INTRODUCTION

The thesis takes on itself the unique task of drawing parallels between the artistic and philosophical vision of Nigerian dramatist Wole Soyinka, and select Indian contemporary dramatists. Chapter one will therefore begin with a detailed introduction to Noble Laureate Wole Soyinka, and his body of creative and critical production. It will then make an attempt to present points of convergence and divergence between Indian traditional cosmological and metaphysical systems, and the Yoruban world view. The chapter will elucidate how the work of select Indian playwrights are very similar to that of Wole Soyinka, in terms of the use of indigenous myths, rituals and folklore to explore both universal and contemporary themes. Hence the unique and exciting project that this thesis wishes to undertake, is the cross applying Indian aesthetics to Soyinka's work, while simultaneously reading Indian plays within a framework of Yoruba metaphysical thought.

The primary focus of Chapter Two is to draw comparisons between Wole Soyinka’s concept of the ‘Fourth stage’ with the concept of ‘Turiya’, a metaphysical state of being derived from Advatic belief. Both these concepts will be elaborated upon in detail. The chapter will then proceed to analyze Girish Karnad’s play The Fire and the Rain (1998) which deals with the theme of caste prejudice. Nittalai, a tribal girl is in love with Arvasu, who is a Brahmin. She is compelled to marry a tribal, and is killed by her husband because she is found with Arvasu. Her tragic end draws the audience’s attention to the evils of caste system in Indian society. By applying concepts of Soyinka’s ‘fourth stage’, this chapter will argue that Karnad compels the audience to rise above a mere physical realm, and enter into the metaphysical realm, as a means of addressing the social evil of casteism. Only then can one arrive at a true state of ‘consciousness.’ It is in Soyinka’s Fourth Stage” and the Indian “Advaitic Stage”, that the souls are
united. The realization dawns on human beings that life is pure consciousness. Both Wole Soyinka and Girish Karnad believe that good drama should take the audience towards a realm of elevated emotions and higher consciousness and the purity of being. It is supposed to purge a human being of all limitations, physical and psychological. If on witnessing good theatre, the audience evolves, this can help furnish a better society.

Chapter Three will examine an important aspect of Indian aesthetics, namely the ‘rasa theory’. ‘Rasa theory’ is a vital part of the ‘Natya Shastra.’ Each rasa corresponds to one of the nine ‘permanent emotional modes’ (sthayibhavas). The nine Rasas are listed as rasa for delight or the erotic (sringara), for laughter and the comic (Hasya), for sorrow and the pathetic (Karuna), for anger (Raudra), for the heroic, energetic or zestful (Vira), for fear (Bhayanaka) for disgust (Bibhatsa), for wonder (Adbhuta) and for serenity, Sama (Santa). While our thoughts and intellectual ideas may vary or differ over time, emotional states are an unchanging part of human nature. ‘Bhavas’, though freshly felt in new situations and ideas remain the same in terms of emotional content. Bharat Muni has classified these emotional states in three categories, Sthayi (dominant) Vyabhicari (transient) and Satwika (psychosomatic).

The chapter will then proceed with an application of ‘rasa theory’ to Wole Soyinka’s play *Death & the King’s Horseman* (1975). The central protagonist Elesin, who is the King’s Horseman, has to die in order to accompany his king to the ‘other’ world. Elesin’s son Olunde undertakes the ritualistic death when he sees his father delaying his death, which is his destiny. His love for life is however stronger than his calling for a ritualistic end to his life. This struggle of the individual to live, at the community’s behest to die, is a crisis which Elesin undergoes. His crisis is the crisis of every individual who struggles to free oneself from the community’s fold and live for oneself. Family, society and the community is so important in
both the Indian and the Nigerian contexts, that individuality is often sacrificed at the altar of the communities and family’s well being.

The chapter will therefore demonstrate how this play is replete with ‘Sringara’ and ‘Karuna’ rasas. Elesin’s love for life and his dancing in the marketplace with the village belles is a celebration of life and calls for ‘Sringara’ rasa. But this man pulsating with life, having a tremendous zest for living will have to give up everything and die a ritualistic death, which saddens the audience and this evokes ‘Karuna’ rasa. Though Elesin also dies in the end, it is the son who has actually shown the way of sacrifice to the father. The chapter will also discuss how Soyinka’s plays have social value as they point out injustices prevalent in contemporary Nigerian society. Soyinka faces the double edged job to make known to the West, the significance of rituals such as that of the Horseman dying ritualistically after the king’s death. At the same time, Soyinka must also try to comprehend the relevance of such rituals in modern times. The grip of certain traditional rituals is as strong on the Yoruba mind as it is on the Indian mind. It is a Herculean task to free the mind from such rituals and Soyinka stresses upon the power of the human will, which has the power to bring about change.

In Chapter Four, Focus shifts to issues of social injustice. The chapter will examine Wole Soyinka’s view on the notions of violence and freedom. As J Krishnamurthy rightly points out: ‘If we know how to look at violence, not only outwardly in society, the wars, the riots, the national antagonism and class conflicts, - but also in ourselves then perhaps we shall be able to go beyond it” (2009:16). In the Climate of Fear (2005), Soyinka discusses how acts of violence result in the demeaning of human dignity. Dignity is simply another face of freedom, and the opposite of power and domination which are equally sustained by fear. This chapter will examine how A Play of Giants (1984) focuses on physical violence perpetuated by
military dictators in Africa. The chapter will also consider how *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995) deals with the theme of corruption at political and moral levels. Indian playwrights like Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar have also dealt with themes of social injustice. Discussion of caste resurfaces in Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Kanyadaan* (1996) which deals with the social issue of inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin girl and a Shudra boy. Tendulkar demonstrates how violence is endemic to human nature and how the suppression of the Shudras over centuries in India has led to cycles of violence in human nature. This chapter will also examine Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972) as a brilliant satire on political violence.

The thesis will conclude with a summarization of Wole Soyinka’s philosophy, namely that to live in harmony with all creatures, one must accept difference and respect it. Every individual is unique. It is the role of the writer to demonstrate how the soul or essence of all beings is the same. This is a universal theme that should be taken up by the artist irrespective of place, location, time or culture.