CHAPTER V
AFRICAN SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

Any literary artist consciously or unconsciously communicates his taste and ideals about men and societies through his work. The significance of his work can be judged by the complexity and profundity of his tastes and ideals. Wole Soyinka at the level of social action can be regarded as a progressive idealist in the sense that his involvements in and utterances on specific social problems indicate a fervent preoccupation with social injustice and an aversion to oppressive institutions.

A reading of Soyinka's plays reveals that he goes beyond the definite social and political situation to a fundamental concern for the quality of human existence. His plays deal with problems, which nagged the African society as a result of transformation that overtook the post-independence Nigeria. His writings are directed against society itself and its power structures. He uses drama to register his dissatisfaction with the society. He is a radical who is not particularly satisfied with the political authority in his country and an idealist who is highly critical of the social order. He uses his plays as a vehicle to show his feelings and uses it as an instrument to bring about social change.

Soyinka believes that the writer must first of all, be true to himself, and that he must be independent and original. He once told a gathering of African writers in 1967:
The time has now come when the African writer must have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity.... It is about time that that the African writer stopped being a mere chronicler and understood also that part of his essential purpose is to write with a very definite vision...he must at least begin by exposing the future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present. 1

Soyinka presents the emerging African elite at war with its society. He, by analyzing the prevalent mood, aims at forcing the society to recognize the true nature of its problems. He said in 1967 that

If the writer feels committed or involved or if he feels a compulsion within himself to write the truth, then he surely has the right to try and build the kind of society in which he can write this beautiful literature, the beautiful words. 2

He claimed to remain convinced that the writer should be committed to the restoration of the permanent values- justice, freedom, human dignity in the society. His aim is to evoke a new society in the process of coming to birth. But he recognized that literature could not perform this function. In one of his interviews, he said:
The exercise of the literary function may serve the writer and perhaps a few followers to keep in view what the ends of humanity are. They may eventually be spurred into action in defense of those ends. In our society especially it is essential to recognize this. At the moment literature and art can only function as a keep in view tray on a bureaucrat’s desk. Once this is accepted, the writer does not fool himself into thinking that all is said and done. He holds himself in readiness—accelerating the process where he can be—when the minutes in that file can be made a live project. No other attitude seems possible to me. 3

Soyinka is aware of the writer’s responsibility within the increasing pace of social change taking place in the society. He said,

When the writer in the society can no longer function as a conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of the chronicler and post-mortem surgeon. 4

Soyinka believes that the writer possesses inner light unavailable to the
mass of the people, and that it is his duty to use this inspiration and insight to guide his society towards a beautiful future. He said,

The question of vision simply refers to the contribution of the writer to the kind of human society—individual, parochial or world that he believes in.  

Soyinka is a speculative thinker and his persistent call to African writers is to demonstrate that they have a heavy responsibility towards their country. He sees the literary artist as a redeemer who can guide and inspire the society. In his interview in Zimbabwe, he said:

...When one is a writer, one's imagination is engaged by the very complexity within the society, the interaction of the characters that make up the society. Whether one is merely working out a personal problem in relation to one's own place within that society that also motivates a number of writers. I think..... that may be at the level of social commitment and the problem that rises for the individual who, is after all, a human entity. Every individual, is in a sense, unique - and that combination of psychology, sociology, or history,
or environmental effects - these are also legitimate
and inevitable areas of fascination for any writer. 6

Society comprises individuals of different temperaments and different
motives. Interaction with these individuals causes friction at times. Coalition
too comes as a result of this interaction. The individual wages a relentless
battle against the established norms of the society in order to give it a face-lift.
The battle, in many cases, proves to be futile, but the effort does succeed in
awakening the people from a somnambulistic state. The impact of Western
education has made the average African a better person, but he has not lost
respect for the traditional values. Education has helped the African acquire a
broader perspective. It has helped him to come out of the claustrophobic
atmosphere of self-interest. The protagonist in some of the plays of Soyinka
wants to create an enlightened Africa. However, Yoruba tradition is so deep
that it cannot be uprooted by the sophisticated education acquired in the
West.

In the African society this conflict between tradition and modernism is a
deep one. The African society is communal whereas the Western society is
individualistic. Africa emerging from the cocoon of colonialism, found itself in
the grip of certain western ideas. The ideas were progressive but the coalition
of the two strands of culture became a painful experience. This led to a
distinction between the modern and the traditional. People in the period of
transition are caught in a whirlpool. They are between the anvil and the
hammer, and are engaged in the shaping of a new life. The protagonist waits
for the opportune moment to strike the right chord, but sometimes he does not succeed.

Soyinka, in his writings, wants to communicate some message. His reactions are not class based— he is only interested in the shaping of the human psyche. The power to change the course of mankind is in the hands of leaders and strong men. These men sometimes make decisions prompted by their self-will and petty interests, rather than the high-minded considerations for the welfare of the society.

Soyinka’s plays have for their background that sensitive period which is called the transitional period. Africa was ravaged by colonialism and it was passing through a socio-economic stage, which produced the protagonists who tread the path of progress and attempt to rouse the conscience of the people in their society. The Professor, Kamini, Kongi, Baroka and Bero are some of the protagonists in his plays who are interested in their own welfare whereas Igweju, Lakunle, Eman and Olunde are among those who have the welfare of the society uppermost in their mind. They assert their will in order to rehabilitate the society, to make it a better place to live in. We can see the reflection of this transition in many of his plays.

Soyinka’s The Swamp Dwellers markedly examines the society in a state of change, which extends beyond its apparent theme of rural decay. It is concerned primarily with the social changes brought about by an easy access to sudden wealth. It demonstrates how easy money destroys people and the
The play comes to us essentially as an evocative study in disappointment and frustration.

In this play, the author shows us a lower class rural community, which is disintegrating because the young, unable to accept poverty and hazard, no longer have faith in its life or its narrow gods. The play explores the theme of man’s misfortunes set against hostile nature—human and physical. In the swamps, land is scarce. Although this village had earlier survived within its strictly sanctioned borders without much threat from outside influences, now it seemed impossible as these outside influences have begun to make steady encroachments and a crisis has reached. There is a threat to the village as a majority of youth has been migrating to the city. Alu and Makuri are witness to this migration as their two sons, Awuchike and Igweju, have also migrated to the city. As Makuri, the father says:

Those were the days...those days were really good. Even when times were harsh and the swamps over ran the land, we were able to laugh with the serpent...but these young people...they are no sooner born that they want to get out of the village as if it carried a plague.... I bet none of them has ever taken his women into the swamps.7

Awuchike, Makuri’s elder son, has, long ago, left for the city and never returned. Igweju, the other son, too, had left the swamps to forget nature’s
harshness but he has been without success in the city, thus running into debt. The irony here is that while Awuchike prospered, Igweju was ruined. When Igweju approached Awuchike for help, the latter turned him out of his house. Thus, the disintegration of the society can be seen where in a brother is driven against one's own brother. Igweju is completely disenchanted and so he blames the Kadiye (the priest):

...Perhaps he can give meaning to what seems dark and sour.... When I met with harshness in the city, I did not complain. When I felt the nakedness of its hostility, I accepted it. When I saw its knife sever the ties of love of kinship, and turn brother against brother....

When his mother enquires of the welfare of his brother he says,

He lives. What does it matter that he breathes a foreign air. Perhaps there is something in the place that makes men forget. What if he lives sufficient only to himself? He lives. One cannot ask too much.

On being asked whether Awuchike remembered his parents and what happened in the city,
Igweju: Awuchike is dead to you and to this house.
Let us not raise his ghost...the city reared itself in the air, and with the strength of its legs of brass kicked the adventurer in the small of his back.

Makuri: And Awuchike? Was he on the horse that kicked? ...Did your own brother ride you down? 10

Igweju is frustrated with his brother and also with the city. His elder brother has robbed him of his money and wife. He is in despair and is furious at the Kadiye, the priest, who had promised him a good harvest, a long happy life with his wife.

Igweju has lost faith in the gods and the priest. He is intent on his vendetta against the Kadiye, who he sets down as an overfed rascal and an obstacle to all advancements in the area. The irony here is that while the whole of the village is suffering from poverty with nothing to eat, the Kadiye has grown immensely fat. Igweju is a victim of ruthless commercialism as well as the victim of the 'serpent'. He suffers against his will, as he can do nothing to avert suffering.

The play shows that if the city destroys every obligation of kinship and friendship, it also destroys the kind of sanctified exploitation represented by the Kadiye. Igweju again rushes off to the city to escape from the wrath of
villagers though there is more likelihood of his finding death than fulfillment. He says,

Only the children and the old stay here,
bondsman. Only the innocent and the dotards.¹¹

The play deals with a kind of spiritual death where the young sever all familial and human ties with the village and commit themselves to a totally new life in the towns. It seems the city tends to dehumanize the emigrants. The play also seems to be a questioning of the tradition by the young. But so intertwined is religion with all life in the village, that this questioning comes close to blasphemy. The villagers are totally unreceptive to new ideas. They have totally compromised themselves with their surroundings. The beggar, who, inspite of his handicap, is a spiritually strong force, represents any hope of change within the village. He is a man of quick intelligence and is able to analyze the ills of the society of the swamp dwellers. In contrast to Igweju, he has not lost hope as he insists on being allowed to cultivate the land. He is a symbol of encouraging presence, a man of integrity and optimism for the future.

Soyinka, in The Swamp Dwellers does not show an easy solution to a problem. While the beggar represents change within the society, the forces of tradition are totally opposed to it (change). Thus at the end of the play, Soyinka tends to offer an open situation where the society is in a state of change but is bound by the shackles of tradition.
In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka compares the old order and the new order in the Nigerian society. As in *The Swamp Dwellers* the author depicts the struggle between progress and tradition. Here the protagonist, Lakunle, a village schoolteacher, represents the new order that strongly opposes the old practices. Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle, represents the old order and he does not want any change in the society. Lakunle's dress itself shows that he is inching towards modernity.

He is dressed in an old style English suit, thread bare but not ragged, cleaned but not ironed, obviously a size or two small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waistcoat. He wears twenty-three inch bottom trousers and blanc white tennis shoes.\(^{12}\)

Lakunle dislikes the traditional dress, which the village girls wear. He disapproves of the custom of carrying loads on heads, which Sidi, a village belle does. He warns her of impending dangers that lie in it. He reprimands her for her way of dressing and asks her to dress up as most modern women do,

You can wear something
Most modest women do.\(^{13}\)
He considers himself to be literate and very intelligent. He talks of changes and introduction of modern machines, which will change the villagers' way of life. Notice the dialogue between him and Sidi:

Lakunle: ...You can no longer draw me into argument
Which go above your head.

But don't you worry. In a year or two
You will have machines, which will do
Your pounding, which will grind pepper
Without it getting into your eyes.

Sidi: O-Oh. You really mean to turn
The whole world upside down.

Lakunle: The world? Oh that, well may be later
Charity, they say begins at home.
For now, it is this village I shall turn
Inside out. Beginning with that crafty rogue;
Your past master of self indulgence-Baroka.¹⁴

Lakunle wants to change the whole order beginning with Baroka, the Bale of Iljinle. He considers the practice of bride price to be barbarous and wants to see it abolished. He describes bride price as:

A savage custom, barbaric, outdated,
Rejected, denounced, accursed,
Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,
Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.
Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable.
An ignoble custom, infamous, ignominious
Shaming our heritage before the world.\textsuperscript{15}

The Bale is considered by Lakunle to be a hurdle to progress as he recalls the reactionary wiliness of Baroka when he refuses to let the railway be built through the village.

Lakunle: His wiliness is known even in larger towns
Did you never hear
Of how he foiled the Public Works Attempt
To build the railway track through Ilujinle
.... Oh he's a die-hard
Sworn against our progress
...Alone I stand
for progress....\textsuperscript{16}

Lakunle completely rejects traditional ways and accepts foreign ways of living. He represents a mere travesty of modernism. He is an angry young man who wants to change the whole world overnight and rushes into action
with characteristic temerity. He dreams of the entry of civilization or modernity into Africa very soon through the construction of a motor road. He believes, rather wishfully, that there would be remarkable change in the life style of villagers. He gives a contrastive picture of the traditional and the modernized Africa. He believes that the conventional bride price would be cancelled and replaced by the simple method of love marriage; that the motor road would connect the village to urban life; that clay pots would be replaced by saucepans; that polygamy would be replaced by monogamy; that the forests would be cut down and replaced by modern parks for the benefit of lovers; that palm wine habit would be replaced by tea with milk and sugar and so on and so forth. He wants the people of the village to enjoy the amenities of industrialization. His idea of modernity is depicted in the following lines:

(With conviction): Within a year or two, I
Swear
This town shall see a transformation...
A motor road will pass this spot
And bring the city ways to us....
We must be modern with the rest
Or live forgotten by the world.17

Lakunle is so preoccupied with his modern ways of thinking that he makes himself an object of ridicule and scorn. He is considered a crazy fellow and a fanatic whose brain has been upset by the ideas he has read in books. He is so influenced by the western civilization that he no longer respects the
older tradition of his people. As an educated man, he has filled his head with many new ideas and dreams of translating them into action one day. But the African way of life is diametrically opposed to his dream of modernity.

There is a sharp contrast between the African viewpoint and the European one with regard to progress. Lakunle and kindred souls believe in the European ideas of progress expressed in terms of their belief in the establishment of roads, rails and bridges and in introduction of industry and technology in various aspects of life, which would shorten the distance between the people of different countries by bringing them into the wide network of communication and transportation and by rendering their life more comfortable.

On the other hand, Baroka who represents the old order is strongly reactionary and does everything to prevent the march of progress coming near the village. He does not agree with the modern point of view and says:

...For a long time now,
The town-dwellers have made up tales,
Of the backwardness of llujinle
Until it hurts Baroka, who holds
The welfare of his people deep at heart...
I do not hate progress, only its nature
Which makes all the roofs and faces look the same.¹⁸
He is successful in enticing Sidi towards him in spite of his old age and traditional methods. Sidi chooses Baroka only for his manliness.

In this play, tradition easily triumphs over modernity. But it looks as if Baroka’s triumph is by default deriving from Lakunle’s clumsiness and ineffectuality rather than the inherent strength of his position. However critical discussion of the play has frequently been based on the assumption that Baroka represents static, ‘traditional’ African values and that Lakunle represents western civilization. It seems that Soyinka in a reactionary mood, favoured Baroka by letting him win the girl, Sidi, who ‘represents’ the new generation. However it can be said that the play seems to be a celebration of Baroka, his vitality and his cunning, and it recommends a syncretistic approach. A key statement of the playwright’s vision is found in the seduction scene where Baroka argues that ‘the old must flow into the new’. This argument pervades the form as well as the meaning of the play, for The Lion and the Jewel stands at the confluence of two traditions: the Yoruba masque and the European satirical musical and challenges the readers to respond to a new theatrical experience.

In this play too, Soyinka does not arrive at a definite solution to a problem. Lakunle is attacked for his half-hearted modernity. Baroka’s world too cannot survive for a long time in spite of the sporadic outbursts of cultural rehabilitation on the African continent by genuine cultivators or tradition mongers. Thus, the struggle between tradition and modernism in rural Nigeria, which is actually in the transitional phase, is clearly seen.
In The Dance of the Forests, Soyinka involves himself closely to the African conditions. This play was actually written and staged in 1960 as part of the independence celebration of Nigeria. The play is an attempt to represent the complexities of human personality and the consequences within the cyclical pattern of history. Though this play draws inspiration from both European and Yoruba traditions, it is clearly addressed to a particular point in history, a point at which change appeared to be possible. It represents a comprehensive view of man over a massive span of history and it even looks at the future. It concerns the possibility of making a break with the past, of a new beginning.

The play depicts the plight of man in the totality of his experience in the context of the past, the present and the future. Soyinka's human characters in this play are all complementary parts, which together add up to a picture of man with all his capacity for creation and self-perpetuation as well as destruction and self-elimination.

In the beginning of the play, a central social event- the gathering of the tribes- is celebrated where the dead mingle with the living and the gods with men. Man is the central figure in the play, and is represented by the living men and women. They are Demoke, Adenebi, Rola, Agbereko, and the Old Man. The Dead Man and Dead Women also represent man- as victim of other men- and history as indictment of man's past actions. Some of these characters have a dual existence. Man is also represented by Half-Child, that ambiguous symbol of man's future.
Demoke, the carver, can be described as the protagonist in the play who is a complex man, creative and violent, an artist and a murderer. He is a protégé of Ogun, the contradictory god. He creates a magnificent totem, which is the centerpiece of the gathering of the tribes. But he also exhibits his act of destruction by the very act of denuding the trees of its natural foliage. Eushoro complains:

...Have you seen how they celebrate the gathering of the tribes? In our own destruction. Today they dared to chase out the spirits by poisoning the air with petrol fumes. Have you seen how much of the forest has been torn down for their petty decorations? My patience is at an end. Where the humans preserve a little bush behind their homes, it is only because they want somewhere for their garbage. Dead dogs and human excrement are all you'll find in it. The whole forest stinks. Stinks of human obscenities... but if humans, as always wreak havoc on their heads who are we to stop them? Don't they always decide their own lives? ¹⁹

The above lines show how man is working towards his own destruction by felling trees in the forests. But we can see a more significant act of destruction when Demoke murders his own apprentice out of pique. Demoke himself says:
I pushed him down. I pushed him down...
He climbed higher and I pushed him
down...
...till I plunged him into hell
...Now, now and from his nest, I will again
Pluck him, Oremole, servant of Oro and
fling him
Screaming downwards into hell.

Obaneji: Hatred, Pride, Blindness, Envy. Was it envy?

Demoke: Envy.

...The squirrel who dances on
a broken branch, must watch
whose jaws are below.²⁰

Thus we see how human beings kill fellow human beings just out
of envy and hatred. Man is working out his own destruction that is very much
evident in the following lines spoken by the warrior:

Unborn generations will be cannibals most
worshipful Physician. Unborn generations will, as
we have done, eat up one another. Perhaps you
can devise a cure, you who know how to cure so
many ills.²¹

Eushoro tries to influence the fate of mankind by various devices. He is
an enemy of mankind and even when he is outsmarted by Ogun and the child is returned to its mother, instead of a gesture of defeat, he gives a loud yell of triumph. He is confident that if man is left to his own devices, he will need no aid to destruct himself. Earlier he declared that he would do nothing by his own hand to hurt men:

Not by my hand. But if humans as always, wreak havoc on their own heads, who are we to stop them.²²

In this play, the playwright shows how man is in despair with his own creation. Though mankind is free, the forest head, who knows the truth, is not content with the freedom given to man.

Trouble me no further. The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden-to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness-knowing well, it is all futility. Yet I must do this alone, and no more, since to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumored ineffectuality complete; hoping that when I have
tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, in new beginnings... 23

The above words of the Forest Head point out that man is a victim of his freedom and actions. The other characters in the play also show that modern man tends to be full of deceit and corruption.

Rola, a woman character, is an attractive woman who with her fatal attractions has callously sent many of her lovers to their death. She resists the traditional ways and finds the family business a burden. She is a whore who has amassed wealth by deceiving her lovers. She is a selfish woman who has no human feelings at all. Thus, the play shows the gradual disintegration of man in the transitional phase where human beings transform into cannibals.

Soyinka’s yet another play Madmen and Specialists depicts the progressive dehumanization of man in the contemporary African society. The play is centered on a father and a son who have recently returned from war. There, they tasted human flesh. While the Old Man adopts a more rational attitude to the prevalent disorientation in the ethical base of the society, Bero, his son luxuriates in his newfound assignment as a ‘specialist’ in torture and other sadisms. He is the villain of the play and is an embodied evil in human form. He has mortgaged his science to the goal of success. He is full of contempt for humanity and all that, which symbolizes the world. He treats his patients as mere corpses. The transformation of Dr. Bero into an inhuman
beast produces a traumatic effect upon his father and makes him lapse into a peculiar madness.

The old man is apparently helpless and is at the mercy of his domineering son. The son does not even hesitate to kill his own father. He is tempted by the lure of power, and is rapidly self-corrupted. The play shows that almost anything can be purchased or corrupted. The blind man in the play shows and points towards the change in our civilization. He points out that it is the duty of the people of this world to save their civilization from the threat to tradition. He says:

It is our duty and a historical necessity. It is our duty and a historical duty... what though the winds of change are blowing over this entire continent, our principles and traditions-yet, must be maintained. For we are threatened, yes, we are threatened.24

The Old Man also points towards the malady in our system:

...As is, and the system is its mainstay though it wears a hundred masks and a thousand outward forms... 25

The Old Man reminds his son:

....I am the last proof of the human in you. The
last shadow. Shadows are tough things to be rid of. How does one prove that he was never born of man? Of course you could kill me...  

Dr. Bero kills the Old Man and gets rid of the shadow. One of the central images of the play is of cannibalism, an image of man’s tendency to feed off the human flesh and the power from his own fellow men.

Abiola Irele, a renowned critic commented as follows:

The play itself is a kind of fantasy that takes off from reality and whose actions seem parallel to it by developing the implications of real life situations to their weird, absurd and finally, in human limits. The prevailing atmosphere of the play is one of acute moral and spiritual discomfort.

Soyinka’s play, The Road, is an eloquent and bitter comment on the Nigerian society. The whole society reeks with the stench of disintegration and death. The play presents a grim picture of gloom and decadence, where a dog-eat-dog morality rules supreme.

The road is the central symbol of the play. It embodies the educational progress or technological advancement of the Nigerian society. The roads, which were constructed across the country by the colonial rulers for their
selfish ends symbolize progress and modernism in transitional Africa. It is used as a symbol to capture the transitional phase of his country and its very precarious socio-political state on the verge of the civil war.

The central character in the play is the Professor. He is a Sunday school teacher and a lay preacher who lost his job after charges of corruption and misconduct. He has lost his faith in the validity of Christian teaching, but retains his interest in spiritual matters. He is a sort of an amphibian, neither African nor European. He represents the cultural clash and also shows signs of lunacy. He is between two worlds-his connection with Christianity and his closeness to the worshippers of Ogun. He is obsessed with one idea- to find the key to the mysterious truth, which he calls 'the word', and which he believes is closely related to death. He is the type of westernized Yoruba, who is caught between two worlds.

The Professor owns a shop where he sells the parts of wrecked cars to drivers who are in need of them. There are other persons around him who depend on the road for their livelihood. There are the men with names inspired by American crime and Western films, like Say Tokyo Kid who adopt a Chicago gangster's drawl, yet sing traditional Yoruba praise songs and worship Ogun. In fact, Say Tokyo Kid represents an ugly fusion of the traditionally African and the hardheaded materialism of an alien culture. He is a lorry driver more interested in leading a gang of hooligans. He helps politicians in disrupting meetings of his opponents. There is Kotunu, an erstwhile lorry driver who now assists Professor in his ugly business. He is
haunted by a guilty conscience as he knocked down an egungun figure, Murano, who was taking part in the drivers' festival. Murano represents the unadulterated old order. He is a palm wine tapper, the representative of a traditional rural occupation. He is deaf and dumb and is heading towards bankruptcy. Samson is Kotunu's companion. Salubi, a driver without a driving licence and Particulars Joe is a corrupt policeman. People like Sergeant Burma and Professor are ruthlessly indifferent to human loss. The following lines illustrate the point:

Kotunu: Sergeant Burma was never moved by these accidents. He told me himself how once he was stripping down a crash and found that the driver was an old comrade from the front. He took him to the mortuary but first he stopped to remove all the tyres.

Samson: He wasn't human

Kotunu: ....You know, Professor is a bit like Sergeant Burma. He was moving round those corpses as if they didn't exist. All he cared about was re-planting that signpost. To see him you would think he was Adam re-planting the tree of Life.
All the above characters are corrupt and help the Professor in manipulating accidents especially when the shop runs short of spare parts. There is no character in the play who is not diseased—there is an ambience of vice and greed.

The play is about a search for hidden knowledge in a world of broken traditions and cultural chaos. It is balanced by a pettiness and low level corruption encouraged by the bureaucratic setup among petty officials and semi-literate individuals. The very modernism, which has given a face-lift to Nigerian social and economic life, has also endowed the westernized class with ways of exploiting their own lower classes. In a similar position are the other characters in the play and the African society.

Modern Africa is nagged by psychological problems. It follows absurdly the fashion of Europe at a distance and never catches up. Soyinka seems skeptical of the cost of progress and brings out the paradoxical nature of progress. The road in the play symbolizes the air of uncertainty about one reaching the destination, which is very similar to the lack of direction, which characterized the Nigerian society in 1965. It depicts a society, which has lost its grip over the essentials of life, and is on the road to dissolution and death.

Most of Soyinka’s works arise from a passionate, almost desperate concern for his society. Man is a product of his environment and the society and his response to the situation is of significance. Any man, especially one belonging to the freshly emerged from the colonial grip, is a product of a long
process of adaptation and development. The environment influences his disposition and his total worldview. In turn, he too influences the society of which he is a part. He believes in maximum freedom for human beings and is prepared to sacrifice almost anything. The playwright observes:

I believe there is no reason why human beings should not enjoy maximum freedom. In living together in a society, we agree to lose some of our freedom. To detract from the maximum freedom socially possible, to me, is treacherous. I do not believe in dictatorship—benevolent or malevolent.29

Soyinka's plays show that he dreams of rebuilding the society. He is desirous of changing the entire social set-up and is interested in the welfare of the society. He has a sense of social obligation and has a faith in the future of the society. He believes in a socialist, democratic complexion of the society and mentioned it in an interview with Biodun Jeyifo:

I happen to believe and accept implicitly what goes under the broad umbrella of social ideology, believing this to be a logical principle of communal organization and true human equality.30
Soyinka believes that drama should be made to reflect the way of life and the social aspirations of the people. In recent years he has used the stage as an instrument of political satire. He holds that much is wrong with independent Nigeria and uses drama to call attention to the evils of the society - the great division between the rich and the poor, the lack of social amenities for the lower classes, the corruption, nepotism, greed, barefaced intolerance and political dishonesty. He strongly believes that the creative writer should never be silent about these things. He sees it as a business of writers to expose these evils as a means of bringing about social and political reforms. He has an uncanny knack of reading the symptoms, and diagnosing the malady. He believes in liberty. In an interview in 1973, he said:

I have a special responsibility, because I can smell
the reactionary sperm years before the rape of the
nation takes place.31

Soyinka is an artist interested in twilight zones — between night and day, or life and death. It is clear that he has a fascination for the areas of transition. And yet he does not reject modern life, in the manner of Yeats, Eliot or Pound. He believes that it can only recover its meaning and its soul by a full-hearted espousal of African values and civilization. The political, social, religious and economic arrangements of Yoruba land offer a system which only needs re-interpretation to act as the blueprint for tomorrow. The social and class mobility which urbanization and industrialization are imparting to Nigeria; the growth of huge multi-ethnic communities like Lagos, Kano or
Benin; the emergence of serious class-conflict for control of the levers of state power are all apparently irreversible developments.

Soyinka's concern is for man on earth. His focus is on man, human nature, and man in conflict with himself, with God religion, established institutions and nature itself. He is a conscience-keeper of his society. He is greatly concerned about the well being of his society and he endeavors to correct the follies implicit in change through ridicule. He dramatizes the conflict and correspondences between city and village, tradition and modernism, conflicts of ideas and visions, of illusion and reality. He meaningfully stimulates and even provokes the African society by adopting certain dramatic and theatrical devices, which have been discussed in the next chapter.
NOTES


2. Ibid., p.52.


4. Ibid., p.63.


8. Ibid., p.103.

9. Ibid., p.103.

10. Ibid., p.104.

11. Ibid., p.112.

13. Ibid., pp.4-5.
15. Ibid., p.8.
16. Ibid., p.23.
17. Ibid., p.24-25
18. Ibid., p.47.
21 Ibid., p.49.
22 Ibid., p.42.
23 Ibid., p.76.
24 Ibid., p.24.
26 Ibid., p.271.
27 Irele Abiola. Spear, May 1966, p.20
31 Ibid., p.64.