CHAPTER – IV

GAME OF SILENCE
As a playwright of ideas, Imbuga seeks to explore and interpret East Africa significantly in its various aspects—social, political, economic and cultural. Inspired by the vision of a just social order, he artistically expresses the urges and aspirations of East Africans who were heroically involved in the struggle for equality and liberty. He has been able to portray powerfully the plight of the poor and their sufferings at the hands of a few neo-colonialists. His Game of Silence is a powerful expression of

\[a \text{ symbolic indictment of the regime's politics of double dealing, deceit, intimidation and neglect.}\]

The play is dedicated to Byron Kawadwa, a playwright and director of the Uganda National Theatre.

The setting of Game of Silence is a room in Raja's mind. It is his study / bedroom abroad, but also represents his living / bedroom back home. (p.1)

The dramatic action of this most elite and enigmatic play is set in protagonist Raja's mind and its dramatic action unwinds on Raja in either asleep or dreaming for the most part.\(^2\)
The play deals with the despotism of rulers, their indifference to the well-being of their own people, their pre-occupation with enriching themselves, clinging to power at the cost of the lives of their fellow citizens and their endeavour to see that the people should remain the same in the clutches of poverty and submissive to them. Thus, these tyrannical neo-colonial and selfish tendencies of the ruling elite are powerfully depicted in the play.

The play runs into two Acts. In the first Act Raja is abroad, far away from his homeland. It opens with a conversation between Raja and Bango, who is portrayed at the outset as Raja's friend and a student of psychology sponsored by the government.

A number of beggars, madmen and cripples enter the room. They exit as quickly as they enter. Soon, a series of painful moans fill the air. Bango, a typical neo-colonialist, neither understands what is happening there nor hears the loud and clear painful moans of the poor. He hears only silence. Raja grows impatient because of Bango's indifference and asks him to think to know the reasons for such groans of dismay. Bango replies, Think? No, my friend, I am not like you. I don't think (p.1). For him, psychology is magic, speaking for and beyond itself. He declares that he has no consideration either for the laughter or tears of pedestrians.
Raja explains the reasons clearly that common men whisper quietly among themselves during the day and then howl like dogs at night as no one cares for their well-being.

This conversation brings to light the neo-colonialist oppressive regime which turns a blind eye to the minimum needs and just aspirations of its people. Common masses are afraid of the authoritative system, unable to resist, writhe in pain and gripped in hunger, poverty and death.

In the same scene, Raja criticises Psychology because it is enforced by the ruling regime to dig out *filth in order to give meaning to meaningless situations* (p.11). He also says that people who die of starvation are sacrificial goats of the utter negligence of the pitiless rulers. On the contrary, the regime declares that the deaths are due to *natural causes*, only to cover its misdeeds and to mislead the masses. Realising Raja's rebellious ideas, Bango tries to divert his attention by advising him *to take rest, to try and have sleep* (p.3)

But, Raja replies that sleep is his enemy and an illusion. In his sleep, he can think of only his dead child. Though Raja is deeply affected by the child's death, Bango is unimpressed. According to Bango, all families are swept off the surface of this earth in one fateful second. On the contrary, Raja takes death of any person seriously and he is worried about the death of the child Edna, his own daughter. His
wife, Emma, not sending Edna's photo even after three months, rises his suspicion. He says that personal tragedy has struck him every five years. His mother passed away while he was studying in a college far away. Five years later, his first daughter born outside the range of wedlock also died. Now, five years after, he has dreamt of the death of his daughter, Edna. He gives a detailed account of the death of his first daughter.

That she was going to die-to-die there in front of me. I rushed out and shouted for help. People came. Someone went to call a doctor. The rest just stood there looking at her, then at me as she lay there dying (p.10).

As Bango departs, Raja looks at the picture of his daughter, Edna before putting it back in the drawer. Lights fade and come up again, as Raja falls asleep and dreams. There is a procession of mourners on the stage with the corpse of Edna. Elder, leader of the procession, addresses the congregation, stating that there are reasons for every death, but nobody knows the reason for Edna’s death, God alone knows the reason (p.13).

A mourner angrily says that God has become very notorious of late (p.13). The Elder wants Emma to speak about the child, but Emma full of grief, cannot do so. He then asks Flora, Raja’s sister, to give a
brief history of the child. Even Flora maintains the same silence. The Elder declares that they move forward for the funeral and the procession leaves the stage, with only two mourners remaining. The second mourner says that there are too many funerals down here (p.14). The first mourner is unhappy that there was no food for the mourners in four funerals attended by him in the past seven days. This is the reason why God is called notorious. It reflects not only the despair of the citizens, but also the pathetic state of affairs in most of the African countries.

Lights fade and come up again after two seconds. Emma, Flora and Raja are in the room. But the two women do not notice Raja's presence until he knocks on the door later. A large teddy bear lies on the table. On hearing the cry of a child, Emma feels sorry for her keeping Edna's death as a secret from Raja. On the other hand, Flora, Raja's sister, is of the opinion that the truth must be told to Raja. Flora's love with Jimmy comes up for discussion. She tells that Jimmy is a trustworthy young man. She expresses confidence that in spite of his well-to-do family background, he will not let her down. Their wedding will take place and her brother Raja will not miss it.

Flora tries to comfort Emma, who repents for her having hidden the truth from her brother saying that he can understand the situation because
death is not uncommon among us. Hers is a good decision because it has been taken to safeguard the future. (p.17)

Raja enters the scene of action. Expressing anger at his wife, Emma he demands to know the whereabouts of his daughter. He impatiently says that his sister, Emma, can go ahead with her effort of bridging the gap between the 'top people' and the 'bottom people', by marrying from the top. (p.19) It may prove to her that the top and the bottom can make good bed fellows. But he doesn't believe in this method. To reach the top of the ladder, he has a different plan. He wants

to prove to his child and to everyone else that books are not necessary for one to live a sober life. I wanted her to live the life of a princess without ever bothering to know the meaning of ABC. It happens everywhere these days, and why not to my child? (p.19)

Thus, he says that the child is the only possible link between the top and the bottom. This scene ends with Raja's words, Is Edna dead or alive?. (p.19) These words of Raja throws light on the rampant poverty
and on the wide disparity between the rich and the poor in the African nations.

When the lights come up again, after five seconds, Raja gets up from his sleep. Bango steps in and is surprised that Raja is not yet ready to go to the airport. Raja tells Bango that last night in his ever-ending dreams, he saw his people mourning the death of his child. Thus, he believes in the efficacy of dreams as his *dream always come true* (p.22). When Bango tries to convince him to reach the airport to go to his native places, Raja says that he doesn’t go to his place because his people have done a wrong to him by hiding the news of the death of his child, Edna, from him. Despite Bango pointing out time, Raja does not move and he misses the flight.

At the end of this Act, Raja makes some important statements according to which the incidents in Act Two occur. He says that degrees are as lifeless as toys only to be played with by the ruling elite. He finds fault with his sister, Flora, who wants to fill the gap between haves and have-nots by using the charm of the body, *the desire of the flesh.* (p.24) He suggests the other way to reach the top. When the so called *top people* cannot respond to the needs of the *bottom people*, they must revolt. *The top will never descend, so the bottom must rise.* (p.25)

Bango calls Raja’s ideas *wild aspirations.* Nevertheless, Raja wildly rises his voice against the private property hinting at the
concentration of nation's wealth in the hands of ruling class. The act ends with Bango's comment that the *time is up and you have now missed your flight*. (p.26)

Act Two begins with the portrayal of how the operatives of a dictatorial government work.

The walls of the room are covered with medical charts, pictures of the sick, the starving and the beggars. (p.27)

Raja lies in bed while Emma is sitting on a chair by the door pulling at each of her fingers. Dr. Zumaka, supposed to be a medical doctor, enters the room. He is in fact an operative working as per the directions of Bango. He says that the common people are to be scared out of their wits before they learn to obey. He takes care of the people who are anti-establishment. Though reluctant at first, he confesses to Emma that he has to do the job because it is the only possible way to avoid being victimd. He has to do the work, though he hates it from the bottom of his heart. He says that Raja has been brought there as he is *an important man on our list*. (p.29) He tells that Raja is a man of violent nature and anti-establishment. He almost reveals the secret that Bango has submitted a report to this effect. Thus, it is disclosed that Bango is a government-sponsored spy to report to it the intentions of its people.
Zumaka is visibly embarrassed at the sudden entry of Bango. Warning Zumaka sternly, Bango orders him to leave. He then begins direct interrogation of Emma. He asserts that he knows Raja very well. Emma informs him that Flora died the day before Raja was due to arrive. Emma reveals that Jenifa, Jimmy's sister, was totally opposed to her brother marrying Flora. She, however, appeared to have compromised herself to the situation. On the day of engagement, Flora collapsed hardly five minutes after the dinner. The doctor declared that Flora died of heart failure caused by over-excitement; he said it was common disease among the bottom women of nineteen and so, death by natural cause. (p.37) This reveals that the establishment is keen on deliberately suppressing the poor and distorting the truth.

Again, there is a change in the scene in which the revengeful encounter of Raja with Jimmy reveals the actual reason for Flora's death. It is narrated in the form of a flashback. Dancers troop in, carrying the placards of welcome brother. Raja also joins the dance for a few minutes but is furious when he finds Jimmy among the dancers. Completely ignoring the appeals of Jimmy, Raja knocks him down saying you lured my sister to her death. (p.38) The elderly man of the dance troop interferes and advises Raja to be patient. Then, Raja becomes calm and listens to Jimmy's explanation. Jimmy says that
Flora was killed by his murderous sister, who poisoned her. He remorsefully says that he has two alternatives,

Either to take my own life and join Flora or to come here to you to try and at least fill the gap that she had left. (p.40)

Once it is said, the Elder asks the representatives to whisper it among themselves and give a decision. The decision is that Jimmy cannot fill the gap that the young girl has left behind as night and day have never shared a meal, since the beginning of time. (p.41) As Raja and Jimmy depart, Elder also leaves the place singing a song. The next morning Jimmy comes saying that he is very sorry. But Raja knocks him down. Flora intervenes and stops further harm to the boy. After this incident two thin men come and take Raja away. Now, Bango continues to interrogate Emma.

He says that he must protect Emma from Raja’s unnatural dreams. (p.43) But Emma emphatically says that Raja’s dreams are her dreams and they are their life. Bango is satisfied that he has got all information he needed and hence asks Emma to leave stubbornly refusing permission to her to see Raja saying that rules forbid it. (p.44) Emma’s repeated appeals to Bango do not have any effect. Bango calls Zumaka and orders him to take Emma away.
After a short time, Bango takes out a notebook and makes some notes. He sets the small radio like tape-recorder and puts it into his pocket. Then, Zumaka leads in Raja, who is blindfolded. He orders Zumaka to remove the blindfold and the hood on Raja's face. On seeing Bango, Raja realises that every event that has taken place so far, is the result of the evil design planned and executed by Bango himself.

He expresses his determination to see Emma, his wife, immediately because she is the only person who has resisted the two men who have come to arrest him while the whole village is watching the scene from behind the hedges. In a fit of emotion, Raja is about to kill Bango, after knocking him down. But he is stopped by Emma, who advises him to have patience.

It is here that the picture changes, slowly leading to a grand conclusion. Lights fade out and after ten seconds, dim lights come up, showing sleeping bodies all over the stage. Dancers are asleep with their musical instruments as pillows. A spot-light reveals sleeping figures of Raja and Emma. Zumaka enters and surveys the sleeping figures slowly, one by one. Then he announces silence in court. (p.48) Suddenly lights come up, as Jimmy enters hotly pursued by Bango, who holds several tapes in his hand. It is as if a trial had begun, with Jimmy acting as a Judge and questioning Raja. Bango switches on tapes, one by one, as the questions continue. Jimmy charges Raja with starting a
party called the Beggar's Brigade and spreading infectious disease of political insanity. He holds Raja responsible for the present wave of strikes in the country.

At a nod from Jimmy, Bango states that he has recorded three hundred and ten different conversations of Raja. He recommends a deterrent sentence to be awarded to Raja that will serve as a warning to potential patients. (p.50) In defence, Raja states that it is not a fair trial. He says, The emptiness of this court scares me. Where are the people? Where are the reporters and all? (p.50) Zumaka submits that the public awaits Jimmy's verdict. Jimmy considers the evidence of the prosecution and also hears the defendants. He is about to deliver the judgment, when something unbelievable and strange happens. Strange music is heard as Flora's ghost enters, and moves slowly and smoothly across the stage. Only Jimmy sees the ghost while others await the verdict in suspense. He pronounces the verdict of not guilty, (p.51) that receives general approval from the public. As Zumaka fires at Jimmy, Jimmy bends over and is transformed into a ghost. Now, Zumaka bursts out in anger at Bango, saying the latter is a pretender. For too long, he has milked the cows that he has not fed. He asks Bango to move on, as he has a lot of questions to answer. As the two leave the stage, the strange, ghostly music is heard once more.
The ghost of Flora holds Jimmy, also a ghost now, by hand and leads him out. Raja, at last, wakes up from his dream and his sleep asking for the judge and his attendants. He gradually realizes that what has happened is a dream and it has all been the making of my head, another of my dreams. (p.52) He sings a poem of victory, saying that it is not taking anything too far. Emma says that it is not only Raja who is freed but

they released all political prisoners. We, the people of the nation, have opened a brand new chapter. (pp. 52-53)

Raja makes it clear that as the rulers kept people hungry for a long time, people went on strike and the strike itself went on for long. The result was freedom for all people from the dictator. Jimmy, the judge in Raja’s dream, is no more. Bango is one of the thirteen, killed by the people rising in revolt. Then, for Raja and Emma the tribal practices come to the fore again. Raja is to be escorted to where the body of Flora lies. He accosts people to arise and behold the birth of a new day. With drums and gongs beaten, feet slapping the soil, people begin to dance, what the Elder calls it the dance of the Future. (p.53)

Game of Silence can easily be called a drama of ideas. The predominant idea that pervades the entire play is that human beings are not treated like human beings but worse than dogs. The dogs referred
to here are not the domesticated dogs, loved and cared for, by their masters but stray dogs, un-fed, un-housed, and brutalized. Even Raja, the protagonist, talks metaphorically about the human dogs of a society which is too busy with itself to listen to the howls of the tyrannized and the whimpers of the wretched of the earth. In fact, Raja, with his piecemeal disclosure of the subject, ensnares us into his text. We are forced to think about the relevance of dogs in our lives. Thus, the play is basically about two dogs, like Caesar and Luath which Robert Burns captured in The Two Dogs. We are called upon to look upon man's inhumanity to his fellow men through the fate of Luath, the under-dog, which represents the poor. As Ruganda rightly observes,

*Game is a play about the lower class, as it is manhandled and manipulated by the upper classes.*

The major concerns of the play – Raja's passivity in solving the problems of his people, the regime's surreptitious suppression of dissent, people's apathy towards the ruthless regime and the family of withholding the information regarding the deaths of his mother and daughter – are implied in the title of the play, *Game of Silence*.

In the play, Raja, the protagonist, identifies himself with the lower class people because they are destitute with *no friends no relatives* and
no hope. (p.2) Moreover, if anyone is seen as potential leader of revolt against the authoritative government, they are branded as criminals and are labelled as insane. A man of letters, knowing the plight of the masses, Raja doesn't have any concrete action plan or strategy to check the atrocities of the authoritative rule. Though he is articulate about change about the need to resurrect the many more living dead bodies (p.7) in his society, it in surprising that he initiates no action to match his ideas. Thus, Raja takes refuge in his own mind, a kind of intentional imposition of silence on himself.

The ruling establishment, with its oppressive methods, turns people into beggars, madmen and cripples. By treating people with indifference and indignation without caring for their just needs and aspirations, the government plays a wild game of silence with its subjects. Though people become victims of terror and tyranny, there is no reaction what so ever; they only suffer in silence. Raja delineates his disgust for the masses' docility, thus.

God, I have never known such weakness such cowardice. Two thin men came for me, you see, and the whole village was there, but they only watched from behind the hedges. Only my wife raised her voice as the two men led me away from the rest of the flock. (p.46)
Thus, the lower class people play a deceptive game of silence. Raja's own people, his wife Emma and sister, Flora, also play a different game of silence with Raja by hiding from him the information regarding the death of his mother. Raja says *it's a shame, this game of silence.* (p.6) This was the exact position existing in Kenyan society in 1970's. John Ruganda makes it explicitly clear when he comments on the production of the play in Nairobi, Kenya, in May 1977:

> *It was a symbolic act of subversion of the dominant societal ideologies of silence which Imbuga saw obtaining in his country at that time*.

Raja is the central character in the play around whom the entire play revolves. As a student studying abroad he has complete understanding of his society and his people with the political elite turning themselves into merchants of death. In the face of terror and intimidation unleashed by the oppressive establishment, the lower classes suffer silently unable to find a way out. Reacting to the existing situation in the society, he asks Bango, the secret government functionary, whether he can hear *a series of painful moans* (p.1) of people - beggars, madmen and cripples - the creation of repressive regime. When Bango replies he can *hear nothing* (p.2) Raja makes it
very clear that being a man of upper classes he does not hear common noises. Only the unique, the uncommon. (p.1) These words of Raja with an ironical sting show his true concern for the masses.

Raja as an angry young man, condemns the ruling elite when he accuses Bango of choosing a wrong subject of study

I think it is the fault of that subject you say, you are studying. What sort of government sponsored you for that? Psychology has blocked your ears, man. (p.2)

Raja reiterates his true commitment to extricate the common man from sorrowful state of affairs and longs for a wiser and a more humane society. He says that

it is now necessary to look deep into the psychology of men, especially small men. (p.2)

A realist and revolutionary, Raja emotionally says that the regime, represented by the higher classes, is

too high up to govern or change the bottom.
The top will never descend, so the bottom must rise (p.25)
suggesting that the down-trodden should rise against the top in revolt so as to bring about a change for equality that will bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots.

But this revolutionary grows silent without initiating a meaningful action to arrest the atrocities of the oppressive government against the marginalised. The altercations and the physical violence he metes out to Bango and Jimmy, are personally motivated. Even, the general strike, which paralyses the nation that ousts the regime of tyranny, is a part of his own imagination. After Raja emerging into the real world from his dream world, his wife says to him that it is his rhetoric that makes the ruling elite think that you helped organise the general strike. (p.53)

At the same time, Bango, the secret Government functionary calls the ideas of Raja wild aspirations and assumes that Raja has created too much distance between reality and your wild aspiration and the solution lies in Action baba, action is the word you need. (p.24)

In this connection, it is worth mention the views of Sartre, who better explains the reason for such an apathy on Raja's part.

The real and the imaginary cannot co-exist by their very nature ...... To prefer the imaginary ...... is not only an escape from the content of
Raja's flight into his mind is an escape from the contemporary polity. The escape leaves him in despair. So, naturally there is a conflict between the real and the imaginary, leaving no scope for any action.

However, there are also clear reasons for Raja's escape and inaction. He has his own fears stemmed from his personal accident in which he has lost his mother and his first daughter. Something terrible has struck him every five years. This being the fifth year after the last tragedy, Raja is plagued with the dreams of the death of his living daughter, Edna. The other reason is that he is disgusted and disappointed with the self-imposed silence and submissiveness of the masses in the face of tyranny. The villagers have become silent spectators rather than active participants in shaping their destiny. This apathy of the villagers also forces Raja to temporarily suspend the possibilities of changing the disturbing system. He says in despair, I did not have to struggle, you see. There was nobody to struggle for. (p.46)

Thus, Imbuga has depicted realistically the psychology of Raja, who is a victim of circumstances.

At the same time, Imbuga has projected Raja as a true leader of the masses. In spite of frustration and dissatisfaction, Raja continues to
be a staunch supporter of the cause of the down-trodden. A true champion of the poor, Raja is not easily influenced by Bango who tries to lure him to his side by advising him to abandon championing the cause of the lower classes and embrace the capitalistic vision of reality. Bango warns Raja *your back is for you alone, don't overload it.* (p.12) But Raja rejects the tempting offer because acceptance of the proposal tantamounts to ascending to the *top* by compromising his function as a mentor of the bottom people. He has to sacrifice his prerogative to think and to influence the bottom; he must become a living dead body. But, he is not one who reaches the top by selling his soul to the oppressive regime. In the face of tyranny, intimidation and lack of popular support, no doubt, Raja escapes into the supposed safe sanctuary of his mind from the frightening and stark realities of the real world. But, he discovers that the creation of his imagination matches the realities in the outer world. Therefore, the image, which Raja evokes in his dream, is both a reflection of his fears of the external world and a projection of his hope for a better future for his daughter, and for the whole society. He also visualises the united power of the masses that will destroy the autocratic regime. He is their hero as dancers carry placards, WELCOME BROTHER and (p.37) *the bottom shall rise.* (p.38) Thus, when Raja wakes up into the real world, he finds that a bloody revolt
has taken place in which thirteen people have been killed including Bango. They have released all political prisoners. (p.52) Raja finds himself among the people who are celebrating the newly found freedom for the goodness of tomorrow. (p.54) Thus, Raja's reflections transcend the very strategies of repression. In this background, Raja cannot be condemned as a hero of inaction.

Above all, it can be said that Imbuga has a purpose in replacing action with words. It is a successful dramatic devise employed by him precisely suitable to the structure of the play, which is based on a series of dreams, to overcome the overall silence or inaction in the play. Imbuga has made the spoken word more powerful than actions as he knows in Black African Theatre, even the word itself has a theatrical effect. 6

It is on the strength of this statement, it can be said that Raja has made himself the master and symbol of the word which was eventually inspired collective action among the dispossessed and disunited masses to overthrow a corrupt repressive regime through intense nation-wide labour strike.

Bango is the other major character representing the oppressive authority. He is introduced as Raja's friend in the guise of a government sponsored Psychology student. In fact, the authoritative government assigns the job of spying on Raja, who is a potential threat to it, during
his educational pursuits abroad. Bango pretends friendship with Raja to report to the government of his hidden intentions against the regime. Thus, Bango is the ear and eye of the state and, in many ways, he is also the vengeful arm that silences the regime's supposed critics.

He is insensitive to the painful moans of the poor; thoughtless about the small men. In his view, death is as natural as birth and is common to all. Death is for all of us. You tonight and me may be several years time. (p.3) Though his views appear to be reasonable, they lack human feeling.

When Raja is sorrowful because of the death of his first daughter, Bango, shamelessly says that he can get one more daughter into the world by taking his wife into his arms and try again. He says,

The way you get the first one, so will you get the second. (p.4)

As a spy, Bango is interested only in knowing the psychological aspects of the people towards the ruling establishment. So, Psychology is the only subject that interests him. All other subjects are pedestrian subjects for him. He says.

Psychology. The word is magic .... I read Psychology ..... Now that is magic. It speaks for and beyond itself (p.2)
He reveals his oppressive reflections when he calls Raja’s ideas of equality, bridging the gap between *the top people* and *bottom people*, *wild aspirations*. Indirectly, he suggests that people are like dogs whose master is the regime. So, people should be ever submissive to the Establishment; otherwise they deserve punishment. He says,

> A good dog doesn't bite the hand that feeds it, you know. And remember that a man cannot outgrow or out-develop the very institution to which he belongs, for when he does so, he must exit. (pp. 24-45)

In the trial scene, he levels wild allegation against Raja as engaged himself in mass psychological activities that can only be described as political insanity. (p.50)

That is how Bango, as an all-purpose government functionary, tries to implicate and victimize and label his opponents as *insane*.

However, ironically, as part of Imbuga’s wild justice, he is taken into custody at gun point by Zumaka as he too long milked cows that you have not fed. *You have a lot of questions to answer.* (p.51) He meets his fate in the coup that takes place at the end of the play as informed by Emma that he was one among the thirteen killed. Through
this character, Imbuga makes it very clear that the government's callous use of power that causes human destruction must go.

Zumaka is the other government functionary in-charge of mental asylum that is created to treat the over-educated who are critical of the government. He was once a medical doctor who was arraigned and placed in a mental hospital on the ground that he was over-educated, with the courage to question the establishment and to articulate truth around him without fear. Now, he is turned to be a government servant unable to bear its over callousness. He opens his heart before Emma when she questions his association with the medical centre,

Do you by any chance imagine that I enjoy doing this work?.... Because it is the only possible way to avoid being a victim. I have to come here every morning and do my round of active work, knowing well that I hate it. Hate it to the bottom of my heart. I have to pretend that I see beauty in these pictures. That, if you want to know, is my fate. (p.29)

However, he turns tables against the system by shooting Jimmy and by leading Bango out, as he has to answer a lot of questions. Through this character, Imbuga implies that if people are over
tyrannized, they may take sides with tyrannical forces temporarily, but will inevitably rise up in arms to throw away the fetters of oppression.

The only prominent woman character in the play is Emma, Raja’s wife. She is seen for the first time in the funeral scene in Act one when Raja sees Edna’s death in his dream. She is a lovable mother. She is found too grief-stricken to speak about her dead child, Edna, as seen by Raja in his dream. She claims to be Raja’s good wife who knows his husband’s mind. She says that

I can say with a certain amount of confidence that I know him because I am his wife. A good wife knows her man. (p. 16)

She is more interested in the bright future of her husband than in her child. That is why Raja sees her in his dream withholding the supposed death news of Edna, from him. But, Raja feels that Emma has done a wrong to him by hiding the sad news. However, he reverses his opinion about her and pours all appreciation and love on her after witnessing her great courage in encountering the two thin men who come to arrest him. When all the villagers show their weakness and cowardice by becoming silent spectators without resisting the two thin men, it is Emma who alone raises her voice. So, he says to Bango that

96
he remembers Emma very much and would like to see her at once. Raja says,

I want to shake her hand and tell her how grateful I am that she at least tried. I didn't expect it from her, you see, God, that woman should have been a man. (p.46)

Emma proves to be a brave lady by questioning the cruel establishment when she visits the so-called *research centre* of the government to see Raja. She encounters Dr. Zumaka, the in-charge of the centre, when he says that he is working for the good of everyone. She sarcastically asks him, *Is this you call the good of everyone?* pointing to the pictures of *madmen, beggars, and pregnant mothers dying of starvation.* (p.28)

She also answers all the questions openly and forcefully when Bango interrogates her to get more information about her husband, Raja. When Bango calls Raja's ideas *unnatural dreams* (p.43) and he wants to save Raja and Emma from those dreams, as a true wife who respects the just ideas of her husband, she furiously responds,

*It's impossible for you to protect me from what you now call his unnatural dreams because his dreams are my dreams* (p.43)
She exhibits tremendous courage, love and concern for her husband, when Bango doesn’t permit her to meet Raja who is detained in the psychology research centre. He says that she cannot see him because rules do not permit. He threatens that if she insists on, she will be inviting risk to his wife. She fearlessly declares,

When the whole world turns against a man, his only weapon is his wife. To tear him away from her is to hit him below the belt .... I demand to see the sick man before he comes really sick. (p.44)

Thus, Emma plays a masculine role more powerfully than a man. Emma is the only character, after Raja, who really resists the onslaught of the oppressive authority.

The play mirrors the appalling conditions existing as a result of irresponsible and ruthless dictatorial tendencies of the ruling regime. The government is so tyrannical that if it feels that someone is loud-mouthed, seeking change in the regime, they are psychologically and physically tortured. They are either sent to a mental asylum labelling them as insane or liquidated. Bango, the all-powerful government functionary, elucidates that people are like dogs and the regime is their master. Dogs cannot go against their master, if they do,
they should be wiped out. Total conformity with the rules of the government is the order of the day. People are chained with rules framed by the ruling class to suppress the poor. The masses are in fetters and in acute distress. This situation reminds one of the misery of the depressed and down-trodden in a city like London, in the beginning of the 19th century as depicted by William Blake in his poem, London. The poet says,

\[\text{In every cry of every Man,}\\ \text{In every Infant's cry of fear,}\\ \text{In every voice: in every ban,}\\ \text{The mind-forg'd manacles I hear}^{7}\]

Thus, Francis Imbuga mirrors the evil-effects of the cruel rulers in the contemporary Kenyan society. As a vehement critic of the system that oppresses the poor, the playwright is highly critical of the political evils and highlights the tragedy of human life.

People are afraid of the regimes because they are the merchants of death. They do not have freedom of speech. That is why they whisper quietly among themselves. (p.1) Many deaths take place because of hunger, which is a source of happiness to the tyrannical elite. The Elder, knowing well the reason for the irresponsibility and negligence of the political elite for the mass deaths, says that god and
god alone knows the reason. (p.13) The following statement of David Maughan Brown can better explain the real situation.

*Freedom of expression in Kenya would appear to be acceptable only so long as it is directed at, or accessible to, those who can be guaranteed to remain unmoved by what it expresses.*

Without freedom what so ever, and with silence, the common man is turned into *walking corpse*. He has been silenced by the psychological torture chambers established by the government to turn them into *a non-believer in the value of human life.* (p.30)

The pictures of the sick, the starving, the beggars and the blood-stained bandages hanging down the walls of these chambers at the beginning of Act Two reveal the high handedness of the rulers. The gruesome display of the symbols of intimidation and destruction is a constant reminder to the possible potential rebels of what could happen to them if they do not conform to the system. The following conversation between Emma and Zumaka regarding the symbols vividly exposes the wicked face of the merchants of death.

*Emma:* Aren't these walls warning enough? I suppose these people were your victims too
Zumaka : In a way you are right. You have to scare them out of their wits before they can listen to you (indicating the walls) (pp.27-28)

Zumaka himself is a good example of the intimidation which has forced him to be a government servant because, he felt it is the only possible way to avoid being a victim. (p.28)

The heinous strategies of the government used in the interaction between the victims in its custody and their relatives are deliberately suspended. Zumaka says the relatives never get to know the truth about their patients whether they are still alive or have been exterminated. The irony is that a woman who approaches the centre to see her brother herself becomes mad because she is not permitted to meet him as he has already been killed. Zumaka says,

She comes every week and begs to see her brother, but you see she does not know the truth. She only suspects it, and that is worst because it has turned into what she is now. A non-believer in the value of human life .... She has no brother, you see. The man died seven months ago. (p.30)
As a dramatist of ideas, Imbuga powerfully presents hunger and death in the play. In the very first scene of Act One of the play, the playwright symbolically highlights the aspect of hunger by showing beggars, madmen and cripples—all begging. (p.1) Starvation is so rampant in the country that almost every character directly or indirectly expresses himself through eating motifs. The problem is so acute that people have abandoned the traditional practice of feeding the mourners because it has become an expensive custom owing to frequent deaths.

The first spectator at the imagined funeral of Edna has sworn,

I saw four funerals last week, and in nearly all of them, there was no food for the mourners. I will never go to a funeral again. (pp. 14-15)

Hunger and intimidation by the ruling elite have paralysed the sensibilities of the villagers to the extent that they have come to accept their fate. However, the hunger of the masses has brought down the government at the end. Raja highlights the reason for the strike. They kept the people hungry for too long, so the people went on strike. (p.53)

Raja’s first daughter died in the process of her father’s very attempt to stem her hunger out. He explains to Bango,
you bring a child into this life, see it grow the first tooth, see it smile at you, see it crawl, then toddler .... And then ..... then what ? (p.12)

He doesn’t have the courage to answer the painful and tantalizing questions; it is because the answer is death. He makes it very clear it is a sin to give birth to children because they are bound to die of starvation. He describes the death of his one year old daughter with a heavy heart.

When Sunday came, she (Emma) took a bag and said she has to go and beg some food from relatives. The kid was hungry, and that is something I cannot bear to see .... a hungry kid. So I gave her a piece of cassava that had been tucked away. Took a bite that was all ..... one little bite and it got lodged in the throat, right back ...... she just stared at me with tears in her eyes .... As she lay there dying. Dying there in front of me. (p.10)

Death has become so frequent that the people feel that God has deserted them. In his despair, the second spectator, at Edna’s imagined funeral, says that God has become very notorious of late. (p.13)
In the play, more significantly, death is imagined as ravenous eater who draws no discrimination between the poor and the rich, the weak and the powerful. As Elder explains at the funeral,

Kings die, beggars die, even hyenas die. It is not without reason that those who die, die. (p.13)

The Elder's grouping of kings, beggars and hyenas together is important in that it equates man with beasts while suggesting that beasts kill because of hunger but man kills for fun sometimes.

But, Imbuga seems to bring to our notice the fact that in tyrannical polity, death is common among the common men. So the lower classes, who are easy victims, are almost neurotic about the ever present threat of their being killed. The second spectator says, *there are too many funerals down here*; (p.14) *Death is not uncommon among us*, (p.17) adds Flora.

Even Raja is constantly haunted by the feeling of death as he has encountered frequent deaths in his family. Thus, he says every five years something terrible struck him since he was fifteen. Now, this being the fifth year since the last death took place, he is psychologically forced to believe that his second living daughter, Edna, will also die and
he sees her funeral in his dream. In fact, he includes Emma, his wife, and Flora, his sister, in his list of future deaths.

I see lines of death clearly marked on Emma's face, and Floras' too. It is the curse of the family, these lines of death on people's faces.

(p.22)

Thus, the personal loss of his mother when Imbuga was at a tender age, has prompted him to deal with the idea of death in his plays. The playwright himself says in an interview that

death and vulnerability of the human race is a constant theme in my drama.

Imbuga has realistically delineated the futility of education under constant threat of despotism. Raja says that his wife, Emma is wrong in keeping Edma's death a secret. All she really cares for is the degree. (p.6) But, in reality education is no more a source of livelihood. It is in this sense that Raja sees the insignificance of education. He says,

Degrees no longer work because they have no blood. One by one will just die of hunger, frustration and degrees will not prevent it. (p.6)
This gains validity as Raja recollects the death of his first daughter who became a victim of hunger, *The kid was hungry. Well, we all were, in spite of our education.* (p.8)

Education, which Raja and his people feel is a ladder that can help them reach the *top* from the *bottom*, also exposes him as a potential threat to the ruling elite, and therefore, an easy target to it. He is termed as, *a strange case,... an interesting deviation.* (p.3) Raja, has become skeptical of education. He says that words on paper no longer mean a thing.

Thus, the fears of the political elite are channelled through their repressive ideologies, which attempt to appropriate the minds of the educated as their personal private property. This is what exactly made Imbuga suggest in an interview with Claude, that *Game of Silence*

*is a psychological study of the fears of the educated ...... in relation to their political ideologies [and] the fear of leaders when it comes to their dealings with individuals who are politically aware*¹⁰

Dr. Zumaka's professional degree makes him a slave of the oppressive government. He was forced to quit his medical profession because the government has considered him *over-educated.* (p.34) He
is made the watchdog of the top-secret research station that tortures
the so-called potential patients.

Thus Imbuga implies that education in a corrupt and repressive
polity is not a solution to the practical problems of living. Moreover, it
can turn out to be counter productive.

The playwright employs the technique of symbolism to make his
play very powerful. For example, the use of toy symbol is pre-
dominantly employed in the play. It represents not only the reification of
the populace by the political elite but also represents the self-imposed
silence and submissiveness of the masses in the face of tyranny. The
significance of the toy symbol is very vivid in the words of Raja
addressed to Bango.

You have no feelings. Keep him busy and let
him forget. Give him toys to play with and let
him remember nothing. That is what your little
mind tells you before you hop in here. (p.4)

The rural man has been deracinated and alienated by the political
elite as a critic observes Freedom begins to awe him. He begins to
entertain genuine fears of freedom\textsuperscript{11}

Presentation of the beggars, madmen and cripples—all begging on
the stage in the very beginning of the play as part of stage

107
directions—symbolizes the pathetic condition of the masses. They are the scapegoats of the utter negligence and oppressive methods of the ruling establishment.

The stark display of *pictures of sick people, starving people and beggars and of 'blood-stained bandages* (p.2) hanging down some of the walls as part of the stage decoration at the beginning of Act Two of the play illustrates the ruling regime’s callous exhibition of its power. This daring display of the symbols of intimidation and destruction is a constant threatening reminder to the potential dissidents like Raja who will also meet the same fate if they go against the government.

Raja’s poems at the end of Act Two are fraught with symbolism that reflects the on going reality of Raja’s external world.

In a green fertile field
Alive with working bees
And singing birds
A child lies – dead
Summoned back from a dream
The snoring man’s hand
Searches for his god
Beside the bed” (p.52)
*Working bees* in the first stanza is a symbolic reference to the people like Bango, who play pretentious dedication to duty only for destructive purpose, and who doesn’t hesitate to inflict pain on people like the stinging bees. *Fertile field* highlights the fact that in spite of the masses plagued by starvation and death, life continues while the *singing birds* is an unmistakable reference to the indifference with which the people react to the hegemony of ruling elite.

*The snoring man*, in the second stanza, connotes the contented exploiter and oppressor of the lower classes. His snoring signifies his indifference to human suffering while *people moan and plead for mercy*. (p.53) *God beside his bed* is nothing but the gun, with which the oppressor rules Raja’s world.

The very title of the play, *Game of Silence*, indicates the silence which Raja has imposed upon himself. In the words of Ruganda,

> The play symbolises his flight from the daunting realities of the outer world into the supposed safe sanctuary of his mind.  

The playwright has also employed the techniques of *flash back* and *flash forward* to make his play powerful. These techniques do not unwind the dramatic action lineally. In fact, this adds to the enigmatic nature of the play. The playwright has outdone himself in his bid to
distance the nightmarish experience of his protagonist. Towards the end of the play, when Raja wakes up from his dream into the world of reality, the audience can retroactively balance the details of his nightmare with those of reality. Through the structural juxtaposition of Raja's mind with the reality outside his mind, the playwright finally manages to unravel the knots of the play. This technique would arouse suspense in the audience. As one critic rightly observes,

He is alternately interpolated, drawn into the events and distanced, pulling out the fixity of ideology and into active political debate.13.

Dance is another powerful technique employed by the playwright to make the play strong both in terms of the structure and action of the play. In Act Two, a dance programme is arranged to welcome Raja to his native place.

The sound of sukuti drums now fills the air. Women ululate and Raja shakes his head in rhythm with the drums. Suddenly, dancers troop in, some carry placards of, 'Welcome Brother'. They dance for a while, then Raja goes to join them. He dances vigorously. (p.38)
The entire dance scene is narrated to Bango by Emma in the form of a flashback as part of his interrogation.

In this scene, Raja, in an effort to take revenge against Jimmy for his sister, Flora's killing, encounters Jimmy, knocks him down and tries to kill him accusing his people *you have betrayed me, you fools, luring me to eat with my enemies.* (p.38)

Thus, in this scene, dance is used to serve the purpose of releasing the pent-up tensions of the lower class symbolising when the *top* cannot descend to save the poor, the bottom class should rise in revolt.

There is another dance scene which is meant to pay tributes to his murdered sister, Flora, who had tried to bridge the gap between the lower and the upper classes, and to take the dance through village paths indicating the defeat of the ruling elite; it is also meant for celebration of newly found freedom and for rallying the entire community to resolve not to tolerate discrimination and oppression in the future.

Thus, the technique of dance serves the important purpose of transforming of the totally desperate and disillusioned people into an active united force capable of creating a better future, and at the same time, it announces the moment of Raja's self-realisation from inaction.
This is how Imbuga successfully employs the techniques of *dance* as an important structural element as well as an integral part of the internal dynamics of the play.

In Imbuga’s plays

*dreams become very important because they are the manifestations of the iceberg that is man’s sub-conscious mind.*

The main dream of all dreams he has dreamt is the dream in which he sees the death of his living daughter, Edna. He is psychologically affected because of the recurring occurrence of adversity of losing a family member every five years. So, Raja is compelled to believe that the next death is inevitable and the result is his dream.

Though the dream explains Raja’s a personal accident, Imbuga has used it to expose negative effects of the autocratic regime’s destructive politics on the masses and thus Raja’s dreams are the reflection of his vision for a better society. Thus, Imbuga employs dream as a transparent veil only to give an impression to the tyrant establishment that what is shown on the stage is not a reality. But, at the same time, the fact remains what is happening in the dream is actually a mirror of outside reality.

For this purpose Imbuga’s, technique of dream is best suited. Thus, *dream* is Imbuga’s dramatic strategy successfully employed to
serve a double-purpose of disclosing the atrocities of the establishment and circumventing its censorious eyes and ears without resorting to direct violent reaction.

This is the strategy that stems from the playwright's democratic idea of persuasion not punishment. In this connection, it is pertinent to mention the right remarks of Achebe who has noted that a

*writer must not pretend that violence is good. It may be inevitable but it is not good. Fundamentally, art is on the side of life.*

On the other hand, the technique also reveals the intensity of oppression that it can violently enter and probe even the sub-conscious mind. It is Raja's dreams which *almost always come true.* (p.22) It is these dreams which led the regime to victimize Raja. This only establishes the fact that in the authoritarian society it's a crime even to have dreams. Imbuga has explained, in an interview with Gachugu Makini, that upon Raja's return to his motherland, he

*discovers that he has been earmarked as a dangerous man because of his unnatural dreams.*

At the same time, his dreams are a reflection of his vision of a better society. Though the dreams breathlessly project the negative
effects of the regime's politics of destruction on the masses, Raja is inversely yearning for a saner and more humane society.

This intention of the playwright is echoed in the positive ending of the play with Raja, unlike the previous regime which suppressed people's opinion, soliciting the people's affirmation of his suggestion.

People, thank you for this tremendous welcome .... I can now dance with my head high in the air. Let us dance and forget yesterday's wound. Now that the game of silence is no more, we shall dance through all the village paths. We shall show the world that pride sits high in freedom, old man, what do you say? (p.54)

The freedom which Raja refers to, is newly found freedom in which human life and dignity will be paramount, free from starvation and random death. Above all, everybody's voice will be valued. These are the important values of democracy Imbuga wishes to establish. The same theme of democracy powerfully finds a place in Imbuga's next play, The Successor.
REFERENCES

1. John Ruganda, *Telling the Truth Laughingly*, East African Educational Publisher, Nairobi, 1992, p.4

2. Ibid., p.7

3. Ibid., p.164

4. Ibid., p.158


12. John Ruganda, p.172


16. Francis Imbuga, cited in Makini Gachugu's *The Drama of Francis Imbuga*, p.120.