



Vol.5. S1., 2018

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

AFFINITY BETWEEN GENDER AND POWER AS IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE LION AND THE JEWEL*

VALARMATHI

Asst. Prof, Sri Ramakrishna College for Women, Cbe

Literature is a window to observe social changes and it also mirrors the human mind, irrespective of time, place and other norms of the society. Like every other forms of literature, feminist writing also intends to correct the predominantly male - dominated perspectives of women and their identity. Women, on the whole, have become more conscious of their views on society and other's views about themselves. So they strive to speak out their point of view, using their writing strategies, as specific to their social conditions. Hence, we have a great number of women writing on subjects like the experiences of gestation, delivery and nurturing, and mother – daughter relationship.

Western Civilization is pervasively patriarchal, being male – centered, it always tries to subjugate women in all cultural domains, such as, familial, economic, religious, political and artistic. Even the great canons of Western Literature are evidence for this fact, as they were written by men for the readers, who were also men. Women themselves are taught to internalise that patriarchal ideology and also succumb to their own subjugation. Therefore, even the female characters created by women writers also present a subordinate role to the major characters as 'heroes'.

It is widely believed that, one's sex is determined by anatomy, while the 'gender' is mostly, if not entirely, a cultural construct of the patriarchal society. Simone de Beauvoir insists this as, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature Which is described as feminine" (Abrams 89) . In this cultural process, the masculine is widely identified as active, adventurous, rational and creative; the feminine, on the other hand, as passive, timid, emotional and conventional. But several attempts had been made by the feminists of the recent years to "reread" the classical literary works to do justice to the female perspectives and values.

The advent of Chinua Achebe and his contemporaries in the 1940s - 60s marked a milestone in the Nigerian literary history. The most outstanding writers of this era were Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, T.M. Aluko , Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark and Cyprian Ekwensi. As the first generation writers, these writers gave African literature focus and direction. They addressed the basic African problems like colonialism, neo-colonialism and propagated African values to the outside world. They sought to correct the misrepresentation of Nigerians and Africans in literary works like Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. For instance, as against the African society portrayed as uncivilized, simple and corrupt, the Igbo society of *Things Fall Apart* is shown as having grown from a long tradition of careful decision-making and a well arranged system of religious, social and political beliefs.

Wole Soyinka is one of Africa's greatest writers and the first African to be awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. He is regarded as one of the finest poetical playwrights known for his outspoken views on the Imperialist government. His plays deal with a variety of themes, ranging from comedy to tragedy and from political satire to power struggles of the indigenous people. He is also recognised as one of the masters of dramatics and theatre, presenting crucial political issues through his literary works. Some of

his most influential works include, 'A Dance of the Forests', 'Aké: The Years of Childhood', 'The Lion and the Jewel' and 'The Interpreters'.

Wole Soyinka's best known play, *The Lion and the Jewel* was written and first performed in the year 1959, the year before Nigeria was granted its independence from Great Britain and the script was published in 1962, two years after independence. It deals with the primary conflict of the play- the traditional Yoruba customs against the Western concept of progress and modernity. This theme is represented by the conflict between Baroka and Lakunle for Sidi's hand in marriage.

The chosen play, *The Lion and the Jewel* dramatizes a day in the life of three Yoruba villagers in Ilujinle, a Nigerian village. Lakunle, a young, arrogant schoolteacher and Baroka, the elderly chief / the bale, both compete for the hand of Sidi, the 'jewel'/the belle of the village. But Sidi ends up choosing Baroka, the Lion. The reason for Sidi, not marrying Lakunle, is that he refuses to pay her the traditional bride price. He thinks of himself as a modern, forward-thinking man and disapproves of the outdated custom of paying the bride price. Baroka's wife Sadiku, the head wife of the village, tries to convince Sidi to marry Baroka and join his harem. But, Sidi refused this offer, in the beginning, on the basis that Baroka is too old for her. Later when Lakunle learns that Sidi isn't a virgin, he grows angry with her, but quickly calms down and offers to marry her again. But, she turns him down, choosing to marry the wiser and more experienced Baroka at the end.

Though, on the surface level, the play focuses on the competition to win Sidi's hand in marriage, in another sense, it is a battle of the sexes. As such, the play asks a number of questions about the nature of each sex's power: who among them is more powerful - men or women; how they were powerful in the beginning; and how they either maintain or lose that power at the end. The men who fight for Sidi, see her only as a beautiful prize to be won; Baroka and Lakunle value Sidi for no more than her beauty and her virginity.

Meanwhile, the men in *The Lion and the Jewel* are valued by others, based on what they can do or have already done. Lakunle values himself because he's educated and he seeks to bring change - education, modernity, and Christianity, to Ilujinle. And Baroka's value derives from his role as the Bale of Ilujinle and his responsibilities to keep his people safe and erects his image by taking many wives and fathering multiple children. To both these men, Sidi is a jewel—a valuable object capable of teasing and annoying the men, but an object however. For them, marriage to Sidi is a status symbol, an indicator of their power, virility, and the superiority of their respective ways of life (modern versus traditional). Sadiku herself insists this as,

Sidi, have you considered what a life of bliss awaits you? Baroka swears to take no other wife after you. Do you know what it is to be the Bale's wife?... even the lion has to die sometime You will have the honour of being the senior wife of the new Bale.... No living in the outhouses for you, my girl. Your place will always be in the palace....It is a rich life, Sidi. I know. I have been in that position for forty-one years. (Soyinka 20-21)

Lakunle, on the other hand, represents the modern Nigerian man. His western costume, reasoning attitude, refusal to pay the bride price, idea of changing the village into a civilized place (as of Lagos), all these suggest that he not only admired the western society but also despised the traditional values of his place. He expressed this in his indignation towards Sidi as, "For that, what is a jewel to pigs? If now I misunderstood by you, And your race of savages, I rise above taunts and remain unruffled" (ibid 4). Lakunle's refusal of paying the bride prize shows that it's more important to him to convert Sidi to his way of thinking and turn her into a "modern wife" than his love towards Sidi.

Both men promise Sidi a different version of power and fulfillment. Baroka's wish, to add Sidi to his harem of wives, is that he no longer wants anyone to be in the limelight than himself. Because Sidi had been given more preference in the magazine, Baroka decides to bring her under his control. When Baroka dies, Sidi will become the head wife of the new Bale, a position that would make her one of the most powerful women in the village. Whereas, Lakunle dreams of having one wife who, in theory at least, is his equal. With more conviction, he says:

Within a year or two, I swear, This town shall see a transformation, Bride -prize will be a thing forgotten, and wives shall take their place by men

No man shall take more wives than one, That's why they're impotent too soon.... We must be modern with the rest Or live forgotten by the world. (ibid 36-37)

Lakunle offers Sidi the possibility of an equal partnership, in which she's not required to serve her husband as in traditional marriage. However, the way Lakunle talks to and about Sidi, indicates that by marrying Lakunle and embracing modernity, Sidi won't necessarily be better in any way. Sidi recognizes that Lakunle's idea of modernity might not improve her life; in fact, it might mean that she would have less power and fewer rights than she would have in a traditional marriage. His opinion about women is clearly shown as, "The Scientists have proved it. It's in my books. Women have a smaller brain than men, That's why they are called the weaker sex." (ibid 5)

However, the end of the play suggests that what Lakunle wants from Sidi (a modern wife to make him seem more modern) doesn't even require Sidi specifically; by immediately turning his attention to the next woman who dances at him, Lakunle indicates that while Sidi may not have been an appealing prize, he can accomplish his goal of having a modern wife by marrying any woman up to the task. This reduces women in general to objects who must simply play a part in the lives of their husbands. Baroka's feigning frustration about manhood shows this as:

I am no man, Sadiku. My manhood ended near a week ago. I wanted Sidi because I still hoped That, with a virgin young and hot within, My failing strength would rise and save my pride.... When manhood must, it ends. (ibid 30-31)

The idea of reducing people with little power to objects, however, works in reverse as well. When Sadiku believes Baroka's tale that his manhood (virility) is gone, she dances gleefully around a statue of Baroka and chants that women have won the war against men. Because She believes that Baroka's power is tied to his ability to perform sexually and produce children. She believes that when this specific power is gone, the rest of his power will also disappear, leaving his wives victorious. However, the play suggests that there's a great deal of difference between Baroka's weakness being represented by an object and the fact that women are literally treated as objects.

When Sadiku dances around the statue of Baroka, it's important to note that she cannot celebrate her victory overtly. She can celebrate it in her privacy and taunt a representation of Baroka, because they're simple and innocent and they're women. The male characters, on the other hand, don't have to privately taunt the inanimate objects; their culture, regardless of how they engage with modernity or tradition, allows them to reduce women to objects and treat them as such. Lakunle himself says,

You could wear something . Most modest women do. But you, no. You must run about naked in the streets. Does it not worry you The bad names, the lewd jokes, the tongue-licking noises Which girls, uncovered like you, Draw after them? (ibid 3)

Though it is not a conscious effort of Soyinka, he has made an understatement about gender in this play. On the one hand, he has created two female characters, Sidi and Sadiku, who are lively, dogmatic, manipulative, and independent and on the other hand, both of them are ultimately victims in the scheme of men. Sidi does not want to marry either Lakunle or Baroka, but Baroka tricks her, rapes her, and then gets to marry her. To him, She is an object at his mercy and nothing more. Sadiku is also cheated, though she is elated over the Bale's impotence, her excitement vanishes as his plots are made clear. The power of women, which they seem to possess in the beginning, vanishes when the plot is untangled.

Thus, it is implied that women may seem to have 'power' in the society, but they ultimately do not. They are still puppets in the hands of men, for them to play with and throw away as they wish. Hence, this paper entitled "**Affinity between Gender and Power as in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel***" aims at highlighting the inequality that exists between the two genders in spite of all the developments and modernization of our civilization.

WEBREFERENCES

1. <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-lion-and-the-jewel/study-guide/themes>
2. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-lion-and-the-jewel/themes>
3. <https://www.enotes.com › Homework Help › The Lion and the Jewel>
4. www.languageinindia.com/sep2013/srinivasululionjewelfinal.pdf
5. shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/64512/10/10_chapter%204.pdf
6. <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/wole-soyinka-3329.php>

7. www.everyculture.com › Countries and Their Cultures › Mauritania to Nigeria
 8. everythinginliterature.blogspot.com/2010/12/history-of-nigerian-literature.html
 9. <https://www.enotes.com> › Study Guides
 10. Soyinka,wole. *The Lion and the Jewel*.n.p.,n.d.,
-