Volume 18 Issue 41
Originally issued as A6



Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 18 Issue 6 Version 1.0 Year 2018
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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By Md. Mominur Rahman

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GJHSS-A Classification: *FOR Code: 419999*



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The Guide and *the Lion and the Jewel*: The Peace-Making Efforts of R. K. Narayan and Wole Soyinka

Md. Mominur Rahman

Abstract- The paper will unveil how both R. K. Narayan and Wole Soyinka contributed much to establish peace in their respective countries through their literary works. They have engaged themselves in a journey to protect traditionalism and the practices of their cultures from any kind of foreign intrusion. Almost all their literary works bear the testimony to their peace-making efforts. However, amid them, *The Guide* by R. K. Narayan and The *Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka make it clear that both writers have prioritized traditionalism over modernity. This research discovers how the characters of the above-mentioned texts engage themselves in different deeds to find out the auspicious of traditionalism and the negative aspects of modernity and how they succeed in doing so. At last, the paper will bring out how both R. K. Narayan and Wole Soyinka have emerged as peace-makers through their literary contributions.

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I. Introduction

Sahitya Academy Award-winning writer R. K. Narayan always loved to focus on the age-old cultural practices of India through his writings. It was his motive to spread the message of Indianness through his novels. In recent days, his novels have become a media to dish out the wealth of Indian culture amidst the rest of the world. Even in India, students learn about history and culture of India through reading his fictions. So, the critics consider him the finest Indian fiction writer of all time. Narayan never produced any novel keeping in mind about the readers who are only well-versed; rather he always wrote for the mass people. He aimed at manifesting Indian mythology, history and culture among us through the writings which are lucid to read and easy to understand. And the same spirit of Indianness evoked Narayan to pen the novel, *The Guide.* This novel brings into focus how Narayan established himself as a peace-maker in India disseminating his ideas of non-violence and 'ahimsha' (non-violence). By the same token, Wole Soyinka has emerged as a peace-maker in Nigerian society, who strongly believes that a society cannot progress without its own culture and its practices. Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* encapsulates the importance of traditionalism in African society. It also unfolds how the intruders from the west invariably try to influence the Africans with their ways of living. And Soyinka has considered this as a threat to the cultural variation of Africa. Moreover, he has shown how the people of the west have been trying to impose their thoughts and ideas on the peace-loving people of Africa. In this play, we find him a very committed playwright who, by all means, wants to maintain the peace of his locality. His peace-making efforts take us to his world of tension, confusion, and synthesis.

Objective of the Research

This research has shown how both R. K. Narayan and Wole Soyinka, through their above-mentioned literary pieces, contribute to establishing peace in their respective countries. The characters they have made in their works are also committed to maintaining peace in their localities. They represent the ideas of the writers. Raju from *The Guide* goes through different tough phases of his life and at last, he becomes a saviour of his society. The way Raju takes the responsibility of saving the villagers from the bad days of drought is very similar to Narayan's project of spreading the history of India through writing to make people conscious about India's myth, trend, culture, and its practices. Wole Soyinka, through the play, *The Lion and the Jewel*, brings out manifold tensions prevailing in different societies of Africa. He has shown these problems have emerged because of the intrusion of western cultural components to the African society. In his play, he also accentuates western subjugation, in the name of enlightening the backward people, and has created confusion amid the African people. They have got baffled. They are being influenced by western culture since most of the governments of Europe have been injecting money along with their cultural practices. The ambivalence of African people becomes conspicuous through the projection of the character, Sidi. However, Soyinka, through Sidi's rejection of Lakunle, aims at removing confusion and tension from the society and wants to reestablish peace in the locality.

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II. Narayan's Preference to Spiritualism Over Modernity

Throughout the novel, Narayan speaks of the necessity of spiritualism. The novel deciphers his ideas about non-violent resistance and ahimsha (non-violence). The storyline helps us understand that Narayan strongly believes in the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. Moreover, his concept of Indianness also dominates the novel. He felt that "to be a good writer anywhere, you must have roots-both in religion and family. I have these things." He always worked with dualities of life such as appearance and reality, good and evil, beliefs and betrayals, tradition and modernity etc. But this novel particularly deals with Gandhian ideology and Indianness which ultimately lead Narayan to prioritize spirituality over modernity.

At the outset, we find the protagonist of the novel, Raju running a shop at a railway station. Then he becomes a railway guide. And then he turns a married woman's lover. Gradually, he turns a dancing girl's manager. In the middle of the novel, we find him a swindler who cheats people. This activity makes him a prisoner. Finally, his transition from a materialistic one to a spiritual guru makes him a genuine human being. Raju goes through a process of crime and punishment. In this regard, Sharan remarks that:

> In the course of his ordeals, he changes himself thoroughly and accepts the challenges of reality. He plays his role of a holy man with a ring of sincerity and embraces death at the end of the novel. Thus, 'Railway Raju', the guide becomes a 'spiritual guide' and all his imperfection and impersonation turn into a real act of self-sacrifice. (1993:21)

Most of us know that Mahatma Gandhi struggled not only for India's independence but also for making a united India where all people, regardless of class, caste and creed, will live a happy and peaceful life. Gandhi's dream of establishing a peaceful society is very similar to that of R. K. Narayan. And Narayan has brought this issue into focus through the projection of the character, Raju. In *The Guide*, Narayan creates a picture of Gandhi which we can compare with Swami or Raju. The villagers of Mangal consider Swami or Raju as Mahatma. They deeply believe that Raju will rescue them from the evil spirit of drought. They also believe Raju's fasting will bring rain to the land as Gandhi's fast became able to bring changes in Indian society. Raju, the Swami will save the land the way Gandhi's fast saved India. In this regard, we find the villagers saying the following words about swami (Raju): "He is like Mahatma. When Mahatma Gandhi went without food, how many things happened in India! This is a man like that. If he fasts there will be rain." (*The Guide*, 102)

It is Narayan's art of characterization that he imbues Gandhian spirit for saving others and risks his own life, into his character Raju. Raju tries to acknowledge his past life sins to the villagers for several times. However, they do not want to believe those, rather they regard him as their saviour. Raju's fast makes it clear that he also does not want to destroy the peace of villagers. As soon as the villagers regard him as their saviour he does not hesitate to sacrifice his own life to bring back peace to the village, Mangal. Indeed, Narayan's own beliefs regarding spiritualism have been reflected in the actions of the character Raju. Thus, Narayan becomes a great peace rooting facilitator in Indian society.

Moreover, Narayan's portrayal of Malgudi represents his concept of Indianness. The Malgudian society and its tradition represent the society and the tradition of India as a whole. In addition, Narayan has used symbols which stand for typical Indian tradition and culture. The portrayal of the temple and the river Sarayu represent the old nature of Indian culture. To fully understand Narayan's Indianness G. S. Rathore voices,

> The temple's influence on the democratic consciousness is so profound and efficacious that it results in the ultimate transformation of Raju. It enables the establishment of the identity of the mask and the man. The second symbol of the village, Mangal as well as Malgudi, signifies native strength, continuity of tradition, the ecology of a whole race with its inescapable influence on the individual consciousness and elemental determinism of individual destiny. . . . Thirdly Malgudi is the symbol of modern India caught in the throes of change under the impact of western civilization. Its faith and resilience are effectively affirmative of the root of a changing tradition. . . . Lastly Narayan's invention of Mempi Hills is paralleled in his creation of Sarayu River, thereby completing the image of a whole country as a structural symbol for the Universe itself. (7)

Again, Raju's transformation into Swami gives us the idea of age-old faith of the people in sanyasi. In this regard, G. M. A. Christy utters:

> It is true that R.K. Narayan has proved that typical Indian thoughts and feelings can be expressed in foreign language without trying to imitate the native speakers of English. He gave his characters Indian thoughts and feelings and expressed it in his scenes and backgrounds. Indian culture and tradition is rich and varied and it is not easy to summarize through few situations or characters. But Narayan made it exuberant and all his characters share Indianness. (5)

III. Portrayal of Yoruba Culture in *the Lion and the Jewel*

In any society, culture is the most predominant force which determines other important forces of the

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society. It includes shared values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviours among individuals. Our decisions and actions are largely guided by the cultural components. According to Madzingira, "Culture is the totality of human endeavors in a given time and place. People are constructs of their culture. Culture gives people their identity and dignity. It is every day expression and future aspirations. Culture and development are intertwined because culture underpins development and reinforces it." (3) This paper tends to give a very accurate picture of culture within the play *the Lion and the Jewel* that depicts the tragic and comic nature of life.

The above-mentioned description will make us understand how Soyinka prioritizes localness over Eurocentric ideas in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Indeed, the play takes place within a day and is divided into morning, noon, and night. It basically unveils the conflict between traditional Nigerian Yoruba values and the Western influence of Nigeria's colonizers. In this play, Soyinka seeks to satisfy his thirst for Afro-centricity by applying many methods, which are in African origin, in his play. It is needless to say that this play enabled the Nigerian drama to become part of the world theater. Through introducing Sidi and Lakunle he introduces two worldviews; the Afrocentric view and the Eurocentric view. The critic says "The play turns to be a kind of ideological war between these two poles; and furthermore, Soyinka adds another important character who is a female to mediate the conflict." (2)

IV. Conflict between Old and New Set of Values

Indeed, the play, in many ways, explores the value of traditional Yoruba ways against the European innovations. Lukunle, an eager but naive schoolteacher, who believes in modernity and Western ideas, does not want to accept the age-old ideas of African culture. On the other hand, Baroka, the village leader, advocates traditions and considers modern ideas as the threat to his culture. In this regard, the two characters represent the two sides of the major social and political issues in Africa. Likewise, Sidi, the village Belle, also believes that modern ideas are threat to African cultural diversity. In this way, the play presents us with Afrocentric and Eurocentric ideas which are in constant conflict.

Also, the play is a comedy with a message, which puts the Westernized schoolmaster Lakunle against the leader Baroka, illustrating the division between the modern and the traditional. Thus, Wole Soyinka writes about Yoruba rituals and beliefs to reveal his roots. It begins with Lakunle pouring out his heart to Sidi but she does not want to pay attention. If only Lakunle can pay dowry then she would marry him. However, to Lakunle, that is being barbaric, outdated and ignorant. The following lines bear the proof of the aforesaid statement: "Lakunle is dressed in an old style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waistcoat. He wears twenty-three-inch-bottom trousers and blanco-white tennis shoe."(*Collected Plays 2*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, 1). Erapu (1975) illustrates that:

> The school teacher turns out to be a man with a missionary zeal to transform the village from 'primitivity' to 'modernity'. Lakunle is a romantic and a dreamer on the one hand and a jester with an imperfectly hidden zest for life on the other hand (3-4).

He proves to Sidi that he is a man of words, not action. She says "These thoughts of future wonders- do you buy them or merely go mad and dream them?" (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 5). Therefore, she calls his speech nonsense. Moreover, he says

Nonsense? Nonsense? Do you hear? Does anybody listen? Can the stones
Bear to listen to this? Do you call it
Nonsense that I poured the waters of my soul
To wash your feet? (6).

The above-discussion makes it clear that Wole Soyinka strongly wanted to bring into focus the constant conflict between Afrocentric and Eurocentric ideas in Africa. And his play *The Lion and the Jewel* has successfully portrayed the conflict.

V. Afrocentricity vs Eurocentricism

Afrocentricity includes a set of views that encourage the writers to write about the history and culture of Africa. It is an intellectual perspective which discusses the ways of African life. The term 'Afrocentricity' was first coined and popularized by Asante and he states that it is essentially concerned with the tradition and cultural variation of African society. As a movement Afrocentricity places African history and culture at the centre of any analysis. The movement brings into focus how Africans are being marginalized. It rejects Eurocentric ideas imposed on African people. It analyses how Afrocentric ideas are being pushed aside because of the intrusion of Eurocentric ideas into African culture. No doubt, Soyinka always prioritizes Afrocentricity over Eurocentricism. And the way the play, *The Lion and the Jewel* portrays rich cultural heritage of Africa endorses his love for own culture and tradition.

We find that dance and music plays a key role in shaping the entire play. These are drawn from African tradition and they are also similar to other African rituals. These are the vital objects of African oral literature. Moreover, these components show us the importance of oral literature in the literary domain of Africa. According to Feuser "the center of Soyinka's literary art is on African forms." (2) In the play, one must observe that Sidi, Sadiku and the villagers occasionally chant, sing

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and dance. Soyinka used it to unravel the Afrocentricity in his play.

In the play, we also find Soyinka presenting a dichotomy between two ideologies, Afrocentricity and Eurocentricity. On the one hand, Lakunle represents the European tradition and on the other, Sidi and all other villagers represent African tradition. As a result, a conflict arises when the two sets of opposing ideas emerge. Lakunle desires to marry Sidi in a westernized way. But Sidi refuses to accept so. She is more willing to marry Balle, an old traditionalist of the village. The entire episode unveils why Sidi does not want to come out of the cycle of her age-old tradition and culture. It also proves that Soyinka values Afrocentricity much over Eurocentricism. In this regard, Asante states:

> An afrocentric critique must focus on and invest energy in depicting Africans as inevitable creators. Thus in *The Lion and the Jewel* we found Soyinka presenting the Africans as civilised in their own kind of way, and at their own pace without the need of the European views or help. Thus Sidi could not approve with what Lakunle called civilisation which is dining in the city not carrying buckets of water on her head and also using some modern tools. Sidi appreciated her own African way of living and culture. She was not influenced by Lakunle's western views. This depicts Africans as civilised in their own kind of way. Hence we can say that Soyinka reflected African people as subjects not objects of history. (1)

VI. Conclusion

This paper has elaborately analyzed how both R. K. Narayan and Wole Soyinka, through the above-discussed literary pieces, have shown us they are completely faithful towards their own culture, tradition, rituals and trends. They have prioritized localness over any kind of westernized idea. It is clear that the characters namely Sidi and Raju largely represent the beliefs and ideas of Narayan and Soyinka. The way Narayan contributes to establishing peace in Malgudi is very similar to the way Soyinka plays a major role in protecting Yoruba culture from the vicious cycle of Eurocentricism. Again, the way Raju represents Indianness through his sacrifice for the village people resonates the way Sidi rejects westernized ideas of Lakunle. Narayan has chosen the path of spiritualism to save his culture from the evil spirits of modernity. Conversely, Soyinka has celebrated the components of African oral literature to encounter the onslaught of westernized ideas. Consequently, it can be said that the peace-making efforts of both Narayan and Soyinka have succeeded in many ways.

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