CHAPTER FIVE

The fifth chapter analyses hero in Rabindranath Tagore’s *The King and the Queen* (1923) and Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975) as the *pharmakos*, “scapegoat and random victim” (Hassan, 327). In the light of Marko Zlomislic’s tracing the etymology of the word *pharmakos* which “refers to the ‘scapegoat’ in ancient Greek religious practices…the ritual of *pharmakos* was a purification ritual” (Jacques Derrida’s *Aporetic Ethics*, 42). *Pharmakos* hero can be viewed as the one who purifies and rejuvenates the society with his sacrifice. The *pharmakos* functioned sociologically, Derrida explains, to save society by being excluded from it as a scapegoat or killed by it as a sacrifice...one can indeed become a *Pharmakos*, a truth seeker whose greatness of soul exceeds normal human circumstances, but society will exact its revenge (*Plato, Derrida and Writing*, 96-97).

The character of the *pharmakos* has been compared to a scapegoat. The “evil and the outside, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city – these are the two major senses of the character and of the ritual” (*Dissemination*, 133). A noted critic, Harpocration, commenting on the word *pharmakos*, describes them thus: “At Athens they led out two men to be purifications for the city; it was at the Thargelia, one was for the men and the other for the women” (Jacques Derrida, 133). In *Thousand Histories*, Tzetzes gives the following account, based on certain fragments by the satirical poet Hipponax, of the ceremony:

The (rite of the) *pharmakos* was a purification of this sort of old. If a calamity overtook the city by the wrath of God, whether it were famine or pestilence or any other mischief, they led forth as though to a sacrifice the most unsightly of them all as a purification and a remedy to the suffering city. They set the sacrifice in the appointed place, and gave him cheese with their hands and a barley cake and figs, and seven times they smote him with leeks and wild figs and other wild plants. Finally they burnt him with fire with the wood of wild trees and scattered
the ashes into the sea and to the winds, for purification, as I said, of the suffering city.

(Dissemination, 134)

In Girard’s account, the pharmakos is a “surrogate victim” – as the one who is typically a stranger living within the community and also a threat to the community’s unity. He further explicates that Pharmakos figure is described as “polluted” by the community and is always blamed for all its ills. According to Girard, the departure of pharmakos figure is mandatory because pharmakos is the one who “restores peace and order by his departure”.

In Violence and the Scared, Girard explicates that those who sacrifice the pharmakos “are striving to produce a replica, as faithful as possible in every detail of a previous crisis that was resolved by means of a spontaneously unanimous victimization. All the dangers, real and imaginary, that threaten the community are subsumed in the most terrible danger that can confront a society; the sacrificial crisis. The rite is therefore a repetition of the original, spontaneous ‘lynching’ that restored order in the community...Like Oedipus, the victim is considered a polluted object, whose living presence contaminates everything that comes in contact it and whose death purges the community of its ills – as the subsequent restoration of public tranquillity clearly testifies. That is why the pharmakos was paraded about the city. He was used as a kind of sponge to sop up impurities, and afterward he was expelled from the community or killed in a ceremony that involved the entire populace” (94-95).

Northrop Frye defines the pharmakos figure as, “neither innocent nor guilty” (Anatomy of Criticism, 41). He further opines, “We meet a pharmakos figure in Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, in Melville’s Billy Budd, in Hardy’s Tess, in the Septimus of Mrs. Dalloway, in stories of persecuted Jews and Negroes, in stories of artists whose genius makes them Ishmaels of a bourgeois society” (cf. 41-48, 148-49). Ihab Hassan has convincingly observed the pharmakos stance of hero as he says:
The hero appears primarily in the guise of a victim or scapegoat, pharmakos. He enjoys little or no freedom of action: he is ruled, that is, by necessity.

(The Pattern of Fictional Experience, 334)

In the light of above cited critical opinions on pharmakos particularly as given by Frye and Ihab Hassan, this chapter analyses the hero in Tagore’s The King and the Queen and Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman who epitomises victimization emerging out of the societal oppression of poor by the rulers of India and cultural distortion of Nigerians by the Britishers. The first play under consideration is Rabindranath Tagore’s The King and the Queen (1923; from original Bengali play, Raja O Rani Published in 1889) and the second one is Wole Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman (1975). Rabindranath Tagore and Wole Soyinka always firmly believe that in order to release the society from the grip of social ills like fear, injustice and sins; it has to come to a purgatory end by sacrificing hero’s life for the regeneration of the whole community.

The King and the Queen was written during the period of socio-political upheavals in colonial India. 1890’s was the period when Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, proposed partition of Bengal which was purely on religious and political grounds resulting in chaos and conflict in society. Tagore was strongly involved in protest against the British Raj on a number of occasions, most notably in the movement to resist the 1905 British proposal to split the province of Bengal, a plan that was eventually withdrawn following popular resistance. He was forthright in denouncing the brutality of British rule in India, never more so than after the Amritsar massacre of April 13, 1919. The devastation caused by such oppressive regime injured the writer’s feelings and this gave an impetus to Tagore’s writing particularly this play.

Likewise, Wole Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman emerged during the times when Nigeria was undergoing the repercussions of colonization where writers like Soyinka were feeling choked. In 1971, Soyinka left Nigeria after he was disgusted with the brutalized society he saw around him. In 1975, Yakubu Gowon was overthrown
from the rule in a military coup in Nigeria. General Murtala Mohammed became the Head of State. Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1975 and was appointed as the professor of English at University of Ife. In this period he produced the play *Death and the King’s Horseman*. In 1976, Murtala Muhammed assassinated, General Olusegun Obasanjo became the Head of the State. Governmental corruption and social inequality intensified in the wake of an oil-boom economy of Nigeria. Soyinka had been facing intimidation by the agents of military regime for his vocal stance as a writer and for denouncing the inhumanity that Nigerian society had been subjected to. In such an atmosphere, the first stage production of *Death and the King’s Horseman* took place at the University of Ife in December.

Rabindranath was temperamentally unsuited to be a political leader. His social approach amounted to little more than humanitarianism, the appeal to Zamindars was basically utopian and the basic problem of land relations remained untouched. His protest against the British rule was basically based on humanitarian philosophy as his strength was spiritual and mental. A. Lunacharskii, for example, observed:

Tagore’s works, despite their pantheistic mysticism, are so full of color, of subtle psychological insight, and of truly noble ideas that they are now among the cultural treasures of mankind.

*(Krasnaia Niva, 30)*

In Tagore’s opinion, king holds a pious position as he is supreme in the feudal hierarchy. In the British Rule, India became impoverished and after a series of economic depression in the post Mutiny period, the new and more vibrant land owning class came into prominence. King is the representative of this section. Tagore saw them from the very childhood as he himself belonged to the Land owning family called Zamindar. He had himself supervised the Zamindari in Shilaidaha (Bank of the Padma River). As a visionary writer, Tagore possessed the first hand knowledge of feudal hierarchy and its pitfalls which were plaguing his country. Tagore’s discomfort and restlessness is echoed
in the character Sumitra in the play *The King and the Queen* where he exhibits the will power of a pious woman to bring a change in society.

In *The King and the Queen*, the dramatist’s concern is clear and loud, where he exhibits his suffering of poor people due to hunger and illiteracy which he always felt was the biggest impediment in the economic prosperity of the country. The play resonates Tagore’s commitment to convey a strong message to the rulers of colonial India who were mere pawns in the hands of Britishers and were leading a self-centred life.

History proves that numerous kings in India had been leading a megalomanic life focussed more on personal comforts and nurturing enmity for extending their kingdoms. This resulted in destruction and cultural degradation of colonial India which was a fodder to the Britishers. Krishna Kripalani comments on the central theme of the play as she avers:

> The central theme of the play concerns the disciplining of the destructive forces of ego-centric love to affect a spiritual poise. Rather simplistic is the view that the conflict in this play is between love and duty, between a vain and infatuated man, and a proud and humane woman.

*(Rabindranath Tagore, 127)*

The play revolves around the audacious Queen Sumitra’s revolt against her husband who propounds war. Sumitra, the queen symbolizes Tagore’s ideal of modern and dynamic woman. The king Vikram, for the sake of personal favours, neglects his duties towards his kingship, while Sumitra is sensible enough to realize the distinction between the personal affairs and the responsibilities of a ruler. For the sake of society and to justify the multidimensional role of a woman, Sumitra refuses to dwindle between a mere mistress and a wife but is ready to wear the responsibilities of a queen mother.
Queen Sumitra is moved by the outbreak of famine to take military action against the provincial governors responsible for it. So, she leaves the king and goes to seek the aid of her brother, Kumarsen, to defend her husband’s kingdom. Feeling it an insult that help should come from outside, the king goes to the war himself and crushes his enemies. With wounded pride, he thinks of taking vengeance on his queen. He carries war into Kashmir, the territory of the queen’s brother Kumarsen. Shankar, the attendant of Kumarsen, asks the king, “Is it king-like or man-like, to magnify a domestic quarrel into a war, carrying it from country to country?” (*The King*, 719). “I warn you, old man,” says the king, “your tongue is becoming dangerous” (*The King*, 719). The shameful act of vengeance by the king brought death of numerous soldiers and common folk.

The simple controversy between husband and wife turned into war due to insensibility of the King. Here Tagore reflected the conflict between King's self and his responsibilities towards his kingdom and society. The King was not able to understand underlying principles of kingship in him and only acted as a sensuous man. Due to this conflict between the king and the Queen, Kumarsen sacrifices his life to control the situation of the war. A well known Indian critic, Amiya Chakravarty believes that one can show the real strength only through the heroism of suffering and sacrifice as she further explains:

I appeal to you to make a trial of this moral power through martyrdom. Prove how, through the heroism of suffering and sacrifice, not weak submission, we can demonstrate our wealth and strength. Know that no organization, however large, can help of power, but only individual faith in the infinite, the invisible, the incorruptible, the fearless.

(*A Tagore Reader*, 209)

As wished by Kumarsen in the end of the play, Queen Sumitra carries the severed head of her brother to King Vikram and thereupon she falls dead in the presence
of her husband whose redemption is completed by the shock of the double death of his loved ones.

According to Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath Tagore was born in an age when the impact of the civilization of the West on the centuries-old traditions of the country led to a disintegration of old values all around him. He further declares:

As a sensitive humanist, Rabindranath felt the compulsive urge for a search for new values and as a literary artist it is this groping which he records in his writings. The recording is most poignant in his dramas since the drama is *par excellence* the literature of conflict. But at the same time the essentially lyrical genius of Rabindranath asserted itself again and again in his dramas with a very personal accent which is alien to the real character of the drama.

*(Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary, 240)*

Tagore advocates one of the unique Indian tradition in *The King and the Queen* i.e. *Rajdharma*. The concept of *Rajdharma* described in almost all texts of ancient Indian history like *Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Bhagbatgita, Arthasastra* and *Rajrangini* etc. It lays emphasis on the kingly duties towards his poor subjects of the State. The *Shantiparva* section of *Mahabharata* highlights the concept of *Rajdharma*. People only wish to accept their king with leadership qualities like courage, bravery, social consciousness and good character. The foremost duty of the king according to Bhism, was to conquer himself.

King Vikram in *The King and the Queen* does not recognise his *Rajdharma* being an emperor. He neglects his royal duties in his passionate attachment to his queen. Queen declares:
I have my place in your heart, as your beloved, and in your world, as your Queen...King, if you thriftlessly squander your all upon me, then I shall be deprived.

(The King, 699-700)

The King says: “The King and The Queen? Mere names. We are more than that; we are lovers” (The King, 700). The Queen begs him to do his kingly duties. The kingdom is invaded in consequence of his negligence and the people die of hunger. The queen begs the king to fight his foes, and rebukes him saying, “Do not wreck your manhood against a woman’s charm” (The King, 707). The king always replies to Queen, “I know my power. There is an unconquerable force in my nature which I have turned into love for you” (The King, 707). He strongly refuses to fight.

In the play, The King and the Queen, the conflict arises when Queen Sumitra takes the assistance of her brother, Prince Kumarsen of Kashmir. The King Vikram feels humiliated when he came to know that Queen Sumitra is taking the helping hand of her brother. The uxorious king thinks himself free from the self-ensnaring love, adopting an extremely belligerent stance. The uncontrolled passions and hate up-setting all balance in the king’s life is consequent upon love’s falling out in the world of humanity. These things turns king’s frame of mind against Kumarsen.

Kumarsen presents the imposing figure who remains the soul of honour, zealously true to his sister, his motherland and to his betrothed. Kumarsen is an embodiment of sacrifice and new vision. Kumarsen represents the benevolent king in the play. In the Vedas and the Puranas, the character of a benevolent king used to take part in active reform. Here, Kumarsen feels humanity for the poor subjects. At the end, Kumarsen is ready to become the ‘random victim’, the pharmakos, whose single death saves the whole city and important for the redemption of mankind. Kumarsen like his sister Sumitra is aware of the situation, the harsh reality where the poor subjects are starving. Kumarsen and Sumitra are not only the King and the queen of their states, living a secluded life of luxury in the fortified palace, they both represent the
humanitarian self of Rabindranath also. The conversation between Queen Sumitra and the Devadatta lays emphasis upon the critical conditions of the king’s poor subjects:

Sumitra: Tell me, sir, what is that noise outside the gate?

Devadatta: That noise? Command me, and with the help of soldiers I shall drive away that noise, ragged and hungry.

Sumitra: Do not mock me. Tell me what has happened.

Devadatta: Nothing. It is merely hunger - the vulgar hunger of poverty. The famished horde of barbarians is rudely clamouring, making the drowsy cuckoos in your royal garden start up in fear.

Sumitra: Tell me, father, who are hungry?

Devadatta: It is their ill-fate. The king’s poor subjects have been practising long to live upon half a meal a day, but they have not yet become experts in complete starvation. It is amazing.

Sumitra: But, father, the land is smiling with ripe corn. Why should the king’s subjects die of hunger?

(\textit{The King and the Queen, 701-702})

After seeing the whirlpool of oppression and exploitation of the poor subjects, Queen Sumitra comes out of her luxurious cocoon to fight heroically. Tagore portrayed the king as an embodiment of romantic world which is totally alienated from reality. But through Sumitra’a protest, reality intervenes and lays bare the futility of the king’s romantic appeals for love making. King Vikram’s negligence of his royal duties left his poor subjects brutally oppressed under the hordes of officials who constitute the bureaucracy. The king becomes totally blind due to his revenge. The conversation
between the king and his Minister highlights the pathetic condition of poor subjects by the foreign robbers:

Vikram: I wish all happiness to my people. Why should there be suffering and injustice? Why should the strong cast his vulture’s eye upon the poor man’s comforts, pitifully small? (Enters MINISTER) Banish all the foreign robbers from my kingdom, this moment. I must not hear the cry of the oppressed for a day longer.

Minister: But, King, the evil that has been slowly growing for long, you cannot uproot in a day.

Vikram: Strike at its root with vigour and fell it with your axe in a day, the tree that has taken a hundred years to grow.

Minister: But we want arms and soldiers.

Vikram: Where is my general?

Minister: He himself is a foreigner.

Vikram: Then invite the hungry people. Open my treasure; stop this cry with food; send away with money—and if they want to have my kingdom, let them do so in peace, and be happy.

(The King and the Queen, 705)

Here, Tagore highlights the social reality more loudly and vociferously to depict the oppression and exploitation by the Britishers on the poor subjects in all the ugliest forms like poverty, hunger and homelessness.

In the play, Sumitra is depicted as a heroic lady and an ideal queen. Her heart moves to pity on seeing the people of Jalandhar suffering from hunger. She came to know that her own relatives coming from Kashmir had monopolised all the big posts
and eaten up everything they could lay their hands on. The king was so much infatuated with her that he had no time to look to the administration of the country. Monarchy had thus been reduced to anarchy, and to make things worse, it was a foreign bureaucracy at that time. Commenting on the inherent weakness of society, Tagore said:

Indians are trying to transfer more and more of their duties to the state. They are following even our social customs to be framed by alien rulers. There lies the fundamental weakness of our society.

*(Literary Concepts, 32)*

The queen’s mind is torn between love and sense of duty but she wishes to punish the high officers of his State with the help of her brother Kumarsen at any cost. The king burns down villages and towns, and causes so much havoc and consternation in Kashmir that Kumarsen prefers to sacrifice his life and becomes the “random victim” of the circumstance, only for the sake of saving his subjects. Sacrificing himself for the community makes a man happy as Pradhan aptly comments:

Man gets abiding happiness in giving himself up to ideals higher than his self. The service to society and country are considered by Tagore as unselfish ideals. Dedication to higher causes and noble ideals implies a transformation of man from the finite to the infinite consciousness.

*(Literary Concepts, 49)*

Kumarsen is also depicted as a heroic and courageous king in the play. He inspires others through his idealism and selfless commitment to a cause- even at the cost of his own life. He depicts the fact that for him his country is more important than his life. Highlighting the character of King Kumarsen, Shankar says:
That is an impossible as for the morning Sun to kiss the dust of the western horizon. My king will never surrender himself alive into your hands, and his sister will never suffer it.

(The King, 719)

Kumarsen’s sacrifice proves his loyalty and faithfulness for the community. Sumitra instils bravery and encourages Kumarsen which makes him emerge as a heroic figure. Sumitra declares herself as “the mother of the people” the poor people who were subjected to inhuman exploitation. The king however, is reduced to a name and serves the order of miscreants. That is why Devadatta belittles the king when he tells to Sumitra, “The king has become a piece of wild rumour, which they can believe, or not, as they like” (The King, 706). Queen Sumitra and Kumarsen describe those robbers as a “disgrace to Kashmir”. They both wanted to crush those miscreants, who were responsible for so much havoc in the country. The conversation between Devadatta, Sumitra and Vikram highlights the depth of anger of Sumitra and the pathetic state of affairs in the country:

Devadatta: They have defied the king’s call, the foreign governors of the provinces,- and they are preparing for rebellion.

Sumitra: Do you hear, king?

Vikram: Brahmin, the palace is not the council-house.

Devadatta: Sire, we rarely meet our king in the council-house, because it is not the palace garden.

Sumitra: The miserable dogs, grown fat upon the king’s table sweepings, dare dream of barking against their master? King, is it time for debating in the council chamber? Is not the course clear before you? Go with your soldiers and crush these miscreants.

(The King and the Queen, 708)
Nothing can be more transparent than this depiction of social reality by the dramatist. The possibility of rebellion is so vivid that it recalls the fall of Bastille, the Bourbon dynasty cuddled in luxury and pomp at the cost of the people. The cry for breed is the cry for liberty, equality and fraternity. Tagore’s depiction of the social reality of his times through this sheds light on the dreadful reality of famines taken poor subjects who are starving. Amidst the apathy of the ruler, the “random victim” succeeds in bringing the ruler to realization of his duties and responsibilities.

The second play under analysis and comparison is Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, which is a tragedy based on Yoruba rituals and historical event that shook Oyo (an ancient Yoruba city) in 1946. Highlighting the authenticity and relevance of the play, Soyinka writes in ‘the Author’s Note’:

The changes I have made are in matters of detail, sequence and of course characterization. The action has also been set back two or three years to while the war was still on, for minor reasons of dramaturgy.

(*Death*, 5)

The play is a powerful portrayal of reality in its revolutionary form as what Andrei Zhdanov, a well known socialist realist, asserts in his speech given at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Literature:

Socialist realism...demands from the writer an authentic, historically specific depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. This authenticity and historical specificity in the depiction of reality should be combined with the task of ideologically reshaping and educating the toilers in the spirit of socialism.

(*Problems of Soviet Literature*, 21-22)
By the 1940s the inhabitants of Oyo, an ancient Yoruba city, had reflected, consciously or unconsciously, a far wider array, of attitudes toward human sacrifice than Soyinka presents, depending on their religion (traditional, Christian and Islamic) and also their social status. Their perspective had speckled according to their experience of the persistent attempts to moderate or suppress the practice. Before the colonial period the custom had not remained totally static. In 1886, following the mediation of the British governor in the war between the Ibadans and the other Yoruba divisions, a series of legal enactments were against the practice was exacted from the local rulers. A noted critic, Johnson strongly condemned the abolition of the custom of human sacrifice as when he writes:

Abolition of the custom of human sacrifice by the Council of Ife, Whereas the practice of immolating human beings is cruel, barbarous, futile and unjust; and whereas His Excellency the Governor of Lagos, to whom the Ife nation is greatly indebted for having magnanimously mediated between them and their enemies, will be pleased to hear that the Ife nation has abolished the said detestable practice;...the practice of immolating human beings is and henceforth for ever shall remain abolished in the Ife country.

(The History of the Yorubas, 665)

The chiefs of the different Yoruba divisions appended their marks on the above statement and each treaty was signed in the presence of two British “Special Commissioners”. Some of the versions stipulated specially that human sacrifice was forbidden “at the festival of any deity or before, at, or after the funeral of any king or subject”, and that “no person condemned to death for a crime...shall be utilized for the purpose of sacrifice” (Johnson, 663-64). As the British extended their authority deeper inland in the years following the conference of Berlin, they nevertheless continued to encounter the custom as Crowder, a critic explicates:
The excesses of sacrificial bloodletting perpetrated in 1897 by the panic-stricken Ovonramwen, Oba of Benin, in an attempt to turn the gods against the British advance, represent only one well-known and spectacular example.

(The Story of Nigeria, 164)

In Nigeria, the practice of animal sacrifice does still exist but Soyinka presents in his Death and the King’s Horseman an example of the practice of human sacrifice in the pagan culture of Yoruba. In an interview, he declares that the concept of ‘sacrifice’ didn’t originally arise amid the Christian European culture. He asserts that its roots are rather ‘Pagan’:

I cannot accept, I do not regard the principle of sacrifice as belonging to the European world. I completely reject the idea that the notion of scapegoat is a Christian idea. This scapegoat idea is very much rooted in African religion.

(Conversations with Wole Soyinka, 54)

Death and the King’s Horseman presents a representation of Yoruba worldview. In Yoruba cosmology, there are three worlds: the world of the living, the world of the dead and the world of the unborn. This play focuses on what connects all three worlds—transition, the pathway on which members of the different worlds meet and interact. The story of the play revolves around a traditional religious practice performed after the death of the King of Oyo. Elesin Oba is a prominent character and the king’s chief horseman. Gerald Moore comments that Elesin Oba, “dances from the condition of life towards the condition of death” (Critical Perspectives, 126). He had to sacrifice his life in order to accompany the king’s spirit on its journey to the afterlife otherwise according to Yoruba rituals it would aimlessly wander and might curse the whole community. Olufemi Obafemi comments on the death of Elesin, “Elesin’s later death is not a ritual death. It is suicide. It is not transcendental as he does not ‘raise his will to cut the thread
of life at the summons of the drum” (Contemporary Nigerian Theatre, 130). Whether Elesin’s tragic death is a ritual suicide or mere suicide, it remains a wilful death, an act of free will.

Olunde as a hero of the play, is a healthy admixture of tradition and modernity. He accepts to go and study surgery in England and on the other hand he respects his indigenous tradition by fulfilling the duty of ritual suicide. He is an embodiment of ‘overlapping culture’ defining not only his local city but the whole country (Amkpa, 36). Commenting on Olunde’s reconciliatory attitudes, Mpalive Msiska opines:

We are thus shown that the transgression of cultural boundaries may not necessarily lead to the transformation of a subject’s fundamental belief and that, if anything, it may in fact entrench them more deeply.

(Wole Soyinka, 77)

Olunde not only embraces death by fulfilling the role assigned to him as the eldest son and becomes a pharmakos figure but he also stands as a defender against Pilkings Western views like the dramatist himself. Jane Pilkings comments on Olunde’s capacity to reason and his power of speech, “So it isn’t just medicine you studied in England” (Death, 53). B, M. Ibikotun regards Olunde as a man “more of the heart than of the intellect” (African Drama, 49). Olunde always shows deep understanding of his people and their indigenous traditions. He also notices the western culture very carefully. He tells Mrs. Pilkings, “I found your people quite admirable in many ways, their conduct and courage in this war for instance” (Death, 50). He also knows the mentality of English people very well that how they think of the other. Olunde makes Piklings silent by saying:

You forget that I have now spent four years among you people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand.

(Death, 50)
The concept and experience of death for Olunde is very different due to his training as a doctor during World War II. He says, “I have seen death too often. And the soldiers who returned from the front, they died on our hands all the time” (Death, 56). That’s the reason he dies for the welfare of the community. In the play, Olunde represents the most able person who fathoms his father’s nature and his failure to die after the king’s death. When Olunde saw his father alive and chained by Pilking’s lieutenants, he did not stop himself from performing the death ritual. Elesin realises later on that “what he (Olunde) said must never be unsaid. The concept of my own son rescued something of my shame” (Death, 63). While the son acted as a rescuer, the father acted the role of the abandoner.

Olunde’s sacrifice shows his faithfulness both as the elder son of the family and as a member of the Yoruba community. Elesin by leaving his responsibility, becomes a treacherous man who betrays his king whom he is supposed to accompany in the other world and also betrays his community which trusts him with this sacred duty. Elesin disliked the responsibility charged to him, a human life sacrificed for the welfare of the whole community. Obiechina argues that Elesin’s sensualist nature was the reason that impeded the progress of the sacrificial ritual:

The critical issue of the play, therefore, becomes the question of Elesin’s ability to shoulder his onerous burden, to fulfil his great destiny. As a sensualist with an enormous capacity for life and enjoyment how would Elesin confront a destiny whose fulfilment requires stringent self-discipline and social denial?

(Language and Theme, 156)

Obiechina regards Elesin as a revolutionary figure by commenting:

Elesin hates the idea of being called Elesin Oba, a human ram to be sacrificed, as it were, for the other, the late king. In this way, he is trying to make
another history, break the endless cycle of feudalistic tradition and usher in a revolutionary ethos.

(*African Drama*, 49)

In the play, the District officer tries to impede the flow of the ritual activity in the Yoruba city but his attempt to prevent the death of a single individual, caused the death of two. In fact, Elesin confronted his futile attempt to save him from death when he said, “You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it” (*Death*, 62). Iyaloja also confronted Pilkings by saying, “To prevent one death you will actually make other deaths? Ah, great is the wisdom of the white race” (*Death*, 73). Iyaloja calls Pilkings a “servant of the white king”. She explains to him that death is necessary for the continuity of their culture.

Like Mr. Pilkings, Elesin was not quite religious from a Yoruba perspective because he was assigned to perform a religious death ritual. It is true that he killed himself at the end of the play, but in Yoruba culture this is a shameful death. Elesin admits his mistake in front of Iyaloja as he declares:

It is when the alien hand pollutes the source of will, when a stranger force of violence shatters the mind’s calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in this alien rupture of his world. I know it was this thought that killed me, sapped my powers and turned me into an infant in the hands of unnameable strangers. I made to utter my spells anew but my tongue merely rattled in my mouth. I fingered hidden charms and the contact was damp; there was no spark left to sever the life-strings that should stretch from every finger-tip. My will was squelched in the spittle of an alien race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought – that there
might be the hand of the gods in a stranger’s intervention.

(Death, 69)

In *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Soyinka uses the concept of sacrificial death to test the will of his hero in the play. The play is also a symbol of struggle, not only between the colonizer and the colonised, but also between the new and the traditional in the Yoruba culture. The play also shows the relationship between Olunde and his father Elesin. Olunde embodies not the loud voice, but the actual voice representing his Yoruba culture.

In the play, Olunde, a *pharmakos* figure purifies the community through his sacrifice. Olunde always worships his rituals and traditions but for Mr. Pilking’s, *egungun* ritual is a ‘non-sense’, a ‘mumbo-jumbo’. Mr Pilking wanted to distort the culture of Olunde’s community as what Fanon argues:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all forms and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.

(Wretched of the Earth, 170)

Olunde’s great appreciation for his culture is conveyed with considerable authority as he explains to Mrs. Pilking the significance of the ritual suicide to his father, Elesin, and the community:

No one can understand what he does tonight without the deepest protection the mind can conceive. What can you offer him in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration of his own people? What would you think of your Prince if he
refused to accept the risk of losing his life on this voyage?

(Death, 53)

Here, Olunde very interestingly shows us that the transgression of cultural boundaries may not necessarily lead to the transformation of a subject’s fundamental beliefs about his own culture and traditions. Thus in this transgression, Olunde not only regenerates a particular community at a determinate moment, but also opens up the colonial moment to the dialectic of transformation, metonymically staging a deeper form of cultural nationalism and anticipating the post-colonial critique of the uncritical valorisation of tradition in nationalist discourse of identity.

Olunde causes his father and the whole community a lot of grief when he abdicates his traditional role of a king’s horseman by going to England, but in the end it is he rather than his father who saves the community from the ignominy of an unfulfilled sacrifice. Some critics believe that Elesin conforms fully to the Aristotelian notion of tragedy. Believing that he is destined to enact ritual suicide, an event that he has been prepared for since his youth, Elesin demands that his community has to offer before his departure, including the best food and a beautiful bride.

Elesin’s failure is completely presented as a result of his weakness for worldly pleasure, and thus it is not only the interruption of Pilkins which stops his transgression to the other world, but also his own tragic flaw. In the end he suffers the embarrassment of prison, which even more painful than the ritual sacrifice. Iyaloja, the leader of the market women who had sung him into the commencement of his tragic journey, becomes the vehicle of communal condemnation. She confronts him:

You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the World’s left-overs...No, you said, I am the hunter’s dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter.

(Death, 68)
So due to the embarrassment, Olunde substitutes himself to fill the place of his father. This substitution makes Olunde- the pharmakos-the ultimate victim. A well noted African critic, Eldred Jones writes that Olunde’s decision to die in his father’s place is an indication of “the society’s hope of regeneration and of continuity” (The Writing of Wole Soyinka, 118). Iyaloloja describes Olunde as “the favoured companion of the king” (The Death, 75). She further praises him as she says:

There lies the honour of your household and of our race. Because he could not bear to let honour fly out of doors, he stopped it with his life. The son has proved the father Elesin, and there is nothing left in your mouth to gnash but infant gums.

(Death, 75)

In Soyinka’s landmark book, Myth, Literature and the African World, he has explicated the rituals and myths which truly inspired his drama. His use of rituals in drama shows us a way to transcend the temporal and draw upon the resources of primary reality. Soyinka has established a very close relationship between ritual and drama as he views ritual as the source of drama because ritual acts as the bridge between deities and mankind.

Ogun is the central figure and idol god for Soyinka. He first dared to enter the abyss that separated human beings from their gods, the dead and the unborn. He formed a bridge to span the abyss. It was an act of courage which risked extinction and disintegration of the personality. He was the god of the destructive and the creative principle thus having in him both the creative-destructive aspects. We can say that the dramatic world of Soyinka then is the retelling of the Ogun myth. Thus the hero in the dramatic world of Soyinka creates from ritual experience. He enters the abyss, the inner world of primal reality and brings back its essence, which is beneficial for the whole community.

Thus for Soyinka, drama represents “the passage-rites of hero gods, a projection of man’s conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonize with his
environment” (*Myth*, 36). Soyinka was so much influenced by his favourite god Ogun, he himself has experienced that bridge which connects the Western philosophical world and Yoruba religious world in order to attain universalism. Ostensibly, Soyinka has consistently applied his Yoruba mythology in all his work. He believes that it provides a progressive vision of reality than anything else.

Olunde’s figure in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, as a gifted man with both constructive and destructive abilities is also an embodiment of Ogun principle. Though he is endowed with a healing capacity as a doctor, his duty is to perform a ritual death. With his creative spirit, Olunde acted as an intellectual figure and sacrificed himself willingly for the sake of the stability of his community. Like Olunde, Soyinka from his personal experiences as a student and a teacher at many foreign universities, has understood that his native tradition, Yoruba, is the most inspiring source of meaning and depth when compared to the Western belief system. It is difficult for Britishers to understand the metaphysical implications of the Yoruba myth.

In the play, Olunde’s sacrifice symbolizes his determination to be true to one’s roots and at assert the value of higher duty against both the internal threat of materialistic self-interest (Elesin’s tragic flaw) and the external threat of an imposed alien culture. The play, *Death and the King’s Horseman* depicts an account of how the Yoruba people celebrate their rituals and earn their liberation or salvation by sacrificing an individual from their community. The African view justifies sacrifice as a symbolic destruction of the ‘the part’ to save ‘the whole’.

Soyinka has envisioned the role for the artist which is of dynamic force. Soyinka believed that the artist lives in a society which is subjected to internal changes. The duty of the artist is to direct this change. The society is to be saved by means of dedication and far-sighted actions of certain individuals. Such individuals may have to risk their own life and may be victimized. But the society may benefit from their vision. So he “sees society as being in continual need for salvation from itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act” (*Ogungbesan*, 6). A critic further explains:
It comes about through the vision and dedication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision in spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save. They frequently end up as the victims of the society which benefits from their vision.

(Ogungbesan, “Wole Soyinka”, 6)

Through the act of salvation, Soyinkan heroes awaken the society and the world from their deep slumber in order to revitalize society. Soyinka as a speculative thinker believes that the literary artist should be a redeemer who can redeem the society through his literary and creative sensibilities. Thus the artist should provide a remarkable insight into the nature and existence of the world. Thus he is entrusted with a great responsibility. Soyinka advocates a more dynamic use of rituals directed towards change through reintegration. Through the use of the rituals in the play, Death and the King’s Horseman is designed to demonstrate the possibilities for articulating resistance to colonialism. The ritual serves as significant agents in inspiring not only actors on the stage but the spectators in the audience. The ritual “has a regenerative effect for all its participants: it reinforces the community on stage and, in turn, the community in the audience who are also exhorted to fight colonialism” (Gilbert and Tompkins, 65). Another critic Gassner and Quinn further comment on the significance of rituals in the society when they explicate:

Not only do these rituals symbolize the passage from death to life and from one way of life to another, but they are the actual means of achieving the change over, they mark the transition by which through the process of separation, regeneration and return on a higher level, both the individual and the community are assured their victory over the forces of chaos, which are kept under control.

(A Reader’s Encyclopaedia, 714)
Soyinka who had Yoruba roots and Western upbringing was inclined towards Yoruba world view as reflected in his mouth piece Olunde who sacrifices himself to uphold the tradition by denouncing retrogressive Western ideology. A noted critic, William, a critic comments:

Olunde is the ideological spokesman for the playwright, who is obviously in profound sympathy with the young man’s aspiration. He is therefore, a perfect match and a counterfoil to the arrogance and chauvinism of the colonial administrators

(Death, 190)

Like his spokesman, Olunde, Soyinka too remained absolutely loyal to his countrymen. He refused Western philosophy, utilizing every opportunity to attack Western hegemony in general and apartheid in particular. Olunde is smart and courageous unlike his father who acts like a coward.

The central concern in Yoruba society is the preservation of the community. Soyinka affirms the dying tradition of ritualistic self-sacrifice, because it forms the crux of his vision, which is based on African sense of communal well-being. Olunde as the hero of the play is an individual endowed with a strong will and a desire to redeem the community. His end is not a fall but an act of conscious sacrifice for the well being of the society. It is a spiritual deed. Soyinka here seems to convey the message that we must undertake the journey of self-discovery, vigorous though it might be. It might involve crossing a number of obstacles. It might demand great, perhaps the ultimate self-sacrifice. But it is always rewarding.

The sacrifice of both the heroes Kumarsen and Olunde in their respective communities fulfils the need for salvation. Thus they both become the meeting point of the human and the divine. Both the heroes depict their humanitarian concern through their sacrifices. The King and the Queen and Death and the King’s Horseman are such
plays which show the need of sacrifice and the necessity for death in man’s life to ensure the future of the common unity.

In a nut shell, Tagore and Soyinka highlight their vision that family, society and community is so important in both the Indian and Nigerian culture that individuality is often sacrificed at the alter of the communities and family’s well being. The hero in Tagore’s *The King and the Queen* and Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* becomes the ‘random-victim’ of circumstance that surmounts difficulties. Tagorean hero, Kumarsen sacrificed his life to save Kashmir from total devastation and Soyinkan hero, Olunde sacrificed himself to rescue his father’s failure which was essential to the continuity of his culture. Both the heroes are the embodiment of sacrifice. They enact the salvation of the city. Kumarsen and Olunde are the best examples of –the pure ‘*pharmakos*’- the one whose sacrifice controls the situation of the war or removes the pollution from the city.
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