CHAPTER V

Conclusion: The Hero’s Welcome

One feels a sense of excitement passing through the pages of Soyinka’s works -- plays, poetry, novels, autobiography and critical essays. One striking feature of his brilliant works is that the writer peeps through every page and looms larger and larger than life size as we proceed further and further. It is a thrilling voyage into the most turbulent events of that shook the whole state of Nigeria of the civil war in the postcolonial period. The trials and tribulations of the most excruciating nature through which the people passed, made them feel that the pre-colonial times were better than when they had got independence. The most ghastly incidents, indiscriminate massacres, draconian laws oppression of human rights suppression of social justice under the rule of the cruellest dictators like General Gowon and Id Amen and their brood characterise the political and social conditions of Nigeria that had seen her birth into freedom through many a travail. A Charles Dickens alone can describe those horrors so vividly to make our senses faint. In short, the first decade of the postcolonial Nigeria had witnessed saturnine blood bath, turning the whole state into a veritable Inferno on earth. Hell was let loose. Reason and humanity had fled to the beasts. Social justice was raped. Human rights were mercilessly trampled upon. The satanic brood holding power in their greedy hands changed the whole state into a wilderness. This was the most horrifying picture of the Nigeria during the early years of her independence.
It was against this the Saturnine blood bath of Nigeria that the first generation of eminent writers came on to the African literary scene; Cyprian Ekwensi, Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Soyinka, Clark, Amadi, Ike, Okara, and so on. Of all of them Wole Soyinka is a colossus standing astride over the African literary world. A versatile genius that he is, Soyinka has left no literary genre untouched and whatever genre he touched he adorned it as Dr Samuel Johnson had said about his literary friend Oliver Goldsmith. A genius like Soyinka would bring to life with his unique mastery over the English language, the whole cataclysmic conditions of the Nigeria of that ill-fated period. Sensitive writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, etc. have vividly described the (civil) war-torn Nigeria recording the indescribable agony and suffering of the masses in their immortal works. They have rightly captured the zeitgeist of that nightmarish period of Nigeria. Most of the intellectuals, if not all, had sensed through the tentacles of their sensitive perception of the impending calamity of a civil war. Each writer in his own way had held the mirror of the writings in which the immediate cataclysmic future was reflected. For instance, Achebe’s *A Man of the People* appeared which Kolawole Ogungbesan described as “a literary tour de force” and prophetically enough, January 1966 coup took place soon after the novel was published. And other works like Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* and Okara’s *The Voice* revealed in unmistakable terms the moral depravity and social degeneration in the Nigeria of the 60s.

Soyinka’s unfortunate solitary confinement from 1967-70 was really a blessing in disguise at least for the literary world; for the genesis of his second novel *Season of Anomy* took place here and this novel was conceived as an allegory of a perfect utopia
where no particular political credo was propounded. It is, as critics aver, is not a political novel. For instance, Abiola Irele observes;

There is no real definition at the level of the novel’s political reference to the purpose of his quest, and even the political meaning ascribed to the novel does not involve an active participation in any form of concrete political events… it is a poetic sensibility that Soyinka brings to his treatment of social and political questions in this novel. The vision behind the work is not that of a limited programme of social transformation but rather of a renewal of the wellsprings of the collective life and sensibility. (77-79)

An ardent advocate of peace and non-violence, Soyinka thought it was his duty to prevent the impending civil war between the hostile forces of the Federal Military Government and the rebel Biafran Forces from taking place and thereby avert great disaster and destruction and loss of human life. But as fate would have it, Soyinka’s well intentioned intervention, ironically enough, was awfully misunderstood by the Federal Military government and consequently he was thrown into solitary confinement for about a period of two years. This novel projects a utopian vision which incidentally is based on a real village in Nigeria, named Aiyerto. This village which enjoys peace and social justice endeared itself to Soyinka. This village is the model for Pa Ahima’s Aiyero. This utopian vision is an answer to the present disrupted Nigeria.
Even in his first novel, Soyinka is chiefly concerned with socially, politically, and morally disintegrated Nigeria. He makes five young intellectuals, who studied abroad, diagnose the nature of disease that Nigeria suffers from during that period. They discover that Nigeria of that period has been suffering from a chronic disease, namely, corruption. Although these intellectuals hardly succeed in their duty of diagnosing the factors responsible for its disorganised health, they have miserably failed to correctly assess the present state of Nigeria’s debacle. Corruption, of course is Nigeria’s worst disease. And this disease leaves the whole body politic of Nigeria deteriorated. Thus Soyinka shows his deep concern for the total welfare of Nigeria in all his writings, prose, poetry, and drama. There has not been any writer of his eminence in the whole literary world of Nigeria who has been a political activist with such dedicated commitment. It is, therefore, hardly difficult for one to separate the writer from the political activist in him. Thus Soyinka has emerged in the recent political and literary spheres as a rare phenomenon. His writings have been thoroughly steeped in his convictions that have become nearly his religion. A critical reader perceives in him a staunch apostle of truth and an untiring fighter for justice of mankind. Although Soyinka has had profound faith in Yoruba myth and tradition, he is still a rationalist at heart. When there has been hostile criticism against his novels that they are not easily intelligible to an average reader, he remains unruffled and answers his critics that he does not write for the assimilation of simple minds. One who makes a critical study of Soyinka’s works; one sees in him a Promethean stalwart that possesses undaunted courage in no little measure. In our final estimate of Soyinka as a writer and man we see in him a figure that is much larger than life itself. His great contemporaries
like Achebe, Kolawole Ogungbesan, and Kofi Owusu who have known him very intimately, have a great esteem for him both as writer and ‘man.’

It is common knowledge that the most renowned writers now, as in the past, are denounced or denigrated for reasons political or ideological; in the past too, writers of immortal fame who are now ranked as world’s classics and venerated even by countries beyond the frontiers of their own home land, were condemned and exiled either for political or social reasons. For instance, Ovid (43 B.C.), (A.D. 18) the Roman poet was exiled for his poetical work “the Art of Love” -- translated by John Dryden; and Dante, the author of the celebrated work “The Divine Comedy” (1265-1321 A.D) and Machiavelli (1469-1527 A.D.) the author of “The Prince” were exiled. But what then? They are now revered all over the world as writers of lasting fame.

Wole Soyinka belongs to the immortal race of writers and when he scented that his life was at stake, he ran away from Nigeria and lived in Europe for a short period in self-exile.

He is well known in all noted journalistic circles. NdaeyoUko in his brief but most fascinating biographical round up of Soyinka entitled “Crossing Soyinka’s Path”, packed with literary anecdotes and some of the little known amusing facts about this celebrated writer and Nobel Laureate, observes that Soyinka avidly participated with challenging spirit in arguments and dialectics of literary nature with writers of renown, like Achebe and the venerable French scholar Leopold Senghor. The latter has been known for championing the much acclaimed concept of ‘Negritude,’ that lends a special flavour and quality of its own to all that is ‘Negro,’ Soyinka, in his very
characteristic way, almost in a less reverential tone and in Voltaire -- like manner observes, “a tiger does not boast about its tigritude”; it acts on it. And he goes on to observe that, Soyinka is often known at home as a one-man riot squad.

In all his writings one perceives a man with dauntless courage of his convictions. He is not one to be easily intimidated by the adverse critical remarks flung in his face by a brood of writers known under the appellation of ‘critics’. When a colleague of his, says that his writings, especially his two novels, are beyond the shoulders of an average reader, Soyinka didn’t hesitate to say that he had hardly written for the assimilation of the simple minds. He has the courage of his convictions.

A few instances in Soyinka’s life will show that he is a dare devil, hardly caring even for the worst consequences that might become a noose around his neck. He is made of that rare stuff that has the weakness of not conniving at any act of social injustice or any incident of truth that is maimed or mangled; he vehemently condemns such things even at the cost of his person’s safety. It is one thing to deal with men of little consequence in this respect; but it is entirely a different thing when he would attack military generals at the helm of State Affairs, only in defence of truth. One can enumerate a series of such dare devil incidents in his life. The following incident as narrated by NdaeyoUko richly illustrates this fact;

The most engaging part of Soyinka’s career of dissent is his cat and mouse relationship with Nigeria’s big generals, including Olusegun Obasanjo with whom he nearly came to blows in a wild argument at the airport. Well that was before Obsanjo returned as
civilian president, and became the subject of Soyinka’s constant criticism. He was in the black books of General Gowon, who imprisoned him and pushed him into his first exile after his release. As he explained it: “I went into voluntary exile because I saw that to have said or written anything at the time would have sounded like, oh, this bitter individual who’s coming from prison and doesn’t want to see good, doesn’t want to see prosperity, wants to badmouth the regime.” He also infuriated General Buhari, from whom he had fled initially, General Babangida, who nibbled at his credibility, and Sani Abacha, who pushed him into exile yet again. (2006)

Soyinka, even as a school boy, used to rebel against the religious indoctrination of Christianity since he was a staunch votary of Yoruba traditional religion.

Soyinka is not without his detractors. Once Chinua Achebe, Soyinka’s senior, extols Soyinka for his stupendous energy and vitality; Chinweizu, the well-known poet and critic, observes rather with some contempt that Soyinka’s being awarded the Nobel Prize as the “undesirable honouring the unreadable.” Nadine Gordimer observes that his (Soyinka’s) writing could be “overtly self-conscious” offering unresolved choices. Ben Okirí, the author of “The Faminished Road” which won Booker Prize for him, has a fling at Soyinka, and said, he, “deprives us of a great deal of wisdom with the fury of his complexities.” A playwright of Nigeria, Femi Ososían says that he was aghast at the “frenzied scenes of logorrhoea.” “The Economist” of London criticised Soyinka’s prison writings as “personal, bitter and obsessed by his own fate.” It is to be observed
that the cataclysmic history of the Nigeria of the early independence period was intimately and intricately woven with the daring deeds of Soyinka; he did all that only in the larger interests of his people of Nigeria. Soyinka possesses the dauntless guts and indomitable will and tenacity of purpose for the right and just things to an immeasurable degree.

One sees a glint of puckish tendency in his eyes as if inviting a scholar of his own stature for a bout of polemical dialectics of a genuine literary character.

Wole Soyinka is the continent’s literary plenipotentiary and Poet Laureate of the Black people; he won most coveted crown of the Nobel award as an official recognition of his intellectual supremacy.

While Soyinka was being lionised on the joyous occasion of his being awarded the Nobel Prize, a few of the writers of some eminence, were bitten by the ‘green-eyed’ monster -- jealousy and could hardly contain themselves and expressed their animus; there have been many a little known fact that in itself is highly dramatic and fascinating. Dr. Yemi Ogunbiyi, who was on the staff of Ife University as a theatre lecturer, like Soyinka, was taken on the editorial board of ‘The Guardian’ in 1983, after having abandoned his lectureship. He is one of the warmest admirers of Soyinka and under his unique editorship The Guardian earned fabulous profits and gained great popularity and reputation as a journal. His love and admiration for Soyinka was so immense that, after the Buhari coup he did his best to smuggle him -- Soyinka back into Nigeria. Once there was a very interesting incident which is worthy of our notice; TolaAdeniyi encouraged journalists at the Daily Times to extol its performance but,
ironically enough, it fell on evil days and evil tongues and consequently it lost its prestige and profit margin to a conspicuous degree. And Adeniyi, who was the sole administrator of *The Times Group*, had been removed from being the sole administrator. A similar incident may be referred to here so as to highlight the conspiracy of some of the detractors either to abate Soyinka’s soaring reputation or to fling some kind of mud on him.

Thinkers of eminence have made their appearance on the continental literary scene especially during the early decades of postcolonial Nigeria. Although the majority of them had viewed the whole phenomenon of the emergence of Nigeria into freedom after a prolonged conflict between the natives and the colonists, in literary and cultural terms, a few of them, like Achebe and Soyinka looked upon this event more as a political strategy. As such, they are determined to wipe out even the last vestiges of colonialism. But it would not be possible for the natives and these thinkers to totally relegate some of their institutions to total oblivion. That the continent had been under the control and authority of the colonists -- be it for a brief period of time -- has been history and the traces of history will survive for a long time; those colonial memories will haunt the immediate generation of independent Nigeria like a nightmare. In all colonial history what is commonly observed is that during the period of the colonial rule, the natives suffer almost indescribably in many respects. In the first place the natives are thoroughly exploited by the colonial masters and the natives are left behind as the inheritors of indigence and a trail of afflictions. But this also proves to be a blessing in disguise for the natives. The colonists leave behind them certain traces of their own culture. For instance, the British and the French colonists have left behind
them their religion, language and political institutions. Certainly the natives, because of these things, find themselves, at least in certain respects, better than they were before the advent of colonialism. Although the natives were to a great extent enlightened, the fervent traditionalists would feel that a visible dent had been received by their native culture. This had given rise to a conflict between two classes of people there, one in favour of negritude and the other being indifferent to or almost negating it. For instance, Franz Fanon champions the cause of negritude while writers like Soyinka are not inclined to favour it. This does not mean that Soyinka is opposed to the native tradition and culture. As a matter of fact, he is for Yoruba culture and her tradition.

Significantly, Soyinka has never shown any particular fascination for Christianity. Although he does not overtly criticise or denounce it, he has hardly made any comment or observation in favour of it. We observe that Soyinka has left an indelible impress both on political and literary scene of the contemporary Nigeria. We have already observed that Soyinka, the writer, and Soyinka, the political activist, have been so intricately entwined into one personality that it is not possible to separate the one from the other. Soyinka has once observed that any writing, in one sense or other, is a political comment. It may not be true in a deeper sense; but it is hundred per cent true in his case, since his writings, prose, poetry or drama have been chiefly motivated by some political issue. In a broader sense, Soyinka is right since man does not exist outside the confines of some political organisation. Man is essentially a political animal. All his writings reveal that his life has been a crusade for liberating man from the shackles of political bondage and injustice.
It can hardly be gainsaid that Soyinka is a Titanic figure in the world of postcolonial Nigerian literature and intellectual of the first order; he has touched all genres and left on each one his unique mark of mastery. And yet, Chukwuma Okoye observes: “he has been criticised, sometimes passionately, for the obscurity, solipsism and self-reflexivity of his writings, a practice which seems to regale in the meretricious manipulation of the formal character of the English language at the expense of its signifying function.” It is not out of place to quote T.S. Eliot, explaining, this sort of obscurity, in his lecture on *Ulysses* (of James Joyce) says; “in some minds certain memories, both from reading and from life, become charged with emotional significance. All these are used, so that intensity is gained at the expense of clarity.” (ed. Lillian Herlands Horlstein)

Peculiarly enough, Soyinka’s interpreters and critics of his works have been divided into two camps: one extolling him as the greatest of African writers, both in quality and quantity while the other camp denounces and denigrates Soyinka for his being inaccessible particularly to the average readers. Some scholars deny the obscurest claim and “someone even mischievously offered to teach Soyinka to those who find his compositions a bit above their comprehension, while others yet accused those who find him difficult of intellectual laziness” (Lindfors 1993:8). And some other critics observe, in defence of Soyinka that those who fail to understand him are guilty of intellectual laziness. Bernth Lindfors praises him immensely as “one of the greatest writers Africa has produced” (1999:51) he, in the same breath, deprecates his “enigmatic obfuscation… perverse and irresponsible… spouting nonsense instead of wisdom” (1999:52).
From the corpus of criticism on Soyinka’s works by critics of various ranks, reveals that there has been basically certain hiatus between their reading of Soyinka’s works and their level of understanding; for no two critics have expressed the same critical opinion about Soyinka. As we have already noted, critical judgements passed by different Soyinka’s critics have been at baffling variance with one another. An astute reader, no doubt, will understand from this imbroglio of critical opinions that there has been a mysterious element which is integral to Soyinka’s genius as a whole. This is not uncommon with some of the extraordinary geniuses. Their vision of human life is as complex and mysterious as things in God’s creation. Their shifts of vision which alter at even the slightest tilt into a different hue and shape as do the tiny glass pieces of various colours that assume most fascinating designs of infinite variety at each imperceptible movement of the kaleidoscope. The hidden complexity of their genius which often lies beyond the ken of the critics’ understanding and, therefore, these critics view the whole thing as being simple. There can be no better example to illustrate this fact than the multitudinous critics that avidly attempt to interpret the elusive, complex character of Shakespeare’s the prince of Hamlet. And still the critics of Shakespeare continue to grope to get at that mysterious element in Hamlet’s character which very fascinatingly tantalizes the minds of the critics. This piece of argument, in my opinion, stands well in the case of Soyinka and his critics.

We have already observed that Soyinka had changed his role from the ‘conscience of society’ to the ‘political activist’. As a political activist, he plunged headlong into the political situation of the postcolonial Nigeria and did his best to ameliorate and, if possible, to change the very face of Nigeria in a political sense and
recreate a new one where social justice would prevail and human rights would be protected. Sometimes some critics are tempted to describe Soyinka’s political stand as ‘strategic essentialist’ but Soyinka is anything but a strategic essentialist. It is because Soyinka’s temperament does not admit of being a strategic essentialist. At best he is a strategist through and through; neither is he an essentialist nor is he an exclusivist.

Despite Soyinka’s unambiguous declaration that he is in favour of non-violence and that he would eschew violence at any cost but in his second novel *Season of Anomy*, Soyinka’s hero Ofeyi, the author’s mouth piece, is a votary of non-violence and vehemently opposes the Dentist who resorts to ‘selective elimination’ and advises him to give up all means of violence. But as the plot unfolds, certain uncouth and hideous realities that boggle his mind -- namely the atrocities perpetrated by the Cartel Organisation -- is convinced that only by adopting acts of violence he could check and root out the evil that is fast spreading through the Cartel. At least temporarily until the aim is realised and the goal reached, he believes that there is an imperative need for the use of violence. Thus Soyinka is not dogmatic about the use or the non-use of violence. It depends on the dictates of strategy and expediency but not as philosophy of conviction. Soyinka uses violence in connection with his armed hold-up of the radio station of Nigeria Broadcasting Service in Ibadan, Soyinka observes as follows:

I never join those who call for a violent revolution, in spite of the fact that I accept violence as a sometimes necessary component of positive change. Yes, a sometimes necessary component, and one that I am always ready to endorse, instigate and even partake of, where circumstances leave one no option. (1994:315)
Soyinka puts this evitable policy or principle into practice in real life. His intervention, with the best of intentions, to avert the civil war between the Federal Military Government and the rebel Biafran Forces those two hostile camps his peace mission was misinterpreted or misunderstood to be a treasonable act and consequently he was thrown into the bars. So we understand from such episodes in his life that he is for non-violence as a principle but he would not hesitate to take recourse to methods of violence when constrained by circumstances. Soyinka’s daring act of the radio station hold up in 1965, illustrates this point. This ambivalence of attitude on Soyinka’s part convinces us that he is all for non-violence, although he is not averse to adopting means of violence as and when necessity demands but not as a policy.

Wole Soyinka as he is in real life and as he emerges out of the pages of his writings, looms much larger than a single individual; he is an institution by himself. He contains legions of fighters within himself. His unabated assaults of vitriolic jeremiads were directed against the successive dictatorial military governments that have trodden the rights of the people of Nigeria under their ruthless iron boots. Sani Abacha by force took the reins of power of Nigeria in 1993 and had become notoriously corrupt and repressive dictator in the annals of the republic. Soyinka’s constant exposure of the most wicked acts of Abacha’s reign of terror which without the least qualms of conscience indulged in the massive extermination of his enemies; the rumours were afloat that Soyinka’s life was almost at stake and this forced Soyinka again into self-exile in 1996 and subsequently Soyinka was tried in absentia and was found guilty of treason by a military tribunal. Subsequently Abacha died under mysterious conditions.
Soyinka as a writer has been vehemently criticised by a band of intellectuals for his lack of social vision which excludes the poor as a class. They complain that Soyinka has not applied the Marxist-theory in evaluating the social conditions where the poor live and suffer. Soyinka brands this band of intellectuals as leftocrats and one can easily guess that Soyinka uses the term ‘leftocrats’ with an ironical wry. Soyinka does not belong to any ‘school’ or ‘ism’ which implies that the writer’s vision of society is parochial and partial. Soyinka is above all these narrow confines of any ‘school’ or ‘ism.’ He possesses a catholicity of vision.

Soyinka often behaved like one possessed and flung himself straight in the face of death and on many occasions, it was for the sake of social justice or in defence of truth. For instance, Soyinka persistently criticised Sani Abacha’s government, exposing all atrocities committed by Abacha -- his rampant execution of prominent critics of his repressive regime -- it was certain that he would have been liquidated by Abacha, had he not escaped from Nigeria. For he was tried in absentia and found guilty of high treason; and this was for Abacha much more than an excuse for his liquidation.

The works of a genius, astounding as they are, certainly contain a message for the world, transcending time, space and all geographical limitations. One particular aspect of the works of any genius will contain a twofold message; one for the present generation of people to whom these works are generally addressed; it discusses the prevailing problems that confront them and show the some possible solutions to these problems; thus it tries to lead the people into the light of understanding from their erstwhile darkness of confusion. In this way a writer of genius shows the right way for his people lost in a state of confusion and becomes their (un)acknowledged leader. And
the second message contained in the works of a genius is universal in its appeal and application thus a genius transcends all geographical boundaries and become assimilated in human thought; it is how we happen to quote the wise sayings of the ancient writers even today at the appropriate moment. Soyinka, beyond all shade of doubt, can easily be ranked with writers that have attained classical status. Language of a writer as a medium of expression is accidental. There are great writers who expressed themselves in a language other than their native tongue. The author instinctively knows which language that suits him best for easy self-expression. Soyinka has chosen a foreign language like the English over which he has tremendous command and he has been supremely confident that he can express himself the way he likes; and, therefore, the question why Soyinka has chosen English for his writings is quite irrelevant. All his works essentially deal with the Nigerian problems of the day. They have great relevance to them. The poignant problems of the postcolonial Nigeria have been the very raison d’etre of his writings. For instance, we find no effusions of romantic love in his poetry if they are all any, they are incidental. While the message contained in his works has urgency and immediacy for the people of Nigeria in particular and the world in general. All great artists make broad suggestions and they rarely give any direct suggestions for the people to follow to solve their problems. It is often the business of the man -- the politician -- who is directly involved in the conflict of a problem that comes out with a practical solution. An artist, on the other hand, gives a sweeping picture of the present situation making suggestions for the solutions of the problems. Soyinka has not given any concrete solutions for the problems that the postcolonial Nigeria had confronted with.
Soyinka had left for Leeds -- England where he studied English literature under the guidance of the eminent Shakespearian critic, Wilson Knight. It was during this brief period in England he became acquainted with a number of young, gifted British writers. It was as early as this period; Soyinka wrote and published some of his writings of comedic nature. After the completion of his B.A. he stayed in the University of Leeds for his M.A. degree. It was during this period Soyinka learned to merge European theatrical traditions with those of his Yoruba cultural heritage. It was at this time in 1958 his first major play entitled *The Swamp Dwellers* was staged; then another comedy under the title of “The Lion and the Jewel” appeared which won for him recognition as a playwright from the members of London’s Royal Court Theatre, then he proceeded to London and during this period, both his plays mentioned above were staged in Ibadan.

Soyinka was granted the Rockefeller Research Fellowship in the year 1960 from his alma mater and then returned to Nigeria. And a series of plays were enacted in Nigeria. The play *A Dance of the Forest*, a virulent satire on the Nigeria’s political elites; and his genius as an established playwright was immediately recognised with this play. It was also selected as the official play for Nigerian Independence Day. The same play premiered in Lagos as Nigeria celebrated its sovereignty.

He lashed the Federal Government which occupied a larger part of his Yoruba homeland. And the emergence of certain unfavourable political conditions led to an imbalance in power. And this imbalance paved the way to a coup by military officers under Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. He joined the Department of English Language of the University College in Ibadan as a researcher. Soyinka even as a student at this
university started writing essays, criticising some men of repute. For instance, he criticised Leopold Senghor’s concept of negritude as an indiscriminate glorification of the black African past that ignores the potential benefits of modernisation. He commented in derision that “a tiger does not shout its tigritude, it acts.” Soyinka published his first novel *The Interpreters* in 1965 which received from critics opinions of a mixed nature. Some praised it very highly and others criticised it as being unworthy of Soyinka. And another followed in 1973 *Season of Anomy*. Both these novels express Soyinka’s deep concern for the postcolonial Nigeria which was passing through a great political crisis, social debasement and moral degradation. Corruption, as a national vice, was eating away the very vitals of the Nigeria of that period.

Soyinka, unlike any other writer of high intellectual eminence, identified himself with the destiny of the new born free nation. From being the conscience of society, he became an ardent political activist from that moment onwards, Soyinka, the writer and Soyinka the political activist, had merged into one powerful entity. Soyinka is not only a man of revolutionary ideas; he is also a revolutionary in action. His life has been an uninterrupted tale of combats of both intellectual and political nature; dauntlessly, he attacked military dictators of the worst description and in turn he was hunted by them to be persecuted and he had that sagacity to escape from them. Soyinka has been a legendary figure in the recent history of postcolonial Nigeria; and to crown all his patriotic efforts and his literary productivity of the very first order, the Nobel committee at Stockholm honoured him with the most coveted prize. Soyinka has been hundred per cent right and honest when he declared that for him the first condition of humanity is social justice.
In August 1967, Soyinka clandestinely contacted Ojukwu in the South-eastern town of Enugu, with the good intention of averting civil war. But his attempts at bringing a peaceful solution proved to be abortive and consequently he had to go underground.

On another occasion, when Soyinka tried to stop the impending civil war which would erupt between Biafran and the Federal Government, his mission of peace was misinterpreted and misunderstood by the government and consequently Soyinka was incarcerated until the end of civil war. It was during the period of his detention for a period of 27 months that Soyinka wrote his second novel *Season of Anomy*. Being a prolific writer, Soyinka wrote about 20 plays, 2 novels, 5 memoirs, 9 poetry collections, and about 6 essays and 2 movies to his credit. Soyinka’s intellectual stamina and creative imagination are still unabated and remain sustained to an admirable degree even after 25 years since he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1986. Most of his plays and his two novels are being prescribed for graduates and postgraduates in many universities of the world.

Wole Soyinka is essentially a dramatic genius. And the poet in him is irrepressible. And it is for this reason that his novels reveal very conspicuously the predominant element of poetic imagery and dramatizing situations which rob the novels of their characteristic fictional flavour. Critics often find fault with Soyinka’s art as a fiction writer. Although there are critics who defend Soyinka by observing that Soyinka does not follow the conventions of fiction writing. Soyinka having studied English literature at Leeds University has absorbed the modern technics of fiction writing which are at variance with the traditional manner of writing fiction. Soyinka adopts the
technic used by the stream of consciousness-writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Moreover, Soyinka handles the concept of time in the most unconventional way; for instance, there is a frequent interplay of past, present and future jumbled in narrating incidents. This technic naturally baffles the understanding of the reader who is absolutely unfamiliar with the modern technics of fiction-writing. The traditional way of narrating a story with the (flat) characters that are individualised through tell-tale names and fixed characteristics are traits throughout in contrast to the ‘flat’ and ‘round’ characters as we find in the English novel. This is one of the reasons why the Western reader fails to appreciate Soyinka as a fiction writer.

*Ibadan: the ‘Penkelemes’ Years: A Memoir 1946-65* (1994), Soyinka’s life is a prolonged poetic metaphor. He is the Greek hero fighting for the recapturing and recovering of Helen (Nigeria) from the prolonged captivity of the aggressive Trojans -- the Cartel Organisation. This heroic venture of a highly perilous nature being successfully over, like Odysseus confronting many a trial and tribulation and finally braving the most dangerous weather, he arrives at Ithaca -- the Nigeria of his dreams, which is his legitimate haven of rest and peace.

Soyinka’s life has been a rough sailing forth as a writer and political activist. In a sense, there is no demarcation between these two roles as they have overlapped so intimately and intricately. The spirit behind the two is one and the same; and we find a very natural fusion of the two into one integral whole, so that Soyinka the writer does hardly exist without the Soyinka, the political activist and vice versa.
Soyinka’s ‘Memoirs’ (Ake, Isara, Ibadan including The Man Died) constitute an epic struggle of a superhuman encounter that may justly be described as the ‘Odyssey of soul’. Such a title will speak volumes of the Titanic confrontations that Soyinka had overcome. His promethean patience coupled with his inflexible will had dwarfed the organised military forces of the Id Ameen’s, the monsters in human guise. His acuity of vision, reinforced with a dogged determination and creative imagination, has the power to change ideas into unerring action. Above all, Soyinka is the very embodiment of rare qualities that reveal of superhuman being.

Soyinka emerges in this Titanic struggle against social injustice and the ruthless oppression of human rights, as a Colossus, barring the legendary figure -- Nelson Mandela -- standing astride the whole of the African continent. Soyinka’s first great prose work is The Man Died: The Prison Notes. This book is a memorable chronicle of his spiritual agony during his solitary confinement for a period of 27 months. Like a legendary hero, Soyinka fought against the most heinous acts, like the rape of justice and oppression of humanity at the hands of the military dictators.

Ibadan: the ‘Penkelemes’ Years makes an exciting reading. Some of the very common facts about a very uncommon man are full of excitement. The language employed there, is full of pep and the facts fictionalised are full of verve. Soyinka’s life bristles with problems of a rare kind both personal and public. Having confronted many a risky situation, he has become hard-bitten.

The essence of Soyinka’s writings seems to be his apologia for his passionately avowed statement that ‘human justice and social equality’ is the very crown and glory
of human achievement. Consistently, insistently and persistently, Soyinka has flung the most virulent criticism squarely in the face of the government that was openly and shamelessly guilty of heinous crimes against the innocent public -- the people of Nigeria. He has become the most irritant thorn in the bed of the power-hungry dictators that have mercilessly trampled on the rights of man under their oppressive feet. At a time, when collective force failed to set them right and reason has fallen on their deaf ear; Soyinka turned a political activist and fiercely took his cudgels against the organised misrule of vandalism and thuggery with an uncompromising will. He has fought heroically, single handed, throughout and he is a consistent social critic; and a staunch crusader in defence of social justice and the rights of mankind. In him are combined the indomitable will of a Mandela and the invincible spirit of an Aung San Suuuki.

But for the four books, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), *Isara: The Voyage Around Essa* (1989), *Ibadan: the ‘Penkelemes’ Years* (1994) and *You Must Set Fourth at Dawn* (2006) which constitute a monumental work together, the world would have lost the very genuine soul of this highly remarkable man. Although the whole corpus of his writings might reveal the unmistakable spirit of his dynamic personality, it would still remain blurred and each critic would interpret his personality as reflected in his writings according to his level of understanding and surely it would be an unsavoury one tainted by the inevitable prejudices of each critic. Thanks to Wole Soyinka that he has left behind him, his autobiographical records in the form of four books mentioned earlier. These books, that reflect the beauty and excellence of his impeccable personality serve as a matchless self-portrait -- the playwright, the poet, the
novelist, the critic, and, above all, the man. He excels himself most gracefully in the role that he has played. The cumulative personality of Soyinka as it emerges from the immortal pages of his autobiographical texts is tremendously larger than life itself.

The four autobiographical texts put together make a highly exciting reading with rare adventures of a highly courageous man who with his astounding intellect at his command manipulated very adroitly all the unexpected circumstances to his great advantage; the author being an eminent teacher of English literature uses all the literary devices such as tropes, imagery and symbolism to make his style unique and most admirable. His erudition is tremendous and appalling and his English structures are somewhat out of the way; but all these literary devices of Soyinka lend a peculiar charm to his work. To an average reader, Soyinka’s English is something that goes above the reader’s -- shoulders. This is a very common charge that is levelled at Soyinka. But Soyinka seems to be aware of this fact and his answer is that he does not write for the assimilation of simple minds. A critical reader hardly fails to notice that Soyinka’s presentation of facts in a language that is peculiar to him is highly poetic overlaiden with images as fresh as dew-drops. The impression that a reader gets while going through the pages of these autobiographical texts is that there is a striking originality both in the blend of his thoughts and the sinew of his language.

The author makes it plain that an autobiography is bound to be an admixture of fact and fiction; and the proportion in which fact and fiction are thrown together entirely depends on the discretion of the writer. The reader of these autobiographical texts is certainly made to feel that what Soyinka records here comes from the very
depths of his heart and a sense of deep conviction and the final impression that he gets is, indeed, the truth.

The author frankly admits that his autobiography is not based on pure truth; there is an element of fiction is added here and there and it is not to make truth spicy but since writing is an art, fiction inevitably creeps in, but not to a gross extent as to impair truth. But one thing is certain: his autobiographical texts bear an eloquent testimony to the events, most of which have a historic significance there. The people who have been discussed at length are still alive. The events described therein are corroborated by the recent history of Nigeria. Soyinka is shrewd enough to understand that some of the intimately personal experiences connected with his public life can never be made in clear vivid terms to the outside world; even facts relating to his private life might appear to be fiction and the author might have thought that those facts of his intimately private life would have the flavour of fiction. But the fact remains that what he has recorded in these four autobiographical texts have been based on solid reality since Soyinka’s life both as a polemical writer and as a political activist is of no little consequence.

Soyinka’s solitary confinement in 1967, for a period of 27 months has produced his famous prison notes under the title of *The Man Died* which was published in 1972. In this, he describes most vividly and agonisingly, his spiritual torture at the hands of “the mind-butchers.” Frank Birbalsingh in his essay “Faction; The Autobiographical Writings” observes that *The Man Died* does not fit into his autobiographical writing. But it is a mistaken notion to treat it as anything other than his autobiographical text. *The Man Died* is not a fiction; it is not a mere documentation of a body of dry facts. It
was born of his genuine experience as a detainee. Soyinka feels convinced that Nigeria, under the ruthless, systematic misrule by her dictators, was shattered socially, politically, and morally, almost beyond repair. His bitter experience in his solitary confinement was more than physical torture; and this made his resolve doubly strong that when he was released from prison, he must muster all the resources available to him to fight against the ‘mind-butchers’ and release Nigeria from their diabolical clutches. It was during his bitter experience as a detainee that he made this statement; “The Man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny” (TM 13). This is his silent explosion in his solitary confinement against the tyrants of the day; it is here, against the background of his excruciating experience that Soyinka conceived the story of his second novel *Season of Anomy*. Thus new ideas have taken shape in the crucible of his prison life envisaging the birth of a new Nigeria where people live in the midst of peace and plenty like the model Aiyero Community. *The Man Died* may justly be regarded as a part of his autobiographical texts since it adds a new dimension to his personality.

*The Man Died*, while chronicling the socio-political conditions of the day, it contains the writer’s reflections of a very grave nature. For instance, Soyinka who is wedded to non-violence by nature and choice, gradually changes his viewpoint from non-violence to violence as an inevitable means of checking violence from any source. For instance, in *Season of Anomy* Ofeyi admonishes the Dentist to eschew violence of any kind against the Cartel Organisation by his favourite method of ‘selective elimination’; but towards the end, Ofeyi realises that he should resort to means of violence, be it for a very short period, since he is thoroughly convinced that without violence he could hardly subjugate the wicked Cartel Organisation. Ofeyi tells himself
that he must make virtue of vice, as expediency demands; and once their purpose has been served, he would have none of it. He makes it crystal clear in this book that he would purge Nigeria of the “brutish arrogance” of the tyrants and its material corruption, especially of the Gowon government and finally he would reach “the people to whom I belong” (TM 15). Soyinka discusses at length some of the moral issues of the war. *The Man Died* is really a very exciting book that presents before the reader vivid descriptions of portraits of men in power and of consequence; each page pulsates with renewed life and dialogues such as one comes across in a drama from the pen of a veteran playwright. And in this process, Soyinka unfolds certain important glimpses of his dynamic personality.

These memoirs, which constitute the author’s autobiography, are engaging and exciting in their facts that they read like a lively novel of a classic stature. These pages are vibrant with stimulating dialogues, unfolding a galaxy of dynamic personalities. Life is neither a complete comedy nor is it a total tragedy. It is an imbroglio of situations sharing both the characteristics. Sometimes, one does not know where the one begins and the other ends. As we know, Soyinka’s life has been all through a life replete with conflicts, contradictions and attacks and counter attacks. As such, every phase of the author’s life is romantically thrilling. Once the reader starts reading these pages, there is no knowing where and when he would stop. As a real hero, in the right sense of the term, he has hardly passed without some kind of external or internal conflict -- conflict that chiefly concerns itself with public affairs sometimes with private matters.
By the time Soyinka published his first novel, *The Interpreters* he has already carved a niche for himself as a poet and a playwright. In an interview in 1963 Nkosi, the interviewer asked Soyinka whether he was trying his hand at fiction writing. Soyinka told him that he was writing one and that would be published in the following year. The novel in question was *The Interpreters* which appeared in 1965 late by one year. The reason for its being late is not known. A committed writer like Soyinka would write not for nothing. There must be a purpose, a message behind it. And so the interviewer asked the writer what the novel was about. Soyinka cryptically answered that it was about ‘cannibalism’. The term cannibalism is the epitome of the theme of the whole novel. The author’s aim in writing this novel is crystal clear. The novel deals with the most deplorable state of affairs, socially, politically and morally, that prevail all over the Nigerian society during the postcolonial period. He introduces five young men who studied abroad and returned to their native state. They would study anatomically and analytically the conditions there give the reasons explaining for the prevailing conditions. So far and no further. They are mere interpreters. They are like expert doctors who make a correct diagnosis of the body politic of Nigeria. They are not supposed to prescribe any remedial measures for the ailments that the postcolonial Nigeria was suffering from. But these five young men with a foreign education in their background, applying their latest knowledge to understand the problems here fail in their job. The reason was that they had little knowledge of the traditional background of the natives of Nigeria and their conventional mental set up and their customs and mores of the natives. Instead, each of the five characters has become caught in his own individual problems. As the plot of the novel unfolds, the author brings in other
characters like professor Oguazor and the chief Winsala and others. Professor Oguazor does not have any professional ethics. He is an immoral character in his private life. He has an illegitimate daughter whom he has kept in some private hostel. And he keeps all this under the rug while posing himself as the guardian of morals. The chief Winsala is an embodiment of corruption.

Thus Soyinka exposes the rotten condition of Nigeria in all its nakedness. These five young men who set out to study the conditions in postcolonial Nigeria were, as all young men fresh from university, idealistic. But when they come in contact with the rough and tumble of society, their idealism slowly fades away and they get into the vortex of the rugged realities of life. They get ultimately disillusioned and let go the corrupt world its own way. The obvious purpose of this novel is to expose the corrupt conditions in the postcolonial Nigeria and thus it remains the despair of the doctors of social wellbeing. One particular aspect that Soyinka stresses is the ethical and moral vacuum that prevails among the professors of universities. He mercilessly exposes the hollowness of professional dignity.

Egbo is the prominent character since he is the mouth piece of the author. The views expressed by Egbo are quite similar to the personal views of the writer. It is well known that Ogun is Soyinka’s favourite god in the Yoruba mythology and Egbo shares many of the characteristics of Ogun. Some critics point out that The Interpreters does not fulfil all the norms of a good novel. It has many faults. It has neither a plot nor the artistic growth of a well-developed novel. But there are critics who praise it as one of the best novels written in English by an African. But one most relieving feature of the
nearly seven years have elapsed before Soyinka produced his second novel, *Season of Anomy*. Thematically this novel is related to the first novel, *The Interpreters*. Although the second novel is not a sequel to the first one in the strictest sense, we find the same theme of the first novel continuing in the second one, be it ever so tenuously. In both the novels the author has the postcolonial Nigeria in the background; in a sense, the postcolonial Nigeria is the central characters in both the novels, for whatever the characters involved in the plot direct their efforts towards the same object, namely, the Nigeria of the postcolonial period. Only in the second novel the events are narrated under the garb of an allegory; yet the garb is so thin that one can easily find out an unmistakable similarity between the themes of the two novels. Egbo, the protagonist of the first novel, is the Ofeyi of the second novel; the difference between them is that Egbo is wavering in his decision and seems to have been, occasionally, torn between two passions pulling him in opposite direction. He is now the inheritor of his grandfather’s Creeky domain and his own people make a strong appeal to him that he should come back to his own kingdom and ameliorate its conditions with his latest knowledge and education that he acquired from his foreign education while the other self in him is very much inclined to be a bureaucrat so that he can reconstruct the dissipated and debilitated the postcolonial Nigeria. In this sense, *Season of Anomy* may be viewed as a sequel to *The Interpreters*. There are multiple themes in the second novel as there are in the first novel. And the central theme of the whole novel is a total transformation of society from the present disintegrated and
demoralised state to an ideal community which, in other words, is a kind of utopia. Ofeyi, the protagonist of this novel who embodies the principle of regeneration and quest for renewal, is the extension of Egbo, the central character of *The Interpreters*. He is full of energy and courage but he suffers from the besetting sin of indecision. Aiyero, the ideal village where peace reigns supreme and where contentment is the very elixir, of their life is nothing but disintegrated Nigeria of the postcolonial period rediscovered. Thus the title of the second novel, *Season of Anomy* is richly appropriate since it depicts the Nigeria that was cruelly exploited by the Cartel Organisation and consequently reduced to a state of anomie.

Soyinka’s dealing with the theme and his art of characterisation are fairly understandable to the reader when compared with the first novel *The Interpreters* is rather obtrusive for an average reader. And the objective of the writer in this second novel is unambiguous almost in every respect. The message that the author wishes to convey to the world through the second novel is as clear as day light. A state or a nation to have a well-rounded development in every sphere of life has to have unconditional freedom. Where there is colonialism, in whatever form it might be, that state or country will be crippled in its progress; since every effort made by the colonial government will be in its own interest, for, as the saying goes, charity begins at home. The interests of the subjects will be relegated to the background and as a result, organised deterioration sets in until the whole region of the natives becomes a vast barren land where nothing grows-except poverty. One theme of the novel that where there is foreign domination in any country, it must immediately be removed or abolished in the best interests of the natives to achieve this end, according to Soyinka the oppressed natives might resort to
all means of violence to drive the colonists out of their soil. Although Soyinka is not an advocate of violence, he exhorts the natives to resort to violence in any form to drive out the alien ruler. According to Soyinka what is true of an individual, is also true of a nation. If the individual is deprived of his freedom, he will remain famished, physically stunted and spiritually barren; so is the case with a nation. The people in thralldom become emaciated physically, mentally and spiritually. This is one of the points that Soyinka pleads for. He fights for social justice and human rights not only of the people of Nigeria but for the whole of mankind. He asserts that all humanity is his.

In *Season of Anomy*, he exposes the hollowness of Christianity, its charlatanism and hypocrisy. Although he was born in a Christian family and although his parents were true Christians, and Soyinka calls his mother by the nick name of ‘Wild Christian’ to mean that she is a little short of a fanatic, Soyinka was disillusioned with Christianity when he saw around him only quacks, mountebanks and charlatans amongst the Christian preachers who used religion as a means to accumulate their material gains. Lazarus of *The Interpreters* is a special specimen of a fraudulent preacher who makes a big farce of religion. Soyinka has embraced the Yoruba world-view of his forefathers. This aspect of Christianity the hollowness of which he has so mercilessly exposed constitutes one of the themes of the novel. The hypocritical preachers like Lazarus in the novel are endowed with the gift of the gab and they are capable of convincing the ordinary masses and converting them to Christianity. But the intellectuals are impervious to the persuasive arguments of these hypocritical preachers. It is the height of hypocrisy on the part of Lazarus who identifies himself with Christ and insists on Noah’s washing the feet of the people gathered there for the Sunday service. Egbo, who
was there, bluntly refuses to get his feet washed by Noah and thereby he expresses his disapproval of such practices. Egbo, as we have already noted, is the mouth piece of Soyinka himself.

Throughout these two novels, Soyinka gives expression to his convictions on matters of politics, and the traditional religion, namely, the Yoruba religion of his ancestors. Professor Egochukwu Eiinkeonye in his critical essay on Wole Soyinka, under the title of Ogun’s Son … refers to professor Sola Adeyeye as having said in an interview that Soyinka called himself Ogun’s Son. Commenting on this, Egochukwu Eiinkeonye observes that Soyinka has a “fanatical adulation of Ogun, a blood-thirsty tyrant, thus untold damage to the democratic credentials his boys force on him. As hero of his lengthy poem, “Idanre”, Ogun revels in extreme militarism and boundless dictatorship, and kills just to satisfy his blood-lust.” And he admits that Ogun is a reprehensible character since he indulges in a fit of sadistic orgy. It sounds, indeed, paradoxical that Soyinka who is an advocate of peace and non-violence should accept the Yoruba God, Ogun to be his chief deity whom he glorifies in every way possible. A critical reader observes in Soyinka a good number of contradictions. The author of this critical essay says that *The New Age Newspaper* has quoted Soyinka as saying that the best brains in the world are confraternity members; you will understand that, sometimes, he takes a lot of contradictions to assume an enigmatic status. Now it is the job of a critic to explain how his “adoration of Ogun”, the blood-thirsty god, is consistent with his advocacy of peace and non-violence. Cicero once observed that consistency was the virtue of an ass. Soyinka creates the protagonist of his second novel, Ofeyi as a great lover of peace and non-violence; and yet he is inclined to resort
to violence for he believes that when evil becomes stubborn and unyielding, one might use, as a last resort, to check or eradicate evil. As regards his adulation of Ogun, a sadistic god, while professing his adherence to non-violence can be explained as follows: Soyinka as a votary of Ogun, the Yoruba deity, sees only the positive traits in him and, therefore, glorifies him. This is the only way in which we can compromise ourselves with Soyinka’s double standards.

Almost every critic of Soyinka has noted a very prominent feature in his personality: that is the harmonies blend of two unique aspects in him: the unexcelled writer and an irresistible political activist. The ideology that he expresses in his books has been well translated by him as a political activist. For instance, his radio hold-up in Nigeria which was dubbed as an act of violence on his part but, viewed from this distance of time, would appear to be Soyinka’s most daring deed only in defence of truth and justice. Thus Soyinka then became a legendary figure.

Soyinka has had profound insights into the nature of his native society. He has had almost an intuitive grasp of the complex operations of the mind of the community; the peace that generally prevails in the community is, now and then, disturbed. The factors responsible for this disturbance of peace, though temporary are beyond the ken of an alien eye. They -- the aliens -- attribute these causal communal disturbances to regionalism and atavism. Soyinka vehemently condemns this argument of the aliens. They have created these disturbances among the members of these communities in order to reap their own profits. It is quite appropriate here to quote James Booth in support of our statement:
Soyinka’s treatment indicates that the real sources of tension within society are not apparent ones of regionalism and atavism. These are merely tools in the hands of class interests. In Soyinka’s version the outbreak of tribalism in the Northern massacres is in fact a deliberately orchestrated diversionary tactic, used by the alliance of military government and bourgeoisie for their own materials. (Booth, 1981: 148)

The title of my present thesis is, as is already known to the reader is “The Novels and Memoirs of Wole Soyinka: A Study from the Postcolonial Perspectives.” Although the scope of my present dissertation is wide ranging since it deals not only with the texts namely, the novels and the memoirs of Wole Soyinka, which reflect and reveal the spirit of the most dynamic personality of the African continent, but also with the most turbulent events that shook the whole of Nigeria to its foundations. The thesis presents a solid and integrated picture of those turbulent times of the postcolonial Nigeria as reflected in his novels, memoirs and other works in the possible clear way.
Works Cited


