

CHAPTER - II

LIFE AND WORKS OF WOLE SOYINKA

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2.1 LIFE:

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka, the Nobel Laureate of 1986, is one of the best known contemporary African playwrights. He has written eighteen plays and has produced them extensively in Africa, Europe, and to a lesser but increasing extent, the United States. In addition he has published two novels, two volumes of poetry, two books of non-fiction, and one translation and has appeared in numerous anthologies. He has written occasional pieces of social and literary criticism. He is as well-known for his political entanglements as for his literary and theatrical skills. He has also acted on stage and screen both in Nigeria and abroad.

Oluwole Soyinka was born on 13th July 1934 in the town of Ijebu, Isara in the Abeokuta Province of the Western State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His father, Samuel Ayodele, had moved to Abeokuta from the Ijebu town of Isara. He was a teacher and later become the headmaster of the St Peter's Primary School in Ake. His mother, Grace Eniola Soyinka, was born into the famous Egba family which had played a pioneering role in spreading Christianity through Western Nigeria and has composed music which fused Yoruba and European traditions. James Gibbs writes : 'An energetic

and extrovert woman of great presence and many accomplishments, she was teacher, performer, political activist and trader'.¹ Soyinka learnt a vast about Yoruba life and particularly, life in Ake from her.

Soyinka attended St Peter's Primary School and after that spent a year at Abeokutta Grammar School. In 1946, he took an admission in the Government College, Ibadan, one of the six elite model public schools in the country² while there he wrote sketches for his house drama group and won many prizes for reciting his poems at Arts Festival. After passing the School Certificate in 1950, he went to Lagos and worked as a clerk there for sometime. He read his short stories on the national broadcasting service and thus pioneered Nigerian radio drama. In October 1952, he attended the University College, Ibadan, at that time a college of London University, and Leeds University, England. While at college, he played leading roles in productions, co-founded a fraternity, edited a student publication titled The Eagle and did creative writing. He graduated with B.A. Honors in English. He took his speciality in drama. He passed the Intermediate Arts Examination and in October 1954 entered University of Leeds. There he read for Honors Degree in the School of English. At that time he was just a twenty year old youth acting with the University Theatre Group, publishing short stories in student literary magazine, singing a rag

revue and taking active interest in politics. In 1957, he was awarded an upper Second Class Honors degree. Then he began to think on M.A. At this point he wrote two important plays - The Swamp Dwellers and The Lion and The Jewel.

After a year of post-graduate studies, Soyinka joined the Royal Court Theatre in London as a reader and playwright. Gerals Moore observes : 'This apprenticeship was later to be the turning point in his career. The experience at the Royal Court, which started in the fall of 1958, provided for Soyinka an extensive and intensive participation in the most active dramatic circles in the British Theatre at the time. It also gave him a working knowledge of both the language and the techniques of the theatre, as well as exposure of his first works'³. Apart from his work at the theatre, he taught, broadcast and wrote. In 1959, he wrote a song 'Long time, Bwana' - an expression of the feelings of the Kenyan people about British colonial violence in Kenya. While at the Royal Court theatre, Soyinka had the opportunity to present an 'Evening' of his own work at the theatre, the programme included poetry and songs which revealed his interest in Black American styles, and dramatic pieces. This consisted of two parts : the first was a presentation of poems and the second was his one-act play, The Invention pursuing the mischievous question of what would happen if everyone in South Africa suddenly turned white. It also highlights his in tense dislike of racism and apartheid.

The Swamp Dwellers and The Lion and The Jewel, earlier plays written in 1958, were produced by the Arts Theatre at Ibadan on February 20 and 21, 1959. The former was directed by Ken Post and the latter by Geoffrey Axworthy.⁴

He returned to Nigeria on 1st January 1960 because he was awarded a research fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation to study drama, especially Yoruba traditional drama in West Africa. *Substance* { The knowledge he gained from the ensuing study was later to be the one most important influence on almost all his future plays. } During this time he broadcast his play, The Swamp Dwellers, participated in the group discussion and radio talks. He wrote two new radio plays - Camwood on the Leaves and The Tortoise. He wrote a TV play, My Father's Burden and also a full-length play, The Trials of Brother Jero. He also sang at Music Society concert and played Yong Sun in Bertolt Brecht's production, The Good Woman of Setzuan. He finished his work on his first full-length work A Dance of the Forests in May 1960. It won a prize from the British Liberal Publication Encounter. While he lived on the campus of University College, Ibadan, he drew together a group of friends of amateur actors and actresses and with them formed, 'The 1960 Masks'⁵. The group's first stage production was addressed to Nigeria at the time of Independence (1st Oct. 1960). Commenting upon the presentation

of the play, A Dance of the Forests, James Gibbs writes :

'For some this complex and sometimes confusing play revealed Soyinka as an enfant terrible, a writer who delighted in shocking and bewildering his audience. For others he emerged as an independent thinker with numerous theatrical skills and a vaulting ambition.⁶

During 1961 no major play was written because he had to work writing scripts for a weekly radio-series, Broke-Time Bar, which ran for many months. He got into disputes with the authorities when he introduced trenchant social and political comment in the programme and this resulted in cancellation of the further episodes. He attended conferences in Italy and America and his poems were published in Sweden. He was also involved in plans to make a film about Nigerian culture for Esso. After some days it was released as ' Culture in Transition' with Soyinka as presenter. He contributed regularly to Nigerian controversies through the press and with his views made an impact on his countrymen. He attacked Negritude, contradicted a leading newspaper columnist, Peter Enharo, jeered at expatriate literary critics and complained about the censorship and the press.

Soyinka took up a teaching job as a lecturer in English at the newly-established University of Ife in Western Nigeria. But he soon resigned following a political crisis. He protested the arrest, conviction, and imprisonment for treason of Chief Obafemi Awolowe, the leader of the Action

Group Party. The Action Group had been in power in the then Western Region of Nigeria for many years. In 1960, the AGP became the Opposition Party in the Federal House of Representatives. Awolowe moved to the Federal capital, as the leader of opposition, making his deputy, S.L.Akintola, Premier of the Western Region. Shortly thereafter a conflict arose between the two men which led to the breaking up of the party into two factions. Both factions claimed to have a majority in the Western House of Assembly. This led to quarrels and fights in the Western House of Assembly. The Federal Government led by the late Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa exploited this opportunity to silence the opposite voices by declaring emergency. The Balewa government, which was alleged to be sympathetic to the Akintola faction, arrested Awolowe and other top members of the loyal wing of AGP and charged them with treason. This increased the wrath of the people.

In 1962, Soyinka, who had earlier been married to an English girl in 1958, married his second wife, a Nigerian girl named Olayide Idowu. In the same year he wrote the first version of The Strong Breed but it was lost and never found. In 1963, however, he wrote a new version which is the extant one.

There was a political turmoil marked by violence, repression and victimisation. Both the press and the radio were under pressure from the government. Therefore, Soyinka turned to drama and satirical revues in order to convey his

feelings. At this time he wrote and staged a satirical revue The Republicans with the help of his group 'The 1960 Masks'. He reviewed this revue in the middle of 1964 and adding new materials brought a new version, The New Republicans, and presented it at the Arts Theatre at Ibadan under the new name and 'Orisun Theatre Group'. According to Gerald Moore this name change was a move towards forming a "Permanent Professional Company", and an attempt to have " a company which, owing to its semi-professional composition, would be a little more secure against the pressure and indignant politicians, for the members of the 1960 masks were largely in government employ".⁷ Soyinka here tried some new techniques contributing to the development of drama by bringing together the Nigerian theatre in English and Nigerian Theatre in Yoruba. There are other two reasons for this name change. Perhaps Soyinka and other members of the company may have decided at this time to be called something different in order to avoid the dangers of having a name that could be quickly dated.⁸ And at about 1964 it had become extremely fashionable ideological act for Africans to drop all that was regarded as signs of colonialism. As a result many Africans dropped their Christian names entirely, or reduced them to initials. 'The 1960 Masks' was not an exception. It changed to "The Orisun Players", ideologically a more appropriate name for an African theatre company since 'Orisun' is an African word meaning source or origin.

Although Soyinka became a senior lecturer at the University of Lagos, he kept a very active life in the theatre. There was a political violence and party arsonist were murdering the ministers. At this time he produced a new revue Before the Blackout through which he attacked opportunist politicians, corrupt time-servers and cynical manipulators, In March and April 1965, as the Western Region continued its downward cascade into political disaster, Soyinka launched two new plays, Kongi's Harvest, which premiered on August 12 in Federal Palace Hotel in Lagos, and The Road, which opened at the Theatre Royal in London. In Sept. 1965, he went to London to read his long poem Idanre as a part of the Commonwealth Arts Festival. He also advised on the production of his play, The Road. He took part in recording his political play, The Detainee, which he had written for the BBC. The play remains unpublished to date and it warns against the rise of one-party states and of dictators. Soyinka's first novel, The Interpreters, was published in the same year.

Soon after Soyinka's return to Nigeria from London, the Western Region elections took place in October, 1956, which were declared won by Chief Akintola, the splinter group of Action Group Party. However the people believed that Awolowe and his Action Group Party would have won but for the unorthodox experimentation with the ballots. Elections were

followed by grave violence, bloodshed and massacre that ultimately brought about the secession of the Eastern Region (to be known as Biafra) and the Nigerian Civil War.

On the night of the election, Soyinka is alleged to have entered the broadcasting studios of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in Ibadan and replaced a pre-recorded victory statement by Akintola with one of his own, claiming victory for the losing party, the Action Group. A warrant was issued for Soyinka's arrest. He was arrested in the last week of October and remanded in custody. The Times of London, reporting from Ibadan said that Soyinka had gone on hunger strike.⁹ Two days later The Times reported that Soyinka was trialed at the Ibadan high court and charged with :

... stealing and threatening violence. He pleaded not guilty. He was accused of stealing two tapes belonging to the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, and of threatening to use violence on a radio station official. Soyinka is in the hospital after staging a two-day hunger strike in protest against what he claimed was unlawful detention.¹⁰

Shortly thereafter Soyinka was trialed and from all reports the trial must have been a complete farce. Soyinka was acquitted on Dec. 21 on the grounds that there was "material" conflict in the evidence of the prosecuting witnesses.

The twenty months between Soyinka's acquittal and his re-arrest during August 1967 in connection with the Civil War were momentous ones for Nigeria.¹¹ During this period he concentrated his energies more on poetry, productions and essays. He wrote two books of verse 'Massacre October 66' and 'For Her Who Rejoiced'. He directed Home Again by Lindsay Barret and The Crucible by Arthur Miller. His revealing and influential critical pieces of writing were And After the Narcissist?, Of Power and Change and The Fourth Stage. Through the press he campaigned for appropriate peace initiatives to stem the rising tide of violence in the North and for a cease-fire in the war against Biafra. However this led to his arrest and detention without trial.

Soyinka was detained for nearly twenty-seven months in solitary confinement in Kaduna prison. In his prison notes The Man Died, he has described this very experience in prison in detail. When under the bars he wrote poems with a quill and cell-manufactured 'ink' between the lines of printed books.¹² In October 1969, he was released and he became the director of the School of Drama at Ibadan. He produced Kongi's Harvest giving it an anti-military and anti-Gowon stance. He prepared the script of the play for a film company and in March and April 1970, himself acted the role of Kongi.

In July 1970, he accepted an invitation to rehearse and perform a play at the Eugene O'Neill Centre at Waterford, Connecticut and presented his play Madmen and Specialists. After that he left Nigeria for Europe.

He nearly spent five years in Europe and travelled to many parts of the world giving lectures. He wrote The Man Died, a compilation of African Poetry, a second novel, Season of Anomy and three important plays : Jero's Metamorphosis, The Bacche of Euripedes and Death and the King's Horseman. In the spring of 1971, Soyinka played the part of Lumumba in the Paris production of Murderous Angels, Connor Cruise O'Brien's controversial play about the Congo crisis. In the same year Soyinka published Madmen and Specialists and a volume of poems A Shuttle in the Crypt.

In 1972, Soyinka resigned as head of the Ibadon Department of Drama emphasising that a writer's art and his politics are inseparable. Early in 1973 Soyinka completed a modern adaptation of Euripedes' The Bacche and had its premiere performance by the National Theatre at London.

Soyinka left Europe for Accra, Ghana, to become the editor of Africa's leading intellectual magazine, Transition. He renamed it as Ch'Indaba¹³ He used it to support socialist revolutionary movements on the continent and to attack tyrants such as F.M.Nguema, Jean-Bedel Bokasso

and Idi Amin. Together with South African poet, Dennis Brutus he inaugurated the Union of Writers of African Peoples. he worked as a Secretary General of the Union. The chief aim of this Union was to protect the interest of writers and to campaign for human rights.

In the same year he completed a sequel to The Trials of Brother Jero, called Jero's Metamorphosis, and in the spring of the same year published his second novel, Season of Anomy, in New York.

The self-exiled writer returned to Nigeria when Gowon was over thrown in July 1975 in a coup which brought Murtala Mohammad to power at the head of the military government. He took up his long pending position as Professor of English at the University of Ife. However in February 1976, Mohammed was assassinated and Olusegan Obasanjo came to power. At this time Nigeria was facing many problems. Soyinka became gloomy to see the glaring inequalities of wealth, blatant political corruption and pervading disorder. He wrote his second novel, Season of Anomy, based on these conditions. He helped in organising the Second Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture held during Jan. 1977. He published his play Death and the King's Horseman and a collection of essays, Myth, Literature and the African World in 1976.

After his return to Nigeria, his first production was Death and King's Horseman. In 1977, he adapted Bertolt

Brecht's Threepenny Opera with the title Opera Wonyosi.

Writing about this play James Gibbs writes :

'This attacked, often in song, several African tyrants and many of the values of oil-boom Nigeria.¹⁴

It was a large-scale production, designed to make an impact in a well-equipped theatre-building. When he suspected that it will be disallowed to present in Lagos, he formed a new group, The Guerilla Theatre Unit of the University of Ife and with the help of it presented playlets in streets, market-places and lorry-parks.

During 1979, he directed and acted in The Biko Inquest, an edited version of the proceedings in the South African courts following the death, in police custody, of a black consciousness leader Steve Biko. Through this play he exposed the inhumanity and deceit rampant in far-off South Africa. At the same time he used it an opportunity to criticise the then Nigerian government which was not much better than South Africa. During Sept. and Oct. 1979, he directed Horseman in Chicago. James Gibbs comments on the performance as : 'This production was well received and was transferred to Washington DC, it raised Soyinka's reputation in the American theatre to a new level. ¹⁵

In October 1979 the election took place in which Shehu Shagari won Presidential elections in Nigeria. A cry of protest was raised from the opposition parties. Soyinka had

some links with the members of the opposition Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and accepted the chairmanship of the Oyo State Road Safety Corps (OSRSC). During 1980, he was deeply involved in the activities of the Road Safety Corps and in the life of the University of Ife. In Dec. 1980, he delivered a lecture on the topic The critic and Society : Barthes, Leftocracy and other Mythologies. The paper constitutes a major statement in his continuing debate with his critics in Nigeria, particularly those of the left.

Soyinka was a visiting professor at Yale University during 1981. When he returned full-time to Ife, he played significant role in campus matters. He wrote Rice Unlimited, a brief sketch in which he attacked and exposed the racketeering and profiteering connected with the importation and distribution of rice. This was presented in the city of Lagos as a part of demonstration.

Soyinka wrote his auto biography Aké in Abeokuta in January 1982. It covered first eleven and half years. He describes his life as begun in Accra and completed after his return to Nigeria in 1976. But his work was under attack for being 'too European' in the eyes of some of his countrymen. However it was greeted with enthusiasm by reviewers and readers in the U.K. and, particularly, in the U.S.A. In Nigeria the author took advantage of the launching of the book to continue his attack on Shagari's government.

During March-April 1982, Soyinka staged his early radio-play, Camwood on the Leaves at the National Theatre in Lagos. On August 18, 1982 he delivered a lecture entitled Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist, at Stratford-on-Avon. He wrote an half-hour radio-play Die Still Rev. Dr. Godspoke! which was broadcast in the African Service of the BBC in December 1982.

In the first quarter of 1983, he wrote, directed and produced a full-length play, Requiem for a Futurologist. It made fun of the credulous and exposed apostates. It was taken to the different parts of the country and was accompanied by agit-prop sketches like Rice Unlimited, Festac 77, The Green Revolution, Ethical Revolution and Abuja. All of them were known collectively as Priority Projects. These used spectacle, simple dialogue, Pungent lyrics and attractive music to draw attention to the corruption, mismanagement and hypocrisy in the country. He used songs in these sketches in order to communicate effectively with his countrymen.

Elections were held in Nigeria and gave victory to Shagari second time. Soyinka immediately flew to London and described the background to the elections through the British press and on the African Service of the BBC. He brought out distortions in the official results. Soyinka returned to Ife

to support those who had broadcast his songs and to defend them against the persecution by the police. On December 31, 1983, Shagari was overthrown by the coup which brought Mohammad Buhari to power. The new leader justified their seizure of power by citing the examples of the corruption in the marketing of rice and the construction of new capital at Abuja. Soyinka appreciated the anti-corruption stand of the Buhari Regime. However, he was the first person to condemn the sweeping ban on all political parties and expressed concern about the 'over-enthusiasm' of the some of the military governors.

His prison notes The Man Died was banned in 1983. During the run-up to the election in 1983 and into the early months of 1984, Soyinka worked on a film, Blues for a Prodigal. In May 1984, his production of The Road opened in Chicago and in December A play of Giants was premiered at the University of Yale.

Wole Soyinka came to limelight in 1986, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He is the first African author to receive the most coveted literary honour, the Nobel Prize for Literature.

2.2 WORKS:

2.2.1 PLAYS:

James Gibbs classifies Wole Soyinka's plays into various groups : 1. The Leeds Plays, 2. The Independence

Plays, 3. Plays from the Sixties, 4. The Post-War Play, 5. The Plays of Exile, 6. Plays for Nigeria of the Seventies and Eighties,

2.2.1.1 THE LEEDS PLAYS:

The plays under this group are titled as 'The Leeds Plays' since they were written when Soyinka was studying in the University of Leeds, during 1954 to 1958. At about the same time he wrote two very different plays - The Swamp Dwellers and The Lion and The Jewel. These plays opened doors for him in London and established his reputation in Nigeria. The brief summary and theme of these plays are as follows :

The Swamp Dwellers :

The play was written when Soyinka was in London. The story reveals the evils of too great an emotional attachment to superstitious belief. Before we see Igwezu, we learn that he has gone to the city to make money but has lost everything, including his wife, who has eloped with his twin brother. He has just returned home in order to harvest his crops, but to his great disappointment, he finds that the floods have destroyed them all.

At this point a blind beggar arrives from the North who has moved South in search of land to cultivate, a home, and water, but he finds that the available land in the swamps cannot be cultivated because of the superstition that

the land belongs to the Serpent of the swamps. Kadiye, as the priest of the Serpent, who is malevolent god, appeases him with sacrifices. All the people on the land depend on Kadiye for 'the benevolence of the reptile' Igwezu blames Kadiye for the failure of his crops, hinting indirectly that Kadiye is corrupt, instead of carrying out the sacrifices of animals Igwezu gave him, he kept them for himself. He also blames him for the failure of his marriage. Igwezu has lost his belief in the religion of his home place because he has failed in the city. He rejects the company of the beggar, who has made himself his bondsman and remains to till the land. He leaves the village in bitterness and despair, to some mysterious place.

The playwright has tried to focus many points relating to national interest. In contemporary African countries there is a movement from the village to the town. This is a phenomenon which has brought with it unemployment, financial loss and social disappointments, and it is depopulising the countryside. The play highlights the faith of the Nigerians in their land. As they are incompetent to do any other job, they stick to their land where their only hope lies. The migration from the North to the South during the dry season is an annual occurrence. The people have to move to the South to survive the drought. The playwright satirizes the priests who take disadvantage of the ignorance of the people and exploit them. We read how some possibly fertile

land lies uncultivated because of the strong hold of superstition on people's mind. The superstition is enemy of progress and becomes a stumbling block in the way of economic development.

Thus The Swamp Dwellers discusses the problem of superstitions which are prevalent in the life of the African people and how these superstitions mar the way of economic development.

The Lion And The Jewel:

The Lion And The Jewel dramatizes the story of rivalry between an educated Schoolmaster, Lakunle and sixty-two years old bale or village head, Baroka, for the hand of the beautiful village belle named Sidi. It is a comedy. It also symbolizes the conflict of cultures - Western and traditional African. In the end the tradition wins over the modernism. Since the play will be discussed in detail in Chapter No. 4, it would suffice to say that it is an early masterpiece of Soyinka which is capable of provoking entertainment in full on the stage.

2.2.1.2 THE INDEPENDENCE PLAYS:

Nigeria became independent on 1st Oct. 1960 ending the long rule of Great Britain. Soyinka had returned to Nigeria earlier i.e. on 1st January 1960, as a research student of Rockefeller Foundation to study African drama in

West Africa. There, he published his three plays - The Trials of Brother Jero, Camwood on the Leaves and A dance of the Forests. A brief discussion of these plays follows -

The Trials of Brother Jero:

The Trials of Brother Jero is a satire on the way of life of certain religious sects in Nigeria. Brother Jero, a religious divine, makes a living by cheating others in the name of religion. He even doesn't spare Chume, his assistant who becomes emotional and highly critical of Brother Jero whom he suspects of having an affair with his wife. The play is a light-hearted comedy in which the playwright laughs at human folly. We will have discussion of the play in detail in Chapter No. 4.

Camwood on the Leaves:

Camwood on the Leaves is a radio play and was first broadcast as part of the Independence celebrations. The play is set in a Yoruba community in which Christian teaching has made some impact. The plot of the play is as follows :

Isola is a son of the Reverend Erinjobi and his wife Moji. Isola is always on bad terms with his father. He falls in love with a girl named Morunke Olumurin who is the daughter of a powerful local couple. In their course of love Morunke becomes pregnant. When this is revealed, Isola runs away with Morunke in order to avoid the wrath of his father.

They take shelter outside the town, where Isola sleeps fitfully and dreams. It is understood that he keeps a gun in the shelter in the hope of killing python, which leaves nearby and threatens the life of a tortoise and her young. When the last shot in the gun is accidentally fired, Isola returns to the town followed by Morunke. He breaks into his father's study and steals ammunition.

The alarm is sounded, the community is aroused and the chase begins. Isola is cornered in some bushes. He fires and kills his approaching father, believing, he is killing a python.

In Camwood on the Leaves, Soyinka has made effective use of songs and sounds and juxtaposition of events. There are rapid and significant juxtapositions of scenes. Soyinka locates his scenes quickly through sound effects and clues in the dialogue. He has used folk-songs between the scenes in order to provide links and create a social and emotional context. It has a violent final and there is no epilogue. In short, Camwood on the Leaves is a brilliantly constructed and deeply moving Yoruba tragedy.

A Dance Of The Forests:

A Dance of the Forests is one of Soyinka's most important plays and the one in which his maturity is revealed. It has been claimed that the play was 'commissioned' for the celebration of Nigerian independence.

However, the following comment from James Gibbs overrules the above statement. Gibbs says : 'This is not true, a significant portion of the text was taken over from an earlier work The Dance of the African Forests, an anti-Apartheid play'.¹⁶

It is an extremely complex play and very difficult to understand. Many important themes are being dealt with in the confines of one play. There are multiple critical approaches about this play but all of them are 'evasive'. Gerald Moore has compared A Dance of the Forests with A Midsummer Night's Dream.¹⁷ Eldred Jones offers rather grand interpretation of the play. He writes :

'...A Dance of the Forests is an attempt to represent the complexities of the human personality and its consequences within this cyclical pattern of history. The result is a very complex play with tremendous possibilities for staging as well as for interpretation, it is a warning against moral complacency and escapism'.¹⁸

There are numerous interpretations about the theme of the play. Writing about the possible themes in the play, Eldred Jones observes :

'Numerous themes appear - some only momentarily... in this vast drama, but they are all contained under a broad enveloping theme of the contradictions (both as it involves the single man and as it varies from man to man) for the whole race of man and his environment. The environment involves not only other men and trees and rivers and minerals, etc., but also gods and spirits of the dead who act as prodders and stimulators to the human conscience. Within this vast framework there is a room for a great variety of sub-themes - the nature and the function of art, political corruption, the

destruction of the natural environment, war, changes in values brought about by 'modernization', the consequences of free-will - there is a profusion of themes which arise naturally from Soyinka's treatment of the overall theme.¹⁹

Thus it is not easy to say which of the themes of the play the playwright regards as most important one. But the main theme seems to be the gathering of the tribes. This is curious gathering of the living, the dead and the spirits. It may symbolize and celebrate the unification of various strands of Nigerian society at the declaration of independence. It concerns the possibility of making a break with the past, of a new beginning.

The play was written in May 1960 and was first performed as part of the Nigerian independence celebrations - an occasion marked by great festivities and gatherings.

The construction of the play is unusual, since it does not follow any formal or classical pattern. It is divided in two parts. The events are held together so loosely that it is difficult to see the connection between them. There are countless characters and none of them is fully developed except Demoke. Many characters are social types, representatives of groups rather than individuals.

The understanding of the play is hampered by many things: the unclarity about author's aim, the long and obscure poetic style, the introduction of words in

vernaculars without giving their English equivalents, the jumbling together of facts and events and the double role given to some characters etc.

Despite these flaws, A Dance of the Forests remains one of the most appreciated and interpreted plays of Soyinka.

2.2.1.3 PLAYS FROM THE SIXTIES:

With his three earlier plays grouped as 'The Independence Plays', Soyinka had established himself as a leading playwright and a major figure in the literary and the cultural circles in Nigeria. From 1961 to 1969 he wrote and published only three plays and some revue sketches. The major plays in this group are The Strong Breed, The Road and Kongi's Harvest. The only revue sketch that has survived today is Childe Internationale.

The Strong Breed:

The Strong Breed is based on the traditional custom of a having a carrier for the sins of the village. With his sufferings the carrier atones for the gross injustices of the whole community. He goes round the village, collecting insults, curses and abuses and he is finally driven into the bush. He never comes back. In most cases, a village has a family of 'strong breeds' usually, stranger

elements, from which these carriers are supplied each year. But in the play an idiot named Ifada is forced to be the carrier. Eman protests and offers himself for the job.

Soyinka does not reveal the identify of the village in which the events of this play take place. This is because the playwright wants to stress the fact that the problem of strangers is common to all villages. Strangers are made to do the most difficult jobs and they do not enjoy their full rights as members of the community.

Thus in The Strong Breed, Soyinka highlights the custom of having a carrier. He calls our attention to a system which needs immediate reform. The carrier dies for the sins of the community but his death doesn't result in any noticeable improvement in public morality.

The Strong Breed is the story of how a sick society, burdened with a strong sense of guilt, seeks to absolve itself through the sacrifice of an innocent scapegoat. It is also a study of predestination and how the individual is haunted by his destiny.

It is Soyinka's most disciplined play. It is very tightly written with few digressions. It is simple in structure. It has economy of the language and it is restrained in style. Its dramatic treatment is effective. It is a moving and powerful play of Soyinka.

The Road:

The Road is a very complex play by Wole Soyinka. There has been very little interpretation of the overall meaning or significance of the play. Some renowned critics like Gerald Moore, Eldred Jones and Margaret Laurence have tried to write better analyses of the play but all of them present us with no overall interpretation, for they give occasional insights into specific lines or segments in the play.

Superficially, The Road may be described as the story of a man (the Professor) in search of the Word. Although the Professor's search for the Word dominates the language of the play, this search is really no more than mockery, a force. The Road provides us with a complex study of death in its different stages, as well as the diverse attitudes of different individuals to it. It is a play about death and examines the anticipation of death by living beings and the question of their preparation or lack of preparation for its inevitability. The play is symbolic because the road stands for life - the road as the arena in which people act out their lives and where they meet their ultimate end, the death.

In his essay, 'Tradition and Talent in Wole Soyinka's Plays' H.H. Anniah Gowda writes :

The Road is a very complex play, a combination of comedy and tragedy, very much Shakespearian in its make-up. The characters are a mixed lot : driver, a professor, a politician, a policeman, and a crowd and other typical West African characters using the mask-idiom. They all are road users - the drivers, the touts, the passengers and their followers - all linked by the common phenomenon of death.²⁰

The play has two parts. The dance in the play symbolizes suspension of death. The play is full of grim realities of the tragedy and the pictures of human destruction caused by maniac speed. The various characters talk of the many facets of death on the road. The character of the Professor is very enigmatic; he is responsible for many accidents and these very accidents are a source of business in his life. He dies with these words:

"Be even like the road itself. Flatten your bellies with the hunger of an unpropitious day, power your hands with the knowledge of death?"²¹ (P.265)

All in all, The Road is Soyinka's most important play and a substantial piece of drama. Soyinka himself considers this play to be the most precious to him and once remarked that there were only two or three people so far whom he could permit to direct it.

Kongi's Harvest:

Kongi's Harvest was conceived when Soyinka heard Banda's statement about a political enemy: "I want him alive, if possible".²²

Kongi's Harvest is the study of the conflict which arises when the authority of traditional rule, unquestioned for centuries, is suddenly challenged by the authority of contemporary political power. The new authority does not derive spiritual power from tradition and hence it can establish itself by some form of coercion.

In Kongi's Harvest, Soyinka's concepts relating to kingship and his attitude to the new regime, are seen. The new regime depends on the 'government loud speaker'. The superintendant "dressed in khaki and brass buttons" wields power over the traditional ruler. He silences the royal drum, symbolic of the power of the new regime. The nature of Kongism is the overall corruption and misuse of power. Kongi is the dictator.

Thematically, Kongi's Harvest, is a biting satire on Kwame Nkrumah, the legendary late President of Ghana. It is a very African play.

Kongi's Harvest is a very complex play. One needs to know the background of the political scene in order to understand the full significance of the play. There are many

digressions and disconnected episodes. There is an overall lack of precision and development. However, despite these faults Kongi's Harvest is an interesting play on an important subject and is regarded as Soyinka's most important work.

Childe Internationale:

It is a revue sketch. Here we read about Kotun, who is a conservative and shows his determination to have the upper hand in his own house. He is a domineering Yoruba 'of the old school' and has won the sympathy of the audiences throughout Anglophone Africa. The play was received with delight at its first performances and continues to give immense pleasure.

2.2.1.4 THE POST-WAR PLAY:

The War here referred to is the Nigerian Civil War which broke out in August 1967. The Eastern Region led by the then Col. Ojukwu, seceded from the Federation, declaring itself the Republic of Biafra. The Federal Government under the command of Gowon sent troops to prevent the secession which followed by a chapter of severe violence in Nigerian history. Through press Soyinka urged the Federal government to call a truce in the war with Biafra. This was taken as an act of treason and Soyinka was arrested and detained for 27 months without trial in Kaduna prison. He wrote the story-line of Madmen and Specialists in that prison itself. He

wrote this play in full when he was invited to present his play at Eugene O'Neill Centre, Waterford, Connecticut.

Madmen and Specialists:

Madmen and Specialists is the only post-war play which shows dehumanizing and corrupting effects of power. More specifically it is a story of how normal people, when given access to political power, betray their vocations. It tells of their transformation, figuratively speaking, to animals. In an interview with Mel Gussow of The New York Times Soyinka describes the play as dealing with 'a problem in my own society, the betrayal of vocation for the attraction of power in one form or another'. ²³

Madmen and Specialists is a first hand document of the degrading and vicious effects of war. It highlights how the essential values of human beings are sacrificed and how war dehumanizes people. In a way Soyinka warns that war pushes a country to the brink of disaster and it is always bad to follow the paths of extremes for it destroys all values. It is a story about all madmen who start wars and indulge in acts of brutality.

There is a very limited story line in the play and Soyinka weaves the whole plot around a metaphor. The play is full of humour and it is more ironic than usual. Unlike all his earlier plays, Madmen and Specialists, is very abstract.

On the political level, Madmen and Specialists is Soyinka's general comment on all other wars and in particular, on the Biafran War. Soyinka, quite simply, shows how the thirst for power can corrupt professional people.

2.2.1.5 THE PLAYS OF EXILE:

Soyinka left Nigeria for Europe in July 1970, what he calls his second 'exile'. He nearly spent five years in Europe. In his second extended exile (1971 to 1975) he published three plays : Jero's Metamorphosis, The Bacchae of Euripides and Death and the king's Horseman. These plays drew on ideas and characters from the late fifties and early sixties.

Jero's Metamorphosis:

In 1972, Soyinka wrote a sequel to The Trials of Brothers Jero, entitled Jero's Metamorphosis. It presents a profit-minded prophet in his new adventures. It is a satire on Gowon's Nigeria. It is more subtle and embodies the 'iron first in the velvet glove' approach. It is a comedy. The play will be discussed in detail in Chapter No.4.

The Bacchae of Euripides:

Soyinka adopted The Bacchae by Euripides in response to a commission from the National Theatre in Great

Britain. Euripides' Bacchae has remained a riddle to scholars for the centuries. Soyinka relied on translations for source, particularly, translations by Gilbert Murray and William Arrowsmith. He took a few lines directly from these translations into his text, incorporated passages from his poem 'Idarne' and introduced chants from Oriki verses in praise of Ogun. However, Soyinka draws on profusely from Africa and her rich myths.

The premier of The Bacchae of Euripids took place at the Old Vic, then the home of the British National Theatre, on August 2, 1973. The production was well attended and it brought out penetrating numerous reviews.

The Bacchae of Euripides shows Soyinka's interest in Classical Greek play to hold an African theme. It reveals Soyinka's ideas on power, ritual, religion and tragedy. The following comment by Soyinka himself helps us to understand the play :

"I see The Bacchae as a prodigious barbaric banquet, an insightful manifestation of the universal need of man to match nature herself on her monstrous cycle of regeneration. Within the inexorable logic of change, the spiritual and the social are fused".²⁴

Death and the King's Horseman :

Soyinka wrote Death and the King's Horseman while he was at Churchill College, Cambridge. In 1960, Ulli Beier,

a teacher and writer working in Nigeria, had suggested that certain events which took place at Oyo in 1944, would be a suitable basis for an Independence play. The Alafin of Oyo, Oba Siyenbola Oladigbolu I, died after a reign of thirty-three years. On his death his horseman, Esin Jinadu, tried to 'follow his master' by committing suicide. But the British colonial officer in authority at Oyo intervened, and Jinadu was arrested and taken into custody. However, Jinadu's youngest son, Murana, killed himself in his father's place.

Soyinka employs the same theme in his play Death and King's Horseman. Soyinka imposes upon his hero a crucial test. He must face personal extinction in order that the continuity of the community and its values may be assured. The horseman however, fails in that crucial test because the traditional world has begun to be corrupted and he has been touched by that corruption. Soyinka has woven a good story around a well-recorded historical event. In his play he shows us how an ancient and comprehensive civilization falters in its path.

2.2.1.6 PLAYS FOR NIGERIA OF THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES:

Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1975 after his second extended exile. He felt it an urgent need to communicate political ideas to a mass audience through the performing arts. For that purpose he developed a distinctive

agit-prop theatre which made particularly effective use of music and song. During this period, he wrote Opera Wonyosi(1977), Before the Blowout(1978), Rice Unlimited (1981), Die still Rev.Dr.Godspeak!(1982) - a commissioned radio play which emerged as the stage play Requiem for a Futurologist(1983), and Priority Projects(1983), and A Play of Giants(1984).

Opera Wonyosi:

Opera Wonyosi is an adaptation of 'Bertolt Brecht's (German dramatist) Threepenny Opera. Through this play Soyinka satirizes the numerous vices of oil-boom Nigeria. Though he has based his play on Brecht's Threepenny Opera, Soyinka has been able to give Opera Wonyosi a distinctively African and Nigerian flavour. He attacks the injustice, anti-social behaviour, arrogance, corruption and moral depravity prevalent in Nigeria during the mid-seventies.

The world premiere of Opera Wonyosi took place on the night of the University of Ife's Convocation, before an audience which contained many official guests and several national figures. It is a published play. it is full of music and songs through which telling criticism of the contemporary life is made. The important thing about this play is that it shows how European models can be used suitably to speak to particular audiences about particular problems.

Before the Blow-out:

Before the Blow-out is made of two sketches - Home to Roost and Big Game Safari. They were written for the Guerilla Theatre Unit of the University of Ife.

His first sketch Home to Roost examines the activities which followed the lifting of the ban on political activities in Nigeria. The period of emergency ended in 1979 and elections were due in 1979. This gave rise to many new political parties and politicians, old as well as new, started appealing the electorate for voting their respective parties to power. The satire in Home to Roost is biting and there is a lot of verbal humour which keeps the audience laughing all the time.

However, the play fails to make an impact on the mind of audience mainly because of two reasons - first, it is static i.e. apart from 'the arrival' of Onikuru and his henchmen in the beginning nothing much actually happens and secondly, it relies on verbal humour only. But some of the verbal humour is broad and would be widely appreciated in Nigeria. James Gibbs writes :

"I saw the short play performed during November 1978; it was highly topical and much appreciated by an audience in Oduduwa Hall at the University of Ife. I do not think that it would have much impact in the streets of Ile-Ife, where it was also presented".²⁵

Big Game Safari was triggered by a wave of car thefts which swept Nigeria. In Sept.1978, for instance, a hundred cars were stolen in Ibadan over a thirty day period. This sort of news item set Soyinka thinking and he saw a relationship between the car thefts and elections. He indirectly suggested, in Big Game Safari, that unprincipled politicians might be responsible for the thefts since they needed to secure means of transport in preparation for their election campaign.

The texts of Home to Roost and Big Game Safari employ visual effects which enable them to have a certain impact in the lorry-parks and market-places of Nigeria. These sketches could be easily performed almost anywhere. Thus in these two short revue sketches of popular and spectacular theatre, Soyinka exposes the machinations of political leaders.

Rice Unlimited:

Rice Unlimited addressed itself to the numerous scandals surrounding the importation and distribution of rice. The play was presented by the Guerilla Theatre Unit of the University of Ife in the grounds of the National Museum, near to the centre of Lagos.

Rice Unlimited is a simple and brief sketch hastily put together. It was presented in the heart of the city as a part of demonstration against the corruption.

Rice is one of the staple foods of Nigerians. In Shagari's regime, the licences for importing rice were awarded. There was a large scale corruption in this deal. The trading of rice became remunerative and there was a heavy blackmailing, which raised the prices of rice sky-high. It became an explosive issue. Through his sketch Rice Unlimited, Soyinka highlights the corruption practiced in the deal.

Although Rice Unlimited addressed itself to a social problem, the performance passed unreviewed and unrecorded. It was a simple and straightforward performance. James Gibbs comments :

'The directness and simplicity of the language used in Rice Unlimited and the visual quality of demonstration marked a new level of achievement for Soyinka as a political dramatist'.²⁶

Requiem for a Futurologist:

In response to an invitation to write a play for the BBC, Soyinka, in 1982, wrote a radio-play entitled Die Still, Rev. Dr. Godspoke!. Here Soyinka attacks 'metaphysicians and parapsychologists' who were rampant in Nigeria. However, the play out-grew the half-hour radio format and Soyinka decided to write a stage version of the play. As a result, it was published as Requiem For a Futurologist, in 1984.

There were countless metaphysicians and parapsychologists in Nigeria during the late seventies and the

early eighties. The most prominent among those was 'Dr' Godspower Oyewole, who was regarded by some as a 'world-famous' metaphysician and parapsychologist. His predictions were widely reported and were taken seriously by millions of people. Therefore, Soyinka tries to expose the cunningness of the Oluwoles of this world through this play. Besides Soyinka wanted to criticise the wording of obituary notices and the extravagance connected with funerals which were used by the people to make a show of their wealth.

The central conflict in Requiem For a Futurologist is between an astrologer, the Right Rev.Dr.Godspeak Igbehodan, and his rival, Brother Eleazar Hosannah, who had predicted and announced his death. Hosannah's predictions were given wide publicity by using obituary notices and posters. They were broadcast publicly by the BBC. In the play, we see crowd of people assembled before the residence of Dr.Godspeak to see him dead and Dr.Godspeak attempting to make a contact with someone who will believe that he is still alive.

This is essentially a dilemma story. Through a series of humorous encounters, it shows Soyinka's examination of death. The performances given at Ife were well received by the audience. However the play received little critical attention from the critics and reviewers.

Priority Projects:

Soyinka wrote a series of brief sketches entitled Priority Projects. They were taken on tour along with Requiem. Soyinka and Chuck Mike directed them. They carried forward Soyinka's campaign against prestige projects and policies launched by Shagari. The major projects that were attacked include Festac 77, Green Revolution, Abuja and Ethical Revolution. Soyinka exposed the uselessness and futility of these schemes. He focused on the cost expenses of these schemes and how they provided opportunities for the corrupt to make money.

Festac 77 attacks the 'cultural jamboree' held during January 1977. Green Revolution is an attack on an extensively publicized but atrociously managed agricultural scheme. Abuja highlights the corruption involved in the construction of the new capital city for the country. It reveals the corruption in various fields : the construction of 'low-cost' houses and their demolition, the awarding of contracts and their subsequent cancellation etc.. Ethical Revolution criticizes those whose lives are based on purely immoral principles. It exposes the hypocrisy of those who proclaim the Ethical Revolution.

These sketches were profusely spectacular and more directly political. They contributed to the rise of

discontent against the corrupt, hypocritic and ruthless regime of Shagari.

A Play of Giants:

A Play of Giants is an important play by Soyinka and as in Kongi's Harvest, it continues its attack on the ruthlessness of the dictators, Soyinka was highly critical of Idi Amin, who overthrowing Milton Obote began a reign of terror in Uganda, during February 1979. Soyinka waged a fierce campaign against the bloody tyranny in Uganda through Transition and the Nigerian press. In 1979, Soyinka published his 'Happy Riddance' in which he examines Amin's rise to the power and his subsequent downfall.

In A Play of Giants, Soyinka has focussed the ruthless regimes of the two dictators of the time. One is Idi Amin of Uganda and the other Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. The character of Kamini represents Idi Amin whereas Barra Tuboum represents Mobutu Sese Seko. The country of Bugara referred to in the play refers to Uganda.

A Play of Giants was written for production in a well-equipped theatre building. It was scheduled for performance at Yale University during 1981-82 but was postponed. Then it was published in 1984. It is written in two acts and is sub-titled as 'a fantasia on the Aminian theme'. The play continues to have relevance even today

because Aminism is not eliminated and it occurs every now and then in contemporary Africa.

The plot of A Play of Giants is slender and the main focus of the play is satire and theme rather than action. There is no dancing, no music and no flash-back. Soyinka has become highly successful in highlighting the conceit, ignorance, arrogance and philistinism of the dictators. At the same time Soyinka makes it clear how neo-imperialist countries has used Kamini as a 'tool' and enabled him to torture, maim, terrorise and slaughter his people.

A Play of Giants is a satirical display in bile and blood. It refers to one of Soyinka's preoccupation of a themes regarding the nature of power and its relationship to responsibility. Summarizing the play James Gibbs writes :

'A Play of Giants' represents an attack on African leaders of unprecedented ferocity and a work of considerable courage. It's scale and its violence compel attention; Soyinka seems to stride among African tyrants past and present, pointing to their excesses, recalling their ill-deeds and drawing attention to the forces which manipulate them'.²⁷

2.2.2 NOVELS :

Soyinka has written two novels. They are The Interpreters and Season of Anomy. A brief discussion of these novels follows.

2.2.2.1 The Interpreters:

The Interpreters is the first novel by Soyinka which was written and published in 1965. Professor Arthur Ravenscroft of Leeds University and the former Editor of the Journal of Commonwealth Literature has summed up the theme of the novel as follows :

The story of The Interpreters is chiefly about five friends (an artist, an engineer-turned sculptor, a journalist, a lecturer and a civil-servant) who try to come to terms with themselves, each other and the society of the Independent Nigeria. They belong to the intellectual elite, are fully aware of the complexities of the social and moral problems that face a country like theirs, they feel they should be helping their people to solve these problems but are themselves confused about their problems and about the meaning of their own personal inner lives.....²⁸

The Interpreters is a very complex novel of Soyinka and it has been widely criticized and reviewed in Africa as well as in Europe. The novel has many themes. E.D. Jones Comments : A list of topics which the novel covers either substantially or glancingly would almost match the numbers of its pages.²⁹

The following comment by Wole Soyinka himself helps us to understand the novel. He writes : 'The Interpreters was an attempt to capture a particular moment in the lives of a generation, which was trying to find its feet after independence'.³⁰

There is no plot in The Interpreters, as is the convention in other novels. One cannot tell certainly where the novel begins and ends. The novel is full of images which overlap upon one another.

There are five main characters in the novel. Sekoni is an engineer-turned sculptor, Egbo is a civil servant, Bandele is the University teacher, Sagoe is a journalist and Kola is the painter and art instructor. All of these characters are portrayed sketchily. There is no hero in the conventional sense of the term.

In The Interpreters satire comes close to poetry. Satire is poetic in concept and has its full play in the novel. The satire opens up in images breathing disgust, contempt, cynicism, sarcasm, pleasant and light humour. The imagery in the novel deals with abstractions and it has intellectual appeal which gives the novel a touch of the 'Morality' flavour.

The final impression after reading The Interpreters one gets is that of the promise of hope. Although Soyinka displays the corruption, indecision and betrayal in the society, he has full faith in the intellectual elite. He believes that the future of Nigeria rests in the educated men and women who work together and

interpret their actions which contribute to the progress of Nigeria. Thus Soyinka portrays an universal problem using a Nigerian setting. And that is why Soyinka's work is valid. In a nutshell, The Interpreters is the best novel of Soyinka.

2.2.2.2 Season of Anomy:

His second novel Season of Anomy was published in 1973. Gerald Moore narrates the story of the novel as follows:

In part, the novel is simply the story of Ofeyi's attempt to transform the larger society (Nigeria? Africa?) in the image of Aiyero'. In part, it is the story of Ofeyi's (Orpheus's) quest to find and redeem Iriyise (Eurydice), who has been carried off to the underworld of military imperialist tyranny. There is no necessary dependence between these two motifs : But the Orpheus - Eurydice motif provides the mythical element which Soyinka's genius demands.³¹

Moore adds further :

'What we do witness within the scope of the novel is the cataclysmic failure of Ofeyi's attempt to peacefully export the ideas and methods of Aiyero' to the larger society'.³²

The novel contains five chapters with the heading: Seminal, Buds, Tentacles, Harvest and Spores. It has the cyclical and seasonal imagery which gives an implication of hope because the cycle must continue. The language of the novel is charged with poetic qualities.

2.2.3 POETRY:

Soyinka has published four volumes of poetry. They are Idarne and Other Poems (1967), Poems from Prison (1969), A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972) and Ogun Abibiman (1977).

2.2.3.1 Idarne and Other Poems:

Idarne and Other Poems is the first volume of poetry written by Wole Soyinka. It is a harvest of poems written over a long period of nine years. It is an highly organised volume which brings out poet's anguish in stark nakedness for society's general lack of awareness.

The volume has been divided into groups with a few poems under each group. A group of poems entitled 'of birth and death' brings out two major beliefs of Soyinka's poetic idea, the idea of reincarnation and the cyclical pattern of existence.

In the group called 'Season' human beings are compared to reapers waiting for the fruits of life to ripen, so that they can gather them and move on to death, the life's most mature fruit. Soyinka stresses the inevitability of death. We must accept death, for we are responsible to life, it is a road we should negotiate as nobly as possible.

Soyinka is always preoccupied with transitional period between life and dissolution. A group of poems entitled 'grey seasons' details the poet's anguish at the wave of political violence that has engulfed his society. His another poem 'of the road' re-examines death through the accidents on Nigerian roads. The group of poems 'October 66' highlights Soyinka's anguish at the massacre of the Ibos in Northern Nigeria.

The poems in Idarne are autobiographical and show some concern for the Blackman in other African countries.

2.2.3.2 Poems from Prison:

Poems from Prison was published in 1969. In 1968 Soyinka was in solitary confinement in the Kaduna prison. At that time he smuggled two poems out of jail to his friend in Britain, Rex Collings, who published them as Poems from Prison

2.2.3.3 A Shuttle in the Crypt:

In 1967, the Nigerian Civil War broke out on the eve of secession of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. The Eastern Region, then led by Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, separated from the Federation, declaring itself the republic of Biafra. Therefore, the Federal government of Gowan sent troops to Biafra and the world witnessed a massive annihilation.

Soyinka pointed out the futility of the war and urged the Federal government to have a truce in the Biafran War. This was considered as an act of treason and Soyinka was immediately arrested and detained without trial in the Kaduna prison. When he was in jail he wrote poems which are published under the title A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972)

A Shuttle in the Crypt was published in 1972 and it is the most important artistic product of the Civil War. The poems in this volume are simple and direct. A strong feeling of anger and anguish pervades through them and each poem reflects Soyinka's passionate intensity.

In his poem 'Conversation at Night with a Cockroach' the cockroach attempts to justify the killing of the Ibos within the cycle of nature; but the anguished poet condemns the wanton destruction of human lives.

In 'When Seasons Change', the poet presents the seasonal variation against the prisoner's monotonous life. The poet sadly admits that the great truths of life never change. Yet, the poet counsels against despair, basing his faith in the cyclic pattern of changes in nature.

He felt his soul ravished as he grew weak within the prison walls. In his poem 'Live Burial' he writes :

Sixteen paces
By twenty-three. They hold
Siege against humanity and truth,
Employing time to drill through his sanity.

A Shuttle in the Crypt represents the fate of men of vision in the classic confrontation with 'visionless' authority over the rights of the unprivileged. Here he not only treats the clash of culture theme but projects his image as a social critic from the very beginning.

2.2.3.4 Ogum Abibiman:

Ogum Abibiman, Soyinka's another volume of poetry was published in 1977. Here Soyinka expresses his anger against Apartheid Government in South Africa. He carries an assault on the policy of racial descrimination through his poems. Soyinka was the first and foremost poet to support Mozambique's leader, Samora Machel, when he launched an all-out crusade against apartheid. Through his poems he prophesies that these countries will liberate themselves some day or the other. His dream was to see all African nations free and independent. He strongly believed that success would come. Today, Soyinka's dream has come true.

2.2.4 NON-FICTION:

Soyinka has published two books of non-fiction. They include The Man Died : Prison Notes and Myth, Literature and the African World. A brief introduction to these books will reveal the genius of the author.

2.2.4.1 The Man Died : Prison Notes

The Man Died : Prison Notes was published on 15th November, 1972. Soyinka was a political prisoner nearly for twenty-seven months from 1967 to 1969. During his imprisonment in Kaduna prison, he was tortured, maimed and humiliated by the officials of the military region. In this book, Soyinka describes his sufferings. Kolawole Ogungebesan observes: 'It is a bitter book marked by its uncontrolled anger and anguish to the point of shrillness'.³³ The Man Died is a full-length volume of non-fiction which gives us insights into the cruelty and inhumanity practised by the military government of Gowon in Nigeria.

2.2.4.2 Myth, Literature and the African World:

Myth, Literature and the African World, published in 1976, is an important document for students of Commonwealth Literature.

Soyinka delivered some lectures in the University of Cambridge and they are published as Myth, Literature and the African World. In these essays Soyinka expresses his views on religion, metaphysical systems, the Yoruba culture and a host of other concerns. It is a richly suggestive poetic source-book. Soyinka discloses the metaphysical context of his artistic myth-making in this book.

The language of Myth, Literature and the African World is very difficult to follow. It is complex prose. In it Soyinka has dealt with the complex African mythology.

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