the obvious and the subtle forms of Western influence on African mind. Brian Crow expresses the significance of Soyinka as African playwright in his article “Empowering the people: African Theatre and Neo-colonialism”: “Soyinka combines elements of Western drama with Yoruba ritual and locates ritual more prominently in a contemporary world. The resulting hybridity and contamination can provide a constructive way of locating ritual in a post-imperial world” (75).

Dramatists in Africa, like other artists, enjoy one advantage over their black counterparts in America, West Indies or Australia. The fact is that

however much the colonialist tried to intervene in the customs and conventions of traditional arts of the colonized in Africa, they failed to destroy the basic and essential mental structures of the colonized, which survived even through the prolonged period of colonization. This art of combining the models drawn from the colonizer with the powerful elements of a rich and vibrant tradition served as a powerful resistance mechanism. Apparently, the form is Western, but in reality, the effect is thoroughly African. The repeated attempts that we see in the works of the writers of Africa are that of combining the Western dramaturgical and performance models with familiar living traditions drawn from ritual and popular theatre. To quote Brain Crow from "Introduction to Post-colonial Theatre," "No African dramatist has wrought such fusion more often than the Yoruba playwright, poet, novelist and political activist Wole Soyinka" (80).

Traditional drama has represented the communal need of restoration and cleansing mainly through two theatrical categories. One, by resorting to the mechanics of satire and comedy and the other by resorting to rites and rituals. The first is an attempt to diagnose what is wrong with a society and the second is a step to set it right by rehashing and strengthening the conventions. Wole Soyinka's plays, it can be observed, also are divisible along that convention. The first group of plays uses the dramatic resources of the popular stage and aim at the exorcism of collective pain on a purely sociological level. *Kongi's Harvest*, *The Jero Plays* and similar works belong to this category. These plays aim at the exorcism of collective pain on a purely sociological level by using the dramatic resources of the popular stage like masquerade and caricature. The satiric tone of these plays make them similar to the 18th century English tradition. However the aesthetic

quality in them in no way gets compromised. The second group of plays is metaphysical in their content and techniques. They are ritualistic in structure and tragic in tone. In reviewing Soyinka's five plays, Susan Yankowitz in *The Plays of Wole Soyinka* argues that "the contemporary theatre seems to have forgotten that it has its roots in ritual and song, and is only the rare emergence of a Lorca or Brecht or a Wole Soyinka that creates an awareness of our deprivation" (129). By carrying the dramatic tradition back to the very origin or root, Soyinka is simultaneously opening up the possibility of recapturing the half-forgotten and ill-remembered African background and thereby setting up a resistance against the European or English modes.

The major works of Soyinka obviously prove that the contemporary theatre has its roots in ritual. Besides, religious festivals and New year rituals with their attendant external features are integrally linked with themes of political significance or cultural clashes in Soyinka's plays. In *The Strong Breed*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *A Dance of the Forests*, we can see the significance of the purification ritual at the climactic moment. Eman, Daodu and Demoke are ready to make a willing sacrifice in order to bring communal good. In *The Strong Breed*, Jaguna justifies the death of Eman to the villagers returning "subdued and guilty" (145) by the argument "It was all for their common good" (146). In *A Dance of The Forests*, Demoke's father expresses the sense of expiation thus: "Demoke, we made sacrifice and demanded the path of expiation" (73). Similarly, *Kongi's Harvest* concludes with the words of old Danlola, 'The Hornet's nest is truly stirred'. *The Bachae* opens with a ritual flogging and ends in a ritual preparation expressed through chanting, mime, music and dance. So almost all his works reveal a compelling need to use such traditional elements as rituals and

festivals and their related idiom. By using these elements, Soyinka is trying to create anew the ritual atmosphere. Participating actively, in the question and answer session held at Zimbabwe, Soyinka remarked thus: "Rites, rituals, ceremonials and festivals are such a rich source of material for drama. They are intrinsically dramatic in themselves, because they are formalized. Apart from being visually clarifying, their representation is so precise that even when the meaning is obscure you are left with a form, which is so clear that it reifies itself into a very concrete meaning for the viewer. So, for me, rites, and rituals are inevitable metaphors for the drama of life, for many, many human situations" (98). In reconstructing contemporary experiences, the use of archetypes and primitive faith is an effective strategy to discover the roots of human experience. This technique, Soyinka notes, has been used even by European writer. Soyinka has written, in his famous work *Myth, Literature and African World* that "the search even by modern European dramatists for ritualistic roots from which to draw out visions of modern experience is a clue to the deep seated need of creative man to recover this archetypal consciousness in the origin of the Dramatic Medium." (100). At this juncture it would be profitable to paraphrase briefly Soyinka's own ideas on tragedy and its origins and try to fit in his own tragedies in this framework.

Wole Soyinka has written several essays dealing with the mythic sources of Yoruba ritual. After studying the festivals, rituals, ceremonies and masquerades of Nigeria, Soyinka formulated his theory of traditional drama in his essay "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to Origin of Yoruba Tragedy." Along with another paper "The Role of the Writer in a Modern African State", "The Fourth Stage" projects Soyinka's theory of

drama based on a subjective analysis of Ogun festivals. According to Soyinka's interpretation, Yoruba culture separates the cosmos into the human world and the world of deities. At the same time the human world contains manifestations of the ancestors, the living and the unborn. The different communities of ancestors, living and unborn are also separated from the realm of gods. The gulf between these areas of existence is named transition. Since according to tradition, the gods were once completely and unhappily separated from human beings, many Yoruba myths are the stories about efforts made to cross these gulfs. Ogun, the god of iron and the metallurgic core and artistry was the first to succeed in conquering the transition. He crossed the gulf to the world by extracting iron from the earth and thus providing the human world with the source of its weapons and the tools.

Ogun is also the god of creativity, guardian of the road, explorer, hunter, god of war, custodian of sacred oath. Soyinka argues that traditional Yoruba tragedy represents the suffering experienced in these gulfs and the painful efforts of will or assertion performed to bridge them. What Soyinka has sought to do is to develop a contemporary African theatre that would not only be drama in the Western sense of the term but also ritual in the Yoruba sense of the tragedy. Soyinka has described Ogun as the paradigm of ritual archetype. Similarly, the actor in ritual drama operates in the same way. He prepares mentally and physically for the disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin, experiences 'the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and being' (*Myth* 143). It is from a knowledge of the protagonist's foray into this abyss that tragic feeling in Yoruba drama arises. "Yoruba tragedy plunges straight into chthonic realm, the seething

cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming. Into this universal womb the first actor, disintegrating within the abyss the protagonist actor resists like Ogun before him, the final step towards complete annihilation” (*Myth* 143). Many sacrifices of rituals are made in order to diminish the transitional gulf. This area of transition is what is referred to as the fourth stage.

Two prominent aspects that signify the Yoruba desire for resolution and harmony are disintegration and reassembly. Tragic fate in Yoruba myth has been expressed in the following abbreviated formats by some scholars like this: Demonic will within man - desecration of nature - Tragic hindsight - ritual exorcism - Transition or self apprehension or individuation. This formulation is not based on an adequate understanding of the Yoruba culture because the heroic act that leads to tragic end does not spring from a selfish desire. On the contrary, it arises out of a sense of need to save the society. He may designate the fate of the hero with a familiar word “tragedy”, but it is more an ecstasy, a reformation and a triumph.

There is a difference between the Greek and Yoruba sense of morality. The ethical basis of tragedy as it developed through Aeschylus to Shakespeare is punishment. But for the Yoruba it is reparation. Rituals and sacrifice are offered to maintain the harmony with the gods. They are aids to overcome the fragmentation of the essence from the self. The Yoruba exercises the will to act whenever the need arises. Ogun, the first darrer into the abyss confronted the dark forces of the abyss and found a way through it with the exercise of his will. Soyinka discusses different stages of this process, the dissolution of self, the search for oneness, the exercise of free

will and the retrieval of self. The tragic protagonist also is in possession of a strong will power. The protagonist, stripped of his excrescences, plunges into the abyss, and faces the dissolution of self. He faces the dark forces of the abyss, and by the exercise of his free will emerges triumphant and victorious.

The concept of tragedy arising out of the works of Soyinka, obviously differs from the well-known mode of tragedy formulated by Aristotle. The tragic hero according to Aristotle acutely generates the catastrophe due to a flaw in this nature. But in Soyinka's plays, hero is an individual endowed with a strong will and a desire to redeem the community. His end is not a fall but an act of conscious sacrifice for the well being of the society. It is a spiritual deed. On the contrary, in the familiar European mode, the tragic hero transgresses and violates the accepted canons of social life. It is a defect in him or a shortcoming in his conduct that leads to disintegration. The tragic concept in the Yoruba culture is a glorification of the hero who is a social redeemer. The postcolonial overtones in this extent due to Soyinka's use of Yoruba culture act as an effective mode of resistance and they enhance the sense of originality of the African mode.

Tragedy is a passage through the metaphysical world of creative and destructive forces. The only adequate language Soyinka believed is that of religious metaphor and myth. Ogun is the god of creation and destruction. He is also the god of passage between human and divine realities through the abyss of transition. Ogun myth describes him as "the one who crossed this abyss for the first time. [. . .] His cult drama is a cult of the will confronting the cosmic will" (*Myth* 26) at the risk of disintegration in order to acquire the power of creating and reviving energies. It is important to note that in most

of the works of Soyinka, the idea of transition to another stage is of focal importance. The plays of Soyinka make it clear that they cannot be understood without a thorough knowledge of Yoruba background. His works deal with a tradition that is still alive. His works celebrate the essence of the past and its system of thought. He responds to this essence in a spontaneous and natural way. As explained by Bruce King, “Soyinka has tried to overcome the fragmented secularized Western thought with an integrated vision of life derived from his own Yoruba culture” (341).

The works of Soyinka do not portray a kind of nostalgia, as he very powerfully speaks about the beauty of his culture. They are universal, modern and portray an international awareness. “Soyinka is a modern who writes from an African centered world view without nostalgia for an idealized past and his attitude is sophisticated, cosmopolitan and international in awareness reference and relevance” (King 339).

Inspired and influenced by the Yoruba world view, Soyinka is unable to renounce the metaphysical or mythical and mythological conceptions which play a very crucial role in structuring the vision of a Black African. Making slight changes in keeping with the requirement of the time, Soyinka makes these conceptions offer a new vision of things. As observed by Mary David in her work, *A Quest for Renewal*:

“For him black African writers should turn their attention to the mythological world of their peoples, bring out the principal actors, the identity and action principles that they represent in order to dust them off, weigh them up, analyse them examine them critically and reinject into the information loop of black African

intellectual debate those elements that are likely to generate a new vision of things and beings” (55).

These are effective postcolonial strategies to revive African memory and to turn the attention of Africans to their own past and thereby create mental conditions for combating the all pervasive European modes of thought.

One of the greatest plays ever written, *Death and The King's Horseman* is remarkable for its power of poetry, its tender lyricism, its wisdom, its mastery of language and its elegiac homage to an Africa full and complete in herself. *Death and The King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed* are considered to be the most African of Wole Soyinka's plays. They are remarkable for the recreation of ritual elements. In *Death and The King's Horseman* he interrogates a historical event, interprets it critically, invests it with a dialectic and thereby projects his personal vision regarding Africa's culture, which is steeped in colonialism, corrupted by politics and the consequent predicament of human beings. Femi Osofisan refers to this when he remarks that Soyinka here “creates the complete credible world of African ritual because here the ritual form is not merely recast, but the playwright invests it with a dialectic, and his personal vision intervenes for a crucial interrogation” (163). Looking carefully at *Death and The King's Horseman* through the lens of the Fourth Stage, we can see that Soyinka has constructed a powerful drama of human possibilities.

Death and The King's Horseman is a fine illustration of the fact that Soyinka “reaches for exorcism through theatrical mechanics which grow progressively ritualistic in conception.” (Osofisan 163). He differs from the

traditional artist in that instead of submitting his identity to art, Soyinka continuously imposes his own personality by “either highlighting specific aspects of ritual or even creating other patterns entirely within the conventional mould” (Osofisan 163).

A Dance of the Forests, *The Road* and *Death and The King's Horseman* are three major plays where the theme of transition is of focal importance. But in the first two plays, Soyinka has interwoven so many other themes with the main theme that the total effect is one of confusing complexity. It is *Death and The King's Horseman* which is remarkable for his most conscious and controlled realization of the principle of transition “The confrontation in the play”, explains Soyinka in the notes, “is largely metaphysical contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin in and the universe of Yoruba mind the world of the living, the dead and the unborn and the numinous passage which links all transition. *Death and the King's Horseman* can be fully realized only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition.”

These prefatory notes given by Soyinka emphasize what he had stated earlier in the form of a warning given to the director. He had warned the readers against the reductionist tendency of regarding the play as dealing with ‘clash of cultures’. The play focuses on the metaphysical aspect as it has been admirably explained by Mary David in her work *Wole Soyinka : A Quest for Renewal*: “The play enshrines many of the seminal features of the Yoruba world view. For instance the Yoruba belief that death is not a cessation of existence but a mere transition into a continued existence, and

that the unborn, the living and the dead form a continuum underpins the play's metaphysical scheme" (85).

Death and The King's Horseman is a serious play which deals with themes which are profound and more complex than the superficial sociological disorders that provide the usual crux of so many plays. It belongs to that category of plays which according to Eldred Jones, "deal with things that matter; things that are worth troubling about." Jones explains that "They are concerned with the fate of man in his environment, the struggle for survival, the real meaning of progress, the necessity for sacrifice if man is to make any progress the role of death – even the necessity for death in man's life." (The Writing 14). *Death and The King's Horseman* is one such play which stressed the need of sacrifice and the necessity for death in man's life to ensure the future of the common unity.

The play *Death and The King's Horseman* is based on a real incident that took place in Oyo in Nigeria in 1944. James Gibbs gives us a detailed description in his book, *Wole Soyinka* of the real historical event which led finally to the creation of a powerful tragedy which abounds in Yoruba myth, ritual and metaphysics.

"On Tuesday, 19th December 1944, the Alafin of Oyo died after a reign of 33 years. It was assumed that Jinadu, the master of his horse would follow his master by committing suicide. Three weeks later he came to Oyo dressed in white and began dancing through the street. At the crucial moment by the intervention of a British colonial officer he was arrested and prevented from committing the ritual suicide. [. . .] But another shocking event

occurred – that of the ritual suicide of the youngest son of Horseman” (118).

Based on this real incident Soyinka has created a powerful play remarkable for its blending of Western and traditional elements, its ritualistic elements and for the exploration of metaphysical theme. The play is centered around Elesin Oba, the king’s horseman, who is preparing to die ritualistically so that he can accompany the king who died 30 days earlier into the realm of ancestors. If the ritualistic death is performed, the royal spirit will not be cast adrift in aimless wandering. The world of the living is also safe because the king’s curses will not wrench the world from its normal course. But as it happens, the white district officer intervenes at the crucial moment of Elesin’s suicide, interpreting the whole thing as barbaric. Ironically, his action leads to the death not only of Elesin Oba but also of his eldest son and next heir, Olunde who tries to retrieve the family’s honour. Whether Olunde’s act is sufficient to redeem his father’s failure is uncertain. The praise singer’s despair in his words reflect the despair and anxiety of the whole community. “Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers and there is no guarantee of what the end will be.” (75).

The Praise Singer in *Death and The King’s Horseman* has a major role to play like the Jester in Shakespeare. His role is hereditary like that of the Elesin. Even though he performs all his duties as a Praise Singer – he jests, he warns, he praises – he does it with traditional wisdom. In fact, it is the Praise Singer who gives the readers the first clue about the tragic nature of the king’s transition: “They love to spoil you but beware. The hands of women also weaken the unwary” (10).

At this point in the play, the playwright introduces the market place with all its scenes of festivity, dancing and singing. The story of the Not I bird narrated by Elesin is remarkable for its depth of meaning, its exquisite beauty and energy. Elesin relates that death comes calling. But no one hears its call – neither the farmer, the hunter, and the schoolmaster, nor the priest and the tapper. Death finds the little bird nestling in the leaves. Hence after this the Not – I bird became the symbol of death. Elesin through this song is reassuring all around him that no one need to fear any more.

... When the hour comes

Watch me dance along the narrowing path/

Glazed by the souls of my great precursors

My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside.” (14).

He conveys this message that “... Life is honour / it ends when honour ends” (15). David Richards suggests in his article “Proverbs like Horses: Wole Soyinka’s *Death and The King’s Horseman*”, that “A whole world, a society of farmers, priests, courtesans, hunters, gods and animals is created. The natural, social and metaphysical world of the Yoruba is contained in Elesin’s poem, all controlled by and under the dominion of death” (87).

^{Elesin}
He is filled with a sense of duty and a sense of anticipation for the world of his ancestors, “the still great womb of the world”. The song expresses his desire to experience ~~of~~ the rite of passage. The song has a metaphysical tone in it. Besides reflecting the preoccupation of Elesin at the moment of transition with the world of ancestors and the numinous passage of death, it also reflects a dilution of will from where the play moves to its

disastrous and unexpected conclusion. One of the reasons for this disastrous end is Elesin's last wish: "Seed that will not serve the stomach / On the way remain behind. Let it take root / In the earth of my choice, in this earth / I leave behind" (21).

Elesin manages to convince Iyaloja and others that the ancestral world is not to be offended by the withholding of his last wish – that of spending the night with the girl who is betrothed to Iyaloja's son. Iyaloja remembers that even this act has its function in their world – "As if the timelessness of the ancestral world and the unborn have found sprits to wring an issue of the elusive being of the passage" (22). Iyaloja is also cheerful that the child of this union would be "neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind us" (40). She consents to this request of Elesin because she knows that Elesin should enter the passage with all his worldly desires fulfilled. She does not have any doubts at all regarding the strength of his will power. At the same time, she does not forget to leave the moral consequences of his choice to him. After handing over the white cloth stained with his new bride's blood to Iyaloja, Elesin declares that "it is not mere virgin stain but the union of life and the seeds of passage when earth and passage used the consummation incomplete only when there are grains of earth on the eyelids of passage" (40).

Towards the end of the scene, Elesin Oba dances deep in a trance. He is on the very verge of that passage between different realms of being which Soyinka calls the gulf of transition. He is an excellent example of an individual actor or protagonist entering the passage either to come back energised with wider enlightenment or to accept death for the welfare of the

community. Etienne Galle has expressed this idea beautifully in his article “Wole Soyinka and Ritual Drama”: “Traditional tragic drama appears a journey to the heart of force-being from which the actor comes back added with the energies necessary to the life of community” (21). Elesin Oba thus undertakes the journey to the abyss on his own in order to energize his community. Mark Ralph Bowman’s comments in “Leaders and Leftovers” throw light on this plunge of Elesin into the chasm:

He is not only to undergo a transition, to go along the passage, he is transition itself, he is the passage. Thus the passage is conceived as both the passing through a stage of existence and that stage of existence itself, it is both passing and to pass, both gerund and infinitive. Thus Elesin Oba is both the mediator between the dead and the living as well as mediation itself (83).

Elesin is aware of the transcendental situation in which he is:

The moon has fled, a glow from its full stomach fills the sky and air, but I cannot tell where is that gateway through which I must pass. My faithful friends, let our feet touch together this last time, lead me into the other market with sounds that cover skin with a clown yet make my limbs strike earth like a thorough bred. Dear mothers, let me dance into the passage even as I have loved beneath your roofs (41).

He reveals himself to be very confident. He does not have any doubts or fear: “In a night when lights falls before our eyes / however deep, we do not miss our way” (43), he says almost over the threshold of transition. Elesin alone is unique in the entire universe, because he is the master of his fate. He

represents the culture of “the essential Yoruba man” (Richards 88). At this point, “the pivotal focus of Soyinka’s drama is the transition of Elesin from the world of the living to that of the ancestors” (Richards 88). No body is suspicious about the strength of Elesin in carrying out his ritual suicide. Elesin is no longer Oba, but Alafin. He is even given a promotion in rank. But as it turns out, Elesin Oba fails in his duty. We are given slight hints about this tragedy from Iyaloja’s warning as well as from the determination of Simon Pilkings to stop this barbaric custom. The inability of the Pilkingses to realize the depth of their ritual action is reflected in their use of the egungun mask as their fancy dress costume. They argue that masks “belong to a dead cult, not for human being” (25). They fail to realize the significance of these rituals and masks. They are insensitive to the fear of Amusa, the fear of offending the ancestors. The importance of Egungun masquerade to the people of Yoruba has been explained by Soyinka himself in his question and answer session at Zimbabwe. To quote his words,

The Egungun masquerade is an ancestral masquerade. It is one of the devices for reconciling society and individuals to the trauma of death. The Egungun continues in the line between the living and the dead. [. . .] The world of the dead is brought closer to that of the living and that is the social and psychological purpose of the Egungun (65).

Quite unaware of this sanctity with which Egungun masks are handled by the natives, Pilkings and his wife wear such a mask for the dance. The mental framework of the Pilkingses is clearly reflected in this remark made by Last Brian, in his article, “*Death and the King’s Horseman – A Note*”: “Amusa’s

reaction is intuitive and asserts that the will of the rites – symbolized in the form of the outfit must survive after the disappearance of the flesh inside it. The ‘reasoning’ European mind cannot penetrate their imaginative leap and Soyinka emphasises his point by making Pilkings less than sensitive towards the feelings of Amusa and Joseph, the Steward” (40).

Soyinka presents everything in such a way that the reason for the tragic failure lies in the sacrilege of the district officer’s intervention as well as in Elesin’s longing for the worldly pleasures, in “Elesin’s concupiscence, his tenacious love of earth and flesh.” (Osofisan 169) Elesin makes his confession to his young bride. “For I confess to you my daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man, who came violently into my fading presence, there was also a weight of longing on my earth – held limbs” (65).

So, the bride is obviously more than a mere desire of the flesh. She, being the final gift of the living to their emissary to the land of ancestors turns his feet, now laden with her warmth and youth. Viewed from this angle, the tendency of some critics to trivialize the play into a matter of culture conflict by labelling the play as one with the theme of clash of European and African cultures may not be seen as the only or the central theme.

Amusa had already told the Pilkings about the importance given by the natives to their law and custom. But Pilkings knows how much force he will have to use to prevent the ritual suicide of Elesin because he had met with stiff resistance and opposition earlier when he persuaded Elesin to send Olunde to the Medical School in London. “The old pagan wanted him to stay

and carry on some family tradition or other” (28). Simon Pilkings takes the decisive step: Elesin is arrested, imprisoned and thereby prevented from committing the ritual suicide which will help the dead king, his ancestor and the then living people rest peacefully. In the Residency study, Elesin appears a tragic but a poignant figure. In the conversation that ensues between him and Simon Pilkings we see the difference in view points of the Europeans and the natives.

PILKINGS. The light on the leaves, the peace of the night

ELESIN. The night is not at peace, District officer

PILKINGS. No?, I would have said it was. You know, quiet...

ELESIN. And does quiet mean peace for you?

PILKINGS. Well, nearly the same thing. Naturally there is a
subtle difference

ELESIN. The night is not at peace, ghostly one. The world is not
at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world for ever.
There is no sleep in the world tonight (61-62).

Ultimately, it is something in his own mind, ‘the blasphemous’ thought that in some way gods have condoned the colonialist’s intervention in his ritual action. Here the emphasis is on a more profound exploration of the unpredictable temper of Death. By an unnatural reversal of roles, the child taking the role of the father, Olunde heroically takes the place of his father to accompany the king. He takes this daring plunge into the abyss and so makes this willing sacrifice so that his race can be safe and the king can sleep in peace at last.

This simple outline cannot reflect the subtleties of inner beauty, ritual vision and metaphysical aspects which make the play complex, deep and enigmatic. An attempt is therefore made in this chapter to scrutinize the ritualistic and metaphysical elements of the play which successfully and beautifully blend to portray the author's perspective on the tragic predicament of human beings, the theme of transition, politics, the theme of Death, colonialism and history. Accordingly, the metaphysical aspect of the play with which Soyinka was obsessed can be considered the basis of an approach to interpretation. Yoruba cosmology emphasizes the importance of community and the need for maintaining the continuous and contiguous relationship of the three stages of being - the dead, the living and the unborn. The 'Fourth Stage' which is the vital link between these three phases is the abyss of transition or the transitional passage. It is this 'Fourth Stage' which is explored in the image of passage in his metaphysical play, *Death and The King's Horseman*. The metaphysical nature of the play is evoked from the very first few lines of this play. The playwright has succeeded in sustaining this atmosphere throughout. The praise singer's song, Iyaloja's words, Olunde's speech - every word in the play highlights this aspect of the Yoruba world view - the link between man, his ancestors, and his gods which establishes his world on its true course. The play *Death and The King's Horseman* stands as a solid example of the fact that nothing can alter the true course, least of all, historical events. As Soyinka has made clear in his interview with Jeffrey Portnoy, "I think it's more the preoccupation with the mysteries of transition really trying to explore this normally intangible space through which we presumably pass coming into this world and through which we presumably must pass to join the ancestors" (2).

To the Western mind, historical events play a crucial role in making or unmaking civilizations. As Biodun Jeyifo, remarks in “Tragedy, History and Ideology,” “Soyinka’s mythopoeic attitude to history, his constant penchant for transforming experience into metaphysical trans-historical mythic dimensions” (15) can be traced here.

Death here is viewed from a different and uncommon angle. Neither is it destructive nor is it awful or tragic. Death is like birth, merely a stage in the process of life. It is sometimes a necessity as in the case of the Elesin and Olunde. Rituals, Cosmology and death mean different things to Yoruba community. This is something which cannot be comprehended by the White men. Perhaps Soyinka’s own interpretation may be helpful in understanding the meaning of the situation. In his interview with Antony Appiah, Soyinka remarks:

Death does not mean for such a society what it means for other societies. And its only if one establishes their kind of context through whatever symbolic means, that one can begin - distanced as you and I are from this particular kind of society, even if we are a part of the world. It is only exposing this world as a hermetic, self regulating universe of its own that a tragedy of a character like Elesin can have absolute validity. So within that context, this is what enables him. For him it’s not death (780).

It becomes obvious that the Pilkings fail to grasp the significance of ritual death. He fails to realize the celebratory attitude towards death which the Yorubas believe in. The significance of death and its celebratory nature is revealed by Soyinka himself in his interview with Jeffrey Portnoy: “Indeed,

the attitude of many African societies towards death is not a negative one, especially the death of an old person. The expression ^{is} ~~is~~ 'she has gone to join the ancestors.' Actually, there's always a sense of loss. Absence is loss in all human beings. But then there's a therapeutic approach which is that of recognizing the fact that there's been a transfer: she has gone to join other energies in preserving the health of the community" (3). Man-made law is entirely different from the nature of order that Yoruba universe contains. Actually Pilkings has disturbed the world order. He has pushed the world of the Yoruba from its orbit. "The world is set adrift and its inhabitants are lost. Around them there is nothing but emptiness" (63).

The sacrifice is something which will arrest the disorder that was threatening to engulf the world. The chaos which had yawned to devour the race has been controlled. In the cosmology of Olunde it was crucial that Elesin should have died in order to keep the world in its own orbit. Elesin, as a leader of the people at a particular time in their history had a very important duty to see to it that the life sustaining essence of the society should remain unadulterated. But he rationalized and was fatally compromised "seeing the hand of gods in this alien rupture of this world, in the stranger's intervention he tried to reason out his compromising action. But it was nothing but betrayal" (73).

Thus Elesin Oba for whom nothing but good has been desired is finally cast off and rejected "I have no father, eater of left overs," (61), cries Olunde in anguish. And Olunde, thinking through both the Western and the Yoruba beliefs understood the superiority of his culture, the control of the metaphysical world of the Yoruba over the supernatural in the Western

world. In spite of his education in the medical college he could not repudiate the old tribal ways or discard the rich cultural heritage of the Yorubas. It is not the voice of the education but the call of one's tradition, one's blood that matters. Western kind of education does submerge or erase the strongly formed cultural mental background. But it is known as always alive and when occasion demands, its power arises and subdues the Western ideas. With this point, Soyinka seems to emphasize that there can never be a clash of cultures when there is only one culture - Yoruba culture. Bowman gives a convincing interpretation of the ritual suicide of Olunde: "That death is a significant and uncompromising affirmation of traditional cosmology and a significant and uncompromising indictment of a generation of leaders who have betrayed both it and their trust" (86).

Finally when Elesin Oba also embraces death by hanging himself using the chains with which he had been imprisoned, we hear Iyaloja consoling the young widow to turn her mind to the unborn child she has conceived by Elesin. The myth of Ogun, the god who risked the dangers of abyss by taking the daring plunge in order to find a way for the human beings, to find a road from the spiritual of the human world is the key to the understanding of Soyinka's play. The Western dramatic form and its possible effect of the readers / audience have been self-consciously constructed here by accommodating the Yoruba world so that what ultimately gets projected is the native metaphysical system. This revival of the native system is at once resistance mechanism.

Elesin Oba has lost his self-respect. He becomes a despicable figure to his people. But even then, he has absolute faith in his son, thereby evoking

his tragic grandeur. ‘He will avenge my shame, white one. His spirit will destroy you and yours’ (63). Iyaloja proclaims as she enters along with the dead body of Olunde: “Because he could not let honour fly out of doors, he stopped it with his life” (75). Elesin Oba desperately cries out, “My will was squelched in the spittle of an alien race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought – that there might be the hand of the gods in a stranger’s intervention.” (69). Will is the fulcrum of Soyinka’s vision. Ogun will never support those weak questers who cast a longing lingering look behind. Ogun disowns the so called leaders who lack strength of will and a totality of commitment. So, towards the end of the play, Elesin fails to attain the grandeur and dignity which make Ogun the hero of the Fourth Stage. We have a thought provoking interpretation by Mary David:

The relinquishing of his role as a voyager, quester, responsible for the spiritual well being of his people is the reason for the tragedy of Elesin and this is the focal point of the play. So in Elesin Oba we have the tragic instance of a protagonist of the community’s choice failing to come to terms with the forces of the chthonic realm on behalf of the community. His failure is due to the failure of will which alone could have sustained him and seen him through the great passage to the beyond (89).

In fact, Elesin has something in common with Ogun the great actor who crossed the abyss and who is Soyinka’s ideal tragic protagonist. The circumstances in which he is placed make him aware of the responsibilities as a being of transition. He knows very much that his act of transition from this life ‘to the great void’ through ritual suicide will put things right and will

help to maintain harmony in the world. The role he has to play as the mediator in the moral and ritual crises, and the role he has in reintegrating the disintegrated societies are very crucial. But in spite of all this, he fails: "Elesin Oba is a failed Ogunnian, as he loses his will at the brink of this abyss of transition which he had to cross on behalf of his community." (David 90)

Olunde takes his daring plunge into the abyss at this moment. He decides to make himself the ritual offering through whom the race can be regenerated and the cosmos can be renewed. Soyinka here seems to convey this message that we must undertake the journey of self-discovery, vigorous though it might be. It might involve crossing a number of obstacles. It might demand great, perhaps the ultimate, self sacrifice. But, it is rewarding

Olunde's ritual death to correct his father's failed ritual can be read aesthetically, religiously, culturally and more importantly, politically. This ritual death is a corrective action which can be considered as a ritual recuperation of performative agency and consequently cultural power. Olunde has salvaged some honour for his family and for the society as a whole. He has exercised freely his individual will and has made a voluntary sacrifice. If Elesin has brought disgrace by an 'Elision', Olunde has liberated his society from the curse of the king. He proves to be what the name Olunde indicates because 'Olundanide' means one who liberates.

The preoccupation with the transitional phase and the myth of Ogun forms the central theme of the plays like *The Strong Breed* and *Death and The King's Horseman*. Olunde's wilful death reminds us of the Ogunnian achievement. In addition to this, Olunde shows a significant control and

balance from the moment he appears in the play till his death. His conversation with Jane Pilkings, his assertion that Yoruba ritual is far superior to the actions of the prince, his confidence in the will power of his father, his view of death and finally the acceptance of ritual death – all these reveal the Ogunnian characteristics. It is aptly pointed out by Richard M. Ready in his article, “Through the Intricacies of the Fourth stage” that “From his first appearance in Act 4, Olunde represents the balance and arrangement of Ogun that mark the successful bridging of transition Under the impetus of Soyinka’s dramatic theory, we are encouraged to admire Olunde for his enactment of Ogun’s unique assertion. Ogun not only dared to look into the traditional essence but triumphantly bridged it with knowledge, with art, vision and the mystic creativity of science – a total and profound hubristic assertiveness that is beyond parallel in Yoruba experience” (720).

Death and The King’s Horseman is an illustration of what Soyinka has conceptualized in *Myth Literature and African World*. “The Fourth Stage affords us a way through to the understanding of the play. No doubt, the shortest and most accurate interpretation is that which is given by Ready. “The essay clearly invites us to see Elesin and Olunde as contrasting figures. Elesin as failed Ogun and Olunde as the successful one” (714). An especially appropriate and authentic explanation regarding the fate of Elesin is that which has been given by Soyinka himself in his interview with Anthony Appiah:

We believe that there are various areas of existence, all of which interact, interlock in a pattern of continuity: The world of the ancestor, the world of the living and the world of the unborn. The

process of transition among these various worlds is a continuing one and one which is totally ameliorated. For instance, the function of ritual, of sacrifice, whether it's ram or chicken the function of seasonal ceremonies is in fact allied to the ease of transition among these various world. [. . .] And so for Elesin the difficulty does exist as a human being within this world. But he is been brought up to believe, and his whole community believes, in the existence of these various worlds which are secure and even concrete in their own terms. And his failure to make that transfer from one to the other, that really is the tragedy of Elesin (776).

The formidable depth and complexity in Soyinka's works often arises from his deep mental association with the cultural paradigms of his people, the Yoruba, their mores, their myths, and above all, their rituals. So it is only natural that ritual plays such a crucial role both as an ideological strategy and as a formal category in most of his works. We find that almost all the plays abound with ritualistic overtones. The death of Eman, The protagonist of *The Strong Breed*, the killing of the Old Man in *Madmen and Specialists*, the mental and physical destruction of Sekoni in *The Interpreters*, and the death of the Professor in *The Road* are examples of the incidents which are ritualistic in their overtones. Even though all the works mentioned above have strong ritualistic overtones "it is in *Death and The King's Horseman* that we find Soyinka's most explicit deployment of ritual both as an organising principle and as a surgical instrument for prizing open a peoples collective unconsciousness at a crucial moment of their historical development" (Williams 69).

Soyinka's plays are explorations into many irksome questions of postcolonial history such as culture clash, corruption, creative-destructive duality in man, craze for power, the selfishness of man, etc. These problems are dramatized by returning to his own philosophical home base, by going back to ritualistic roots. It is from these ritualistic roots that visions of modern experience are drawn. Soyinka's works probe into Yoruba lore and mythology and show a deep interest in ritual form. "If Wole Soyinka's dramatic reputation today is largely as a mytho-poet with an abiding proclivity for the ritual form it was *A Dance of the Forests* and *Death and the King's Horseman* that decisively announced this with its deep immersion in and creative plunder of Yoruba lore, mythology, performance traditions and thought systems." (Williams 74) Myth and folklore have been the source and mainspring of a writer's social, moral and aesthetic perception in Africa. Every situation in African life is accompanied by music and dance. Traditional drama also used to depend upon the relief of laughter and the catharsis of ritual. But whereas the traditional artist submits identity to art, Soyinka imposes his own personality in the insistence on either highlighting specific aspects of ritual or creating other patterns entirely within the conventional mould. Femi Osofisan points out: "His (Soyinka's) drama thus becomes at its best a symbiosis of rhetorical and ritualistic traditions, fusing an essentially intellectual preoccupation with the structural machinery of rite" (164). This is most successfully realized in *Death and The King's Horseman*. In almost all the plays of Soyinka, religious festivals and New Year rituals and their attendant external features are so integrally united and fashioned with themes of political significance or cultural or religious clashes. His works are well known for the celebration of different type of

rituals. *The Strong Breed*, *A Dance and Kongi's Harvest* employ purification rituals. *The Bachae*, and *Death and the King's Horseman* also employ rituals. These plays richly use such devices as drumming, singing, dancing, feasting and sacrifice. In using these elements, the dramatist is seeking to create anew the ritual atmosphere.

The Strong Breed and *Death and The King's Horseman* are among the most African of Soyinka's plays. Here Soyinka makes his best use of proverbs, music, mask and dance. Ritual, song, storytelling, masque, mimicry and dance, pervade the plays. Elesin's all important dance into the passage to benefit his race, the use of proverbs, the significance of sacrifice – all these make *Death and The King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*, Soyinka's ritualistic dramas, the African plays. The early scene where Elesin prepares and is prepared for the ceremonial death is rich with dance, music, and incantatory and metaphorical language. A magical ritualistic effect is produced from the beginning of the play till the end, for the characters as well as the audience. It is significant that the ritual of the horseman's death becomes very closely connected with the ritual of his union with a new bride.

The second act in the play reveals to us the preparations made by Pilkings and his wife Jane for an evening ball in the ancestral dress of 'egungun'. The reaction of Amusa and other natives heighten the ritual. The third act has three subsections. The characters are placed in situations which are either ritual or conscious play-acting. The first subsection begins when the women surround Amusa and his men and they try to mock him out of his authority through ridicule and mimicry. The second subsection tells us of the

marriage rite, the union of life and the seeds of passage contemplated in the first act but not yet completed. The third section seeks to complete the enactment of the main ritual of Elesin willing himself to death. The horseman entering the passage deep in trance is the true ending of the initial ritual which is designed to emphasise both will and order. Soyinka mixes the scenes involving Elesin and those featuring the colonial authorities. The dance and festivity in the colonial scenes provide an ironic contrast to Elesin and his retinue's ritual dancing. The tango that the Pilkingses are dancing looks superficial and hollow in comparison with the ritual dance of Elesin and others. Soyinka seems to suggest in a subtle piece of satire that the colonizers are not merely contemptuous of the indigenous culture, they have another view of life that is different, uncomprehending and hostile to that of the natives. Finally, toward the fifth act the initial rite of ritual dance is partially reenacted but under remarkably changed conditions. Bowman explains it thus: "the prison well has replaced the market place; shame has replaced honour and Elesin finds no longer as one whose name would be an honoured memory but an eater of leftovers" (82).

To develop the theme of ritual closure Soyinka integrates Western and Yoruba dramatic techniques. The only reintegration of European and African worlds that occurs in *Death and The King's Horseman* is accomplished by Olunde. He returns from Europe to bury his father according to set procedure. He ends by entering into the passage to save his father's face. Thus he proves that he is more a child of tradition than his own father, who had never gone abroad but who had apparently disowned his son for doing so. Joan Hepburn aptly remarks thus in his article, "Mediators of Ritual closure."

It is he who draws comparison between the Western and Yoruba traditions. Yorubas perform rituals only to let their race survive. Their rituals are performed with this intention. Similarly, the Europeans indulge in certain other methods; the ball, mask and the war which are the British ways of surviving. But they lack the humility to let others survive in their own way (607).

From the postcolonial perspective the use of rituals in *Death and The King's Horseman* is highly significant. Even though Soyinka had in his prefatory notes vehemently warned his readers against seeing the clash of cultures as the prominent theme in his play, *Death and The King's Horseman* by asserting the supremacy of the Yoruba cult, communicates this message to his countrymen that “ritual is part of the cultural dominant.” (Williams 71). Besides being remarkable for “its superb characterization, its haunting beauty and lyrical grandeur” (Williams 72) the significance of *Death and The King's Horseman* lies in being the first clear attempt made by Soyinka to deal with the theme of decolonisation. Perhaps Adebayo Williams gives us the best explanation: “Within Soyinka’s corpus *Death and The King's Horseman* has achieved the status of a classic. *Death and The King's Horseman* derives its powerful dynamics from Soyinka’s first attempt to grapple directly on the creative level with “the colonial question” – a question that obsessed his literary peers on the continent for over two decades” (73). Europeans always enjoyed a racial and cultural superiority over the Africans. This ideological superiority enjoyed by the Europeans continues to cast a heavy burden on the colonized people – whether they be Africans or Indians. Gaining independence does not lead to the attainment of total liberation from the colonizers. The fact that the independent nations

have to labour under that burden in order to assert their identity is made obvious through *Death and The King's Horseman*. What strengthens and renews and gives sustenance to such communities in their long struggle is the practice of rituals. Soyinka has been for a long time preoccupied with the West's disruptive effect on Africa and Nigeria. But, through *Death and The King's Horseman* Soyinka gives this message that colonialist intervention has failed to destroy the traditional culture, art and rituals of the colonized. Soyinka's dramatic imagination draws from this vast reservoir of material and uses the theatre to explore and affirm the cultural superiority of his people. He considered the rituals as the primary means by which he could resist the destruction of African culture by colonialism and its postcolonial legacy.

The definition given by Stephen Slemon of postcolonial literature as "a form of cultural criticism and cultural critique" (4) is well applicable to this powerful, memorable and unique creation of Soyinka. It can be argued that the play, *Death and The King's Horseman*, mainly rests on a difference in approach towards rituals between the Europeans and the natives. The word 'difference' has great significance in colonialist and postcolonialist discourses. Gilbert and Tompkins have used the explanation given by Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin in their work *Postcolonial Drama, Theory, Practice Politics*. If in normal colonialist discourse 'difference' indicates subordination, in postcolonial discourses it is a sign of unique power and identity. Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin have tried to explain it in the best manner possible: "'Difference', which in colonialist discourse connotes a remove from a normative European practice, and hence functions as a marker of subordination, is for postcolonial analysis the correspondent

marker of identity, voice and hence empowerment” (Gilbert and Tompkins 11) *Death and The King's Horseman* is an evidence of the fact that Soyinka has succeeded in recognizing this distinction between differences which, if not recognized, he knew will recreate the “hierarchies, misreadings, silencings” (Gilbert and Tompkins 14) that are part of imperial enterprise. This distinction between differences is present in almost all the works of Soyinka. *Madmen and Specialists*, *A Dance Of The Forests*, *The Strong Breed*, *The Lion and the Jewel* and almost all the works of Soyinka are based on this distinction. In this compassionate masterpiece, Soyinka has, as Bernth Lindfors points out, definitely succeeded in “beating whiteman at his own game” (Beating 120).

While analyzing *Death and The King's Horseman* one has to keep in mind the warning of Soyinka against the reductionist tendency of the readers in regarding the play as projecting the clash between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized. The author's note reads that such a tendency “presupposes a potential equality in every given situation of the alien culture and the indigenous, on the actual soil of the latter” (6). But the readers can never fail to notice the aspect of cultural resistance underlying the more obvious metaphysical theme. It is true that Soyinka has not depicted a direct clash between the alien and the native culture. But there is portayed, the intrusion of alien culture which tries to prevent the natives from practising their culture. How the Europeans encroach on their freedom and space in order to alienate them and thereby to subordinate them is also clearly depicted. The imperial masters are determined to alienate them and make them transformed civilized human beings by distancing them from their own tradition. It is apt to bring in here a quotation from the article by Jasbir Jane,

“Problems of Postcolonial Literatures and Other Essays” from the book of the same title:

The colonial period not only created a sense of alienation from the native cultural tradition, but also ingrained an attitude of subjection. There is a division at several different levels: a division between the world of ideas and one of reality and a division in the self. By placing the norm, the measuring stick outside the native society, it has taken away its center from it, a kind of hatred for the self has been allowed to grow (3).

Soyinka has depicted the lives of the Pilkingses and that of Olunde together in order to emphasise the point that the white masters have failed to create a feeling of inferiority complex and hatred in Olunde. There is the indirect warning in his prefatory notes against regarding the alien culture of Pilkingses as equal to the indigenous culture on the actual soil of the latter. With these introductory lines, he constructs his powerful play to assert his argument that the cultural supremacy of the natives can never be questioned. By placing the events in the lives of the Pilkingses and Olunde side by side Soyinka has dramatized through *Death and The King's Horseman*, “the indestructible character of the cultural resistance of the masses of people when confronted with foreign domination” (Cabral qtd. In Young 285). We find here culture serving as both resistance and as a means for the liberation of the natives.

The colonial power in the play is represented by Jane Pilkings and Simon Pilkings. Simon Pilkings considers himself as the civiliser who can see Yoruba rituals only as something primitive or regressive. It is his

intrusion-the intrusion of alien culture-that prevents Elesin from committing ritual suicide. Simon Pilkings' contempt towards the native customs and traditions is obvious from his reference to the holy water as 'nonsense' (31). Through Simon Pilkings we see the attempt of the colonizer to undervalue the religion of the natives over Christianity. This was the first step towards cultural colonialism. Ngugi Wa Thing'O has remarked, in *Decolonising the Mind* that "Colonialism's most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others" (16).

By intervening in the customs and rituals of the natives and by preventing ritual suicide from taking place what Pilkings, like a typical imperialist officer intended was to make them appear as, "less human and less civilized and convert them to a headless mass" (Boehmer 78). They are transformed into beings "in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality." (Fanon 18). This is what is exactly implied by the term colonization. A country is colonized only when its people "internalize their defeat and start imitating or following their rulers winningly" (Macleod 88). The attitude of Simon Pilkings and his group involved the complete negation of the most elementary rights of the natives. If at all an attempt is made to understand the indigenous culture, it is only done with an intention to manipulate, repress and destroy them. Simon Pilkings clearly represents the ideas illustrated by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "Colonialism was a denial of all culture, history and value outside the colonizers frame, in short a systematic

negation of the other person” (200). They neglect Elesin and his beliefs. They neglect Olunde too. Hence *Death and The King's Horseman* projects Soyinka's realization of “the capacity of colonialism to undermine psychologically those charged with ensuring the well-being and continuity of the culture” (Crow 14).

Simon Pilkings by putting on the garb of a civilizer tried to convince Elesin and Olunde that their world was uncivilized and barbaric and Europe was “the site of civilisational plenitude” (Gandhi L. 15). By educating Olunde, Simon Pilkings hoped that he can systematically and gradually “cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the non-west” (Gandhi L. 16). He hoped to colonise Olunde and thereby all others both physically and mentally. As Nandy puts it, “Colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all (so that) the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside in structure and in minds” (XI).

Through *Death and The King's Horseman*, Soyinka proves how all such efforts of the white imperialists to control the natives, to impose their religion, education and power by severing the umbilical links of the natives were resisted and finally destroyed. The play leads to the apprehension of the African world and African culture by taking reference points from within. It is a dramatization of the effectiveness of cultural resistance of the people who use their own culture “as a bulwark in preserving their identity” (Cabral qtd. in Young 285). These natives who are treated as ‘the other’ by the colonizers overcome the psychological complexes engendered by colonial exploitation and recover their personalities as Africans. In Olunde and Elesin

we have the examples of psychological reconstruction taking place as a result of the contact with the colonizers and asserting cultural identity and dignity.

Soyinka has made an attempt through *Death and The King's Horseman*, "to confront on a creative level the arrogance and cultural chauvanism of Western imperialism" by counterposing "the dominant culture of the ancient Oyo Kingdom against the equally hegemonic culture of the white invaders" (Williams 77). Here we find all the characters representing Africa – both the educated as well as the uneducated – disregarding the West and its system of education. From Iyaloja to Olunde, none is overawed by the claims of the imperial masters as having cultural or racial superiority. The Pilkings and his men might have expected that, like most educated Africans, Olunde also, after his education in missionary school, might have accepted the savagery of his own past and the superiority of Western civilizations. Instead, he gains strong personal courage and capacity to objectively analyse the two contrasting worlds of the colonizer and the colonized. By becoming observant, analytical and perceptive after his education, he is able to see through the hypocrisy and shallowness of the Westerners and understand the quality of his own culture and tradition. He holds not only the rituals of his culture but even the ethnic ancestral dress in high esteem. His loyalty to his culture is obvious from the very first scene itself. Elesin remarks: "A hive is never known to wander. An Anthill / Does not desert its roots. . . / Coiled / To the navel of the world is that / Endless cord that links ^{us} ~~is~~ all / To the great Origin. If I lose my way / The trailing cord will bring me to the roots" (62). Quite contrary to the expectations of the

Pilkings and his men, what Olunde does through his education is to expose “the myth of white superiority” (Bhambani 206).

Olunde continuously reminds the Europeans that they are only exposing their Eurocentric arrogance and ignorance by speaking in derogatory terms about the African rituals and rites. He feels that “they have no respect for what they find incomprehensible” and “saw nothing finally, that gave you the right to pass judgement on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all” (54). When Elesin Oba fails to commit ritual suicide, Olunde sacrifices his own life to save his tribe. It is an attempt made by him to reestablish the severed links with his roots. It is a highly symbolic act when interpreted from a native’s position. It is a symbol of the natives’ quest for identity, a symbol of their struggle against colonialists. To quote Jasbir Jain, “Motivated variously, perhaps by a need to trace one’s origins as a protest against inequality, a need to free oneself from cultural domination, to prove one’s credentials and in order to seek self assurance, the newly independent countries turned to their own traditions” (“Problems” 7).

Soyinka understood that the native improvement which colonization promoted could not in any circumstances take place at the expense of European superiority. They educated the natives believing fully that the colonized people – both educated as well as uneducated – would always remain secondary, weak, abject and ^oOther to the European. The colonizers had absolute faith in the fact that the African intellectual academy will remain subordinate to the Europeans. But Olunde the physician, by committing the ritual suicide and by fulfilling the task left unfulfilled by Elesin proves that the efforts of the Europeans to alienate the natives from

their environment, their traditions and their customs will never succeed. Soyinka through Olunde once again avers the argument that he could never digest the slogan of the imperialists that “~~the~~ former (British) dominate: The latter (colonized) must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power” (Said 35). By going on exile to a foreign land to study, Olunde realizes the value of his tradition. To quote Parthasarathy from “Rough Passage”, “There is something to be said for exile: you learn roots are deep” (17). His words to Mrs. Pilkings are highly significant: “You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand (50).” On another occasion he remarks to Mrs. Pilkings: “You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you” (53).

Soyinka understood that Europeans really intended to use education as the most appropriate ideological apparatus of the state in order to assert certain values as the best or most true. The colonizers used educational institutions mainly to propagate their ideas, their prominence and superiority so that they could easily maintain colonial power. The intention of the white men was to create among the people the colonizer’s mentality. Education as it was given in their institutions mainly served colonial interests. For the colonizers, education was a means by which they could inculcate and transmit ‘civilised’ values in the colonized group. They knew that by getting education, the natives, will “immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become ‘more English than the English” (Ashcroft et al, *Empire* 4). The imperialist rulers could very well grasp the importance of gaining cultural domination through education.

Gowri Viswanathan points out the usefulness of the idea of how “cultural domination works by consent and often precedes conquest by force” (“Currying” 85). This is obvious from the example of India where the British administrators tried keenly to build an English speaking India. Only by creating an English speaking group can the Europeans carry out their work of colonizing them. Lord Macaulay, President of the Council on Education in India put it thus in his now infamous “Minutes on Indian Education” of 1835. “It is impossible for us, with our limited means to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern: a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.” The educated Indian whom Macaulay had hoped of creating was “a mimic man” or in other words, “authorized versions of otherness” (Bhaba, “Of Mimicry” 128-129).

It was obvious that the Europeans monopolized the field of education as their own possession. They agreed that the colonized must be educated. But the process was not reciprocal. They intended this educating process as a method for civilizing the colonized people. For them, it was not merely a process by which intellectual powers will be made sharper but a process that involves civilizing and improving the status of the colonized. They did not find anything worthy enough to be learned from the colonized people. But actually they were revealing their own ignorance and arrogance by refusing to learn from the rituals and traditions of the natives. Simon Pilkings, in *Death and the King's Horseman* was confident that Olunde will remain as an interpreter between the two cultures. He will remain an African in blood and colour but English in his attitude and outlook. Little did he realize that

Olunde will use his power of observation to critically evaluate the approach of the European masters themselves. They failed to observe that he has acquired the power of self and social critiquing which is the result of attaining good education. In him we see “a healthy skepticism about the interference of the Britishers and a critical interrogation of the failure of will in his father which is born from a rootedness in his own culture” (Bhambani 206). Education, thus in Olunde, as in so many natives becomes a life-empowering process through which he can gain command over the language of his rulers, and know their culture and thought. Thus, quite contrary to the expectations of the English man, the native becomes a ‘menace’, a threat to the colonizer. He has attained a double vision – a vision of his ruler’s psychology and culture and that of his own people. To quote Homi Bhaba, the threat to the colonizer lies in its “double vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (“Of Mimicry” 129). He poses danger for the Europeans, because of his very partial and in-between status. As Meenakshmi Sharma explains it.” The curious hybrid product often claimed to “know”, admire, and even identify with true Englishness, thus troubling the very basis of colonialism in the necessarily drawn differences between the colonizer and the colonized.” (Sharma 76). Perhaps the broadest hint as to how to interpret Olunde and his response is given by Soyinka himself in the interview he gave to Louis Gates in 1975: “I find that Europe has for too long brow-beaten the rest of the world, and especially the African world into an acceptance of the very fundamental system (of evaluation) which is natural to Europe. I believe that one of the primary duties of African intellectual institutions is really not merely to question the system of thought of Europe, but to question the value of these

systems, the value of these particular patterns of thought in European thinking..." (33) .

Death and The King's Horseman opens in a market place which is remarkable for its grandeur, vitality and liveliness. It has great significance because it symbolically stands for the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The difference lies in this aspect that in a market place both buying and selling take place. But in a colonized country, instead of exchanging or buying goods, instead of mutually benefiting from the culture of the colonized, the colonizer imposes his culture upon the other. The remarks made by Adebayo Williams are worth quoting here: "What is going on between the indigenous culture and the alien culture runs counter to the natural logic of the market is that it is a forum for buying and selling. We are confronted with the bizarre phenomenon of a culture that insists upon forging its hardware on another culture without making a commensurate purchase in return" (73).

The arrogance and contempt which the colonizers feel for the rituals and customs of the colonized are further elucidated by contrasting the entertainments of the Pilkingses with the ritual dancing of Elesin and his men. They are ignorant of the deep meaning hidden inside the rituals of the natives. They desecrate it by wearing the egungun masquerade as fancy dress. Simon Pilkings sees the ritual sacrifice of Elesin as "a barbaric custom." But to the natives, the entertainments of the Pilkingses like Tango, festivity, fancy dress, ball etc appear as silly, frivolous and superficial. Talking about the tour of the British prince during the wartime, Olunde is actually satirising the attitude of the British people towards war. If Elesin

performs his trance dance and ritual death to ensure the well being of the community, to assure them peace and security, the prince's tour is just to raise the spirits of his men in order to face the war. Actually, as Olunde reminds Jane, in scene IV. The prince has arranged the tour all over the country only to boost the morale of his people: He asks Jane, "What would you think of your prince if he had refused to accept the risk of losing his life on this voyage?" He reminds Jane that Elesin is engaged in a nobler task-by committing ritual suicide, he is doing something which is definitely nobler than "showing-the-flag tour of colonial possessions" (53) and that his ritual suicide upon which the peace of the soul of the dead king and the future of his men depend is definitely better than "the mass suicide" which a war is. In a double edged tone, he satirises the English people for their art of calling things by names which don't remotely describe them" (54). The war leads to a great waste and destruction, not to peace or prosperity. To quote Brian Crow, from *"Introduction to Postcolonial theatre,"* "Elesin's action is presented as being deeply rooted in an organic culture that knows the meaning and value of the rituals. The colonialists, on the other hand, while being horrified at what they can only understand as native barbarism, fail to recognize that they are ritualists too and are themselves embroiled in actions that others might find senseless and barbaric" (39). The mask, the ball and the war are in a way rituals for the British because they are projections of their culture and thereby the means with which they assert their will. They are also crystallized forms of their psychic energy. As Joan Hepburn remarks, "Yorubas perform rituals only to let their race survive. Their rituals are performed with this intention. Similarly the Europeans indulge in certain other methods, the ball, the mask and the war which are the British ways of

surviving. But they lack the humility to let others survive in their own way (607).

We see Soyinka's personality emerging through that of Olunde. Adebajo Williams remarks, "Olunde is the ideological spokesman for the playwright. He is therefore a perfect match and a counterfoil to the arrogance and chauvinism of the colonial administrators" (75). Like his spokesman, Olunde, Soyinka too remained absolutely loyal to his countrymen. He refused to be "Westoxicated", (Hepburn 609) utilizing every opportunity to attack western hegemony in general and apartheid in particular. He warned the Europeans against the danger of labeling tribal beliefs as barbaric customs because at any time they may rise up to the surface to prove their value and strength. Ishmael Reed has expressed it beautifully like this, "For anyone to term African traditional beliefs 'tribal superstitions' demonstrates vividly that Eurocentric arrogance and ignorance are alive and still kicking. The attempts to use demeaning phraseology or to put a control over it would succeed in controlling it only temporarily" (709).

Olunde, in spite of getting higher education from London, has developed the capacity for psychological resistance to colonialism. He refuses to embrace "the sophisticated leftovers of an alien culture" (Crow 40) and remains uninfluenced by "the glittering eye-catching dross" of the European culture. He has understood the most fundamental element of his culture, the essence of his culture. He has attained total liberation from the curbing influence of the Westerners. And he commits ritual suicide. As Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "Total liberation is that which concerns all sectors of personality" (250). Through Olunde, Soyinka reveals

many principles which he himself strongly believed. He has revealed “the effectiveness of education in the co-option of the colonized to the process of their own significations; the adoption of literary standards of the colonizers; the mimicry implicit in the attempts at matching the valorised, dominant tradition as well as a rather explicit gesture of cultural and racial equality with the self-possessed superior colonizers.” (Sharma 79).

Again, the role of Olunde as an intellectual in teaching his countrymen the significance of cultural resistance as a way to return to roots has got great significance. While discussing the participation of intellectuals in social and cultural changes Fanon has distinguished three phases. The first phase termed “unqualified assimilation” shows his total obligation to his white masters where “he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power” and “his inspiration is European” (Fanon 178). The second phase, is a disturbed phase; he is in a dilemma because he can neither accept the foreign culture nor return to his natives. He is slowly gaining confidence “The native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is” (Fanon 179). The third phase is called by Fanon as “the fighting phase” (180). “He turns himself into an awakener of the people’ and by writing “fighting literature” he expresses “the heart of his people and becomes the mouthpiece of a new reality” (Fanon 180). He has slowly found his voice. Olunde’s character is in keeping with these three phases formulated by Fanon. After going abroad and spending a few years there, Olunde comes back to his country and attains the role of the real awakener to teach them the value of their traditions thereby proving that the rituals of his country have succeeded in surviving the attack of colonialism. He dies to correct the failure of his father. His death may appear senseless and a great waste for Simon Pilkings,

the colonizer. But to Olunde and others it is essential to set the world in its right path. It is “a bodily sign of a cultures’ refusal to die” (Gilbert and Tompkins 130). Again his death is important because offered as a ritual sacrifice, the death of Olunde “successfully challenges white history and thwarts the colonizer’s attempts to construct the natives, both physically by imprisoning Elesin and metaphorically by attempting to destroy their culture” (Gilbert and Tompkins 130). So *Death and The King’s Horseman* has succeeded in conveying this message to the readers that in a postcolonial African society the first stage in the process of decolonization is “a reinstatement of the values authentic to that society, modified only by the demands of a contemporary world” (*Myth X*). In *Death and The King’s Horseman*, Soyinka has chosen as the dramatic moment, an occasion when all these values and world view they reflect are in crisis. Elesin Oba has failed to perform his “role of intercessor to the other world” (21). From this point of crisis, the play moves on to its climax when Olunde, a member of the younger generation, decides to correct his father’s failure. Thus the playwright has proved to be “an unabashed horseman of a besieged culture” (Williams 78) fighting a battle against the Europeans (Williams 78). Viewed from this perspective, it can be argued that in *Death and The King’s Horseman*, through the ritual suicide, its interventions and the final end, Soyinka is engaged in “a sublime cultural battle intended to expose the inherent meaninglessness in all cases of cultural superiority” (Williams 65). To quote Adebayo Willaims, “Yet by exploring the sacred terror of ritual suicide within the context of the cynicism and cultural dissociations of the colonialists, Soyinka is engaged in nothing less than a sublime cultural

battle” and “exposes the absurdity inherent in all assumptions of cultural superiority” (76).

Ellek Boehmer has remarked in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures* that the term postcolonial literature can be applied to all those works “which identified themselves with the broad movement of resistance to and transformation of colonial societies” (206). The achievement of Soyinka lies in this point that through his works he has succeeded in “infusing a people with a sense of their own unique identity and spiritually kindling the fire of resistance” (Boehmer 185). Soyinka’s works definitely make a ‘broad movement of resistance’ and take decisive steps to transform the colonial societies. So, inspite of the warning given in the prefatory notes against seeing the play as a clash of cultures, *Death and The King’s Horseman* very clearly exposes the absurdity in the assumptions of the cultural superiority of the West. It is appropriate to bring in the comment made by Adebayo Williams here, “In the final analysis, what Soyinka accomplished in *Death and The King’s Horseman* was to counterpose the dominant culture of the ancient Oyo kingdom against the equally hegemonic culture of the white invaders. His strategy is a brilliant decolonising venture” (77).

The significance of music and dance becomes evident from the very beginning of the play. Actually the ritual plays of Soyinka draw their life-force from the music which is an inherent part of the dialogues. Dance also is important because it is only a form of music expressed through gestures. The music and dance can make an impact on the spectators helping them to reach a state of inner regeneration. Etennie Galle has very relevant remarks to

make about the role of the dance and music in Soyinka He goes further and describes how an artist becomes, in Soyinka's own words, 'the voice of vision.'

Music and dancing are techniques of incantation aimed at bringing out deep psychic forces. Thanks to them, the spectators can reach a state of inner regeneration, a traditional function of the old ritual ceremonies. The themes which are chosen to fit specific social and political circumstances give this regeneration its relevance in the movement of history. The dramatist then becomes in Soyinka's own terms 'the voice of vision' a powerful carrier of energies drawn from "the cosmic will) for the welfare of his society (18).

What we see here is the fusion of an essentially intellectual preoccupation with the structural machinery of rites. *Death and The King's Horseman* exemplifies the theme of Soyinka's vision, a vision based on the African sense of communal well-being. Will is at the heart of Soyinka's vision. The tragedy of *Death and The King's Horseman* lies in Elesin's weak will. The strength of will is seen in his ritual dance which is a kind of withdrawal from the life-force. Such determination marks Soyinka's life in his courage in defying governments, his survival after two years of imprisonment, his political involvement, and his continuing creativity. The revival of inner cultural resources and public sharing of cultural belief system strengthen the writer in withstanding the ordeals of life and in facing an alien government. However, the cultural elements are to be laboriously built up or assembled

because they are buried deep in the alien value system which the British always publicized as superior to the native system.

Like his favourite god Ogun, the protagonist plunges into the abyss of the creative energies. The protagonist serves as an agent of the chthonic will. He reveals the symbolic content of the transitional gulf. He becomes the mouthpiece of the god and also the mouthpiece of his community. His will and his determination charge the community with a new strength for action. The theory of drama formed by Soyinka on the basis of these principles illuminates the tragic vision embodied in his plays. Demoke in *A Dance Of The Forests*, Eman in *The Strong Breed* Elesin in *Death and The King's Horseman*, Professor in *The Road* are example of the tragic protagonists created by Soyinka who are the questers, who daringly plunge into the abyss to face the challenges and rise up energized and strengthened to guide the community. As Steward Cohen points it: "His tragic drama and fiction present us with a dialectic in which self realization can only be attained through the experience of disintegration, a journey into and through 'a noman's land of transition involving the annihilation or dissolution of self.'" (17)

The tragic vision of life as revealed in the plays of Soyinka finds expression in a satire which is thoroughly pessimistic. This vision is based on the mysteries of the creator – destroyer god, Ogun, and on the Yoruba myth of a snake, representative of life and death cycle, eternally eating its tail. The Yoruba myth appropriately explains Soyinka's grim view of human progress and civilisation as a cyclical pattern of folly and violence. This pattern remains unchanged because human beings are violent, selfish and

greedy by nature. The nature of the human beings will remain unchanged. So the cyclical pattern of civilization also will remain unchanged. As Jonathan A Peters points out, "The surface of things may change and harmonious tradition may yield to monotonous modernism, but for Soyinka the drums still beat out a rhythm of violence and disaster." (10).

Soyinka's plays have excellent examples of individual sacrifices for the well-being of the community. It has been observed by Gerald Moore that "Soyinka has, perhaps, always been more of a rebel than a revolutionary, a believer in the heroic individual act which can save a society rather than in a society capable of saving itself by collective will" (*Twelve* 25). Soyinka has continuously pointed out that the cyclical pattern of history is unchangeable with its repetition of follies and crimes. But Soyinka by means of his powerful plays which glorify the protagonists with an individual will actually revolutionizes the minds of his spectators and readers. Thereby he succeeds in evoking the interest of the people in the rituals which again leads to an assertion of the superiority of the African culture over European.

Only a heroic individual act can bring changes in the pattern. This heroic gesture is highly important. It is not concerned with his success or failure. In a world where we see the repetition of follies and crimes it is the hero / artist alone who hazards his own existence in a desperate effort to disturb the cycle of fate. Only he can change the pattern of events.

Soyinka has rearranged the material of history in his play to bring out this message. By picturing the son of Elesin Oba as the educated medical practitioner and by forcing him to renounce education in order to assert the traditional ways of his ancestors, Soyinka is definitely rearranging history.

Although aware of the modern kinds, Soyinka asserts that “the African society can only recover its meaning and its soul by a full hearted espousal of African values and an espousal of which Olunde’s death is meant to serve as an image” (Moore, 20).

Soyinka believed that the political, economic, social and religious atmosphere of the past and the present have a role in moulding the future. His detractors failed to appreciate this radical originality of his vision to liberating black Africa from its legacy of European imperialism. “He envisioned a New Africa that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present on to the stock of its own ancient tradition. Native myth, reformulated to accommodate contemporary reality, was to be the foundation of the future, opening the way to self retrieval, cultural recollection and cultural security” (Internet 31-10-2001).

Festivals often form the background of Soyinka’s plays. He often conveys his tragic vision through festivals. Festivals are usually joyous occasions. Ulli Beier explains the nature of Yoruba religious festivals: “It is essentially difficult to describe a Yoruba religious festival. It is not what happens that really matters, nor indeed is it important what is done. What does matter is the intense spiritual experience that can be shared even by strangers. During these events, sacrifices prayers, drumming, singing dancing all combine to create an atmosphere, an emotional situation which allows the worshippers to come near God (13).

Soyinka’s festivity runs parallel to the gloom that enshrouds the society. Hence the festivals often end on a tragic note. The annual Drivers’ Festival

in *The Road*, the dance in *A Dance Of The Forests*, the new Yam festival in *Kongi's Harvest* are all instances where the festival ends not in happiness but in gloom and sorrow, at least apparently. Similarly in *Death and The King's Horseman* the dancing, singing and drumming which began in happiness do not end on the same note. A gloom has set in the play because Elesin Oba fails to cross the bridge to enter the transitional abyss. It is true Elesin too dies at the end of the play. But he failed to act when he should have acted. Iyaloja says over Elesin's body: "He is gone at last into the passage, but / Oh! how late it all is His son will feast. / On the meat and throw the bones" (76).

Whether Olunde's act has a value for the community is yet to be understood. There is a doubt as to the future of the community "that the future of the community which lies in the hands of the unborn is shrouded in uncertainty" Like the half child in *A Dance Of The Forests*, the unborn child in *Death and The King's Horseman* also raises certain doubts. We are reminded of the prophetic words of the Warrior in *A Dance Of The Forests*. Whether this unborn child too will turnout to be a cannibal to eat his brother is yet to be seen.

When the play ends there is no hope in the present; but perhaps Olunde's sacrifice and his father's belated entrance into the passage of transition may bear fruit. One cannot be too sure about it – what we are sure of is this.

The play ends with a dirge over the deaths of Olunde and Elesin, but also perhaps on the death of a culture. Iyaloja and Olunde have completed the ritual as best as they could, but she is not sure

whether the son's death will satisfy the gods. The question remains, whether the younger generation of Nigerians will be able to save the civilization that their parents in self indulgence, doubt and cowardice have abandoned" (Banks ¹⁸⁵⁰~~50~~).

It has already been mentioned that the plays of Wole Soyinka are remarkable for the abundant use of dances, songs, music and festivals. The setting of the play, *Death and The King's Horseman* is a market place. The stage representing the market place, the area of transition, is given to a lyrical outburst of song, dance, music and poetry. Altogether there is a carnival atmosphere in the play. Soyinka has painted beautifully a picture of grandeur and vitality. In the Yoruba cosmos, the market is important from many levels. It has great economic importance. It occupies cultural, political, and spiritual significance too. Moreover, market place is the long suffering home of the spirit.

Elesin Oba is moving along the crowded streets of the market place, excited and happy, in order to enter the abyss of transition. Only with his entrance into that realm can the king rest peacefully. Only then the world will move safely in its groove. All the natives too are eager to see the ritual suicide taking place because only then the world of the dead, the world of the ancestors and the world of the living will be safe.

While evaluating the significance of the dances and the festivities in the market place of the Yoruba town, as portrayed by Soyinka it will not be inappropriate to bring in the significant contributions made by the famous cultural theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). It is Bakhtin who raised the question of relations between carnivalesque popular culture and the novel.

Bakhtin can be considered “the chief architect of a strategy to remind the authorities of the popular base of parodic, anti-authoritarian, irreverent materialistic culture” (Brandist 1). A flood of material has appeared about Bakhtin’s ideas in Russia and in other countries.

Mikhail Bakhtin, the well-known Soviet cultural theorist, published his major works in the 1920s and on 1930s. Even though he remained critically unknown to the West and even in his Soviet home until the 1980’s his translations gave him a wide and rapidly increasing popularity. His famous works like *Rabelais and His world*, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* earned him great popularity for the ideas he popularized like dialogic interpretations, heteroglossia, polyphony and the concept of carnivalesque. His main area of interest was fiction. He emphasized the view point that each work is a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices or modes of discourse. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, he contrasts the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. He has a preference for the novels of Dostoevsky where “the characters are liberated to speak a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness of a genuine polyphony of fully varied voices” It is in *Rabelais and His World* that Bakhtin popularized his concept of the carnivalesque. This literary mode allows the flouting of authority and inversion of social hierarchies as in the season of carnival. In a season of carnival, people enjoy freedom and are allowed “to flout social norms by ribaldry and to exhibit various ways of preparing what is ordinarily regarded as sacrosanct” (Abrams 63). This occurrence of the carnivalesque can be traced in the ancient, medieval and Renaissance writers. Bakhtin argues that this mode can be seen recurring in “the play of irreverent parodic and

subversive voices in the novels of Dostoevsky which are both dialogic and carnivalesque” (Abrams 63).

The idea of Bakhtin, regarding the development of carnival culture can be applied not merely to the genre of novel but also to that of drama. Derived from the Italianic term *Carne – Vale* which meant “farewell to flesh” the carnival provided an occasion for street parties and pageants. Carnival formed an important source of information for the Caribbean playwrights. Developing from being a spectacular performance, it got shaped and moulded by various African based custom and finally was transformed into an expression of black culture. It also enabled the possibility of social reform by the command of imagination. The Guyanese novelist and essayist Wilson Harris terms it “the dream logic of carnival” (qtd. in Gilbert and Tompkins 83). The view which enables us “to conceptualize through the masks and dances of the masqueraders an absent or ceaselessly unfinished body into which a present humanity descends” is actually compatible with Bakhtin’s idea. He argues that ‘carnival re-acts a gay relativity via regenerative laughter associated with images of bodily life presented through parody, caricature and other comic gestures derived from the mask” (Gilbert and Tompkins 85).

Bakhtin has defined carnival like this in his *Rabelais and His world* “Carnival celebrates the temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from the established order: it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” (10). Carnival, Bakhtin argues, being a medium of the multi-voiced or polyphonic spirit, is antagonistic towards and opposes monologist orders such as colonialism. It has no distinction between

performer and audience, auditorium and outside street. Informal and casual conversation is allowed among all participants. Ritual catharsis and community renewal can also be made effective by the concept of carnival.

The years after 1960 are remarkable as the period that marked the last vestiges of colonial rule. Since the 1960s, carnival has emerged as one of the primary influences of Caribbean drama. Derek Walcott and Errol Hill are some of the well-known playwrights in whose works carnival motifs are used quite often. There are certain similarities in effect between ritual and carnival. The difference has been suggested by Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkin like this: "Overall, the performative force that drives carnival is similar in effect to that of ritual but different in shape; it depends less on a concentrated focus of spiritual and physical energy than on the exuberant Kenosis of the unrestrained body" (86). The opening scene which takes place in the marketplace is remarkable for the way in which it threatens to loosen the grasp of the authority. The women who have assembled near the bridal chamber of Elesin are in a jubilant mood. They have got that mental strength to question Amusa who enters there. They succeed in halting the police. They even mock the white community's affected and trivial preoccupations. Temporarily liberated from the established order and norms, and having suspended all hierarchical ranks, rules and laws, the women and praise singer praise Elesin Oba and mock the white men and police. The market women shame them with their superior control of language. "Go back and tell the white man who sent you to come himself" (26), ^{one} One of the women chides Amusa, as if she realizes that this link between the British and the Yoruba is hardly worth their skilful derision. Even the daughters of the market women are able to defeat Amusa with their skilful use of language. They mimic the

British, using one cliché after another. The absurdity and pettiness of the Pilking's language are emphasized and Amusa and his men are forced to leave. The market women feel triumphant in their successful diversion of police officers. We feel that language here used is able "not merely to speak to the colonized only" (Fanon 100) but even to decolonize the European minds as well.

Bakhtin has considered three aspects of folk humour : laughter, the language of the market place and the mock – beatings and uncrownings typical of carnival. Talking about the language of the market place, he refers specifically to the colloquial language of praise and abuse. Typical of this form of speech is marketplace billingsgate. Quite contrary to the fear and religious awe which were the overtones of the official and strict forms of social relations, every carnival and every celebration emphasized the victory of laughter over fear. Bakhtin remarks in *Rabelais and His World*: "The truth of laughter embraced and carried away everyone, nobody could resist it" (26).

Similarly the men and the women of the market place of *Death and The King's Horseman* are carried away by the victory of laughter over fear. They have no fear of death. It is the social consciousness of all the people. It is appropriate to quote here Bakhtin's own words as to how people are able to overcome their fear of death. "Man experiences this flow of time in the festive market place, in the carnival crowd, as he comes into contact with other bodies of varying age and social caste. He is aware of being a member of a continually growing and renewed people. This is why festive folk-laughter presents an element of victory, not only over supernatural awe, over

the sacred over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings of the earthly upper classes of all that oppresses and restricts” (Morris 108). The inhabitants of Oyo might have experienced the same kind of victory when they made all the preparations for the Elesin to enter the passage. They must have felt a sense of victory over their oppressors, over the British authorities.

While medieval laughter celebrated victory over fear, it also revealed the truth behind things. It revealed the hypocrisy, meaningless praise and flattery that existed in the world. It degraded power. The carnival motif, as seen in the market place, suggests not merely the faith of the natives in their culture. It promotes the trend towards self-reflexive criticism. This capacity for introspection and self-evaluation is the first effective step towards self-discovery and self definition, a process which will invariably lead to cultural roots. Iyaloja who urges the women “to richly, richly, robe him richly” (17) warns Elesin of the consequences of his untimely desire to wed the young girl who is already betrothed to her son. The same Iyaloja abuses him using his own phrases and sentences when he fails to do his duty. She bursts out,

You have betrayed us. We fed your sweet meats such as we hoped awaited you as the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world’s left overs. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down: to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said I am the huner’s dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faecs of the hunter. [. . .] We said, the dew on earth’s surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honor. You said No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the

droppings of nice; I shall fight them for the leftovers of the world
(68).

Death and The King's Horseman succeeds in portraying the life of the market place. We enter into the world of market place in the very first lines. On the one side we have the exaggerated praise of the Elesin; on the other side, towards the end, we have the accusations and the abuses made against him. There is the passing from excessive praise to excessive invective. Olunde who had firm conviction in his father's allegiance to his duty tells him towards the end "I have no father ... eater of left overs (61). Their speech forms are liberated from hierarchies. They are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally. Such speech form create a special collectivity.

Bakhtin theorises that popular festive forms are remarkable for the vision they give of the future, of the golden age. The birth of the new, of the greater and the better is unavoidable like the death of the old. The better turns the worse into the ridicule. It kills the worse. As it is illustrated in *The Bakhtin Reader*, "carnivalized literature takes from the medieval carnival the inversion of power structures, the parodic debunking of all that a particular society takes seriously" (Morris 194). Bakhtin has formulated the theory of novel where he speaks of how it revitalizes stability, inverts hierarchies and leaves unresolved the dialogue between the author and hero "by the carnivalesque way and how it becomes an open genre." Bakhtin has a libertarian and open concept of the literary narrative.

Bakhtin describes discourse "as a medley of voices, social attitudes and values that are not only opposed and irreconcilable with the result that

the work remains unresolved and open ended” (Morris 199). This carnavalesque way of interpretation is possible in the case of *Death and The King's Horseman* too. Bakhtin considered the novel more interesting because of the possibility of a number of voices carrying dialogue with one another. He regarded poetry and drama less interesting because they contain only the single voice of the author. *Death and The King's Horseman* provides ample scope to be interpreted using the concept of carnivalesque. Towards the end of the play, two deaths occur: Olunde, the son of Elesin Oba commits suicide in order to prevent his country from entering into chaos. He wants to save the honour of a world whose order has already been reversed. When Elesin faces the dead body of Olunde, he is unable to counter this direct result of the consequence of his failure and he strangles himself. We cannot be sure whether Olunde's death has served the purpose or not. As the Praise Singer reflects, “we are not gods to tell” (75) Referring to Elesin's death Iyaloja says, “He is gone at last into the passage but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on meat and throw him the bones” (76) Katrak trying to solve the ambiguity of the final scene remarks that “the play ends with the assertion of life through the image of the unborn in the last line of the play but that the future of the community, which lies in the hands of the unborn is shrouded in uncertainty” (100).

Iyaloja commands, “Forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn” (76). These remarks leave the play open-ended suggesting numerous possibilities. What becomes evident is that it is not words or sentences that determine the work of verbal art. It is the artistic vision that determines words and sentences. Soyinka has succeeded in achieving this artistic vision. This vision is constituted by the artist's ability

to achieve an inner understanding of the human being and at the same time to retain an outsideness to that life. Aesthetic activity always involves two kinds consciousness: consciousness and a consciousness of a consciousness. Soyinka has attained an inner understanding of Elesin Oba. He can still retain an outsideness to that life.

Lack of mature political leaders who can lead the nation to freedom and security, lack of cultural perfection and unknown fears of an imperfect and uncertain future are all suggested in the symbol of the offspring, the unborn child that would be a special gift to the living people. He promises that the seed which would be better planted in the earth of his own choice will only be a gift to the living world. But what he offers is something else. Ready has explained it thus:

“To procure his young bride he argues that his spirit should not be burdened by the weight of unused and henceforth unuseful seed which would be better planted in the earth of his own choice and that the ensuing offspring conceived at a critical time, would be a special gift to the living he leaves behind because it would be a child of transition, neither of this world nor of the next. Yet what he proposes is a dubious gift since it is an ‘abiku half child,’ which we know from Yoruba belief and from Soyinka’s other works to be a miraculous monstrosity, a destroyer of mothers and a symbol of cultural deformity” (87).

By writing this play Soyinka has introduced a new type of tragedy. It deals with the ‘death’ theme. It is one of the plays which moves us profoundly by dealing with death. But tragedy lies not merely in the death of

the hero. Soyinka's remarks in his interview with Anthony Appiah are highly revealing:

Ultimately there is a certain passage of the human being, a certain development or underdevelopment of the human character, a certain result in the processes of certain events which affects the human being which has that common definition of tragedy in no matter what culture. [. . .] What happens to a man psychologically in terms of his valuation within the community in which he resides, the fall from grace to grass, that's the element of tragedy (783).

Death and The King's Horseman eventually treats thus a tragic theme. It moves on a profound and solemn level through the mechanics of rite and cultic symbolism. But it also employs the mechanics of popular theatre - that of satire, comedy and masquerade. Soyinka's gift for satire has been employed mainly at the service of his essentially tragic vision of life. He satirises the moral decay of his contemporaries and countrymen. In *Death and The King's Horseman* the satire can be traced to the dance sequence at the beginning of scene four. We are shown a British prince visiting a local club as he makes a war time tour of the colonies. The satire becomes evident in the conversation of Olunde with Jane Pilkings where he compares and contrasts Elesin and the Prince, the two representatives of the colonized and the coloniser. Elesin gets immersed in a trance dance because it will transfer him to the world of ancestors and will enable him to secure the well-being of the community. The prince's tour is intended to create an awareness of the significance of war, which is actually nothing but a symbol of destruction.

Elesin's action is inspired by the culture to which he belongs, the culture which knows the meaning and value of its rituals. The colonialists see the action of the natives as barbaric. But they fail to understand that they are too ritualists and that their action could also be labelled as senseless and barbaric by others. It needs men like Olunde to strike a balance between the natives and the whitemen. To quote Brian Crow "Again it is Olunde who functions as the play's *raisonneur* making the point about the massive disaster that is the white people's war and commenting on Jane's story by pointing to its affirmative quality analogous with his father's action" (102).

The play thus is an attack on the insensitivity of the British colonial authority. Martin Banham in his article "On Being Squelched in the Spittle of an Alien Race" clearly emphasises this aspect. "Thus the play is at first sight an attack on the insensitivity of the British colonial authority in the face of a community ritual of extreme significance. The colonial power is seen to be confused and bewildered by the culture over which it holds authority, and is certainly described as a corrupting influence" (78).

Soyinka's satire does not spare the political leaders either. Though not as overtly political as many other works of Soyinka, such as *Madmen, A Play of Giants, The Man Died, and Open Sore of a Continent, Death and The King's Horseman* does aim its barbs at the corrupt leaders of the country who do not feel any shame at all in leaving their followers to eat the leftovers. Asked whether *Death and The King's Horseman* is a political play or not, in his interview with Anthony Appiah Soyinka answered: "Of course there's politics in *Death and The King's Horseman*. There's the politics of colonization, but for me it's very peripheral. So it's political in a very

peripheral sense” (783). Soyinka’s assertion that there is politics in *Death and The King’s Horseman* is true. What Martin Banham has to say about it is highly pertinent:

Of course like all fine works of literature this play is about many things, but my assertion would be that at the heart of it, it is an allegory about the lack of political will here most explicitly stated in the calm and rational exploration of an historical anecdote Soyinka - speaks of the play’s threnodic essence a lamentation for the dead. But it is also a lamentation for the living and carrying in addition to the metaphysical confrontation a parallel political confrontation – leaders destroying their people in their scramble for the left-overs of the world (80).

Soyinka constantly deals with the theme of the failure of the will to act in many of his plays. In the political sphere it refers to the failure of the postindependence generation of the political leaders in Nigeria who are unable to work for the well-being of the community “Preoccupation of all men in the world seems to be eating up one another” is in the back of his mind when he satirises the powermongers. This theme which can be traced through most of the plays including *A Dance*, *Traials of Brother Jero*, *Jero’s Metamorphoses*, *A Play of Giants* is deliberately stressed in *Death and The King’s Horseman* also. The difference here is that for the first time, he selects a specific historical incident. To quote Banham again, “It may be a conscious decision on the playwright’s part to stand back from the destructive anguish of personal experience and to make his statement through the distancing device of the historical incident. This need not be

accidental in the work of a man with as strong sense of history as Soyinka' (82)

But what distinguishes *Death and The King's Horseman* from other plays of Soyinka which deal with politics more explicitly is that any discussion of the play's political surface should begin from its metaphysical idioms and ritual structure. It may be the awareness of this aspect that led Soyinka to remark in his interview with Appiah that "The colonial factor, as I insist, is merely a catalytic event. But the tragedy of a man who fails to fulfill an undertaking is a universal tragedy. I regard it as being far, far, far less political than *A Play of Giants*" (784).

The failure of Elesin Oba is both individual and representative. He is a beautifully delineated individual character. But he is a representative of his people because he is the embodiment of the culture of his people. When Iyaloja harshly criticizes him for faltering in his path we hear a far reaching condemnation of a leadership addicted to left overs. He could not withstand the attraction of a life of addiction to left overs. He tried to convince himself that the neglect of his duty which was historically important, which was a very sacred one could be explained as legitimate and as the will of gods. But he forgot that the essential duty of the king's horseman as the leader was to withstand the adulteration of the life sustaining essence of the society. When he committed the mistake of rationalizing things he was lost. The creation of Elesin Oba has a grandeur. As Bowman evaluates: "Elesin Oba is a dramatic creation with the mythic proportions of great figures of literature. He has the grandeur, dignity and pathos of Oedipus; the questing anguish of Hamlet; the restless and aspiring soul of Peer Gynt; the arrogance of Nietzsche's

superman; the sense of comedy, love of life and sensual proclivities of Dionysius, and the pathetic rationalizing weakness of Richard II” (105). But finally he has to be renounced because he wrenches the world from its true course and plunges it into chaos. He failed to absorb what was integral to the culture of his people – the contiguity of the past, present and future. He failed to accept the truth that “those who betray the present destroy not just themselves but the entire community” (Bowman 106). Soyinka achieves success and his plays are effective in satirising those leaders who betray their followers without any regard to their duty. “Soyinka stands on the pinnacle of his achievement thundering his condemnation of those leaders who betray their calling and their trust, dragging the people into dung and vomit ... lips reeking of the left overs of lesser men.” (Bowman 107).

By condemning Elesin Oba, Soyinka is condemning a leadership addicted to left overs. Elesin Oba may stand as a representative of those leaders who lack the will power to lead the people and hence have to be renounced. Martin Banham’s comment is worth quoting here “Yet, as with those leaders on the actual ‘world stage’ whom he represents and who also dominate the proceedings and often wrench the world from its true course and plunge it into chaos, if the integrity of the people is to be maintained both Elesin Oba and the leaders have to be finally but humanely renounced. Soyinka may be giving this message through the speech of Iyaloja when she directly condemns Elesin Oba: “We called you leader and oh, how you led us on. [. . .] Oh you emptied bark that the world once saluted for a pits-laden being, shall I tell you what the gods have claimed of you?” (69-70). By renouncing Elesin Oba Soyinka has renounced inert historical scare Crows and ideological dragons” (85).

The Praise Singer represents that group of intermediaries and followers who feel totally lost when their leaders betray them. He represents that group which is “the guardian of culture, custodian of history and chider of misdemeanor” (Bowman 88). When Elesin fails to do his duty, the praise Singer bursts out, “Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from into course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness – you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future, your heir has taken the burden on himself” (75).

If Elesin stands for those so called ‘leaders’ who falter when a decisive action is to be taken due to a lack of will, then Olunde represents the real leader who is endowed with a moral and spiritual stature to face every challenging situation with a questioning mind. It is worth recalling the instructions given by another intelligent giant of Nigeria, Yusufu Bala Usman to the graduates in 1975. “A direct, honest and frank question defines a problem, and if there is the will to tackle it, that is half-way to its solution.” (Usman 89) Even though Soyinka and Usman differ from each other in their ideologies, both of them support a questioning mind. The prescription that Soyinka offers for facing such a critical situation is similar to the pattern adopted by Ogun. They must have the will power to undertake a vigorous journey of self-discovery. But they may not get any directions as to which route to take or how the impediments must be tackled. But one thing becomes obvious- it will demand great perhaps the ultimate self sacrifice.

Many of his works suggest that there is political implication behind Soyinka's inclination for the mythic resolution of actual contradictions. The ritual of *Death and The King's Horseman* also suggests the deeper ideological necessity. The play becomes socially symbolic of the actual collective narrative. In order to unravel this ideological necessity which lies hidden in the ritual we should inquire into "the political reality of the political unconscious behind both the social text itself and the playwright's textualisation of it in his play" (Williams 69). It is difficult to separate the political unconscious from a theory of culture. Culture, as Williams defines it is "the material, intellectual and spiritual totality of a people's way of life" (69). So it can exercise a control over whatever passes into the realm of the political unconscious. The most accomplished theorist of the political unconscious is the influential American Marxist Scholar, Frederic Jameson. From his work "*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic*" two important points emerge. He posits that it is difficult to imagine a story or its narrator without imagining the society to which he belongs. Jameson further argues that repression of unpleasant truths is adopted not only by the oppressor but also by the oppressed as a strategy for survival. The essence of Jameson's argument has been summarized by Adebayo Williams: "His thesis is that since narrative is nothing but a specific mechanism through which the collective consciousness represses harsh historical contradictions, the overriding task of criticism is to confront the political unconscious of the narrative with the Real" (70). The political unconscious is "the realm of collective day – dreaming or mass fantasy" (71). But it is not a simple affair; it is very often difficult to analyse, define and interpret the relationship of an artist to his society. It is all the more

complex in the case of a writer like Soyinka, who is more politically aware, culturally conscious and intellectually combative than many other writers. There are many objections to the theory of the political unconscious as proposed by Frederick Jameson. But it is an effective and powerful weapon for valuing a work of art taking into consideration the relation between the surface characteristics of a work of art and its deeper ideological structure.

In *Death and The King's Horseman*, a work of intense poetic beauty and superb characterisation, Elesin has made all the preparations to enter the abyss by committing ritual suicide. It is against the grand panorama of the Yoruba market place that Elesin marches to perform the important role as the deliverer of his people. His suicide is supposed to keep the world of the ancestors, gods and the living intact. Thus Elesin as an otherwise minor cultural functionary of the ruling class gains historic importance and takes on him a major historical and political burden. The ritualistic suicide assumes greater political and spiritual significance other than its original cultural signification. The failure of Elesin can be explained as “the failure of a weak, vacillating self pitying, self dramatizing and self indulgent Soul” (Williams 74). Elesin is a cultural functionary of the Yoruba state. His failure is symbolic of the failure of the empire caused by “the internal contradictions as well as by the antagonistic logic of the invaders” (William’s 74). Elesin is a weak representative, of a dying empire. He can never rise above the overwhelming historical and social force that raged against him. He is just a faint shadow of his illustrious forebears. So only an Olunde, who is the son of Elesin, can do something. His material and historical circumstances are not the same as those of his father. He is well-equipped with confidence, courage and conviction. As a medical student he has managed to attain

knowledge about the alien culture by a sustained contact. Only he can be a perfect match for the arrogance and chauvinism of the colonial administrators. Only he can tell Jane (Mrs. Pilkings) that he detests their ways. He attacks the superiority complex of the coloniser thus: “you believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you” (53). His suicide is intended to redeem the honour of his society. It is aimed to compensate his father’s abominable cowardice and treachery. But what the end will be, it is uncertain. The Praise Singer laments, “what the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stock and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is tumbling in the void of strategy” (75). What Soyinka seems to suggest is that people should embrace suicide too if it is the only way open to restore the losing cultural values. To quote Williams, “But Soyinka, does not leave us in doubt as to his conviction that, if suicide is the ultimate option available to African revolutionary intelligentsia in the struggle for cultural revalidation of the continent it must be embraced without flinching” (75). Perhaps Soyinka has offered the solution of the mystery in his interview with Jeffrey A. Portroy titled “Actuality, Political Engagement, Literature, Change” about death being an important motif in the play. Emphatically asserting that it was not his preoccupation with transition and the transitory nature of things part of the reason why death seems to be an important motif in his work, Soyinka makes this statement: “If you look at that play very carefully, you’ll find that it really turns out to be an affirmation of life, of the principle of sacrifice, the principle of scapegoat. So it’s not so much about Death... but of the assurance of continuity” (2).

Soyinka has been accused by critics of promoting even romantic suicide to save honor, integrity and dignity of his country. It is here that the ritual of Elesin becomes significant. Elesin's suicide is committed to prevent the king from wandering in the void and to usher him to his new kingdom. It is a ritual of continuity, hope and well-being. That may be one of the reasons for the anxiety of the people about the failure of Elesin. Side by side with this collective consciousness and collective anxiety, there exists, as Frederic Jameson argues, the political unconscious.

Ritual suicide, on the one hand, takes the sting out of the trauma of death. The willing carrier undertakes the journey to the unknown world to release the people from their anxiety of being forsaken as the result of the departure of the king. On the other hand, the suicide signifies the conquest of death. Williams convincingly explains it like this,

For in the absence of visible oppositional forces in the community, death becomes the distinguished scourge and ultimate terror of the ruling class, unconquerable unanswerable, firm unsmiling. It (Elesin ritual) is a socially symbolic act in so far as it negotiates the painful reality of death for the ruling class. Hence the ritual suicide is one of those insidious strategies of survival and containment. It is the political unconscious behind the Elesin ritual in *Death and The King's Horseman* (76).

In this context, we understand that Soyinka by placing the culture of the ancient Oyo kingdom against that of their invaders wanted to begin a decolonizing attempt. More than the correctness of Soyinka's choice of subject and the class of his protagonists what is more significant is "the

project which the choice of subject and protagonist serve” Gareth Grittiths along with David Moody has interpreted Soyinka’s stand as well as the position of his critic, Jeyifo, with regard to the play like this: “It seems to us that Soyinka’s is a profoundly decolonizing project and that Jeyifo has lost sight of this in his demand that alternative project be undertaken by African writers. However the route forward in Nigeria as in all postcolonial societies, is in part through a preservation of what Soyinka has called self apprehension” (81). So, notwithstanding Soyinka’s prefatory protestations in *Death and The King’s Horseman*, “the playwright is an unabashed horseman of a besieged culture, fighting a desperate battle against the cultural other” (Williams 78).

Interpreted from the postcolonial perspective, the play *Death and The King’s Horseman* can be considered expressing resistance to the European attitude to the Yoruba ritual. For the Yorubas, Elesin ritual is most essential in order to set the world in motion in the right groove. The royal spirit may not be cast adrift in aimless wandering. The world of the living must not be wrenched from its course. But because of the intervention of the District officer at the crucial moment of Elesin’s suicide, two deaths occur - those of Elesin and Olunde. Viewed from the Yoruba point of view, the white officer has prevented Elesin from doing his duty. The whites therefore represent the evil tempter Satan whereas the Elesin symbolizes God who is very eager to bring in order and peace in his world. This concept may be just a reflection of Abdul Jan Mohamed’s concept of “Manichean duality” where colonial conflict is posed in terms of a struggle between God and Satan. Like all the other post colonial literatures *Death and The King’s Horseman* is a very good illustration of the three stages of transition which are discernible in

every work of art. The first phase is 'the Adopt phase' where, the writer aims at adopting the form as it stands. In the second stage, 'Adapt Phase', the adapting of the European form to African subject matter is done. In the third stage, 'Adept Phase the writer declares cultural independence. They do not rely on European forms. *Death and The King's Horseman* itself can be shown as illustrating these three phases. The play clearly undergoes these three different phases. Combining the Yoruba stage devices as dance, drumming and singing with the western theatrical techniques like flashback, the play moves on to the final stage where the supremacy of the African ritual over the European customs is declared. Even though we are confronted with the strange phenomenon of one culture forcing its characteristic aspects on another culture, finally the real worth of the culture to which they belong is accepted. David Richards in his article, "Proverbs like Horses" puts it like this: Soyinka warns producers of his play not to transform his metaphysical drama into a "facile" clash of cultures", but encasing the rich gem of Yoruba culture in the thin tinsel of Imperialist appropriation involves an essentially pessimistic and nostalgic view of history; we yearn to be Elesin before his fall and we lament the extinction of the Yoruba in all of us" (96).

Death and The King's Horseman, like the other major works of Soyinka, shows an affinity with the characteristics of the Epic theatre, which was popularized by the well known German poet and playwright and director, Bertolt Brecht. Soyinka has acknowledged his indebtedness to Brecht's mode of writing in a passing reference he made. "I am not aware of any conscious influence on my work. I might aim at Brecht's kind of theatre, just his complete freedom with the medium of theatre" (Duerden and Pieterse, 172), Brecht became popular with *Three Penny Opera*. Hitler's rise

to power forced him to leave Germany, and he lived in exile for 15 years. During these years he wrote some of the famous plays, including *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Caucasian chalk circle*. Soyinka's play *The Opera Wonyos* shows the influence of *The Three Penny Opera*. He advocated the principle of alienation by which the audience could detach themselves from the actors and can view everything critically. The spectator, thus can become actively engaged. He becomes the force of change. He believed that the atmosphere in a theatre should be predominated by reason and detachment, rather than passion and involvement. This cool detachment leads to a correct and effective judgement and action. Abandoning unproblematical unfolding of chronological or the other linear sequences Brecht emphasized discontinuity. The spectator can never be sure of a logical, natural development of plot. Constant disruption of narrative structure, episodic rendering of the plot, short and terse dialogues and incoherent sentences or phrases and use of masks are some of the important methods used to create the alienation effect. Emphasis on the above mentioned aspects actually arises from a rejection of the Aristotlean concept that a tragic play is an imitation of reality with a unified plot and a universal theme. In Aristotle's plays, the audience identifies itself with the hero and the tragic experiences undergone by the protagonist leads to a catharsis of the spectators' emotions too. Here we may find an echo of the concept of Bakhtin which became popular through *Rabelais and His world* and *Problems of Dostvevsky*. The monologic novels of writers like Tolstoy are contrasted with those of Dostoevsky. Whereas in the former, we find a tendency to subordinate the voices of all the characters to the authoritative discourse and controlling purposes of the author, "in the dialogic form of

Dostoevsky's novels the characters are liberated to speak a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness" (Morris 177).

Brecht who insisted that illusion of reality should be destroyed by the episodic rendering of the plot encouraged striking theatricality in stage and setting. By combining speeches with dances and songs and by using masks each scene was made highly theatrical Soyinka, like Brecht before him, believed that the theatre has the potential to be the most revolutionary art form. It has the power to change the awareness of the society. This view seeks to combine ritual and revolution. In one of his interviews with Laura Jones and Henry Gates Jr which has been published in an article titled. "Post mortem for a Death", Soyinka makes this remark about the theatre.

You see, theatre to me is a sociological phenomenon. It involves not only an image which is presented on the stage, it's also the sociological attitude, a portrait of society, the milieu in which theatre is presented, It represents like interaction of responses, processes of thought. It's more than what takes place within the building" (785). His strong conviction about the influence of the theatre over society is further emphasized in his comment that" It (*Death and The King's Horseman*) was a totally new experience for them, and they went away with a totally new concept of society, of the world they live in, of civilization in general" (784).

Soyinka's plays show the influence of the technical devices popularized by Brecht. *The Road, A Dance Of The Forests, Opera Wonyosi Madmen and Specialists, Death and The King's Horseman* and many other plays of Soyinka give evidences of direct or indirect influence of Brecht. *Death and*

The King's Horseman through its short scenes, songs, dances and masks creates the effect of estrangement between the audience and the actors. The spectators are able to judge the events critically and come to a conclusion regarding Yoruba myth, rituals, politics and colonization. He leads them pointedly to the African myth.

Death and The King's Horseman is a play of sombre implications. In such a play, the Western classical tragedian would never think of including any suggestions of laughter because he judges it as being diversionary. But traditional African art makes use of the note of humour both for dramatic emphasis and also for semblance of reality. As Richard B. Sewall has asserted, "The highest comedy gains its power from its sense of tragic possibility and the profoundest tragedy presents a full if fleeting vision, through the temporary disorder of an ordered universe to which comedy is witness. Without a sense of the tragic, comedy loses heart. It becomes brittle, it has animation but no life. Without recognition of the truths of comedy tragedy becomes bleak and intolerable. (Sewall 1)

Death and The King's Horseman also very interestingly combines pathos and laughter in such a way that the tragedy becomes more intense towards the end. "In *Horseman* the mournful atmosphere of ritual is continually relieved by laughter, and the result is similarly an intensification of the final tragic pathos. In fact – and in a way perhaps fully comprehensible only to an African consciousness – the ritual victim himself, Elesin who should be expected to be overcome by sorrow at the prospect of losing his life, is paradoxically the very vehicle of much of the laughter." (Osofisan 162). We are astounded at the author's capacity for "looking at

death in the face without losing its humour.” (Jones 72) Yet another source of humour is Amusa the dutiful ‘native administration policeman’ working under the orders of Mr Pilkings, the District Officer. His character shows a combination of semi-literary and lingering superstitiousness and provide an easy material for fun. His humorous way of speaking, underlines his kinship with some of the other characters of Soyinka’s plays like Lakunle or Chume who are his predecessors. But “no other protagonist as Elesin is conceived as a dual medium of laughter and indignation”. (Osofisan 172).

Death and The King’s Horseman is a realistic and powerful depiction of the sincere and unflinching attempts of the natives to resist culturally the imperialist domination that seeks to understand the indigenous culture only to manipulate, repress and destroy them. Beginning at a very critical point in history – the need to commit ritual suicide by Elesin Oba to save the community – the play demonstrates that rituals serve as an effective and significant agency in reawakening the necessity of fighting against colonialism. The play conveys the message of “the rediscovery of the social system, the beliefs the philosophy of our own society because this in itself means a long overdue rejection of European habits of thought and approach to life” (Gates, Interview). The main central event – the ritual suicide of Elesin – may seem a forbidden event in the view of a colonialist. These activities become subversive activities under colonial rule. But they function as symbols of liberty for an independent postcolonial system. They can never realize that ritual is a central way of transforming and simultaneously maintaining the spiritual and social health of a society. The significance of *Death and the King’s Horseman* as a powerful play of Soyinka is clear from Brian Crow’s remarks: “*Death and The King’s Horseman* can be seen as

marking a peak in Soyinka's career in its elaborately tragic expression of the historical rupture in African integration with nature caused by colonialism" (81).

The detailed analysis of *Death and The King's Horseman* attempted in this chapter emphasizes the significance of Ogun myth as it is explored by Soyinka. It deals with the theme of transition. "It is a remarkable piece which represents Soyinka's fullest dramatic examination of his constant theme of transition" (Richards 88). In the midst of uncertainty and ambiguity, *Death and The King's Horseman* is a play where we are presented with a series of antitheses : "physical Vs metaphysical, British versus Yoruba, personal Vs social and an expression of failure Vs a form of redemption" (85). It is drama at its finest. *Death and The King's Horseman* expresses Soyinka's mythical and historical consciousness through intensely felt local experiences. It remarkably represents Soyinka's attempt to convey the idea of self apprehension through an identifying historical experience. It is Soyinka's most successful tragedy in which ritual closure is crucial. It is appropriate to quote Andrew Peek here. "Its mixture of ritual and modern dramatic elements transform historical detail into a universalized statement about the importance of the psychic health of the community and of the threats to it" (3). Even though Soyinka has concentrated on a particular event which happened in Oyo, Soyinka's concerns are always universalist. Soyinka's universalism. in no way disregards Yoruba particularism . An understanding of the mythic dimensions and the contemporary problems in Soyinka's work is essentially needed in order to comprehend Soyinka's universalism. The significance of mythic particulars determining the ethical and mythopoetic universalism is clearly explained by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in

“The Universality of Local Knowledge.” “The universal is contained in the particular, just as the particular is contained in the universal” (26).

A detailed analysis of *Death and The King's Horseman* has been attempted in this chapter highlighting the significance of the myth of Ogun in the play. The myth provides the living cosmological and sociological paradigm to the play within which the conflicts and dilemmas of Soyinka's characters are to be apprehended and solved. The study has also discussed the ways in which the dramatist juxtaposes and alternates the three separate but intertwining modes, ritual, irony and tragedy.

The analysis also has highlighted the fact that colonialism has not destroyed local customs or traditions. The play *Death and The King's Horseman* stands as a concrete evidence of the fact that we must be cautious about assuming that all colonized or oppressed peoples have somehow lost their identity. It is true that the trauma of colonization and enslavement had marginalized the native traditions. As Gareth Griffiths remarks in his *A Double Exile*: “the African writer in 20th century has been concerned with question of identity and place and has suffered a double exile from his own tradition and from that which has been offered by education and colonial example” (79). But Soyinka, through this play, is once again restating his belief that Africa is still rich in her traditions. He is satirical about the kind of modern writer who ‘even tried to give society something that the society, had never lost – its identity’ (*Art* 17). Of course, attempts by the imperial powers to impair the sense of a unique cultural identity by destroying it completely are portrayed in the play. But a resistance to all these efforts of the European powers “to eradicate the cultural identity by bastardizing it, or by

marginalizing it to the point of impotence' (Crow and Bansfield 6) can be seen in the play. Through *Death and The King's Horseman* Soyinka avers the fact that whatever the colonialists have wished or done, in these colonized societies, which were rich with indigenous cultures, the cultural identity was not lost; on the other hand it has served as a potent weapon in their struggle for liberation.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The detailed analyses attempted in the foregoing chapters of three substantial, stimulating and influential works of Soyinka – *A Dance of the Forests*, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Madmen and Specialists* have sought to test the credibility of the author's argument in his prison notes, *The Man Died* that "Books and all forms of writing have always been the objects of terror to those who suppress the truth" (8). The analyses of these three major works by Soyinka done in the previous chapters have attempted to demonstrate that writing for Soyinka was not only an aesthetic pursuit but also a general critical review of the history of his nation. The political, economic, social and other cultural spectrum related to the national situation have been fearlessly viewed in these works. It becomes obvious that Soyinka is reluctant to accept art as having an objective existence independent of the people, the culture and the language that create it. He regards that both literature and criticism are, at their best, in the service of one's culture and of humanity.

The study of these three major works *A Dance of the Forests*, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Madmen and Specialists* written during three different periods of Soyinka's dramatic career, with three different plots and different sets of characters, highlights the important strands of his wideranging thought. Dealing with themes like love, death, life, compassion, freedom, survival, cycles of repetition and the creative-destructive duality in

man, he has created a host of complex characters. They range from artists to professional men, judges to cheats, corrupt politicians to deceitful priests, a prostitute who enchants and destroys to earth-mothers who represent regeneration and new life. Soyinka not only makes use of Yoruba myths and beliefs in his works but copiously exploits Ogun myth using this myth as a creative anchor in order to explore the contemporary Nigerian and universal concerns. By emphasizing the ordeal-survival pattern as projected through the myth of Ogun and by trying to reinstate the importance of Yoruba culture in determining the roots of his people in order to assert their identity Soyinka is definitely engaged in a decolonising venture. His writing becomes a resistance against imposed social and political practices. His plays excellently portray the active and dynamic integration of traditional myths, rituals and practices with contemporary life and its problems. His works are marked by brilliance, a sophistication and self confidence. At a time when works are read for resistance, assumption of representational authority, appropriation of language and forms and subversion of colonialist discourses, an evaluation of Wole Soyinka's works gains significance. Though not fully grounded in the theoretical framework of postcolonial criticism, the foregoing analysis has attempted to theorise the resistance to colonial control inherent in his works and to examine how his works become sites for cultural resistance. The thesis also focuses on the political, cultural and socio-economic climate of the times. Many of the works display a passionate and almost desperate concern for his society. There is a note of pessimism in his works which is a result of sensitive observation of the sordid reality. As Adrian Roscoe remarks, "Soyinka brought the marks of gloom and misery from the womb. They were branded on his soul at the

moment of conception and his experience of life in a brutal world has served only to burn in the marks more deeply” (48).

The seriousness as well as the contemporary relevance of Wole Soyinka was recognized universally after the awarding of the Nobel Prize for literature him in 1986. It helped in bringing not only international recognition to his works and to African literature but also helped in removing the condescending approach of the European and American critics to the new literatures. To quote Soyinka’s own words, “There is no question at all that I think the Nobel Prize is for my drama. And I think the prize is a recognition of the whole African literary tradition on which my work is based, by the outside world and by the African world itself” (qtd. in Jeyifo, “What is Ogun’s Will”, 144).

From the foregoing analyses of three major works of Soyinka – *Death and the King’s Horseman*, *A Dance of the Forests* and *Madmen and Specialists*, it becomes obvious that he has raised all the major issues about new literatures in English. Besides discussing such general themes like creative – destructive duality of man, cyclical repetition of history, etc. these works also emphasise resistance and the effort towards the assertion of cultural identity. It is true that in his works we cannot find the interrogation of the European ways and attitude in overtly negative representations of England and the English. But in various ways, Soyinka attempts “a redefinition of self and society through a negation of the prior European negation” (Mohammed, “Manichean” 278). His works do play a ‘role in reclaiming the value and dignity of a past insulted by European

representation as well as in connecting the eternal varieties and universalities of a liberal criticism” (Mohammed 153-54).

Soyinka draws upon the religion, poetry and mythology of the African past and creates plays with themes of contemporary relevance. Yoruba gods inhabit his plays. He makes use of the dance and mask idiom which are an integral part of traditional African drama. He combines them with certain Western elements like elaborate stage techniques and flashbacks and produced a number of insightful plays and novels. The plays, poetry and novels of Soyinka show that he self consciously attempted to effect decolonisation.

It is evident from his works that his upbringing and education both in Nigeria and Europe exposed him to the cultures and literary traditions of both worlds. It is also obvious that his greatest inspiration comes from the religion, culture and world view of Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria. At the same time, his preoccupation with the disruptive effects of the West on the African continent, and in particular his own country of Nigeria also becomes clear from his work. But Soyinka has discussed this theme directly only in one of his plays *Death and the King's Horseman*, the only play that depicts colonial encounter from the African perspective. To quote Brian Crow and Bansfield, “But in only one of his plays does he directly dramatize the issue in ways that reveal both the remarkable dramatic power in his capacity to blend European dramaturgy with ritually based theatrical performance and the characteristic quality of his thinking about the distinctive nature of Yoruba reality” (81).

A Dance of the Forests celebrates the first attempt by an African state to establish its own political administration and forge social relations that would bring peace among the nation's social groups. Paradoxically, self-interest and greed rather than co-operation and concern for the well-being of every member characterise human relations in the new nation. People had many dreams about their new nation. They saw the year 1960 – the year in which Nigeria gained independence as a time of rebirth for all of Africa. They expected a decolonisation in all levels – political decolonisation, economic decolonisation and finally cultural decolonisation. But the writers gave them a warning, the most powerful of them being that of Wole Soyinka. He warned his countrymen earnestly through *A Dance of the Forests* that the foundations for a liberated African modernity could be laid only when decolonisation took place in all spheres of African life - in government industry, family and social life, education, city planning, architecture, arts entertainment, etc. In order to generate a suitable atmosphere, the blind admiration of the past, the fascination with past has to be abandoned. The play introduced for the first time the need for introspection and the need of the present generation to be warned about the persistence of evil down the continent's history. It urges the need “to look inward questioning the nature, status and effect of art and the artist in their societies” (Roscoe 53). The play is remarkable for its employment of the Ogun myth and the dominating presence of Yoruba deity Ogun.

Madmen and Specialists, a play written after the civil war, is a grim picturisation of the aftermath of the civil war. The Cannibalism that prevails among human beings, the vulturism of man over man are depicted with intensity here. Here Soyinka depicts man's lust for power and control. Lust

for power is very often associated with “the perversion both of nature and of the forms and ceremonies of traditional ways of using and reverencing natural forces.” (Crow 92). Dr. Bero is a doctor. He knows something about natural resources too. But instead of using these skills to save human lives he uses them to extend his control of others as a scientific torturer. Written after the imprisonment of Soyinka, the play exposes the forces that still obstruct liberation due to their abnormal lust for power. Like the term ‘colonialism,’ power has different manifestations – political power, muscle power, money power, language power, literary power, etc. Like many postcolonial and neocolonial studies here also power dynamics has become the central concern. It emphatically reiterates the idea that exploitation and power politics are innate human tendencies. What he suggests through *Madmen and Specialists* is that, the situation in Nigeria as well as other African countries needs double retrieval, “first from the colonial devices of their past and also from the black neo-colonial deniers of their immediate past and present” (Soyinka, “Twice Bitten” 114).

Death and the King's Horseman is an example of a powerful ritual play which closely follows the dramatic theory formulated by Soyinka where great significance is given to the mystic fourth stage, the transitional gulf. *Death and the Kings Horseman* depicts the sublime dignity of an ancient African culture. It is a dramatic representation of how imperialism tends to disregard a culture's uprightness by sowing seeds of discord among people and exploiting them. It is a play where the motif of death, the numinous realm of passage has retained its central place within the philosophical and spiritual structure. It is also a play which addresses the failure of the older generation of Africans to preserve intact their traditional Yoruba culture and

which pessimistically depicts the futile attempt of their children to undertake the responsibility. The play is remarkable for its lyricism, foresightedness and originality.

From various definitions and interpretations given about postcolonial literatures one point becomes clear. The basic criterion required from a work belonging to postcolonial literature is that it should assert the need to analyse and resist continuing colonial attitudes. Wole Soyinka's works are excellent instances of resistance against Western culture and Western impositions. They excellently project cultural self-definition. The works of Soyinka become a site for what Abdul Jan Mohammed terms "a Manichean code of binary oppositions such as white / black, civilization / savagery, rationality / sensuality, modern / traditional individual / community" (159).

The works of Soyinka can be analysed on two levels. On the one hand, the contemporary situation gets defined through specific details which are directly related to the political and social context. On the other, we have an intense exploitation of the individual psyche. But these differing levels are unified through the use of the myth of Ogun. A critical evaluation of the works of Soyinka makes it evident that the mere talk on decolonization, would never set us far from the colonial hangover. Decolonising is a process for which initiative is to be taken by the natives. Effective decolonisation which may be a long drawn and tedious process requires introspection and rigorous training. It is not easy to free the mind of the nation off the set of values or ideas that influenced them for quite a long time because these ideas have primarily affected, conquered and subdued religious beliefs and values

which lie at the root of the culture. These ideas not only replaced traditional value system but also created a situation in which it was difficult to understand what is native and what is alien. To attain freedom from such ideas and values, people had to have a sort of political enlightenment. Mahatma Gandhi could fathom the full implication of the word freedom. In his *Hind Swaraj*, “the most radical, forceful and clean-cut document of anti-colonialism” (Gandhi 115), he makes it clear that British civilization is more pernicious and harmful than British people. Gandhiji has redefined the concept of freedom in *Hind Swaraj*. He laid emphasis on the individual’s moral strength. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji observes that the individual with his strong will power must be able to gain mastery over the dominating and marginalizing tendencies of the colonizer. It is by means of psychological resistance which is manifested through the individual will power that the colonizing powers can be defeated.

From all the colonial and postcolonial discourses that have taken place for the past few years it has become apparent that the meaning of the term ‘postcolonialism’ can never be restricted to ‘after-colonialism’ or after-independence. It has been testified that postcolonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. It is an ongoing dialogue between two civilizations. Representation and resistance are two areas which come under almost much of the drama of postcolonialist relations.

Postcolonial textual resistance to such colonialist representations has taken many forms. It varies from “the nineteenth century parody of Macaulay’s 1835 Minute by an unknown ‘Bengali’ to the widespread contemporary practice of counter-canonical literary discourse discussed by

Helen Tiffin” (McLeod 35). All the plays and novels which deal with postcolonialism draw attention to the power of textual representations as well as the ideologies popularized through them. At a moment, when theorizing the nature and practice of postcolonial resistance has become central to postcolonial debates Wole Soyinka’s textual representations of it through his works gain great significance.

What distinguishes the earlier theorizations of resistance from that of later theorizations and textual production is that the earlier ones “presupposed a foundation of undislocatable binaries – center / margin, self / other, colonizer / colonized” (Ashcroft *et al*, *The Empire* 86). But the later theoreticians emphasized “the peculiar intimacy of colonizer and colonized.” Ashcroft *et al* have remarked that, “Theorising this complex ‘intimacy’ without giving away the fact of persisting and historic inequalities within those relations and structures is perhaps the major focuss of contemporary post-colonial theory” (86). The remarkable feature of Soyinka’s works is that they depict this complex intimacy as well as the persisting differences very effectively and thereby focus on the major aspect of contemporary post-colonial theory.

Soyinka portrays the society with all its myths, legends, beliefs, customs, superstitions and taboos which are deeply rooted in the consciousness of the people. His plays, rich with the imagery and metaphors of African rituals and customs emphatically announce to the Europeans that Africa “has its own dynamics, a range of historical trajectories and a complex social existence which cannot be subsumed under the European category “Africa” and is not a timeless place without history, or social

change” (Walder 140) as they had pictured it. His works have succeeded in overcoming such limited and limiting view of Africa and in apprehending his own world in its full complexity.

Arguing in *Myth, Literature and African World* that Negritude “not only accepted the dialectical structure of European ideological confrontation but borrowed from the very components of its racist syllogism” (127). Soyinka necessitated the need to treat literature as a cultural necessity. He calls for African artists to abandon superficial, sentimental attitudes towards their culture. Such an attitude is just a reflection of the European way of approach. He turns to the traditional Yoruba cosmology and works within that traditional system. He has been working with the essence of this traditional system spontaneously and naturally, for this is a tradition that still happens to be alive.

This attempt to recapture and depict Africa with her legends and myths in all complexity is clearly reflected in the employment of the myth of Ogun in his works. This figure of the Ogun, God of war, fire, metal and poetry known for his violent temper as well as for his beneficence is present throughout his works. Ogun is a recurring figure in his work. In his plays like *A Dance of the Forests*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Road*, etc. we find Soyinka incorporating dance, music and other elements of traditional Yoruba along with the myth of Ogun to create the effect of cathartic ritual. The Ogun myth gives him a base from which he can evaluate foreign cultural conceptions. Through the myth of Ogun, he drives home the idea that complexity is essentially a part of African art. By means of the Ogun myth,

one of challenge and change, Soyinka advocates a literature that is culturally revolutionary.

From the analysis of the whole corpus of his works, it is evident that they have employed Ogunnian myth and are explainable with the help of the dramatic theory based on that myth. Ogun first dared to enter the abyss that separated human beings from the gods and courageously shaped a bridge from the chaotic elements to span the abyss. This act is highly symbolic. It risked disintegration, and extinction. At the same time it emphasized the need for strong will to reassert identity. Ogun became the symbol of creation and destruction too. Like the protagonists of his works, the poet artist in each play too faces the abyss, encounters the challenging forces, and as he finds his identity disintegrating, saves himself by “channeling the dark torrent into the plastic light of poetry and dance” (*Myth XI*). Each work of Soyinka, like Ogun, enables the reader to take a plunge into the wide inapprehensible abyss of the present life which is characterized by the presence of complexities and contradictions in political, cultural, social and economic aspects. In this post-war age when all postcolonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, when the risk of disintegration and extinction threaten each individual, the need of will to rise above those challenging experiences and to achieve wholeness are essential. Each work, after taking the spectators into the abyss of confrontation, forces them to exercise their will power in order to come out of the chaos, enlightened, energized and strengthened, to face the vexing issues of the postcolonial period challengingly. The chaos is a mental or psychological state when a generation of people have lost the ability and even the opportunity to discover what is their own from what has been

imposed upon them. The foregoing analysis of three of his major works proves that the Ogun myth provides “living cosmological and sociological paradigm” and can very well analyse and interpret the present reality of the contemporary world. Inspired by the awe inspiring personality of his favourite deity, Ogun, Soyinka through his works projects the vision he has attained about life, art, politics, culture and decolonisation.

Ogun, the patron deity of Soyinka, is the embodiment of will. This God, exercising his will power, tried to bridge the gap that existed between men and gods. He sought a way through primordial chaos risking fragmentation. The heroes and intellectuals who are modelled on this deity also exhibit the dual aspects of Ogun. They express a willingness to dare the transitional gulf and bring in a change and face the consequences. The characteristics of the God Ogun and his myth very appropriately explain the focal position of the artist.

A discussion of the three major works, *Mad Men and Specialists*, *A Dance of the Forest* and *Death and the King's Horseman* has been attempted in such a way as to draw attention to many important themes recurring in varied forms. As it has been made clear in the previous analyses the most significant aspect of these recurring themes is the use of the myth of Ogun in his works. Life, in the Yoruba metaphysics, exists on three levels – the planes of the dead, the living and the unborn. Crossing from one to the other requires a passing through the area of transition. It is the myth of Ogun that succeeds well in interpreting the gulf of transition. If the theme of transition is related to the Ogun myth in a metaphysical sense in plays *A Dance of the Forests*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Road* and *The Bachae* it is

explored politically, historically and socially in *Madmen and Specialists* and other works. Paul Lawley, speaking about this theme of transition, remarks: "Soyinka's best plays contemplate the numinous passage of transition between life and death, the human and the divine, affirming the mediating power of dance and music." (qtd. in Kattrak 500)

Tragedy, according to Ogun myth, does not simply mean death to the main character. It implies a great deal more. Tragic moments for the protagonists are those moments when he experiences great conflict while confronting the forces of the chthonic realm. He comes out strengthened to energize his community. Ogun is the first tragic protagonist who crosses the abyss in order to bridge the gulf of alienation between gods and men. Ogun is Soyinka's favorite deity and he plays a significant role in his life as well as dramatic career. "It is through the use of Ogun myth that Soyinka displays a wide cultural perspective and with a style to match Ogun's grandeur and mythic tradition makes statements on human existence" (Ojaide 163). With the use of the myth of Ogun, Soyinka hastened to reinstate the values authentic to that society. Modifications are allowed only to meet the demands of a contemporary world.

It is also worthwhile in this context to consider the revolutionary form attributed to Soyinka's use of the theatre. More than any other media, Soyinka believed that theatre had the most influencing power upon the people. He argued that it has the potential to be the most revolutionary art form known to man. It has the potential to change the awareness of society. This perspective bears certain resemblance to the theatre of Brecht. Brecht had advocated a change in the concept of the theatre as being a medium.

Instead of developing sympathetic relations with the character and identifying with them, Brecht insisted that the audience should criticize, encourage and oppose the actors. Thereby the audience is capable of becoming aware of what happens in their society.

Soyinka has on many occasions referred to the revolutionary use of the theatre. It awakens in the audience a new awareness towards very profound and fundamental truths of his society. In addition to this, it opens the audience up to a new existence. This reawakening affects his attitude to the external social realities. By becoming aware of certain social situations, the spectator thinks in terms of the inevitable contribution for the community. Soyinka explains in one of his interviews, "theatre opens up the audience up to a new existence, a new scale of values, a new self-submission. a communal rapport. (Thus) a reawakening has begun in the individual which in turn affects his attitude to the external social realities" (Kreisler 9).

The theatre should thus awaken an awareness in the audience. It should arrest the ears of normally complacent people so that something explodes inside them. Theatre encourages active participation, involvement and critical questioning rather than passive submission. Soyinka, openly acknowledging the influence of Brecht on him, admits that the keyword for him is change. The aim of an artist is a true representation of reality. His objective is to record the truth objectively so that it encourages the readers to sincerely respond to his experiences. In this respect too Soyinka finds the Ogun myth very relevant. Soyinka was a writer who repeatedly insisted that the Africans should wake up from their state of slumber. They should, like

Ogun, challenge and face the disruptive forces of the wide chasm and emerge out of it enlightened. To quote Thomas Banks, “The Ogun myth is essentially one of challenge and change, not of stasis. Soyinka’s criticism advocates a literature that is revolutionary. What he aims to do is to evoke reality so as to bring about positive action” (1012).

Even though Soyinka’s plays invite active participation from the audience the kind of spectator response encouraged by him must be distinguished from ‘the audience participation’ demanded by the Western theater and Western Playwrights like Brecht. It is here that we find a clear difference between Soyinka’s plays and the plays of Brecht. After reading Soyinka’s works or after seeing them staged, participation occurs intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. But sometimes this participation is invisible and may not be overtly expressed. But it is there. The processes of participation are potentially powerful because they aim at liberation from cultural oppression. Perhaps the remarks made by Peter Brook as quoted in Gilbert and Tompkin are worth quoting here: “Participation occurs when there is an emotional, spiritual, and cognitive relationship which is not overtly expressed: the audience that answers back may seem active but this may be quite superficial – true activity can be invisible, but also indivisible. Therefore Soyinka’s drama aims to make the processes of participation conscious and therefore potentially powerful as part of a larger communal project that images liberation from cultural oppression” (qtd. in Gilbert and Tompkins 85). No African writer has more uncompromisingly asserted the centrality of the theatre’s function in African cultural life than its Nobel laureate and exponent, Wole Soyinka.

As a writer, he believed in action ‘as the ultimate expression of an assertion of the human intellect, as instrument of choices, change, self destination.’ By writing about it, he only states a truth. It can be challenged and if possible changed. Perhaps Kolawole Ogungbesan gives possibly the best interpretation to it: “Soyinka explains only how he is able to function as a citizen when he says that expressions of pessimism in his works are simply a statement of truth derived from a particular situation, but they do not mean acceptance of that situation, nor do they preclude challenge” (187). Soyinka’s own remarks in an interview with John Agetua are worth quoting here:

“The realism which pervades some of my work and which has been branded pessimistic is nothing but a very square, sharp look. I have depicted scenes of devastation. I have depicted the depression in the minds of even those who are committed to these changes and who are actively engaged in these changes. [. . .] I think one should not promise what is not there. Only one thing can be guaranteed and that is the principle of accepting the challenges of life, of society, in the same way as Nature does. Those who are expecting a one dimensional statement from me as a writer” (“When the Man Died” 4).

As a corollary, we can take Soyinkas’ perspective regarding the vision of a writer. Soyinka does not glorify the past. For him it is something that should be used as a point of reference to avoid absurdities and inanities in the present and the future. It is not enough that a writer should dig back into one’s roots. It is not enough that he keeps the connection with his ancestors intact. He should not turn to the past for escaping from the fear of facing

new challenges. Soyinka believed that the writer possesses an inner light which is not available to the mass of his people. With this inner glow the writer must lead his society towards a beautiful future. The past is important in the sense that it helps as a point of reference. From this it becomes obvious that the writer has many roles. He is a chronicler. He is an intellectual. He is a thinker. He is a poet. He is a visionary. He must not only be involved in everyday affairs of his society, he must be capable of looking beyond them: Thus the writer is not a lonely dreamer or a person in an ivory tower but one who works for a better society sufficiently armed intellectually and emotionally to accomplish the task. "The writer is the visionary of his people. He recognizes past and present not for the purpose of enshrinement but for the logical creative impulse and statement of the ideal future. He anticipates. He warns (Ogungbesan 185). In *A Dance of the Forests* Demoke is the man who acts as the stricken conscience of the society. The implied suggestion is that man is mean and noble, evil and good at the same time. Demoke has been archetypally linked with Ogun. He is endowed with the same creative energy and destructive power as his patron God Ogun. The argument is that this contradictory nature in Demoke transforms him into a new artist and provides him with a new insight into things. To quote Abiola Irele,

There is the suggestion that the contradictions of his existence resolve themselves finally into a new insight into his own individual nature and that of his fellow men, a development which transforms him into a true artist, into the live center of the communal consciousness. Art in its deepest sense implies not only a surge of the senses, but also an introspective process (63).

The artist has the responsibility and duty of fighting for his essence and fighting for the essence of the past. The inclination to return to the glory of the past empires for decorative rather than metaphysical reasons exposes a hollow wistfulness rather than a serious commitment. He should show the “courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity” (Soyinka, “The Writer” 13). Soyinka’s emphasis on the writer’s personal responsibility very importantly includes within it the sense of social responsibility. “Soyinka warns against two extremes - a denial of society wherein the writer withdraws into an ivory tower and a denial of himself or herself. The writer must preserve and fight for the essence of himself... if it is threatened”(Katrak, 500). Soyinka believed that the ceaseless striving is of more importance than actual achievement. His belief was that in a world where the follies are repeatedly committed by mankind only such a hero / artist alone can hazard his own existence to make an attempt to alter the repetitive pattern of events and offer a pathway towards sanity and salvation.

It is relevant to remember that the themes discussed in the works belonging to post-colonial literatures include as a prominent one “the functions of art and artists in a subordinated society” (Crow 21). It is clear that Soyinka believes in the functional nature of art as opposed to the claims of those who are advocates of the art for arts sake school. The main purpose of art is entertainment. But, besides this, art should reflect the state of man in relation to his environment. Art becomes functional in making men aware of the evils and absurdities and in elevating him as a socially conscious being. Once he has the power to critically evaluate not only others, but his own self

and his country he has definitely succeeded in elevating him as a social being.

Soyinka had designated the aim of a good work of art as being a medium in destroying old social forms that are no longer functional. He also mentions the role of art in giving the guidance to the audience or readers for a better future. In his Nobel Lecture, "This past must address its present" he had reaffirmed directly or indirectly all these functions. "It must force the audience to join the protagonist in confronting inner reality and purging itself of its shameful past. It must in this way lead the audience to change intellectually and emotionally and to become like God Ogun creative" (Banks, ³Soyinka "1040). He had also assigned the artist a very significant role. It is as if he has taken upon himself the moral role of a teacher or an interpreter "to retrieve his race to recover what has been repressed and denigrated by dominant forms of cultural productions and colonized by Eurocentric bases" (Amin 160). What becomes evident after a close reading of his works is that purgation is a basic ritual experience – purgation of the individuals of their sins and purgation of the nation of its shameful past. By entrusting the artist with such an important responsibility of changing the society intellectually and emotionally, Soyinka shows his preference to "the more complex, aesthetic, profound literature which is more enriching and compelling than "the shotgun' variety which tries to effect immediate social change" (Banks, ³Wole. Soyinka" 1040). Laying emphasis on myth and ritual as fundamental to bringing revolutionary changes in Africa, Soyinka offers this prescription for the future of African and other Third World literatures. Only those works of art which offer the potential for spiritual change and

which are truly revolutionary will prove beneficial to Africa and other Third World literatures.

This desire for a change for the better is reflected not only in his creative writings but also in his political commentaries, memoirs, music and speeches. Any reading of the political dimension of Soyinka's works has to reckon with the thought of contemporary postcolonial theory because his writings are basically a resistance to Western modes of knowledge and simultaneously attempts to create a new kind of awareness not only about the African past, but also about the aftermath of European colonisation.

From this it becomes obvious that Soyinka considers the artist as having very prominent role in stimulating, inspiring and awakening the people to constructive action. The ideas that Fanon has formulated about African intellectuals bear close resemblance to the ideas of Soyinka and his intellectual heroes.

The first phase is a period when the intellectual assimilates the culture of the ruling power. After this feeling of establishment from the native culture, the next phase awakens in him an awareness about the new reality about the greatness of his culture. The third phase is the fighting phase when the intellectual accepts the role of the awakener. Demoke, as well as the other artists, undergoes these three stages and finally succeeds in guiding the tribe through the proper way. Rajeswar has beautifully summed it up like this:

In the first phase, which is a period of 'unqualified assimilation', the intellectual assimilates the culture of the ruling power and gets estranged from his traditional society. [. . .] He can neither totally

embrace the foreign culture nor return to his people because by this time he has already lost his roots. It is here that the second phase starts. Going down his memory lane, he reinterprets old legends in the light of “a borrowed aestheticism” (Fanon 170). The Third Phase is characterized by fighting. Though Fanon appears to have been dissatisfied with the actual performance of the African intellectuals, he nevertheless expects them to closely align themselves with the people fighting against oppression if the situation so demands and become full fledged revolutionaries to launch an all-out-fight against all forms of oppression, be it colonial, neo colonial or imperialist (28).

Soyinka’s education abroad, the feeling of estrangement which he suffered at the hands of his countrymen and finally his return to his cultural roots go well with the three phases which Fanon has explained with reference to the native intellectuals. To quote M. Rajeswar,

Soyinka and his intellectual heroes seem to correspond to Fanon’s formulations about African intellectuals. Soyinka studied abroad and suffered alienation from his people to some extent. He dug up the old legends and reinterpreted them in the light of the contemporary realities. [. . .] Soyinka’s experiences with the oppressive forces after the Nigerian independence made him some kind of a revolutionary (29).

The artists have the good of society as their aim. On an earlier occasion Soyinka had blamed the African writer for an apparent lack of vision. The African writer is persuaded to give up his limitless fascination towards the

past, the historic vision which is inherent in negritude. He should focus on the present, the immediate realities of life, and acquire a realistic vision. Soyinka underlines the urgency of combining the gains of historic and realistic visions. By combining these two, the writer attains the capacity to plan for a constructive future.

Soyinka, addressing a gathering of African writers in 1967 stated : “It is about time the African writer stopped being a mere chronicler and understood also that part of his essential purpose is to write with a very definite vision; he must at least begin by exposing future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present.” (“The Writer” 20).

Committed writers, according to Soyinka, are those guided by their vision. They have a large contribution to make for the construction of a country based on principles of justice and equality. Almost all the works of Soyinka bring out the focal position of the artist within his society. It is the responsibility of the writer to unmask the self-deceptive nature of the society by revealing to it its own nature. The writer can use any method that he likes, he can resort to any mythology, mythic mode or symbol that he knows for exploring the contemporary reality and exposing the very root of contemporary problems. “If the writer feels committed or involved”, Soyinka said in the same conference, “or if he feels a compulsion within himself to write the truth, then he simply has the right to try and build the kind of society in which he can write this beautiful literature, these beautiful words” (52).

The essence of Ogun, the Yoruba God is that he is the god of war as well as the god of creation. Thus as a god of creative principle he reflects the

essence of the poet. And as the god of war he reflects the essence of the man of action. So the usual dividing line drawn between the poet (intellectual) and the politician (the man of action) is a misconception. Like Ogun, Soyinka possesses tremendous will power. Inspired by Ogun, Soyinka has always spoken against injustice and hypocrisy. He had taken the daring plunge to prevent his country from waging the civil war during 1965-67 thereby risking his own life. But he came out of that chaos energized and enlightened and presented the world with four of his major works – *The Season of Anomy*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and *The Man Died*. He has undergone, like his God, the ordeal-survival pattern during his detention as well as the highly critical phases in his own country. His plays show his concern with transition in historical, political and metaphysical sense. He placed great importance on the aspect of the freedom of an individual. Andrew Peek succinctly comments about the influence of Ogun upon Soyinka: “Soyinka is a product of his Yoruba past and present, a child of Ogun, god of creativity, artistry, explorer, hunter, terrible guardian above all the figure who crosses between the temporal and timeless, men and Gods” (6).

The relevance of the Ogun myth is seen in this world where most of the people are blindly intent upon repeating the crimes of the past. From this cyclical repetition of follies and absurdities escape is possible only through the acts of salvation of the hero / artist. It is only through his gestures that the repetitive pattern of the cycle of fate can be disturbed, albeit slightly. Only he can contribute something and that too at the risk of his own existence. Drawing from the example of Ogun, Soyinka has come to the conclusion that it is the ceaseless striving of the hero and not actual achievement that is

important. The heroic gesture as an assertion of will is a heroic gesture. This assertion of will is valuable whether it succeeds in its objective or not. Soyinka bears resemblance to his favourite deity Ogun in his heroic gestures to save his country from the civil war. He risked his own existence by plunging into it and encountering all the evil forces in the chthonic realm. He is still seen fighting against all sorts of dictatorships, not caring whether he is alone or not. Like Ogun, Soyinka too possessed contradiction. He has always urged the artist to be the 'voice of vision' of his time. It is appropriate to quote Femi Osofisan here, "His (Soyinka's) talent is awesome, unique exemplary. This singular personality bestrides the Nigerian theatre like a mortal reincarnation of Ogun the "axe-handed one" (~~170-171~~)

A writer is a sensitive artist. He responds quite naturally, with his total personality to the changing social environment, to the conflicts and tension of his society. As a result, his works may look different in different stages of his life, even though they may have some common strands of thought. The works produced at different periods under varying influences look different in mood, sentiment, degree of optimism and world view. Similarly Soyinka also responded naturally to the collapse of Nigeria as a result of the civil war, to the collapse of its democracy under the ruthless dictatorship of autocrats. Consequently after the Nigerian civil war, his career took a different direction from the one it had promised earlier. On many occasions he had expressed his desire to be a purely creative artist without any burden of the social or political happenings on him. He has remarked in one of his interviews "My horizons on humanity are enlarged by reading the poems of the writers, seeing a painting, listening to some music,

some opera, which has nothing at all to do with a volatile human condition or struggle or whatever. It enriches me as a human being” (Kresler 5).

He has often envied those writers who just indulged in writing and resisted all temptations to propaganda. As he further remarks. “Sometimes I wish I were the other kind of artist.” (Kreiser 7) But as one who cannot write about sunset when there is turmoil and turbulence all around, he had no other option except to transform himself from the role of the artist – moralist to that of artist – activist. He decided, after the civil war, and after the soul – searing experiences of the prison to move from being merely like conscience of his society to a political revolutionary.

The intimate connection between the African writer and the political and social aspirations of the people has been highlighted by Ngugi Wa Thiong’O.

In Africa, the relationship (between the politician and the writer) has taken various forms. Often the writer and the politician have been the same person. In the very process of articulating a people’s collective consciousness the writer is led into active political struggles. Or the politician steeped in active political struggles takes up pen as a necessary and a most important adjunct to his involvement (“Writers and Politics” 72).

Hence the writers were the first group of people to respond to the bestiality and hypocrisy of the rulers after the end of colonial rule. Independence did not bring about fundamental changes. Political repression, mismanagement of resources, corruption and moral decadence of the leaders were some of the threats which the newly independent countries of Africa faced. The

monstrosity of dictators led the nation to destruction and damage. Wole Soyinka vehemently protested against this and portrayed the absurdity of these monstrous beings in his works like *A Play of Giants*.

The Nigerian civil war – the Biafran war – also brought out the dedication and commitment of Wole Soyinka. His passionate assertion that this war was a national evil and his efforts to stop it provoked the authorities and he was put in solitary confinement for two years. The harsh attempts of the rulers to silence the voice of reason, the voice of sanity by the solitary confinement at Kaduna prison led to the creation of *The Man Died*. He could never compromise himself to the tyranny of a military dictator. Soyinka explains in *The Man Died* the psychological oppression that dictatorship causes

When a dictatorship is imposed in your country, the very first thing you feel, the very first day – and it is a feeling that has a totally spontaneous immediacy, free from all mental elaboration – the first feeling is humiliation. You are being deprived of the right to consider yourself worthy of responsibility for your own life and destiny. This feeling of humiliation grows day by day, as a result of the oppressor's unnecessary effort to force your mind to accept all vulgarity which makes up the abortive mental world of dictators (14).

What Soyinka aims at through all his works is an open attack of the socio-political scene and revelation of all illusory thoughts. It is this humiliation caused by dictatorship that Soyinka has been exposing in his works. He can never think of submitting to such a humiliation. As Soyinka puts it in *The*

Man Died “in any people that submit willingly, to the daily humiliation of fear, the man dies” (18).

The plays, novel, poems, political commentaries that ensued show him wielding his pen like a hand grenade to blow up any form of totalitarianism. Thereafter his books served “as a hammer, a hand grenade which you detonate under a stagnant way of looking at the world” (Soyinka, *The Man* 15). They show that his objective is of effecting the revolutionary changes. But he has never shown a tendency to make his commitment to artistic vocation subservient to political causes. We find, on close scrutiny, that never do these powerful political questions that he discusses in his critical essays and political commentary spoil his artistic works even indirectly. His plays may speak of all current issues that he confronts with brutal realism. But they are never given a local colouring. We are able to find the universal in the particular, the general in the specific. According to Simon Gikandi “His essays contain some of the most powerful critiques of political, social and cultural practices; but when they enter his major plays, these topics are allegorized or abstracted, transplanted from their everyday referents in order to perform a larger universal and moral role in the drama of human freedom, a drama where primary goal is the rethinking of what it means to be an African in the modern world” (35).

An analysis of *A Dance of the Forests*, *Madmen and Specialists* and *Death and the King's Horseman* is enough to substantiate this view point. Furthermore as the analysis shows, the plays clarify Soyinka's political vision for Nigeria and other countries. In many of his other plays as well, his dramatic hero, modelled on the qualities of Ogun, helps to interpret his

political vision. As it can be seen, this vision also derives from the qualities of Ogun. The protagonist who can be considered as an incarnation of Ogun translates the qualities of Ogun into action. From this, his political vision can be inferred.

A study of the protagonists of his plays – Demoke in *A Dance of the Forests*, Eman in *The Strong Breed*, Daodu in *Kongi's Harvest* or *Old Man in Madmen and Specialists* – shows them as manifesting the paradoxical essence of Ogun, the essence of destruction and creativity. They destroy and create life. Demoke murders Oremole. But he is a carver. His action redeems mankind – Eman is a member of the strong breed. No woman survives the bearing of the strong ones. Yet when he becomes the convict the community is purified. Daodu may have disturbed the traditional order by the symbolic action of bursting the drum. But he is a farmer who tries to save the state of Isma. Similarly the professor in *The Road* also incarnates destructive and creative qualities. His activities on the road which prove dangerous to humanity stands a destructive action. But his quest to know the word which will definitely reveal the mystery of life and death serves as a creative action. Soyinka portrays his artistic heroes as undergoing the terrifying experience of self-disintegration as well as reassembling like the deity Ogun. The Ogun like hero is in pursuit of his vision. So he, like his god Ogun challenges “the abyss straddling the horrors of a transitional world” (*Myth XV*).

This paradoxical nature of the heroes and the challenging attitude are essentially helpful in the assessment of the author's political vision. Such a nature is useful in understanding the question of ideal leadership not only for Nigeria but also for other countries of the world. Through the creative-

destructive duality that exists in Ogun hero, the dramatist either “celebrates or perpetuates or vilifies and replaces the existing one.” (*Myth XVI*).

Like Ogun, who dared the transitional abyss, the politicians also need great will-power to face the changing situations which are really challenging. Soyinka’s plays provide immense store of information to the politicians as well.

In the disordered upheaval of Nigerian society, passing through the perilous transitional gulf from colonization to independence, from rural to urban culture, tradition to modernity, leaders are needed with the strength of will to link the past with the future, the material with the spiritual, the human with the divine (Morrison 65).

It is very interesting to observe that Soyinka’s vision of the political future of his country was also as gloomy as his views of man and history. In his interview with Jane Wilkinson in 1992 Soyinka burst out. “I find the political situation very frustrating” (2). So his works took a different direction. We find him defending courageously justice, freedom and truth in “words of iron and sentences of thunder.” Perhaps it is for this sense of integrity shown by Soyinka for the continuous and profound reflection on the contemporary African situation” that Soyinka was awarded the nobel prize.

Soyinka attacked corruption, injustice and hypocrisy wherever he found it. He is always with the oppressed; his religion is freedom.

Here is a writer whose religion is man’s freedom, whose integrity is his shining armour and whose will knows no surrender – except

to tribal gods and his own conviction. He rejected dictatorship of any kind – benevolent and malevolent – and emphatically reminded his people of their rights for justice and freedom. He was “every dictator’s nightmare.

In an article with the same title, Soyinka proclaimed that: The message, whether from Yoruba elders or the founding fathers, the bible or the Koran is the same: Humans have rights.” (Soyinka, “Every Dictator” 90). He represented and symbolized Africa. He is a symbol of African literature and a symbol of African resistance. All his works, especially those that were written after the Nigerian Civil war and his detention – plays, poems, novels, memoirs, autobiographies – have projected him as “a champion of the underdog, enemy of the establishment”. He was very much conscious of the turbulence in the field of politics. Thus we find him expressing great anxiety as to the political future of his country through his memoirs and commentaries. But he never forgets the role of a committed artist even while expressing indignation at the political situation of Africa. All his post-war writings reveal his unsparing protest against the buffoonery and gross materialism of most African leaders. The dire need to reawaken and empower the millions of citizens of Africa to face the political exploitation of ruthless dictators has prompted Soyinka to explore active artistic media like music and film as well. He wants to strike the message home more directly by resorting to these media.

As demonstrated by the three plays discussed above it becomes apparent that ritual pervades almost all the plays of Soyinka. The cleaning ritual and purification rites are also used as a dramatic device in his works. In

a society, rituals play a vital role in maintaining its spiritual and social health. In addition to this, the rituals when used in a play keep the spectator aesthetically engaged. Quite Often, the rituals used in Soyinka's works are linked with the political elements of the play. His plays make use of festivals in addition to such major symbols as bridges, domes etc. It is through the use of festivals that "Soyinka's awareness of the dynamic relationship between the past and the present is revealed Ogunbesan 'Wole Soyinka: The Past' 177). Festivals help the revival of the racial memory. It also symbolizes the subversion of colonial sense of hierarchy. *A Dance of the Forests* is set in a festive occasion, the Independence celebrations of Nigeria. *The Strong Breed* has the New Year Festival. *The Road* depicts the annual Driver's Festival. In *Kongi's Harvest*, the festival of the New Yam plays a significant role. A festival gives an occasion to the participants to forget their social political and cultural hierarchy and to see themselves as they are, to express their inner feelings without any inhibition about political freedom or about inequity and oppression. The festivals used in the plays of Soyinka can obviously be related to the idea of Bakhtin where he sees them as representing "licensed inversion of accepted norms." (Gilbert and Tompkins 85). They represent the black culture. Besides, they also serve 'to dismantle the corpus of imperial culture' (Gilbert and Tompkins 85). Through the combination of ritual and carnival tropes, a combination of the sacred with the profane is made. The link between art and tradition which is necessary for decolonisation is made. Similarly a certain political ambience is also suggested by means of the carnival. In *A Dance of the Forests* the gathering of the tribes in order to celebrate a joyous occasion provides ample scope for a critical evaluation of the past as well as a detached observation of the

present. The court of Mata Kharibh exposes the corruption and hypocrisy of the past. It serves as a reminder to the new generation about the crimes that it might commit in the future. The glorious past with its glamorous rulers are exposed. Thereby a dismantling of the hierarchical corpus of a supposed to be superior race is performed. The exaggerated glory of the past is exposed so a that the errors and absurdities may not be reenacted in the future.

Similarly *Death and the King's Horseman*, one of the greatest plays written by Soyinka very effectively highlights the significance of the ritual where the horseman commits ritual suicide to save the king as well as the community. Here this ritual as well as the festivities of the market represent a struggle against inequity and oppression. Though *Madmen and Specialists* is categorized by Soyinka as a play with less ritual, the mendicants, their parodying of Dr. Bero, his father, and military rulers do serve the purpose of a carnival. An interaction between all participants disregarding their rank takes place which leads to the exposition of the hypocrisy and bestiality of the power crazy rulers.

Many works of Soyinka whether political or mythical, are a recognition "of the occasional feeling of hopelessness. He wanted to expel the feeling of despair by talking about it" (Osofisan, "Tiger" 157). Soyinka has always expressed his opposition to dividing his works into Prewar and Post war writings. As Juliet Okukwo quotes Soyinka's words, "All experiences flow into one another" (19). All his works are an expression of his experiences as a mythopoeist, political activist, as a writer and as a human being; all flow into one another and lead to the creation of powerful works, the effect of which is electrifying. One essential feature noticeable as

it has been discussed in the early chapters, is that each work seeks to throw light on “the tragic masque of human state” (Roscoe 100). Thus each work contributes to the essential unity of the literary canon of Soyinka.

Soyinka is always attracted to the dark side of human nature with its foreboding and lack of restraint. Man always seems to be a doomed animal in his work. Man is exploited and victimized by man himself. With this view remaining unchanged he has given varied treatment of human nature, sometimes aided by his sense of humour that is sometimes light-hearted but more often poignant and bitter. He considers human nature to be the same throughout the universe whether an African or American. Brother betrays brother, man eats man whoever he is. This general trait equalizes the human beings irrespective of the class, race or country to which they belong. Soyinka is concerned about this dark side of the human nature. This both fascinates and repels Soyinka. It is the awareness of this aspect that makes him speak against. “the plaintive self-love and glorification of the past” upheld by the Negritudists. (Peters 7).

This analysis of human nature indicates that his vision is tragic. His plays always portray a future that is bleak. In *A Dance of the Forests*, we are given a prophecy that the future is really going to be difficult. He predicted that the cycle of human violence would continue unbroken into the future. This was fulfilled by the outbreak of Nigerian Biafran war. *A Dance of the Forests* never promises a bright future. It presents instead of “a piece of complacent rhetoric, an apocalyptic vision of a dreadful future.” (Peters 9). His ideas went darker as years went by as is obvious from his attitude when he wrote *Madmen and Specialists* ten years later. When *Madmen and*

Specialists was published, the fanged and bloody future” which Soyinka had predicted had already come to pass in the Nigerian civil war. *Death and the King's Horseman* is a ritualistic drama; it hints at the loss of spirituality that the younger generation faces. Olunde has committed suicide; but whether this is enough is yet to be seen. Similarly *The Swamp Dwellers* gives an unflattering portrait of a well fed unscrupulous priest, the Kadiye. He exploits common villagers. Soyinka's aim is to portray a world where the man cannot trust even religion or the man who represents god.

This vision of the dark and gloomy side of human beings has been consistently projected throughout his works, whether mythical or political. From *A Dance of the Forests* through *Madmen and Specialists* to *King Baabu*, Soyinka's aim is to awaken man to an awareness of himself and his plight. He wants to draw the attention of his countrymen in particular and every man generally to the present meaningless existence. The present is fraught with needless pain and suffering, violence, lies and hypocrisy. His disillusionment is very clear from the phrase he uses ‘wasted generation’ (*The Man* 18). He is disappointed with the results of the ceaseless striving as shown by some dedicated writers or political activists like himself. They “who have given quite a lot of their energy and capacity to energize one's environment find “that their work is like the labor of Sisyphus rolling his stone up the hill all the time until it reaches the top, and instead of it being built upon is given a push back down again” (David 23). These words reflect the frustration and disillusionment that Soyinka felt as a political activist.

Soyinka has repeatedly announced that his pessimism is just an objective expression of the reality. It is only by creating this awareness that a

modification is possible Soyinka's pessimism does not reach such a pitch as to deny man his aspirations. He envisions a kink in the tail of the self-devouring snake. The snake, in Yoruba cosmology, represents the cyclic pattern of main destruction. The kink is the possible hope of escape from the cycle of doom. Eldred Jones in *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* has described it in these words: "For Soyinka history is nearly a cyclical movement, any progress being represented by a kink after an evolution and at the start of a new cycle" (32). Like Demoke, Olunde or the Earth Mother, there is a quest for renewal in Soyinka. Soyinka does not portray a world of complete darkness. He does not forget to show us a silver lining in the otherwise dark horizon.

Soyinka actually expresses his desire for a change by exposing the vice, corruption and hypocrisy in the society. It is true that this change can never be brought out easily. But the possibility of this hopeful change enables readers to notice a stream of light in an otherwise dark and gloomy world. It is the only silver lining in an atmosphere pervaded by misery, darkness and death.

A Dance of the Forests ends with the picture of Demokes' father finding three chastened mortals in the growing light of the dawn. Demoke and Rola, especially, come out of their experiences chastened and perhaps regenerated. Perhaps Soyinka may be suggesting an occasional pause for thought so that his countrymen in particular and people of the world in general can move into the future with a mixture of trepidation and hope.

In *The Swamp Dwellers*, the hope for change is presented through the blind beggar. He may be physically handicapped. But he is a strong force

spiritually. The seeds of rebellion against the exploiting forces of tradition are sown by Igwezu and the beggar. The seeds may die or sprout. So the beggar may or may not succeed in uprooting the force of tradition that brings only destruction to mankind. But the hope is there.

In *Kongi's Harvest*, force of hope resides in Daodu, the nephew and the heir to the throne of Danlola. He plots to murder the king, the ruthless dictator. But the plan does not work. The iron grating that falls at the end of the play is not only the country's prison but Kongi's as well. Both Daodu and Segi are at work inside the country. He has released a new spirit in the land. The foundation of the theme suggests the Silver lining. Even *Madmen and Specialists*, the grimmest and the most cynical of Soyinka's plays carries a faint glimmer of hope. According to Dr. Bero the crime committed by the Old Man River Jordan Man is unpardonable. He has taught them to think and to make choices even in the ugliest of circumstances. At the end, the Old Man River Jordan Man is killed by his son and the clinic is set fire to by the Earth-Mother figures. The play seems to pessimistic. But there is the suggestion of eventual futility of regimes like Bero's. These dictators who rule without scruples may be successful for a time. They destroy the forces of life. But they are always threatened by such forces of life. There is the faint hope that humanity may triumph over such regimes which is for the time being all too successful. There is an underlying faith in the future of society beneath the nihilistic and anarchic tone of *Madmen and Specialists*. Similarly *The Bacchae of Euripides* also ends with a whisper of restoration. Euripides can end his play *The Bacchae* with the painful exit of Agave. But Soyinka's play ends when the severed head of Pentheus begins to spurt new jets of red which turn out be not blood but wine.

What becomes obvious is that purgation is a basic ritual experience. In this sense, all his plays are liberating and enriching. Perhaps this idea of the optimistic note present in his plays has never been expressed so accurately as in the comment made by Gerald Weales. "The inevitable disappointment and the perennial hope is what Soyinka's work is about – the work in fact, may be the hope – and if that makes him a Yoruba, it also makes him universal (4).

Through his plays, his articles, speeches and music the playwright has given this message to the people of the world. The violence, hypocrisy and suffering which form the characteristic traits of the people of this century should be controlled in such a way that the art is only a prelude to a new era of communion and peace founded on honesty, truth and goodwill. It is not easy to bring out this change quickly. It can be effectively implemented only through self-sacrifice attained through self-knowledge. As for Soyinka, he has dedicated his life to resist totalitarianism and to defend democracy. He has never been hesitant to wield his talent, art, and moral stature to oppose the successive military dictators who have exploited Nigeria.

Soyinka has been severely criticized for his gestures of protest against social and political deterioration yet, he is resolute in his campaign against dictatorship and corruption. Perhaps he was following the advice of his own grandfather whom he loved very much. The grandfather's advice is about how to deal with bullies. He recollects his grandfather's advice in his interview with Harry Kreisler: "You don't run away from a fight. Your adversary will probably be bigger, he will trounce you the first time. Next

time you meet him, challenge him again. He will beat you all over again. The third time I promise you this, you'll either defeat him or he'll run away" (7).

Soyinka has never failed to put up a sturdy fight against dictatorship and unaccountable power. He has been a lone fighter in most of his political ventures. But he had immense faith in the individual will power and individual effort. His words in the Seattle lecture are worth mentioning in this context. "It is the individual, working as a part of a social milieu – and this may be a fluctuating milieu – who raises the consciousness of the community of which he is a part" (Morrel, "In Person" 86).

Soyinka has repeatedly affirmed his faith in his country men. With its lofty vision, Soyinka asserts, his country will definitely move from dictatorship to democracy. With his awe – inspiring presence, the wisdom in his face and the rich cadences of the speaking voice, he could inspire his audience and lift them from the ocean of despair to heights of hope. He is the poet, and the prophet for his countrymen at the same time. From his eloquent speech they recognized that their nation has sunk so low and has squandered its potential in a deplorable way for which every citizen should be held responsible.

But they could foresee another day coming from his utterances How much he could inspire them is obvious from the exciting response of the world bank audience whom he addressed in September 1999. The concluding sentence which spoke about "a beacon of hope in the eyes and ears of a new generation" brought his Washington audience to its feet in applause. Similarly, on many an occasion he has tried to inspire his

countrymen to work towards the attainment of a lofty vision and leading the country to harmony, peace and freedom.

In an interview given on 3rd April at Emory university in Atlanta in 1998, Soyinka once again pronounced his faith in his countrymen and in the democratic struggle led by them. Speaking about the failure of writers in instigating political change in Africa, he remarked “that he will always struggle to reempower his people so that they will be given choice and the opportunity to terminate the tendency of dictatorship in Nigeria. Tunde Okoli expresses succinctly what Soyinka had set as his aim:

The essential Soyinka is a revolutionary tiger poised to change his society. He is concerned with societal transition, one which is moving from a state of colonialism, neo-colonialism and military despotism to a new age of political and cultural awareness which ostensibly aims to restore the lost dignity of the Nigerian citizen and rehabilitate an erstwhile battered culture, image, being and society (¶).

Soyinka has never used the word tragedy to describe any of his plays. If at all this generic label is to be used it is with regard to the fourth stage. The Ogun myth and the fourth stage stand for restorative justice. His plays do whisper words of restoration in the end. In his works we see a vision of an ordered universe towards the end. May David was referring to the sense, sensibility and sensitivity of Soyinka the playwright when she spoke of this restorative note in his works. “It is the record of sensibility that even in the house of death, was joyously alive to the ritual promise of a new life “Unto us a child is born” - a sensibility that could turn from the chimes of silence

around the gallows to children's voices and laughter among the leaves." It is the record of man's faith in the human spirits capacity to survive the darkest ordeal and emerge renewed and purified into a richer existence" (David, 'Regeneration' 661).

But postcolonial period is unique in its recognition of both historical continuity and change. Postcolonialism accepts the fact that the political map of the world has changed through decolonisation. But still, "the material realities and modes of representation" (McLeod 33) which characterized the period of colonialism are present now also. Similarly Soyinka knew that Africa, even though it had gained independence, still retained the ills of colonial past. The country was subjected to internal colonialism which meant that colonial oppression was far from over. But the uniqueness of the vision of Soyinka is in the fact that it asserts not only the continuing necessity of change but also the possibility of change, while also recognizing that important challenges and changes that have already been achieved.

Soyinka has been vehemently criticized for the obscurity of his works. O.O. Enekwe in "Wole Soyinka as a Novelist" remarks : "Any work whose words are too obscure for the so called simple, but literate audience is not suitable for human consumption, except perhaps as a riddle" (76). Soyinka is not affected by this accusation of being a dense writer. He dismisses all the Nigerian critics as "very simple Ostriches – with their heads turned in quicksands. We must give them up for lost and await the hatching up of new egg" (Transition, 64).

Chinweizu, in "Toward the Decolonization of African literature" has charged Soyinka of not welcoming the appearance of elephants, beggars,

calabashes, serpents, pumpkins, baskets, town criers, iron bells, slit drums, iron masks, squirrels, hares, snakes, iron birds, etc. in a poetic landscape. He prefers 'precision machinery, oil rigs, hydro-electricity, typewriter, railway trains, machine guns, bronze sculpture, etc.' Perhaps Dasenbrock most convincingly explains the reason for misunderstanding Soyinka, the writer. "For Chinweizu, the decisive point about precision machinery is that it is a European import: for Soyinka, the decisive point is that it is part of the African landscape and therefore is something with which the African writer must deal"... Soyinka would say that precision machinery is here to stay and that closing one's eyes to it simply ensures that someone else will control its utilization" (7).

It must never be assumed that Soyinka accepts "a Eurocentric, un-African Euro modernism" which sees progress in the substitution of oil rigs and machinery in the place of snakes, pumpkins and town criers. Soyinka as well as Chinweizu feel strongly that Africa should be different from Europe. If Chinweizu argues that the difference should be established by removing from Africa everything that is European, Soyinka feels that "the way to establish the difference is to deal with European presence, to accept precision machinery, but to learn to use it in a different (i.e., ontologically different) way" (Dasenbrock 8).

'The Troika' as Soyinka calls them, have strongly argued that Soyinka is not proud of being an African writer. "European attitudes to Africa have led him to confuse two things-our land and our traditions and Europe's contemptuous view of our land and our traditions... our traditions and the European caricature of them... We hope that some day soon he will

give up his misguided ambition to be just a writer and be proud to be an African writer.” (36)

But Soyinka proves that their thesis is wrong and that his works manifest a questioning of and a rebellion against the colonial situation and Western categorizations. It is true that Soyinka's own 'social conditioning' within African setting has affected his works, his outlook and his critical theory significantly. He had spent his childhood during days of extreme colonial pressure. He was educated according to the Western educational systems. He drew from Bible as well as British authors, from Greek to modern European and American authors for stylistic techniques and mythical scholarship. He was impressed by Nietzsche: he was impressed by Romantic movement as well as ritual theory. James Joyce, Faulkner and Hopkins attracted him simultaneously with their complexities of style. But he has made repeatedly clear that he has drawn from these resources not to imitate them in his works but because he had found them resembling essential elements in his Yoruba mythology. His approach is eclectic, comprehensive and independent. Perhaps Dasenbrock comes up with the best argument:

Against the Chinuweizus who valorize only African traditions and the African past, Soyinka has a vision of an African future in which precision machinery and African ontology can somehow coexist. And he distinguishes this vision from an uncritical acceptance of Western values: strongly critical of the West and strongly rooted in African traditions, he argues that these traditions must be carried and projected forward into the

contemporary world, not accorded the reverence we give to objects in museums (108).

The dramatic theory formulated and popularized by Soyinka based on the myth of Ogun, through the much discussed article “The Fourth Stage” reexamplifies the fact Soyinka is more a devotee of his own native Yoruba tradition, than the Western tradition. Yoruba heritage, with its indigenous rituals and practices inspired and influenced him more than anything else. The significance of the myth of Ogun is that it gives him a confidence “to describe and evaluate foreign cultural conceptions” and enables him “to reject Marxist ideological criticism as not truly revolutionary and hence not truly beneficial to society” (Banks 1049). He argues that “complexity is traditionally a part of African art, including oral poetry and drama”: and that “it is not the naïve, primitive expression that Westernized observes, and the neo-tarzanists and negritudinists conceive it to be” (1040). As Thomas Banks puts it, “African art has traditionally been eclectic and assimilative: it has thrived on dialectic and synthesis. The Ogun myth is essentially one of challenge and change, not of stasis. Soyinka’s criticism advocates a literature that is revolutionary” (1041).

An objective analysis of the theory of literary creation that characterizes Wole Soyinka’s artistic approach makes it clear that it is very simple. He seems to proclaim that Black African writers should turn their attention to the mythological world of their peoples, bring out the principal actors and their identity. These mythological concepts should be examined critically in order to reinterpret their identity so that they generate a new vision of things, beings and life. It is this kind of approach that definitely led

to the production of a theory which, while being universally applicable will keep at the same time a Black African flavour. The myth on which Soyinka's thinking is based is purely African. It is true Soyinka draws parallels from the myths of Appollo and Dionysius. Perhaps it is the presence of such divine/human confrontations with chaos outside Africa that gives Soyinka a confidence when he goes outside African literature to apply his theory. It is in this perspective that Wole Soyinka's theory of literary creation can be considered as typically postcolonial.

The popularity of the dramatic theory based on the native myth of Ogun significantly proves the hollowness of the accusation of Trioka. If Soyinka had been Eurocentric as accused by them, he would definitely have used the literary theories like post-structuralism, structuralism, psychoanalytic theory and so on, popularised by European writers. But the fact that despite his Western education and reverence to European writers and their conventions he turned towards his patron god Ogun to guide him through the transitional phase between colonialism and postcolonialism, Western culture and African tradition, is an evidence itself of the fact that he was an African writer who was proud of his country's conventions, indigenous rituals, myths and gods, proud of being an African. In this sense, one may well argue convincingly that Soyinka believed that colonialism can only scratch the surface of a culture.

Soyinka's works, using the myth of Ogun, try to analyse and resist continuing colonial attitudes. His works often deal with many of the issues and assumptions that were fundamental to colonial discourses. The plays of Soyinka actively interrogate the world, boldly pronounce his own position in

relation to prevailing views, resist or check dominant ways of seeing. The most effective means of resistance, Soyinka felt, can be expressed through a cultural retrieval, by means of a recourse to the native myths and traditions of his tribe, Yoruba. He knew colonisation is a cultural process. The colonizers tried to substitute the ideas of the colonized with another set of ideas which were primarily concerned with their religious beliefs and values. It is here that the desire for cultural self-determination serves as a means of resistance. The works of Chinua Achebe Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott and a whole range of other writers respond to and reflect their immediate cultural environment.

Soyinka knew particularly well that the adaptation of indigenous myth represented a very important model of retrieval. He knew that by adapting the myths and practices of African tradition, he could very well redefine his culture and reassert his identity and offer resistance against colonial influences. Hence the relevance of the myth of Ogun in his works. According to Soyinka, it is important that any writer should adopt “what has become integrated within the cultural matrix of a society into the idiom of the ritual for making new social and revolutionary statements” (*Myth* 20).

Soyinka believed that myths and rituals are fundamental to revolutionary changes in Africa. He emphasized the significance of myth and ritual because of his firm conviction that it will help African critics and writers “to avoid clichéd constructs and face the realities of the contemporary scene” (Banks 1042). His literary works are examples to prove that his works offer strong resistance against cultural subordination by

imperialistic forces and that he is not Eurocentric as he has been accused of but out and out postcolonial.

Perhaps one of the best comments on Soyinka occurs in *Encyclopedia of Critics and Criticism*.

The depth of his scholarship in critical theory and practice, his ability to assimilate non-African sources into his essentially African, theoretical base, his existence on the cultural and long term values of literature, his experience as a writer himself and his obviously genuine commitment to human freedom – both political and cultural-will no doubt result in a future recognition of his importance to cultural retrieval in which Africa is currently engaged (Banks 1042).

As a writer belonging to postcolonial milieu we find him slightly different from such writers who directly express their antagonism towards European modes. We do not find in his works efforts to decolonise in the sense of trying to erase all conscious knowledge of Western literature and traditions. We find him employing 'Brechtian techniques' and imagery of Eliot in his plays and poetry. Yet he is one of the foremost among the African writers in delving into Yoruba mythology, folklore, praise poetry and drama to bring out some of its most striking and resonant features. By using African cultural elements in literary production, he has re-educated world on African culture using their own language and literary idioms.

Biodun Jeyifo has pointed out that, "for Soyinka the labor of the gods in the cosmos which the mythos recount and their ambiguous relationships with mortals reveal ideal ethical and social paradigms for Africa now and for

all the time” (63). But Femi Osofisan complains that – artistic creations which center around the old mythologies actually take us “to the past instead of taking to the future and such art is anti-progress”(123). But Soyinka’s lecture during an inaugural function at the University of Ife as quoted by Mary David can be taken as an answer to this charge: “Mr Soyinka wishes to announce that he intends to recreate his own myths, unscrupulously in images – consciously selective – of vapour and matter for his contemporary needs” (200).

Explorations into his creative as well as critical works elucidate the fact that myths are used only to interpret and analyse the present reality, the contemporary world. They are never used for questioning or recreating or for nostalgic commemoration of the past. His myths provide “living cosmological and sociological paradigm.” But the fact remains that his philosophy and vision of life are marked by eclecticism. Not merely Yoruba myths, but also Greek mythology, Judaeo Christian mythology, Norse myths all have given inspiration to Soyinka. In his works we find a beautiful blending of various cultural characteristics. His traumatic experiences during the Nigerian civil war have shown him a different route to explore – less mythical and more practical. They have given the impression that Soyinka may never return to the groves of Yoruba gods for further myths to explore. But the fact that he has an inclination for ritualistic and mythic perception is clear not only in Soyinka’s myth informed major plays but even in his autobiographical book like *The Man Died*. While doing a rehearsal of *Madmen and Specialists* in United States of America, Soyinka is reported to have said, “I do have an inclination to use a ritualistic form to express a very modern idiom” (qtd. in David, *Regeneration* 658). Soyinka’s plays make

use of the rich heritage of Yoruba culture as well as other foreign influences. His works assimilate non African sources into African base. Talking about this eclectic nature of his works of art, Dan Izevbaye remarks, “I think the most important element is the fact that Soyinka has been able to bridge the gulf to borrow his own metaphor, between the Western and African world, between the black and the white, the European and the non – European worlds.” (58)

Although Soyinka writes about Yoruba metaphysics, its myths and rituals, his works are endowed with a universality. They can never be criticized for parochialism. They are “both authentically African and deeply universal.” Possessing a mind which is lively and witty but alert, skeptical and ironic he could apply those rituals for making contemporary reference. Referring to the universal appeal of his works, Eldred Jones remarks that “Soyinka puts man against an African background and dresses in African costume in order to suit the occasion. But he represents the whole humanity. Man is dressed for the nonce in African dress and lives in the sun and tropical forest, but he represents the whole race. The duality of man’s personality, his simultaneous capacity for creation and destruction which makes him almost at every moment a potential victim of his own ingenuity is a universal trait of homosapiens who has been given by his creator the lift of free will” (26)

The depth of scholarship in Soyinka’s writings, the blending of modern trends with traditional practice, the genuine commitment shown towards human freedom and the magic of his style as a writer do provide a source of inspiration and information to young generations. But his

achievements can never be arranged to suit a particular frame. He is “an allusive and elusive artist” who is beyond all definitions and demonstrations. Soyinka’s own words can be quoted here to explain what such an attempt would be like: it is like trapping his shadow and not his essence. Crying out in self defense against the torturing and killing experiences at Kaduna Prison, Soyinka wrote, “My shadow is trapped, not my essence.”

Wole Soyinka of our generation is by now too complex and too vast to examine from whichever point one chooses to look at him. Anyway the foregoing analyses, of three major works of Soyinka is an attempt to discuss his plays as the sites in which he is engaged in a dialogue with colonial history. It also evaluates how the playwright has rearticulated postcolonial identities through them by recouring to a viable indigenous Yoruba culture which he posts as an alternative (after / native) tradition to the colonizer. An attempt is also made to give equal emphasis to the vision of life which Soyinka has developed as a consequence of belonging to postcolonial milieu. It will be appropriate to quote Soyinka’s own words from a speech he delivered in 1996 at the summit of Nigerian pro-democracy groups held simultaneously in Johannesburg and in Oslo from Friday to Sunday, 29th to 31st March.

“To be a visionary is unfashionable we know, in the sphere of real politics, and the task is made even more utopian when any grouping seeks to identify and structure, among others, a practical sustainable vision. For a nation that has sunk so low however, one that has squandered its potential in a way that criminalizes almost every citizen by the mere act of belonging, we

have nothing to lose but the loftiness of our vision. That vision, a sustainable one, must inform the laying of the foundations of a new Nigeria.”(6)

By writing such thought provoking serious but grim plays, Soyinka might have intended to shock his readers into recognition of the tragic situation of the modern world. Such an awareness can be created only by those who are in possession of a questioning mind. Inactive and lethargic minds can never awaken in the people the need to respond to and react against the current exploitative tendencies of the governing body. His mental make is similar to what Fanon states in *Black skin white Masks*, “Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions:” (231). Like the Old Man who fed his son with human flesh in order to create in him an awareness of the wastage of war and bestiality of man, Soyinka wanted to create in his readers an awareness of the exploitative tendency and brutality of the new generation. As he has repeatedly stated in many interviews, this expression of pessimism as is revealed in his plays is only to direct the new generation to look sharply at reality with all its horrors a new pathway and to create a new world based on freedom, justice and peace. He explains the significance of the myth of Ogun in creating this awareness. To quote his own words, from his interview with John Agetua, “those who are expecting a one dimensional statement from me as a writer are looking for a cheap injection of optimism in their nervous system. What I’m saying is that we must accept the negative potential of action and then transcend this. And this is why I use Ogun as a representative symbol because it represents the promethean reality of our existence” (62). It will definitely, create an awareness of moral responsibility in the society. He wants his plays to awaken the world to a knowledge of the awful truth about itself of the cyclical repetition of horrors,

its murderous capacities and potential for barbarism. He hopes that this knowledge will help it to reintegrate and reassemble itself from the broken fragments and come out energized and strengthened by the new vision it has attained. Soyinka knew the significant role of the writers and their works. He knew that the world expected a lot from the writers. Soyinka remarks in his interview titled, "Actuality, Political Engagement, Literature, Change: An interview with Wole Soyinka": [. . .] very often what the consumer needs is a work which speaks in certain universal terms, which enlarges the vision of that particular consumer, enlarges the horizons and opens up totally new vistas of perception, in other words, enlarges the humanity of that individuality. The world, so mad with the craze for power and so insensitive to the human values, will definitely not miss the irony, implied in his works. Soyinka's plays will definitely succeed in sharpening the perception of the world and awakening indignation towards corruption so that it will definitely direct its potential to liberate people from despair and disillusionment and lead them to a future marked by qucescent harmony, complacent wisdom and absolute freedom.

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