

CHAPTER - I

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Before going into the details of Soyinka's plays, it is better to take a look at African Literature. African Literature is a part of those 'new literatures' which are post-Second World War phenomena. This literature is embedded in African culture and ethos. Nevertheless it has also been recognised and entered into the currents of 'World Literature' in English.

1.1 What is African Literature?:

To begin with it is necessary to define 'African' literature. The task is not easy, because there is no such thing as 'pan-African Literature'. We can simply define it in geographical terms. However the problem of race and culture would emerge. For convenience sake we can adopt a working definition of Edgar Wright.¹ He means by 'African Literature' literatures of those areas which were former colonies of British plus Ethiopia. Such a working definition has the advantage that it presents a group of countries in all in which there are vernaculars vigorous and alive, carrying oral traditions independent of Western ideas and cultures. But here again, there seems to be a blurring of boundaries in the sense that much of the African literature is written outside the African continent.

As it is said earlier, it is very difficult to define African Literature. In 1962, the Conference of African Writers in English, held at Makerere, even failed to produce a satisfactory definition of African Literature.² A few years later Chinua Achebe attempted a definition : "I do not see African Literature as one unit but as a group of associated units - in fact the sum total of all national and ethnic literature of Africa."³ By national literature Achebe refers to the literature written in national language of the nations and by ethnic literature he means the literature written in one of the indigeneous languages spoken by one group within the nation. Somehow African writing in English comes under the 'national' literature since it transcends the narrow ethnic boundaries.

Moreover there is a distinction between what can be called 'traditional' African Literature and 'Modern African Literature', in the sense of what Irele says :

"Traditional African Literature is something which exists in our indigeneous languages and which is related to our traditional societies and cultures, while Modern African Literature has grown out of the rapture created within our indigeneous history and way of life by the colonial experience, which is naturally expressed in the tongue of our former colonial rulers".⁴

These two literatures show clearly marked differences with regard to content and form and these are derived from two different sectors and African experience.

This point needs emphasis because there is evidence of 'literary' works in English produced by ex-slaves and Africans in 'exile' in Europe, in the form of memoirs and other writings which date as far back as 18th Century. Irele gives some samples of the earlier prose in his papers.⁵

Modern African writing has its origin in the political and anti-colonial struggle and it still bears the marks of that struggle. This literature is still young and tender. But it is clear in conveying its message. Most of the writers are the product of a common history - that of colonialism, independence and its ecstasies, new self-awareness and the burden of being unbound and becoming free. And almost every African writing has a peculiarly African experience - hid in the layers.

A question may be raised at this point and that is what compelled the African writer to write in English. The literature in vernacular languages is accessible only to a small portion of Africa. Therefore, the desire to reach larger audience compelled the African writer to write in English. They not only aim at International Audience but also want to reach different parts of their own nation. Each African nation is divided linguistically in many languages and cultures, and a need to have one common language is as urgent for African as it is for India.

There is a dilemma before the African writers. As English language is less acculturized, there still remains the problem of audience. Audience play a crucial factor in any creative writing. The African writer writing in English is painfully aware of the uncomfortable feeling that this literature, however deeply conscious of its responsibilities, somehow lacks relevance for 80% African people who enjoy no literacy. Even those who handle vernacular literature cannot deal with the complex form of modern fiction and contemporary verse written in European languages.

According to Lewis Nkosi the African writer is alone because his people cannot correspond to the truth of his writings.⁶ The world he creates lies outside the boundaries of his own people and society and that of his adopted language. While the ordinary people in Europe share with their educated elite a common language, the gulf between these two groups is very wide in Africa. The masses are completely sealed off from the educated elite. This leaves the writer in a dilemma. The only writer popular among Africans are those whose works are text books in schools. Even those who go to the libraries do not read poetry and fiction. As Achebe says even the intellectual read their history, economics or mathematics or at the most biographies. This reveals that reading for pleasure is still a luxury in Africa. And the writer is compelled to look outwards for patronage.

1.2 The Origin & Development of African Drama:

It is very difficult to speak of indigeneous drama in Africa. Although some writers have positively affirmed the existence of native drama, it would perhaps be truer to say that in Africa, in contrast to Western Europe drama was not typically a widespread or a developed phenomena.

African drama presents us with an initial problem. This problem is one of definitions. What is African drama? Where and when does it begin and what are its parameters?

African drama, traditional drama in particular, raises problems of definition. There are many difficulties when one tries to discover a terminology which would adequately describe the sort of activities covered by the notion of 'drama' in an African setting. Such an inventory would have to begin with an inventory in the proper African languages. Pirault rightly argues that terms borrowed from European languages such as 'theatre', 'comedy', 'tragedy', 'scene', 'director and actor' are too rigid and severally restricted to describe all the activities and functions associated with traditional African drama.⁷ There is a lot of confusion when we try to isolate the most essential features of traditional African drama.

Ruth Finnegan in Oral Literature in Africa says that there were certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena

which were of great interest in themselves. It is very seldom in Africa that all the elements (e.g. enactments, contents, plot, linguistic element, music and dance) come together in one performance. She further says that while dramatic elements enter into several different categories of artistic activity in Africa, there are a few or no performances which obviously include all these dramatic elements.⁸

In his book, The Drama of Black Africa, Anthony Graham White traces the growth of African drama from the earliest times.⁹ The commonest dramatic figure in West Africa is a masquerades dancing through the village accompanied by his attendants who drum and play for him. The commonest form of African traditional drama is the comic sketch, relying mostly upon action rather than words, and alternating with songs and dance. Rhythmic gestures, dictated by drums, are the dominant symbols. He further observed that "rhythm supplies a compulsive force to the performance as does the plot in European dramas."¹⁰

An indispensable part of any festival in Africa is its dramatic performances. A festival contains rituals and 'drama'. Performers are esteemed. They are the guardians of community values : sometimes satirizing those who go against them, sometimes acting out historical events, often identifying with ancestors or with the spirits and always full of proverbial sayings.

In African drama the setting is bare. The very magnificent part of them is costumes. Masks were used in the traditional African drama to possess the wearer of the mask. The word 'mask' implies that the 'wearer's' identity is hidden. Yoruba masquerades are simple caricatures of social types. These masks, however, share in the taboos that apply to almost all masks : They cannot be touched and the identity of the wearer should not be revealed.

However, African plays written in English and French are not merely an extension of this tradition. In many respects they represent a decisive break with that tradition. We have to take into account the social, economic and political conditions in which one type of drama comes into production, is consumed, interpreted and assimilated into African system of belief. Ozidi by J.P.Clark and A Dance of the Forests by Wole Soyinka may rely on ritual sources but this doesn't entitle someone to argue from this fact that they are 'traditional' plays if by 'traditional' he means plays which continue the theatrical practice associated with pre-colonial forms of drama.¹¹ The writers of these plays simply used the raw materials of myth and extracted certain formal properties from traditional art forms in order to produce something new and wholly unexpected.

The characteristic of traditional African drama is its communal aspect, a collective working out in symbolic language of the fears, hopes and wishes of an organic community, a placation of the gods and a placebo for the dead who are called upon to intercede for the living. Describing the characteristics of traditional drama, White quotes a comment by Joel Adedeji on traditional Yoruba drama :

"The drama consists of episodes and tableaux. There is no continuous narrated story. Visual elements are usually emphasised at the expense of systematic dialogues and plot. The plot line is sketchy and scattered through poetic metaphors and allusions. The essence of plot is contained in chant, music and song. The actor is left with bits of dialogue, gesture and dance. There are always wide gaps left to be filled in by the imagination of the spectator"¹²

Thus there is no proper 'script' and therefore, no single author, sometimes not even a proper audience since the audience itself is fluid and indefinable, constantly merging with the performers.

✓ There is no clearcut distinction in the traditional societies between ritual and a dramatic performance. Sometimes ritualistic elements are kept to heighten the aesthetic appeal of the performance. It is desirable at this point to look at the traditional societies in Africa. In traditional societies men were directly involved in procuring the means of subsistence by hunting or cultivating. For them some control over the environment was an urgent need.

White believes that traditional societies perceived a logic of correspondence in the world. They believed there is a pattern of observed relationship between man, animals and the seasonal cycles and this ordered relationship is projected onto the universe. It is further believed that through dramatizing these relationships man can exert some control over the immanent energy that reigns through them all. The belief in this very energy is the basis for a dynamic view of the world in African traditional societies. And the function of the ritual is to tap that energy. William Fagg is one of the foremost thinkers having authority on African art. He says,

"----- there is a strong reason to believe that in tribal societies all dancing, whether sacred or profane, is held to increase the life force of the participants, and that a person in the stylized movements is ipso facto generating force."¹³

Traditional performances have a spiritual dimension and hence it is very difficult to separate the ritual from drama. "All performances were thought of as contributing to the welfare of the community".¹⁴ However, White gives a distinction between a drama and a ritual. A ritual will have consequences beyond itself and it is expected to produce results in future. But in a dramatic performance the expectations stop with its end. One doesn't expect drama to effect changes, even if it is a social drama advocating social reform. In drama cause and effect are

linked only within the performance, in ritual the performance is the cause of an effect to be appreciated more for themselves than for their future effects. Only then, White says, one is moving from ritual towards drama.

Lewis NKosi refers to Ulli Beier's vivid description of a 'ritual drama' in performance among the Yorubas.¹⁵ Ulli Beier has not only given us a vivid description of such a performance, but he himself has made a succinct but creditable transposition of one such drama, The Imprisonment of Obatala. The source of this drama is the African myth. Beier gives this Yoruba myth a new lease of life. The vigor and directness of the language, as well as the austere economy of the plot, bring to the story a verve and freshness which quicken our enjoyment. Beier's English rendition of the play has the boldness as well as the immense dignity of African speech in a traditional setting.

According to White, the source of African drama can be traced back to the art of story-telling.¹⁶ Story-telling is a form of entertainment which developed into drama by simply undergoing some changes in the method of representation. In Africa, the story-teller impersonates his characters as dramatically as possible. A constant expression of interest by the audience encourages the story-teller.

White classifies traditional drama into two groups: satirical comedies and historical re-enactments.¹⁷

Historical and mythical enactments affirm the unity and traditional values of the community. And much of the satire is directed against those who threaten approved social relationships and outsiders such as foreign traders and Europeans. But pure comedies are for entertainment. They do not have any social or moral purpose.

It is very interesting to look at how African drama developed from the puppet shows to masquerades.¹⁸ According to Finegann, African people liked specialised drama. They lay great stress on certain dramatic characteristics of their literatures which rely primarily on written forms. The forms of these drama are said to be as puppet shows from Bruno, mimicry of hunting from Bantu Africa. Masquerades from the forest areas of West Africa are more elaborate forms of these dramas from puppet shows. These masquerades include most of the dramatic elements : The enactment of characters and events, several actors, - in puppet rather than in human forms - plot, a little linguistic content, specialised costumes, a limited amount of singing, dancing and music. The masquerades are usually developed in forest areas where the carving of wooden masks has reached a high degree of artistic development. Though they vary in content, purpose and pattern, they all seem to include certain elements of drama and are often referred to as 'plays'. However, there is a great emphasis on costumes, music and dancing.

Finnegan adds that with a few possible exceptions, there is no tradition in Africa of artistic performances which include all the elements which might be demanded in a strict definition of drama.¹⁹ We can go further and add that whatever dramatic and quasi-dramatic performances can be discovered, they never seem to involve tragedy in the normal sense. From her research it becomes clear that a little light could be thrown on the question of the origin of drama by a study of the traditional dramatic forms. However the study of it enlarges the general view and the drama doesn't remain a verbal content but includes the rich tradition of dance and music.

Before the colonial era traditional drama enjoyed popularity. It is still performed by adopting some changes. It should be noted here that traditional theatrical forms as such are not entirely obsolete, they have not become objects of historical inquiry, but continue to co-exist with the new drama of the scripted play. This simultaneity of modern and traditional forms is itself not accidental but reflects the conditions of contemporary society in its transitional stage. In fact, it is this contemporaneity of forms and the co-existence of the traditional with the modern drama that makes an immensely rich environment. However, this very richness creates its own problems. It also accounts for confusion and bias which plagues any discussion of African drama.

There are many scattered examples of African drama in the traditional setting - The annual Igogo Festival at Owa in Western Nigeria, the Dahomey 'cult dramas', and the masquerades of the Ekine society. In fact, throughout Africa, whether it is the seven-day Ozidi epic staged by the Ijaw people of Niger Delta, the mmomo mask dramas of the Ibos or the elaborate dance operas of the Zulus, traditional theatre is still very alive in Africa. These traditional forms have not only survived but continue to fertilize the new written drama whose principal exponents are the new generation of playwrights most of whom are university-trained.

1.3 Modern African Drama:

The traditional drama began to decline slowly. The colonial influence brought about many changes. Edgar Wright gives some causes that brought about the decline of the traditional drama.²⁰ There was a fierce desire for European ways of life and artefacts. The Christian missionaries had the hostile attitude towards pagan festivals and celebration. The socio-economic pressures encouraged young men to leave their families and work in towns. The colonialization demolished the idea of traditional ways of life. Sometimes traditional drama was used as a force against colonialism and slowly traditional drama became anti-colonial. The colonial influence not only contributed to the decline of traditional

drama in Africa but also suggested the new directions into which drama might develop.

The dramatists in Africa introduced European dramatic techniques and the drama no longer remained traditional. Many of the contemporary writers, writing in English and French have also been involved in experimental works in the African universities.²¹ The real contribution of colonialism is to provide the models for the development of literary drama. The dramatists wrote with a literary audience in their mind.

1.3.1 Influences:

The advent of colonialization influenced the African drama vastly. Drama as a literary genre is a legacy from the colonial period. African plays often have a tone and structure familiar to the British or French theatre. Full-length plays are usually written in three or five acts. The author's desire to construct an intrigue plot has buried his inspiration and the life and plausibility of his characters under the mechanics of shifting relationships. African drama is replete with such familiar devices as the recognition by a mole on his neck of a king's son lost as a baby and sold as a slave.

The strongest influences on style have been The Times, Shakespeare, and the Bible. Attempts have been made to copy Shakespearian style but without much success.

Shakespeare's plays have provided models for presenting social situations in dramatic terms. Julius Caesar, for example, has provided a convenient model for several chapbook plays which deal with civil strife in Zaire and the murder of Lumumba. The Trials of Death of Lumumba is a play by Felix N. Stephen where we read about the parallel drawn of Caesar with Calpurnia. In his another play How Tshombe and Mobutu Regretted after the Death of Lumumba, we find ghosts of Lumumba & his associates haunting the conspirators. Shakespeare's another famous play, Romeo and Juliet, is a source of lines and situations for the many chapbook play on the conflict between father and daughter over choice of a husband. The two plays written by Thomas Iguh, namely, Agnes in the Game of True Love and Alice in the Romance of True Love are modelled on Romeo and Juliet. Thomas Iguh has even written the balcony scene.

The influence of the Bible is even more widespread. There is a constant summing up of an argument in a telling metaphor and metaphors are generally drawn from the life of pastoral communities. The language of the Yoruba operas has been described as a tussle between traditional forms and biblical borrowings.²² The Bible is closely echoed and the rhythms of the Bible also seep into the chapbook plays, eventhough the plays are self-consciously modern and urban. Playwrights with higher education are not immune to

the same influence. Ganesh Bagchi's The Deviant (Uganda, 1961), seems to have been inspired by John Osborne's Look Back in Anger. Ezekiel Mphahlele in his play Oganda's Journey (South Africa & Kenya, 1960) uses a chorus whose utterances contain distinct echoes of the choruses in T.S.Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral. Pat Maddy's play, Life Everlasting (Sierra Leone, 1972), frankly repeats the situation of Sartre's No Exit.

Irish dramatists have attracted the many African dramatists. It was mainly for two reasons. First like the African writers, they were asserting indigeneous values against British cultural domination and secondly they approved the one-act forms of the Irish dramatist which were easy to write. Like the Irish dramatists, they incorporated the images and speech rhythms of their own people into their works.

West African writing in English have responded with enthusiasm to the style of Shakespeare and the Bible, and many accepted the well-made play as a norm e.g. J.P.Clark writes Song of a Goat, challenging comparison with Greek tragedy, Ola Rotemi writes a version of Oedipus disputatiously entitled The Gods Are Not to Blame (Nigeria, 1971); Wale Ogunyemi reduces Macbeth to a drama of eleven pages (Nigeria, 1969).

The most vigorous characters of the chapbook playwright, Ogali A. Ogali, are full of long words which might have been borrowed from ancient issues of The Times. His most important play is Veronica My Daughter.

Soyinka uses the same mixture of satire and celebration for Brother Jero, the false prophet of The Trials (1960) and for the Professor in The Road (1964). It gives a kind of complexity to these characters.

In the works of the Nigerian playwright, James Ene Henshaw, there is a Victorian flavour permeating language as well as attitudes. There is an Arnoldian "high seriousness" about the hero of Samuel Sofolo's When a Philosopher Falls in Love (Nigeria, 1956).

But there are some dramatists who have not ignored African stylistic models. However, there is little experimentation with local speech patterns. rather, dramatists have turned to the traditional sayings and poeticism of oral literature. But this makes all the characters in a play sound monotonous. The only way to distinguish them from each other is temperament or attitude.

1.3.2 African Drama in English and French:

According to O.R.Dathorne, Ecole William Ponty and H.I.E.Dhlomo are associated with the beginnings of staged

African drama in French and English respectively.²³ Ecole William Ponty was situated in St. Louis, Senegal, and pupils from all over French Equatorial Africa, French West Africa, Togoland came to him. In 1930's an attempt was made to rehabilitate colonial teaching and the inspector general of education assigned various projects centered on students' own lives and customs. This helped to stimulate a knowledge of ethnology, and the pupils began writing plays which were presented at the end of the academic year. The first play in this attempt was called La dernière entrevue de Behanzin et de Bayol. Though the plays were written by the students, for presentation the director and the staff of the school helped. These plays were useful beginning and demonstrated the possibilities of African drama in French.

Since these schools were run by Europeans, the themes and attitudes, obviously, were in keeping with European norms. A famous play Sokhame' seems to identify with European values, traditional beliefs are equated with superstition and are inferior to western concepts. The play suggests that the new generation has to modify values. Instead of depicting an outright clash between Africa and Europe, it describes the conflict of two generations. The overall plot is the dramatization of the familiar myth of the quarrel between earth and heaven in which earth wins in the end. There is an extensive use of proverbs and songs which

show the playwright's attempt to place the play in the tradition of unscripted indigeneous drama.

The first African play in English is Girl who Killed to Save (1935) written by a Zulu writer, H.I.E. Dholoma. Like Sokame, it has its roots in tradition. Nongquase, his heroine, announced that the ancestors have told her that they have witnessed with sorrow the oppression of the Xhosa race by foreign conquerors. She prophesies that if the cattle are slaughtered and the ground left untilled the Whites will be defeated. Her advice is followed, but the only result is famine. The heroic efforts of the commissioner, his wife, his brother-in-law and a missionary restore the tribe to posterity. The play is, however, more than one of many literary dramas attacking the foolishness of superstition.

The plays about two leaders who opposed the Europeans are great in number. A West African King, Samory, expanded his territory and came into conflict with the Whites. Ecole Ponty in his play L'Entrevue du Samory et de Tieba, Fama du Kenedougou, shows Samory cowardly and obsequious and the Europeans arrogant but just. Mamadou Ouattara's La Rencontre Secrete de l'Almary Samory et de Tieba, Fama de Kenedougou (The Secret Meeting of ----) (1957) concerns the war between these two rulers. He presents Samory as cruel, perfidious and ambitious. However he commends his

efforts with another king in order to strengthen their kingdom against the French. In his play Nous avons resiste a l'envashisseur (We Resisted the Invader;1962), Yaya Kane shows Samory wholly heroic and how French are utter villains.

There are numerous plays about Shaka and they cover a longer span of time. In 1925 Thomas Mofolo, of South Africa wrote a biography of Shaka and proved his assassination as a just reward for his blood-letting. In 1951, Leopold Sedar Senghor, of Senegal glorifies him in highly rhetorical terms in his dramatic poem "Tchaka". Seydou Bandian of Mali wrote a play La Mort de Chaka (The Death of Shaka) showing how Shaka was betrayed by his own generals. His work analyses the problem of leader with his followers and highlights the dissensions and rivalaries of post-colonial African politics. The one more play worth mentionable is Les Malheurs de Tchaka (The Misfortunes of Shaka; 1968) written by Ivory Coast writer, Charles Nokan. Dingana (1959), a play by H.I.E.Dhlomo, begins at the moment of assassination and traces the revenge of Shaka's sister and his body-servant upon Shaka's brother Dingana and his other slayers.

1.3.3 Recent Stage Drama:

The link between new staged theatre and unwritten indigeneous drama is a tenuous one. O.R.Dathorne observes :

'Although some plays feature traditional songs and dances and make use of proverbs and vernacular language idiom in dialogue, African playwrights in general tend to regard the modern stage as a rostrum for public issues. Usually these are centered on a chief protagonist who in his inner attitude towards church, marriage, social beliefs and traditional culture epitomizes outer issues of contemporary African life.'²⁴

Nigerian playwright, James Ene Henshaw's collection of three short plays is titled This is Our Chance (1956). The title play describes a society that is fettered by an outmoded tradition but nevertheless aspires toward western values. In his A Man of Character (1956) we come across a government official who has remained poor but honest. He refuses to take bribes and declares that Honesty and the Fear of God are best achievements of a gentleman. Henshaw's plays have little artistic value but they are popular for their simple characterization and firm didacticism.

The corruption of the new ruling class has been attacked, most bitterly in Soyinka's full-length plays Kongi's Harvest (1967) and Madmen and Specialists (1971). The same theme is pursued in Monsieur Thogo-gnini by Bernard

Dadie and The New Patriots (Sierra Leone; 1965) by R.Sarif Esmon. They offer serious criticism of the post-independence society.

In Sarif Esmon's Dear Parent and Ogre, Ogali's Veronica My Daughter and Soyinka's The Lion and The Jewel, the tension is between generations - between an ancient aristocracy and a new technocracy, between traditionalism and westernization, between the dignity of the old and the sprawling vulgarity of the new. J.Saverio Naigiziki's L'optimiste published in French in 1954, also dramatizes the conflict of generations as seen in the relationship between father and son and members of hostile tribe.

The young people in modern Africa identify themselves with a nation whereas fathers are actively conscious of their tribes. The idea of the group is still there; only the dimensions have altered. The young characters in This Is Our Chance, Dear Parent and Ogre, Veronica My Daughter and L'optimiste associate themselves with the forces of progress, and this is somewhat unconventional in African life.

Michael Dei-Anang's play, Okofe Anokey's Golden Stool is the story of an Akan priest who appeals to the Gods for a golden stool. He provides the link between past and present, gods and man. But Dei-Anang's message is nothing more than an exhortation to tribal unity. As a result, the

play is extremely slow and it becomes a rallying cry to patriotic feelings. The use of dance and drumming give the play the sanction of tradition. Here instead of operating through the interplay of the characters, time more subtly suggests itself in the manifestation of drums and dance.

Pat Maddy belongs to Sierra Leone. He frequently attacks his own society, though he is an upholder of tradition. In his play Gbana-Bendu, he makes use of popular beliefs of a society, to describe in ritual form, the dignity of its ceremonies. The play is set in a village. In his plays Pat Maddy enacts the daily lives and rituals of Africans. As a result, music, dance and songs play a large part in his works. His characters always oppose an established order. However, his plays have one weakness and it is the action is often suspended by the verbosity of the speakers.

African dramatists have condemned superstitions and resistance to change. However, this does not mean that all traditional values are rejected at instance. Wole Soyinka of Nigeria strongly attacks the worthless superstitions and customs in The Swamp-Dwellers (1959) and The Strong Breed (1959). But in his comedy, The Lion and The Jewel (1959) he defends traditional ways of life. In Kongi's Harvest he demonstrates how the commonsense and the wisdom of the traditional elders is superior to the self interest of the modern politicians. Through his two dramatic sketches,

The New Republican and Before the Blackout, he satirizes various aspects of Nigerian life - e.g. travelling by plane, rapacious politicians, party thugs and the new middle class and its comical values etc. Soyinka has enlivened theatre by giving to it ritual and realism. He makes an extensive use of mask, mime, the pounding of women's pestles, drums and dance. He employs the "play-within-a-play" technique in The Swamp-Dwellers and The Lion and The Jewel and he expresses the whole of The Road in the terminology and form of ritual. Soyinka conveys his message through snappy dialogues and pointed gestures. His success in the theatre is due to the use of open-air settings with large crowd scenes in his plays.

The Scarr is a play by the Ugandan Playwright, Rebecca Njau. Here we find Marina, who is the leading light in village life, helping in the emancipation of young women.

Countless African plays have been written that are devoted to describing the wickedness of women, or how a 'good' woman is won by a determined and stouthearted man or how a determined girl defies her father for love. The love setting is frequently the scene of murders which results from a struggle over either land or property or money. These plays are worth mentioning because they are an attempt at popularizing the love story and the 'detective story' in drama and in English. However, these plays are not without

flaws. In form they are only partly "dramatic" because the authors often switch to a narrative style. There has been distortion in an effort to reduce to African experience "love", or "crime" or "politics" and neither situation nor character bears the slightest resemblance to what is credible.

In this connection we must mention to two plays of J.P.Clark. They are Song of a Goat and its sequel The Masquerade. Clark isolates two aspects of life - sex and heredity, and gives them a "popular" treatment. Both these plays are love stories.

Camwood on the Leaves by Soyinka and Medicine for Love by Henshaw assert man-woman relationship through the framework of larger social realities. In Henshaw's Medicine for Love, we read about three country relatives of an educated town-dwelling bachelor paying him the high compliment of sending a wife each has "married for" him according to custom. Since he is engaged in an election campaign the arrival of these women is highly embarrassing. Moreover, the three "wives" are not prepared to become the meek, submissive members of a polygamous household that tradition prescribes.

The Opportunity is a play written by the South African playwright, Arthur Maimane and You is written by Kenyan playwright, Kuldip Sondhi. Both of them are radio

plays and they show effectively how the union of love with politics can bring about a disintegration of human worth.

Mapule, a woman character in Rain Killers by Alfred Hutchinson and Sidi, a village belle in Soyinka's The Lion and The Jewel, defy the modernism and prefer to stick to the tradition firmly.

The two other worth mentionable plays by Guillaume Oyono-Mbisa are Trois Pretendants, Unmari (1964) and Jusqu'à a nouvel avis (1970), which was published in English as Until Further Notice. The play deals with the expectations raised by the marriage. The marriage of an educated girl is collapsed and she becomes a tragic figure in the end. The play evokes the tension between the traditional outlook of many old-fashioned communities and the more individualistic ways of the modern towns. Oyono-Mbia poignantly describes the old with its taboos, its close family and tribal ties, its superstitions and its conflict with the new choices, new freedom and new perspectives. His another important play is Three Suitors : One Husband. It was first performed in French in 1961 and it won the first prize in a 1967 competition sponsored by the BBC African Service. Here we come across an educated girl named Juliette, who wishes to marry for love whereas her father wishes to get a good bride-price. The dramatist brings out the essentially mercenary attitudes of the father in extracting money. The daughter steals the money

paid by the first two to give to the third, the poor student she loves. The father becomes happy to get enough money from the third suitor to pay back to the other two. However, the play is not that simple. It highlights how it is unfilial and unnatural in African society just to marry for love. The theme is common one but Oyono-Mbisa handles it with a delightful freshness.

1.4 Playwrights of Different Countries:

Now we will take a quick glance at the growth of drama in East, Central and Southern Africa. It is said that the drama in these regions lacks the quantity and vitality of its counterpart in West Africa. At the moment there is more prose and poetry in print than drama; and no dramatist in East, Central, and Southern Africa is as well known as either Ngugi or Okot p'Bitek.

Drama has richer prospects in Africa than any other form because of its communal nature, its flexibility, its ability to live without texts, its accommodation of the popular arts of song, drumming, and dance, its links with traditional religion. The critics always try to compare the dramatic activity of the West Africa with that of in the East, Central and Southern Africa and conclude that drama in these regions is far behind West African drama.

But there are already in East, Central and Southern Africa, more dramatists than are yet internationally known, more plays than those yet published and more grass-roots experiment than reaches the West End. In these regions there is a strong and growing use of radio and TV rather than the printed book as a means of disseminating dramatic material. Yet the broad impression made earlier is correct because there is not yet solid, flamboyant dramatic presence here that one can find in West Africa. One can account many social, political and historical reasons for a slower development. Formal, institutionalized drama seems to flourish best in firmly settled societies, among people rooted in one locale, be it urban or rural. Hence in the densely populated, long-settled areas of West Africa, rich in their multitudes of cults and fraternities, the growth of a modern kind of drama has been a natural development. Elsewhere, however, outside South Africa, there has been far less urbanization and a distinctly less historically settled pattern of habitation. Huge areas are still inhabited by nomadic pastoralists like the Maasai and Samburu; and other stretches are peopled by those who in the recent past practiced a shifting cultivation. Furthermore, what towns have developed have often been European settlements. There are very few genuinely African towns here resembling Ife, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Accra, Onitsha or Kumashi. While it is true

that scholarship is slowly revealing that West Africa has no monopoly on those fertile seedbeds of drama such as ritual and mime, charade and dance, it is also true that mask and masquerades are not simply everyday facts of life in the streets of Blantyre, Salisbury, or Lusaka. The ancient mask tradition of the Nyau society in Malawi and Zambia has been contained largely within a village milieu. Nor has there been an equivalent of the West African Concert Party tradition associated with Ismael Johnson which James Gibbs has pointed out as a crucial link between traditional modes and the modern scene.

The growth of the drama is steady in these regions and nowadays due to a blend of forces like political independence; a setting up of new schools, colleges and universities; the desire to repatriate the syllabus; increasing economic prosperity, the spread of radio, TV and the printed word; the desire to encourage popular and effective modes of crystallizing distinctly national identities, and finally the catalytic example of West Africa.

1.4.1 Uganda:

Andrian Roscoe takes stock of the development of drama in Uganda.²⁵ It was, doubtless a pace-setter in East Africa only because of the mature presence of Makerere. The historic Kampala Conference of 1964 (where East met West) caused a sudden flowering of prose and poetry. In the same

year David Cook and Betty Baker began planning Mackerere's highly successful Free Travelling Theatre. By 1965 this University group was already performing in four languages (English, Luganda, Swahili and Runyoro-Rutoro) and had 42 productions to its credit, and had reached with a mixed fare of sketches and short plays not less than 17,000 people.

Judging from the plays produced and performed by Free Travelling Theatre, Cook aimed at both local-rootedness and experiment. Hence, pieces like The Famine and The Mirror are straight translations from two vernaculars, Luganda and Runyoro-Rutoro. The former play centres on a man's illicit killing and hiding of a rat in the midst of famine, and the latter play describes the shock of a woman who first looks in a mirror and believes her husband has taken another wife. Likewise, Tom Omara's. The Exodus is a dramatization of the great Luo migration epic that would appeal to Nilotes throughout East Africa. Here Omara has woven the stuff of local tradition into a scripted modern play, and it is an important pioneering attempt by him. Erisa Kivonde transplanted Synge's The Shadow of the Glen and it was so successful that when the play crossed the border into Kenya, it became a cherished acquisition of University College, Nairobi, and was performed with ritual regularity for many years. However, the most of the new experiments were carried out by Robert Serumaga, who now dominates not just Uganda, but the East African scene as a whole.

When Serumaga's A Play appeared in 1968, the signs of a strongly individual talent were unmistakable. It has echoes of Brecht, Beckett and Soyinka. Serumaga's work is far more maturely independent. As actor, producer, playwright, director of Theatre Limited and the Abafumi Company, he delights in unchained experimentation. Majangwa (1971) explores the life of an entertainer and his wife. However it met with a limited success. As a desperate throw for success, Serumaga turned to obscenity. Though the play is rich with the traditional arts of dancing and drumming, it failed to impress audiences. Renga Moi is one of Serumaga's best recent plays which uses music, dance, ritual, and four Ugandan vernaculars. It was welcomed particularly at the Belgrade International Festival, and a lengthy reviews in the newspaper Politika included the following comment : 'a peculiar mixture of originality, the ancient and exotic, traditional and experimental, national and international.' However, The Guardian critic found the play a difficult piece to understand, though undeniably impressive.

Serumaga doesn't see language as impediment in the understanding of the play. He believes that communication takes place through sound. It overcomes the vexing problems of linguistic register and cultural transference. He believes that silence is more important than words. The texts of Serumaga's plays often suggest a slight discomfort with

English and his strengths are more technically theatrical than linguistic. The Elephants (1972) is a useful example of a play with a measure of psychological power, but which, stylistically, is rather vapid. In the introduction Serumaga claims that 'every word matters' but there is neither rhythmic energy nor pungency of statement. However, the play was received warmly in Nairobi and at other places.

The other worth mentionable dramatist is the young Ugandan John Ruganda. He is a serious dramatist who builds his plays around acutely modern problems. He works hard at fashioning a strong pungent prose and dramatic poetry. In his Beckettian play, Covenant with Death, he shows two characters, the infertile Matama and the impotent Motomoto alienated by an intolerant society and how they forlornly try to travel back to their past. Echoes in Covenant with Death suggest Beckett and Brecht. Ruganda is the product of Mackerere's Honours School of English. One can see a wide range of influence of both European and African dramatists on him. There is a shaping influence of Clark & p'Bitek on his style. However his artistic ambition is to produce technically and linguistically rich and morally relevant drama. He chooses his issues carefully and handles them with skill. The Burdens (1972) describes the return to squalor of a once-rich minister, 'tries to diagnose the symptoms and damage of this modern cancer-empty-headed ambition'. His

another important play Black Mamba gives an account of the poverty minutely. He shows us how prostitution becomes as one immoral solution for the poor man. A houseboy in Black Mamba resembles Johnson's Mosca and Soyinka's Samson. The main themes in his plays are the conflict between old and new, the growth of class conflict, protest over land seizure by the new elite. Ruganda skillfully captures the delicate psychological interplay between dramatic characters. Their fears, hesitations, the freight of the real human communication, are handled here better than in almost any African dramatist on this side of the continent.

1.4.2 Kenya:

The National Theatre in Nairobi was designed primarily for the needs of a European audience. There was another Nairobi's Donovan Maule Theatre which showed the finest dramatic activity combined with the qualities of international professionalism. These theatres showed an extreme indifference to the African culture around it and therefore, it was very difficult for the amateur groups to start with a local modern tradition.

Early developments at the University were under the guidance of T.P.Gorman and later of the Ghanaian dramatist, Joe de Graft. In 1968, Seth Adagala, fresh from the drama studies in America, set up the National Theatre

School adjacent to the University, in a corner of the National Theatre Building. This might be seen as Andrian Roscoe remarks, symbolically, as 'the beginning of the Africanization of Kenya's drama scene.'²⁶ Another group is Tausi Drama Club whose ranks include David Mulwa, a playwright and first-rate actor recently returned from drama studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The Black Hermit is rather a thin piece by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, written at Mackrere in the early sixties. His second play, This Time Tomorrow, is a tight piece of social protest provoked by slum-clearing exercise in Nairobi. Though short, the play is very important from the language point of view. There is a deftly satiric manipulation of language as Ngugi explores the contrasts between polished style of an elite bureaucracy and the rough simplicity of a suffering people. The play ends with a plea for class solidarity. 'If only we could stand together', lament the representatives of the poor.

Kenneth Watene's work shows a strong promise of growth. His first three plays, My Son for My Freedom, The Pot and The Haunting Past are in verse and also use mime and dance. His verse attempts to reflect inner movements of soul rather than external landscape. It shows a laboured quality. However it is diminishing slowly as Watene comes under healthy influences. His verse has a simplicity of movement

and he attempts to work with alliteration and tries to select apt figures for the material. It is characteristic of Watene for he writes quite naturally in a religious idiom of his own. His plays show not simply the trite struggle between traditional spirituality and modern materialism, but strife between an old spirituality and a new one. His ability to write dramatic verse is hampered by inexperience and possible narrowness of vocabulary. But the will to improve is there and throughout his texts there is evidence of hard effort expended on the verse.

Dedan Kimathi (1974) is an important play by Watene where he examines the life of the Mau Mau leader of that name. It shows the closing moments of the struggle in the Aberdare forests with the Gikuyu nation split and the movement itself very divided. Again the play shows us that Kenya's writers will not idealise their heroes. Kimathi is portrayed as suspicious and autocratic, a killer of his best friend, Nyati, who because he is so humane; morally dwarfs his leader. Though little dramatic tension is generated, this is a play for the present, carrying with it Kimathi's blueprint for the new Kenya and reminding the living that the dead did not fight to usher in an era of greed and brotherly injustice. The Haunting Past resembles J.P.Clark's Ozidi in its fusion of dance, mime and ritual.

1.4.3 Tanzania:

Tanzania had a University College with the only Department of Theatre Arts in East Africa. Tanzanian theatre had a strong belief in a national philosophy of Nyerere's African Socialism. It tries to express through this art form the local and national aspirations of a nation. Andrian Roscoe sees Tanzanian theatre as 'an instrument of education, of shaping political awareness, of furthering the physical process of development, of feeling national pride'.²⁷ The dramatic activity is carried out at the university, in the schools and by private adults and youth groups throughout the country. A careful look at the theatre of Tanzania will clearly show that it expresses the socialist ideals in which Tanzanians believe. The Tanzanians firmly believe that there theatre must be both entertaining and instructive.

One of the most significant developments in Tanzanian theatre has been the increasing use of Swahili as a chosen medium. The plays written in vernacular medium receive an immense response from all sections of population throughout East Africa. There are many dramatists like Ibrahim Hussein, Farouk Topan and Penina Huhando who write in vernacular. Hussein's Kinjeketile, based on the Maji Maji uprising against the Germans in colonial times receives an electrifying response not only in the towns of Tanzania but also from slums in Nairobi. Tanzanian theatre lacks the

openness and plurality of approach seen in Uganda and Kenya but it has a definite ideology of purpose.

1.4.4 Zambia:

Zambia has vigorous annual school's drama festivals. There is an extensive use of radio and TV. It has active Travelling Theatres. In Zambia Fay Chung, Andrew Horu, Michael Etherton, and more recently David Kerr, have focused their energies on the university and its outdoor Chikwakwa theatre. They have shown that even remote areas of the country are benefitted from national dramatic awakening through rural workshops, vernacular school plays and the travelling theatres. Michael Etherton observes :

'The idea of Chikwakwa Theatre was to develop, through self-help, a theatre place that would allow an expansion of the traditional performing arts into drama in which the spoken words developed the action. Or put the other way round, the theatre was meant to develop a style of drama that used the dance, songs and music of the rural areas and the urban township, the masks and the fabulous costumes, the artefacts, the fires and the lamps of traditional story-telling'.²⁸

Andrian Roscoe states Zambian theatre as having tradition of political awareness and comments; 'it has always supported the national philosophy of humanism and attacked racialism in Rhodesia and South Africa. ²⁹ The members of University Dramatic Society show their honest zeal to address their work to all levels of Zambian society. The Long Arms of the Law, and The Fools written by Godfrey Kasoma, deal

sufficiently with life in townships. His trilogy Black Mamba recounts the rise of Dr. Kaunda and his UNIP party during colonial days. Kasoma is not only a dramatist but has a brilliant all-round personality since he is an actor, producer, writer and politician. Masuto Phiri is another important playwright of Zambia. His famous plays are Nightfall and Kuta, a play on Ngoni history and a dance drama. Both Kasoma and Phiri work hard at bringing drama to the people. Shaka Zulu is a chronicle play by Fwanyanga Mulikita and The Kazembe and the Portuguese, a play by Andrea Masiye are performed in an open air theatre like Chikwakwa. Zambia uses radio and TV and the schools for hectic dramatic activity which leads to the rise of a truly national and popular drama.

1.4.5 Malawi:

Like Zambia, Malawi shares some common approaches to modern drama. It had vigorous annual school's drama festivals and there is an extensive use of radio for the dramatic activity. But the main focus had been in the University. The early work of Trevor Whittock, John Linstrum, and David Kerr has been consolidated and extended by James Gibbs and Mupa Shumba. The arrival of James Gibbs and his Ghanaian playwright wife, Patience Ada, brought to Malawi formidable expertise and theatre scholarship. Gibbs is a leading authority on Soyinka and has had an immense

experience in Ghana and Sudan. His professionalism and openness have achieved swift results. He was joined by Mupa Shumba, who had just completed post graduate studies in West African drama. Both of them quickly fashioned instruments to foster and tap local talent. They organised Theatre Workshops, courses in practical drama. They remodelled Travelling Theatre and used the new Malawian writers series. They welcomed critical reflections appeared in the newspapers. They paid attention with open mind to influences from all parts of the continent and did not impose one chosen doctrine. They have encouraged a wide-ranging approach by selecting anything with dramatic potential; may be poems by Soyinka and Okot p'Bitek, may be moral tales from Chaucer and Hans Anderson, or local myths or legends.

James Ngombe is a leading dramatist in Malawi and his important plays are The Banana Tree and The Beauty of the Dawn. Who Will Marry Our Daughter? is a play by Joe Mosiwa. The important plays written by Innocent Banda are The Lean Years, Lord Have Mercy, Cracks and The First Rehearsal Love Potion and Graveyards are famous by Chris Kamlongera and Phuma-Uhambe is by Bayani Nagulube. All these dramatists use local material and local approaches, but usually in a fresh imaginative way. Ngulube's play Phuma-Uhambe questions 'the values of the Ngoni tradition of banishment'. Mosiwa uses a Narrator-Chorus device with a superb effect. Instead of a

stale exercise in the struggle between tradition and modernity, Mosiwa offers a complex fight in which a kind of modernity wins out on completely traditional terms. Steve Chimombo's The Rainmaker, is the most ambitious play to date. Here Chimombo uses both the material of Malawi's ancient M'bona legends and also the M'bona cult's surviving mask convention. In March, 1975, there was a Conference on Drama in Malawi. During this Conference Fr Matthew Schoffeleers, an eminent authority on Malawian tradition, described the Nyayu cult and its pre-dramatic characteristics and urged that it be used as the basis for a distinctly modern Malawian theatre. So The Rainmaker was an immediate response given to Schoffeleer's call. This is a deep, echoing play its resonances sometimes elusive, but its overall impact heavy and menacing.

In Malawi, there is a strong commitment to African modes. However, as Andrian Roscoe observes there is yet no fixed direction, and no central ideology such as there is in Tanzania or Uganda.³⁰ The question of language, i.e. whether to use English or vernaculars is much debated there.

Opera Extravaganza is the creation of Peter Chiwona, a lecturer in Education, and Fr Joseph Chakanza, a student of Sociology. In this play the story line is thin but there is a large scale use of dancing, drumming and singing. A huge cast swept on and off the stage, singing songs

instinct with local humour and allusion, and accompanied by a large band. However, the play is neither tightly woven nor it is poetically rich as the best known Yoruba folk operas.

1.4.6 Ghana:

The Third Woman is the most interesting play of the colonial period which is written by J.B.Danguash, a leader of the nationalist movement in the Gold Coast (Ghana). The play is based on an Akan myth of how the Highgod created three different types of women. Danguash alters the myth and introduces the character of Ananse, the spider and songs in the manner of the folktale. Ananse has to be converted to the "world of harmony and concord and peace" which the third woman symbolizes. The first two women stand for pre-colonial and colonial Africa and the third for post-colonial. The third woman is the hope that remains at the end of the play. Danguash has observed three unities in the strictest sense. However, the use of archaisms and Biblical language hampers the understanding of the play. It is, however, merely an interesting effort in pioneering African drama in English.

Efua Sunderland is the most significant playwright of Ghana. In his play Edufa, she attempts to isolate the significance of love from the outer political realities of life. The important play by Sunderland is Foriwa (1962) which demonstrates how to bring life and vitality to the small

decaying towns of Ghana. The central characters are Labaran, a university-educated stranger who is camping in the town and "planting seed" in the mind of those who are receptive, and Foriwa, a beautiful girl just returned from training as teacher. By the end of the play we find both of them fallen in love with each other. In this play she achieves an excellent balance in language. It flows in a natural way and is not flawed by artificial climaxes. There is little sentimentality.

The recurrent theme in the African plays is the racial relationship. J.C. De Graft is a playwright of Ghana. His important play is Through a Film Darkly (1970). The central character in the play is John. There are three women in John's life : his present wife, the English girl he might have married, and Rebecca, whom he had seduced before he went to England and had promised to marry on his return. By chance Rebecca turns up and is humiliated to find that John has not married an English girl (as he had intimated) but another Ghanian. In the climatic scene we learn that the girl he thought loved him was keeping careful notes on him for a thesis. At the end of the play John and Rebecca commit suicide. Thus Graft depicts modern Africans in Ghana and their difficulties in coping with interracial situations. His another worth mentionable play is Sons and Daughters.

1.4.7 South Africa:

In Africa, only Lewis Nkosi, of South Africa, and Kateb Yacine, of Algeria, have written plays as bitterly anti-European. There is a strong reason behind their stern opposition to the colonial power. In South Africa and Algeria the nationalist struggle is violent compared to the rest of the colonalised African countries.³¹ The important play by Nkosi is Rhythm of Violence. It is, however, not about apartheid but about the collapse of human relationship.

The Opportunity is a play written by the South African playwright, Arthur Maimane.

1.4.8 Nigeria:

Since Wole Soyinka belongs to Nigeria, it is desirable to have an in-depth study of the development of drama in Nigeria. Therefore, we will take a quick survey of the growth and development of drama in Nigeria.

Ritual drama, traditional drama, folk opera and Nigerian drama in English : these are the four major forms of Nigerian drama. Ritual drama concerns with ritual ceremonies or ceremonies of worship. It is more concerned with the gods, their struggles and life related to heaven.

1.4.8.1 Traditional Drama:

Traditional drama is the most difficult to define because traditional elements can be found in all forms of

drama in varying degrees. e.g. A Dance of the Forests by Wole Soyinka and Ozidi by J.P. Clark belong to Nigerian drama in English, but for subject-matter these plays are dependent on ritual sources. Therefore, it becomes very difficult to put these dramas in strict compartment of forms. Traditional Nigerian drama is the immediate offspring of ritual drama, which is the earliest form of the Nigerian dramatic heritage. The most salient characteristics of traditional drama are dance, mime, music, masquerades, procession, worship and moral tone.

The dance is an advance of mime. It is varied in form and tempo. It is not only a visible expression of rapport between rhythm(music) and movement, but a manifestation of a state of mind whose farthest stretch is trance. In the Nigerian society, the dance is more important than the drama or mime. Dancing is also the medium for the display of yet another important aspect of Nigerian cultural heritage : acrobatics. Within the structure of traditional Nigerian drama, acrobatics are a prominent feature.

Like dance, music is an indispensable part of the traditional Nigerian drama. It provides rhythmic accompaniment to dance. The sound of Nigerian music concerns traditional dramatic presentation. Music or sound is dependent on a wide variety of instruments like drums, horns, metal, wood, bamboo, horn, trumpet, flute, rattles, bells

etc. But in dramatic presentation only the beaten musical instruments like drums, wood, metal and bamboo are important. In traditional drama, dialogue or speech is conveyed not only by the human voice but also by the drum. Dialogue is given less significance and mime and song are major handmaids to story-line. Many times plot is exposed through songs.

In traditional Nigerian drama, mask and masquerades play an important part. Ola Rotimi comments :

Mask is not just an aid to cover the face but it forms a cultural part of a cultural triad that constitutes the masquerade. Masquerade is a concrete evidence of the Nigerian's world-view that asserts the union between man and powers - the mortal and the immortal. It is a testimony of the continuity of the life force. Traditional drama thrives on impersonation of the animal world, and of man either at the zenith of moral or physical courage³².

In traditional drama, precision in mimesis is essential. Here the role of the mask is fully utilized. When the power of the god or spirit of the ancestor comes forth and enters into the masked performer with the aid of the masking medium, the mysteries identified with mask in traditional thought become real at the moment of ceremonial performance. The other role of the mask is aesthetic. To ensure visual appeal, traditional Nigerian drama constantly experiments with form and colour. Hence the chief purpose of traditional drama is to provide entertainment, it uses form and colour for sheer comedy and beauty. This innate love of

form and colour is not restricted to mask and costume alone but it aspires grandeur and magnitude in procession, which is the essential feature of ritual as well as traditional ceremonies. Such ceremonies allow for communal participation and they mark the meeting point between ritual and the traditional dramatic forms.

The other important qualities of traditional Nigerian drama are worship and moral tone. Since some traditional dramas deal with gods and spirits, an element of worship pervades through them. Traditional drama shows concern for moral values. It upholds the merits of virtue and wisdom. It makes the audience to think what is right or what is wrong and by providing examples it tries to make the audience virtuous.

1.4.8.2 FOLK-OPERA:

'Folk-opera', a term coined by Ulli Beier³³, is a recent form of Nigerian drama. In this drama music and dancing play an important part, since folk-opera is means of communication as well as an outlet for emotion. But chiefly it is looked upon as popular entertaining drama which deals with topics like social satires, biblical stories, political events and historical tragedies. There are many folk-opera groups in Nigeria today. They are very popular among the people because they present their plays in the vernacular.

Now we will have a quick glance at the various folk-opera groups in Nigeria.

Hubert Ogunde and his Concert Party:

The first notable pioneer in this field was Hubert Ogunde who founded his Concert Party in 1944. It became popular with his play The Strike and because of the general strike of 1945, it was welcomed warmly throughout the country.

In 1947 he toured Ghana but his plays were received very poorly chiefly because they lacked musical content. Therefore, he returned home and paid a special attention to the rhythmic content of his plays. Later next year his second tour to Ghana turned out to be a great success.

Ogunde has been a great experimenter. He has travelled extensively in order to see the developments taking place in various countries regarding play-action and stagecraft. He has tried to apply some new techniques which appealed to him. He literally married all the female characters of his Concert Party in order to overcome the problem of frequent changes in the cast.

His two famous political satires are Yoruba Ronu (Let the Yoruba Think) and Otito Koro (Truth is Bitter) which refer to the political events in Western Nigeria leading to

the declaration of Emergency in 1963. The satire in these plays is so biting that the government banned Ogunde and his Concert Party.

However his Concert Party has many faults. The audience find his plays difficult to understand since they are all unwritten. He charges high entrance fees which limits his audience. The other folk-opera groups have benefitted from his mistakes, but Ogunde still remains the most popular and most widely acclaimed dramatist of them all.

Duro Ladipo Theatre Company:

Duro Ladipo has started this company. He had little formal education but showed keen interest in drama right from childhood. He started by adapting church stories for acting on the stage and accompanying church songs with traditional instruments. In December 1961, he performed Christmas Cantata at the Mbari Club in Ibadan and at the British Council in Lagos. In 1962 his company was firmly established with the founding of Mbari-Mbayo Club at Oshogbo. It became popular with the masses with some plays.

The play Oba Moro (The King Overcomes the Devil) describes how the king of Oyo foils the plan of his councillors who oppose to his decision of shifting his Kingdom. The play was first performed in 1962.

Oba Koso (The King Never Hangs) was first performed in 1963 and it is the most popular play of the Company. It recreates the uneasiness which preceded the decline and fall of the ancient Oyo Empire. The King and his councillors are tired of the warlike activities of the two warrior chiefs, Gbonka and Timi, and arrange for the extermination of at least one of them. The two of them are involved in several encounters. In the centre of the city the final encounter takes place in which Gbonka becomes victorious. Then he challenges the King and the King flees from the Kingdom. However, in the middle of the jungle, Oya, his wife, deserts him. The King cannot tolerate this shock and hangs himself.

Like these two plays, the third one Oba Waja (The King is Dead), reproduce parts of the history of Oyo. We don't find historical accuracy in his plays. This is because the aim of the dramatist is to produce plays which have great dramatic impact on the people. All these plays of the Duro Ladipo Company became popular among the audience because they are written and hence they give them an opportunity to read them before seeing them performed on the stage.

Ogunmola Travelling Theatre:

The Ogunmola Travelling Theatre is another important folk-opera group in Nigeria led by E.K.Ogunmola. His first popular play was Morankiyo. He became famous with

his adaptation of Amos Tutuola's The Palm-Wine Drinkard. It was taken to the various parts of the country very successfully. Besides it has been shown on television several times. He has brought many improvements to folk-opera and has made it a source of national entertainment.

1.4.8.3 The New Drama:

Developing side by side with folk-opera is what is usually referred to as 'New Drama'. Educated Nigerians attempted to set up national theatres in which plays written by Nigerians can be produced by Nigerians. Oladele Taiwo says "Though there plays utilize Western techniques, they exploit local themes. These plays are all about Nigeria.³⁴ There are many drama groups which are doing their best to achieve the goal of the establishment of national theatres. Most of the important groups among them are as follows.

The 1960 Masks:

Nigeria got independence in 1960. Very close to the date of Nigerian independence, Wole Soyinka, a leading dramatist of Nigeria, formed the group called The 1960 Masks. It contains some of the most talented Nigerian actors and actresses. But this group could not produce anticipated results since the caste were very busy people who could give little time to stage-activity. Some of them got married and left. Some others being celebrities, considered the stage below them. Therefore, this group didn't achieve much because

of the frequent changes in the cast. However, one cannot deny the fact that it stimulated interest in drama and showed that the stage can be used as an instrument of social change. Earlier stage-acting was considered low but with The 1960 Masks cast of respectable persons it enhanced the prestige of the actors in society. This group have successfully produced the plays like A Dance of the Forests, Dear Parent and Ogre and The Republican.

Orisun Theatre:

After the failure of The 1960 Masks, Wole Soyinka formed the group called Orisun Theatre. He provided training for the stage to young people. It produced two plays by Soyinka - The Lion and The Jewel and The Trials of Brother Jero, and a few satires such as his Before the Blackout. It produced and presented only the social and political satires.

University of Ibadan Travelling Theatre:

This group is sponsored by the School of Drama, University of Ibadan. But its membership is open to all students of University who are interested in drama. In the beginning the group only concentrated on producing scenes from Shakespeare's plays. This group came to limelight when it produced a stage adaptation of Danda, a novel by Nkem Nwankwo. The play was taken to the various parts of the country and was well received by the audience. The actors showed greatly improved techniques and dramatic skill. The

stage and sound management was excellent. Thus this group made a major contribution for the development of drama in Nigeria.

The Eastern Nigeria Theatre Group:

This group is directed by John Ekwere, a playwright and producer. It was originally known as the Ogui Players. In the initial stages the group concentrated only on adaptations. But now it produces original Nigerian plays. It came to the limelight with its production of Clarke's Song of a Goat.

Eldred Fiberisima Productions:

A native of Okirika in Eastern Nigeria, Eldred Fiberisima found the Eldred Fiberisima Productions. It started to operate in a big way only in 1964. It has staged five plays successfully namely : A Taste of Honey, Spectator, The Centre Cannot Hold, Sons and Daughters and Song of a Goat.

Thus the groups mentioned above and some other minor groups had done their best in order to popularize drama in Nigeria. These groups aimed at establishing the national theatre. The most significant thing about them is that they have brought drama to the notice of the people and have tried to make drama a part of national life. However, they have not

been able to achieve their ultimate goal since there are many difficulties in the way. The main problems before the Nigerian drama as discussed by Oladele Taiwo, are as follows :³⁵

1. Local Prejudice:

In Nigeria there is a general belief that the stage is not respectable. There is a great prejudice against stage-acting, especially against girls 'displaying' themselves to the public. Therefore, it becomes very difficult for drama groups to have best actors and actresses. The producers have to waste their lot of energy in retaining the working actors and actresses. The only solution of this problem lies in educating the public to accept stage-acting as a legitimate field of human activity. The playwrights can themselves solve this problem if they write plays with educational values rather than cheap satires. The audience will change its attitude if they find drama as a necessary part of their education.

2. Language:

Folk-operas are popular with the masses because they are written in vernacular languages. These folk-operas are understood by the tribal groups concerned. But if the playwright wishes to have national audience, he has to write it in English which is the official language of the country.

This gives rise to many problems. The content of these plays are African but it is not well expressed in a foreign language. The playwrights are tempted to follow English models. Many playwrights did not have a better command of the English language and this results in many faults. They have not been able to handle effectively predominantly African themes in English material.

3. Lack of National Theatres:

Another grave problem faced by the playwrights and actors is the lack of national theatres. The present stages available in Nigeria are too small or structurally unsuitable for the performance of any play. Stage equipment is in most cases poor and technically unreliable. Therefore, the lack of professional and technical assistance hampers their works. So in order to encourage drama and enhance its usefulness to the public, they should set up national theatre.

4. Lack of Professional Actors:

The actors and actresses in Nigeria are not full-time artists. They have other regular employment. This hampers the growth of the drama groups leading to the establishment of national theatres. So the stage-acting should be viewed as a respectable profession. The playwrights must search such people who will take up drama as their profession.

1.4.8.4 The Written Play:

Apart from folk-opera, Oladele Taiwo mentions two other types of Nigerian play written in English - The one-act-play and the full-length play.³⁶

Ene Henshaw, a doctor by profession, was a pioneer of the one-act-plays in Nigeria. In 1952, his play The Jewel of the Shrine won the Henry Carr Memorial Cup in the All Nigeria Festival of Arts in Lagos. His most popular plays include This Is Our Chance, A Man of Character, Children of the Goddess, Companion for a Chief, Magic in the Blood, Medicine for Love. Nearly all his plays have simple plots and he deals with aspects of African culture and tradition in a simple style. His plays are used as an introduction in teacher training colleges and secondary schools. Henshaw was so popular in his times that some have imitated his ways of writing.

The second type of Nigerian play written in English, and the most important one, is the full-length play. These plays are written by Nigerian playwrights like J.P.Clark, Wole Soyinka, Wale Ogunyemi, Ola Rotemi, etc..

Ife Owa; (1965) or 'Love of Money' by Kolowole Ogunmola is a satire on marriage and wealth. Ogunmola uses mime and singing as well as drumming to convey his message.

He adopted Amos Tutuola's Palm-Wine-Drinkard and it was taken around the country with great success by travelling theatre when he was at the University of Ibadan. His serious play is Agbaraj' agbara or "The Reign of the Mighty".

Duro Ladipo has published Three Yoruba Plays, (1964) and Moremi in Three Nigerian Plays edited by Ulli Beier (1967). His works do not merely tell a story in words; music and especially drums help contribute to the effect. His important plays are Oba Koso, Oba Waja, and The Wise. Ladipo uses proverbs and praise phrases to develop his story. Sometimes he makes the audience to join in the chorus; and thus he has made a definite contribution in participatory theatre.

Eda (1965) is a Yoruba adaptation of Everyman. It is the best known work of Obutunde Ijimere and it was performed by Duro Ladipo Company in various parts of Europe as well as in Nigeria. His another play, Woyengi, is based on Ijaw creation myth and was first played in English by students of the drama department of Ibadan University in 1965. Born with the Fire on His Head is included in Beier's Three Nigerian Plays. Woyengi, Everyman and The Imprisonment of Obatala have been published in The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays (1966), which is written in Pidgin English. Here Adam, Eve and God are all seen as Yoruba people.

Ijimere reveals the plots of his plays through song, music and dance which alternate with the dialogue. He provides entertaining theatre because he has enriched the stage by extending its possibilities. He establishes a close alliance with Yoruba lore, making his plays at worst mosaic of Yoruba oral songs and at best exciting new theatre.

Business Headache (1966) is the first play by Wale Ogunyemi. He wrote this play while he was working with Theatre Express, a drama group he helped to form in 1965. The Scheme has been published in Beier's Three Nigerian Plays. His two other plays Be Mighty, Be Mine (1968) and Asare Akogan (1969) deal with the Yoruba pantheon. Besides he has produced fifteen radio and television plays. He has adopted Shakespeare's Macbeth in Yoruba.

Olawole Rotimi, an M.A. in playwrighting from Yale, wrote Kurunmi and The Prodigal, which were printed in Nigeria Magazine (1969). He wrote them for the second Ife Festival of Arts in 1969. His major work is The Gods Are Not to Blame (1971), a Yoruba adaptation of the Oedipus legend. It was performed at the Ife Festival of Arts in 1968 and its appeal lies in its complete break from anything in Yoruba traditional theatre. Rotimi uses extensively mime and choral singing; the customs and proverbial speaking of Yoruba daily life. It is not a mere attempt at rewriting the Oedipus legend in Yoruba terms but a very successful recreation. It is one of the best plays of Rotimi.

Thus Ogunde, Ladipo, Ijimere, Ogunyemi and Rotimi have drawn much from the reservoirs of Yoruba tradition and have tried to give this experience a new and distinct form.

J.P.Clark was born in the Rivers Province of Eastern Nigeria in 1935. He was educated from Government College of Warri and the University of Ibadan. He has worked in various capacities as a journalist in Ibadan and Lagos, as the Information officer at the Western Nigeria Ministry of Information, and as Features Editor of the Daily Express in Lagos. He has also worked as a lecturer in the University of Lagos. He came to be reckoned with a chief dramatist with his play 'Song of a Goat'. His other famous plays 'The Masquerade', 'The Raft' and 'Ozidi' are tragedies and they are very close to Greek tragedies.

His play 'Song of a Goat' was published in Three Plays, in 1964. It has a similar theme to The Lion and The Jewel by Soyinka. But while Soyinka's play is a comedy, Clark's play is a tragedy. The structure of the play, its atmosphere and sense of inescapable and malignant fate have affinities with those of classical Greek drama. Zifa loses his wife to his younger brother, Toni, because he cannot give her a child being impotent. But with a kind of dumb submission to an overwhelming Oedipus-destiny, he walks into the sea, after his young brother in his own guilt has hanged

himself. Thus the family meet its destruction not necessarily because of a fault of a character in the individuals but because of a curse cast upon it.

The Masquerade is also concerned with the curse of impotency, this time the curse working itself out in three generations of a family. Here we come across a character, Dabiri, who, in senseless rage, brings death to his daughter and her suitor. Clark explores a strong likeness between classical Greek society and Nigerian traditional society.

His play, The Raft, is also a tragedy. This play tells of an ordeal of four woodmen who have the business of taking a raft of timber logs in the Niger estuary. The raft goes adrift and it seems that nature itself had a hand in their distress. The play is written in flat, conversational and irregular blank verse; and it is more philosophical rather than dramatic.

Clark's masterpiece, Ozidi, was published in 1966. The basic story of the drama as recorded by Michael Etherton, runs as follows :

A council of the warriors and elders of Oru gather together to select a new King their previous king having died almost as soon as appointed and they choose an idiot, Temugedege, who is the elder brother of all-powerful warrior Ozidi. It is the turn of Ozidi's family to provide the King, and it ought to be Temugedege, because he is the elder. But he is an idiot, and Ozidi advises against his selection; his idiot brother accepts, and he is overruled. The warriors think

that by this move they will retain their own power and autonomy, and they ignore King Temugedege whom they have created. When Ozidi insists on due recognition for his brother, the warriors band together and destroy Ozidi, and serve up his head to his idiot brother. Ozidi's wife, Orea, is with child, and gives birth nine months later in the town of her mother, Oreame, who is a notable witch and an agent of Tamara, the ultimate godhead in that region, a female deity. Oreame rears the boy as an agent of vengeance, and turns him into a warrior full of strength and cunning, protected by very strong magic. He comes of age and learns his name : Ozidi. he returns to Orua with his mother and grandmother and slays his father's murderers, one by one. However, this not the end of it. He provokes further challenges, either deliberately or by virtue of his reputation, and seems unable to stop killing people. He even strikes his grandmother, by whose power he thrives, by accident; but they have been forewarned of this eventuality and she is miraculously brought back to life. It is through her powers, and his mother's love, that Ozidi is able, finally, to defeat the Smallpox King and drive him from the town, thereby purging Orua.³⁷

The play is based on an Ijaw saga, originally accompanied by music, dance, mime and told over a period of seven days. It is Clark's best play for in it he seeks to escape from the desire for cheap thrills. He handles the African myth with sureness; even though the myth undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis.

Clark portrays the life in the Rivers Province through his plays and nearly all his plays deal with an aspect of life important to his people. He dramatizes their social practices and beliefs, their shortcomings and difficulties. The audience try to identify themselves with

the characters in his plays and this is the one reason of the popularity of his plays with the masses. He depicts the confrontation between an individual and natural forces. His plays are successful and well received by Nigerians and non Nigerians.

The other most notable dramatist of Nigeria is Wole Soyinka. But we will close this chapter here, since a separate chapter has been devoted to the discussion of the life and the works of Wole Soyinka.

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