Chapter 1

Introduction
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Any student of research faces the problem of choice of subject for his research. It is believed that the right choice of subject means half the work over. Literature is as vast as ocean and from that ocean it is difficult to pick up one pearl of the problem of research. While choosing the present subject for my research work certain matters have been taken into consideration by me. The first matter is I find a parallel between the Indian life and the African life. The Indian sub-continent and African continent share certain things in common. Both have the majority of the tribal population with strong faith in the tribal mode of life. Both have not only tasted but also suffered slavery under the feet of the white man who played the coloniser. Both face the problem of clashes and conflicts as in Africa the Tribal are divided into clans while in India the divisions emerge on the ground of caste and community. In other words, there is a similarity of problems.

Certain parallels are to be found between India and Africa keeping in view myth and religious beliefs. Our myth portrays Gods involving themselves in human affairs and the same thing is to be found in African myth. This is how we find the similarity of personal Gods and
Goddess and at the same time similarity of myth making nature in the people of both the countries.

Except this we share many things in common just like poverty, ignorance, starvation, corruption and no advantage of independence at the grass root level in the interior parts. These similarities inspired me to think and believe that I may be able to understand African Literature better than other literatures. It made me feel as if there is a kind of proximity between the Indian sensibility and the African sensibility. It led me finally to the present topic for my research work.

I studied Soyinka during my higher education and he remained an author of interest for me. His works interested me more than that of other writers of Africa. After taking into consideration these matters, I embarked on Soyinka's works for my research work.

The spread of Political system in Africa has created areas of political domination and influence which naturally produced a great influence in the development of African Literature. The Western world provided a good background for the African writers because English, French and other European languages became a part of African culture. Though the native feelings of the writers continued to have held over their mind layers of foreign influences became a part of their literature. But due to fight against the colonial powers, there emerged rise to the social commitment. Thus African literature today
is a result of the conflicts and contradictions within the African society and it provides a glimpse of things in future.

Africa had been suffering under the colonial rule for more than decades and it has not freed itself totally from the influences of colonialism. The challenge before African nationalism was to cope with the complications of colonial legacy handed down to them. They were in search of a new direction and order as they triumphed over colonial powers. They were against the policies of the colonialists to apply their norms on the African society. The colonialists heavily exploited most of the Africa and the people of Africa had to live under the laws imposed by the white masters. The traditional value structure of the African societies was shaken to the very foundation with the arrival of colonial powers into African continent. The relation between the individual, society and the government underwent a radical transformation. This resulted into mismatch of situation between the individuals and groups in the African society.

The African people confronted new values and habits which did not fit into their cultural background. They were judged on the basis of European norms and values by the colonial powers. The colonisers could not peep into the African mind because they had many inbuilt notions. Therefore, the colonisers spread all sorts of wrong notions about the African people. But the spread of education of European
system opened new galleries to express their spirit to the contemporary world. The system of education in Africa benefited the African people to enter into all the facets of world. But the education in Africa could not solve the problems of people. However, the system of education increased the level of ambitions of African people. They did not oppose everything coming from Europe, but they did not like the way in which the Europeans treated them. The African writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi and others have drawn the attention of the world on the problems faced by their people and they have presented the different aspects of African heritage in their writings. They have expressed their thoughts in the European languages hence they could reach the largest number of readers in all parts of the world. The people of the world take interest in African literature because they desire to get deeper knowledge of struggle between the old and new ways of life in Africa.

African literature is a representation of the crisis within the African societies which have never been assessed properly by the African politicians. The writers have presented the essence of the myths and legends of their country which are not less impressive than the mythologies of other countries. The effects of the technological advancements have produced many adverse consequences in the
European societies. The individual is under stress in the western technological society and the eastern societies are facing the effects of industrialisation and the spread of technology in every step of human life. The African writers have already warned that due to heavy influence of western ideas and technology the African people have to pay a heavy price if they cannot produce a substance of their way of life with ideas of the modern world. The literature of Africa is representing the crisis and contradictions faced by the African people. The writers like Soyinka have clear vision of the ideal society so he stressed on the need to combine the best in the old cultural traditions with the ideas of modern world. He has also expressed his resentment against the corruption in the independent African states and he has protested against the authoritarian forces which are trying to misuse the freedom gained by the African people.

In the African society individuals who follow the social norms are regarded as worthy persons. Therefore modern leaders of Africa like Jomo Kenyatta have laid the stress on family and kinship. The contemporary African writers advocate on the traditional family structure. The use of English language as a medium of new sounds, rhythm and effects reflected the African voice. It has been adopted for the expression of the native tradition to reach to the world.
The folk song and folk literature show the vitality in African culture which defies all the hardships of life. They mirror the wisdom and insight of the African people. They are sung to the accompaniment of drumming and dancing. It contains the world view and the joys and sorrows of the African people. All this introduces the individual to the depths of the ancient traditions. After the Second World War the process of political change is quickened and this gave a new support to the African literature. Wole Soyinka and other African writers throw light on the changes in the African society and politics and how the new political diplomat is stepped in corruption. He brings out the sufferings of the common man in every period of African history. The literature of Africa has reflected the aspirations of humanity for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The leaders like Nelson Mandela were in jail even after the fact that United Nations call to release the political leaders. This political upheaval in Africa can be felt in African literature. Leopold Senghor asserted that the twentieth century would not have been complete without adding the ingredient of the Negro civilisation. A novelist like Achebe has accepted that the supreme position of European values on the African society has produced many illogical consequences and contradictions. The hold of the traditional ideas is still strong and there cannot be any sudden banishment of them followed by the
replacement of the European ideas in Toto. There are indications, in
the African literature, of a possible synthesis of the African cultures
of other nations of the world.

The Noble Laureate: Wole Soyinka

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka was the second child of Samuel
Ayodele and Grace Eniola Soyinka. He was born on 13th of July
1939. He spent his childhood in Abeokuta, on the Ogun River in
Western Nigeria. From 1954 to 1959 he was in England studying at
the University of Leeds and then later in London, working. In 1960
he returned to Nigeria to do research, write and direct plays. Since
60s he has published novels, poetry, autobiography, plays that have
established his international status. He visited Europe and America
repeatedly and finally moved to the latter to escape oppressive
political regimes in Nigeria. Today he is known as one of the
foremost African writers having written around twenty books in such
various genres as drama, poetry, novels, autobiography, memoirs,
criticism and political commentary.

We discover of his Yoruba parents and the place he lived in from the
first volume of his autobiography Ake (1981). At this time Nigeria
was still a British enslavement. His father Samuel Ayodele was a
teacher and later a headmaster of a school. His mother, Grace Eniola, dubbed "Wild Christian" in Ake was born into a large and influential Egba family which pioneered the spread of Christianity through Western Nigeria. They were also well known for composing music which fused the Yoruba and Western traditions. His great grandfather, the Rev. J.J. Ransome-Kuti was politically inclined and in 1905 became famous for preaching at St. Paul's Cathedral. Soyinka's uncle was a celebrity and his aunt was famous for women's movement in Nigeria. Soyinka has great influence of his mother. She was a teacher, a performer and a political activist. She also ran a shop opposite Ake's place. The mother wished that her son would be exposed to all aspects of the Yoruba life as well as be aware of politics in the larger world outside. There was quite a difference between the life in Ake and the society of Soyinka's father's homeland, Isara in the Ijebu region. Isara was somewhat isolated from the Christian influence and the people of Isara had little contact with white traders and so we mark cultural and spiritual influence of Yoruba in him. Soyinka like other Yoruba has three names: Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka. A Yoruba child is born with one name, "Amutorunwa", christened with a second, "Abiso", and has an attributive name, "Oriki". In Soyinka's case, "Olu", used as a compound in "Oluwole".
originally belonged to a child of high or princely birth. “Akin” in Akinwande means strength or the strong one. Soyinka’s parents’ adherence to the traditional naming procedure suggests the traditional base of their family. Predictably perhaps partly as a result of his mother’s family’s political influence and Christian religion, Soyinka went to St. Peter’s Primary School rather than local Yoruba school. He also spent a year in the grammar school of which his great uncle was in charge.

In 1946, he entered the Elite Government College at Ibadan, the capital of western Nigeria. He wrote sketches for the college drama group and won prizes for the poems he recite at the arts festival. In 1950 he passed his school certificate examination and went to work as a clerk in Lagos. He read his short stories on the national radio and from then moved on to pioneering Nigerian radio drama.

In October 1952 Soyinka entered the newly established University College at Ibadan. There he read English, Greek and History. He was extremely active in a number of student activities outside the classroom. He played the lead in a number of theatre productions. He co-founded the fraternity The Pyrates and edited the student publication, The Eagle. Along with his academic work he continued his creative writing.
After passing the Intermediate Arts examination Soyinka went to the University of Leeds in October 1954. While working for an Honours degree in the school of English he had G. Wilson Knight the famous Shakespearean scholar as his teacher. Wilson Knight was also active in directing a number of classical and modern plays with the students. While at Leeds Soyinka acted with the university theatre group and had his short stories published in the student literary magazine. His interest varied from singing in a rag revue to politics. He was particularly conscious of any racist behaviour. In 1957 he was awarded an upper second-class Honours degree. This period is crucial as being the period of his literary apprenticeship. He drafted two imported plays, *The Swamp Dwellers*, a sombre play where the protagonist is caught between the poisonous old order of the rotten swamp and the soulless new order of urban life and *The Lion and the Jewel*, one of the most sparkling and successful of his early plays. The latter was read on behalf of the Royal Court Theatre in London and he was invited to be a part of the activities of the Royal Court Theatre as a script reader.

In 1958 Soyinka moved to London where he taught did broadcasts and wrote. The theatre was very much a part of his life. Under the leadership of whom he would later call "that remarkable theatre-
manager George Devine", Soyinka was introduced to the early work of the innovative and experimental playwrights John Osborne, Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, N F. Simpson, John Arden and Harold Pinter who were later to become icons, as well as the work of those he called "stylistic and ideological pariahs". He directed a group called the Nigerian Drama Group in a production of The Swamp Dwellers in December 1958 as part of the annual University of London Drama festival. In February 1959 both The Swamp Dwellers and The Lion and the Jewels were produced at the Arts Theatre, Ibadan, to an enthusiastic audience. Also in 1959 Soyinka composed a song against British Colonial violence in Kenya. In November 1959 he directed An Evening of his own work in the theatre where plays like The Invitation, a satire about how an accidental missile explosion eliminates the dark pigments in African skin, were performed. Soyinka was becoming more and more agitated about racism, about apartheid and increasingly interested in the techniques employed by Black American playwrights and fiction writers to deal with the issue of racism. It was at this time that he was gradually evolving into a playwright who employs the idiom of African art to write plays in English, plays that respond to contemporary events, plays that are highly politically conscious, without being mere propaganda pieces.
In 1960, hearing that Nigeria was to become independent, Soyinka returned to Nigeria. From 1960 to 1962 he was travelling all over the country on a Rockefeller Foundation grant in order to study the traditional drama of Western Africa. This was an enormously fruitful and productive time. As he travelled Soyinka studied the extended dramatic structure of the Yoruba religious rituals and the festival performance. The harvest festivals, the initiation ceremonies, the rites for the dead, all these involved community participation in highly structured rituals that extended over days and weeks. These rituals used music, dance, masquerade and symbolic acts to link living and unseen forces. We find the influence of these dramatic rituals in *The Dance of the Forests* and other plays. It is also important to note that Soyinka imbibed the dramatic structure of these ritual performances, a structure that incorporated elements like the masquerade and the play-within-a play, songs and dances. This sort of structure was quite different from the shapes of plays belonging to the western theatre tradition, particularly the classical tradition, which he had studied and seen performed in England.

At this time Soyinka was also attached to the English department at the University of Ibadan. He had friends in the radio and television business as well as among editors of journals looking for Nigerian writers. Soyinka joined and became the leader of this community of
artists and young, creative people. In 1960 *The Swamp Dwellers* was broadcast along with two new radio plays, *Camwood on the Leaves* and *The Tortoise*. Soyinka also took part in radio talk and discussions. He wrote a T. V. play called *My Father's Burden*, and a stage play, a one-act farce, called *The Trials of Brother Jero*. All the plays were produced and, in fact, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, a satire on the Bar Beach sects at Lagos and the story of a wily religious charlatan who outwits his disciplines and creditors, has remained one of Soyinka's most popular plays.

Soyinka formed a group called "1960 Masks" with some friends who were experienced amateur performers. In 1960, in Lagos and Ibadan, this group produced *A Dance of the Forest*. This was a revised version of an earlier anti-apartheid play called *The Dance of the African Forest*. In this production Soyinka played the role of forest father. This, the group's first stage production, was addressed to Nigeria at the time of Nigeria's independence. In this play Soyinka deliberately challenged Nigeria's expectations concerning their country's future in the political sphere. In the field of aesthetics, he challenged his compatriots' assumptions about the form taken by Nigerian theatre written in English.

While the play is undoubtedly complex and confusing, it established Soyinka as the enfant terrible of African theatre. He was seen as a
writer who delighted in shocking, unsettling and confusing his audience, an independent thinker, and an ambitious playwright, one who set out to pillage and combine, often uncomfortably, both Yoruba and western dramatic traditions, and a man of undoubted theatrical skills. However, the relationship between Soyinka and the Nigerian public remained ambivalent.

In 1961 Soyinka wrote scripts for a popular weekly radio series called “Broke-Time Bar”. He tried to introduce hard-hitting social and political comment, and this was not very well received. Soyinka ceased to write for the series—this was one of his early brushes with the establishment. In the same year he was committed to prepare a trilogy of plays for television, *House of Banijegi* which was only partially realised, and *The Night of the Hunted* and the last, which had no name and only two episodes and was not produced. In the same year Soyinka attended conferences in Italy and the United States. His poetry was published in Sweden. Soyinka also presented a film about Nigerian culture that was sadly reduced to *Culture in Tension* and which contained an abbreviated version of his play *The Strong Breed*, a play about the persistence of scapegoat sacrifices in certain African communities.

He continued to be a regular contributor to Nigerian controversies through the press. To a certain extent, he manipulated the media to
influence the people of his country. He attacked a powerful movement called Negritude, he jeered at the expatriate literary critics, he complained of press censorship. In 1963 the “1960 Masks” produced a satirical revue written by Soyinka. He got the post of lecturer in English at University College, Ipe however, he did not continue there for a long time. In 1963 he resigned along with other faculty members in protest against the state of Emergency that was imposed by the Western Nigerian chief, Awolowo. Soyinka continued his literary criticism in talks and essays.

In 1964 there was a strike and talk of revolution. Soyinka advocated a people’s uprising and worked towards it. At this time there were a number of plays that brought together Nigerian theatre in English with Nigerian theatre in Yoruba. Soyinka contributed *The Lion and the Jewel*. A new group was formed by a group of theatre enthusiasts who were hopeful of becoming professional called “Orisun Theatre.” Here the productions were more professional unlike the amateur “1960 Masks.”

In 1965 political violence erupted in Western Nigeria. Ministers were murdered and party arson was uncontrolled. Soyinka boldly produced *Before the Blackout*, an attack on opportunist politicians and corrupt time-servers and conscienceless manipulators. In August that year there was a national crisis. Soyinka’s *Kongi’s*
Harvest was produced in the Federal Palace Hotel, Lagos. In September 1965 Soyinka travelled to Britain to read a long poem, Idanre as part of the Commonwealth Arts Festival. He acted in an advisory capacity on the production of his metaphysical-satirical play, The Road, a play about the meaning of death in a purposeless and transitory existence which was presented on the fringe of the festival at the Theatre Royal, Stratford. He also took part in a recording of The Detainee, a political piece written for the BBC. It warned people against one party states and dictators. It was broadcast to a larger part of Africa although it was not published. In 1965, back in Nigeria, Soyinka was appointed as senior lecturer at the University of Lagos. In this year he published his major novel, The Interpreters which has a claim to be the first real modern novel to come out of Africa. There were elections in Nigeria, marred by violence, and Chief S.L.Akintola was declared the winner. Instead of the winner’s victory address, the Nigerians heard part of a tape which began, “This is the voice of free Nigeria” and went on to advise Akintola and his “crew of renegades” to leave the country. Listeners were intrigued and a warrant was issued for the man who was behind it all and that was Wole Soyinka.

In the trial that followed the arrest, a trial that was occasionally as farcical as parts of The Trials of Brother Jero, but which
nevertheless, could have brought a heavy sentence, Soyinka pleaded “Not Guilty”. He was eventually set free on what some regarded as a technicality. His jubilant supporters hoisted Soyinka on their shoulders and carried him from the court. This trial naturally brought Soyinka a great deal of publicity for some weeks.

The years 1966 and 1967 were unstable ones for Nigerian politics. At first there was a revolution of the radical and progressive officers. Then a counter-coup brought Yakuba Gowon to power. There was a secession of the region of the Biafra and Nigeria drifted into civil war. Despite the political upheavals, Soyinka was as productive as ever. He wrote poetry and essays and directed plays like Lindsay Barrett’s Home Again and Arthur Miller’s Crucible. Soyinka also completed and submitted for publication the important works, And After the Narcissist, a work of criticism, Of Power and Change, a piece of political comment and The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy, an important piece of dramatic theory which is included as an appendix under the title The Fourth Stage to his later work Myth, Literature and the African World, 1976. Predictably, Soyinka was not silent on the political front either. In his numerous contributions to the Nigerian press he campaigned for appropriate peace initiatives in the north and a cease-fire in the war against Biafra. He also published a furious indictment against
those he called "patriots and other sordid racketeers". He was arrested and detained without a trial in August 1967 partly because of the indictment.

Soyinka was detained for twenty-seven long months, fifteen of which were spent in solitary confinement, in the Kaduna prison. He described his prison experiences in The Men Died, which was published only in 1972. The title refers to the fact that the government kept Soyinka incommunicado in an effort to silence his rebellious voice. All the time that he was in prison Soyinka wrote poetry with a quill and cell-manufactured “Ink” in between the lines of printed books. He also completed preliminary writing for plays and a novel. Despite the long confinement, his spirit could not be broken nor could his hand be stayed.

Once released in October 1969 Soyinka was appointed the director of the school of drama at the University of Ibadan. At this time Soyinka produced his play Kongi's Harvest, a play about the tyranny and cruelty rampant in postcolonial Africa, giving it an anti-Gowon slant. The following year Soyinka prepared the screen play of Kongi's Harvest for a film company. In March and April 1970, Soyinka acted the lead role of Kongi in front of the film cameras. A few months later, in July, at Soyinka's initiative, the Theatre Arts Company and a department of Theatre Art were established in
Ibadan. Soyinka was invited to the Eugene O'Neill Centre in Waterford, Connecticut in the United States. He took with him an incomplete manuscript of his play *Madmen and Specialists* which he may have begun in prison. While in the United States he added to the script, reworked it and presented it at the Centre and to local black communities. In March 1971 he presented a revised *Madmen and Specialists* back home in Ibadan. The same year, he left Gowon's Nigeria for a "brief exile" which he spent mainly in Europe. Between 1971 and 1974 Soyinka travelled in many parts of the world, delivering lectures, writing essays, compiling a book of African poetry, writing *The Man Died* and a second novel, *Season of Anomy* in addition to three important plays. The first of these, *Jero's Metamorphosis* was like the sketches of the '60s, only longer and more elaborate in form and pessimistic in tone. *The Bacchae* was written on commission from the National Theatre in London and was a radical rewriting of the ancient Greek playwright Euripides's masterpiece. *Death and the King's Horseman* was written while Soyinka was a fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge. It was based on a historical event. In 1973, as the fellowship at Churchill College, Cambridge, Soyinka was also a visiting professor at Sheffield University, England.
In 1974 Soyinka left Europe for Accra, Ghana. He became the editor of Africa's leading intellectual magazine, "Transition" and used it to support socialist revolutionary movements in Africa and to attack tyrants like Bokassa and Idi Amin. Around this time he changed his name to Ch'Indaba. He became engaged in a debate with those who regarded him as a reactionary figure because they wanted to radically decolonise African literature. In spite of this ongoing debate, Soyinka joined in the inauguration of the Union of Writers of African Peoples and was elected its General Secretary.

In July 1975 there came another change in the Nigerian political scene. Gowon was overthrown in a coup and Murtala Muhammad came to power as a head of a military government. In December of that year Soyinka returned home and within a month, in January 1976, he was appointed Professor at the University of Ife. Soyinka's alliance with the establishment was an uneasy one, particularly after the assassination of Murtala Muhammad during attempted putsch. Olusegun Obasanjo then became head of state.

Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*, a collection of lectures delivered in England in 1973, were published in this year. It is an invaluable reference book for those unfamiliar with African Drama and the African world-view and written, as he explains, tongue-in-check, in the preface, as a response to those academics...
in England who “Did not believe in any such mythical beast as ‘African Literature”. (vii)

In December 1976 Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* was produced, followed, in 1977, by his *Opera Wonyosi*, an adaptation of Brecht’s *Three penny Opera*. *Opera Wonyosi* attacked, often in song, a number of African tyrants and many of the values, or rather, non-values, of oil-boom Nigeria. This was a large-scale production, held in a well-equipped theatre building. Plans to present the play in Lagos, however, were thwarted by certain reactionary forces. Soyinka then formed a new group called the Guerrilla Theatre Unit of the University of Ife. For this group he began writing little plays or playlets to be performed on the streets, in the market places and in Lorry parks - very akin to Indian theatre. Two such playlets or “hit and run pieces” as they were called, under the title *Before the Blow-Out* followed up the careers of the crooks and charlatans introduced in the *Opera Wonyosi* and in this way commented on the contemporary events surrounding the preparations for a return to civilian rule.

In 1979 Soyinka directed and acted in *The Biko Inquest*, an edited version of the trial of Steve Biko, the South African leader who died in police custody. Black actors played all the parts. The work was an expose of the inhumanity and deceit inherent in the apartheid of
South Africa. The piece was also relevant to Nigeria where police atrocities and a corrupt judiciary were omnipresent. In September and October 1979 Soyinka directed *Death and the King’s Horseman* in Chicago. The production was very well received and another performance was held in Washington D.C. Soyinka was highly acclaimed in the United States, but the picture was slightly different in Nigeria. Although Soyinka made a number of trips back to Nigeria, his people felt he had deserted them at a critical time: Nigerian elections were on. In October Shehu Shagari was elected president. The opposition, the United Party of Nigeria or the UPN, declared that Shagari had won by unfair means. Soyinka’s affiliation was with the UPN. Although Soyinka was attracted to the radical socialism of the People’s Redemption Party, he never joined that party. He said he considered himself a “self-suspended member”, since he challenged the attitudes and actions of some of its leaders.

Soyinka was the chairman of the Oyo State Road Safety Corps, a result of his long association with civic enlistment and his belief that art and artists could make a difference to society. All of 1980 he was very busy with the activities of the Road Safety Corps and in the university life at Ife. The Vice Chancellor of the university, Tunji Aboyade, was his close friend and haunting companion. In December he delivered a lecture on the topic, “The Critic and
Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and other Mythologies" which continued his debate with the Leftist critics.

In 1981 Soyinka was a visiting professor at Yale University in the United States. He returned to Nigeria frequently. Back in Ife there was a number of pressing public issues: acute water shortage, the collapse of the hostel, overcrowding in student room, attacks on the Vice Chancellor, the death of four students while taking part in a peaceful demonstration, even ritual murder. Besides being involved in this crisis, Soyinka also wrote a brief sketch attacking the racketeering in rice in Nigeria. The play was presented in the heart of Lagos as part of a demonstration.

In January 1982 Soyinka launched *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, his colourful funny and intense autobiography of the first eleven or so years of his life, in Abeokuta. This book was began in Accra and completed after Soyinka's return to Nigeria in 1976. Soyinka took advantage of the launch of the book to continue his attack on Shagari government. He listed as the ironic “achievements” of the ruler the Bakolori Massacre, the subversion of the kano state government, the destruction of the offices of the “Triumph” newspaper, Shuguba's deportation, the storming of the elected legislature, the depletion of the national wealth of Nigeria, the
butchering of Bala Muhammad, and the deaths of students, athletes and youth workers at the hands of the police.

In March 1982, Soyinka staged an early radio play of his, *Camwood on the Leaves*, at the National Theatre in Lagos. This play proved that he was interested in more subtle forms of consciousness rising than strident and vituperative social criticism. On August 1982 Soyinka was once again in England, this time delivering the Stratford-on-Avon lecture on "Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist". Influence of Shakespeare can be seen in a number of his plays, including, *A Dance of the Forest*. In December 1982 the African service of the BBC broadcast Soyinka's half-hour radio play, *Die Still Rev. Dr. Godspeak*. This play was concerned with the widespread influence of metaphysicians and parapsychologists in Nigeria. In early 1930 Soyinka directed a full-length play, *Requiem for a Futurologist*, and toured with it. This play made fun of the credulous and exposed charlatans in much the same way as *The Trials of Brother Jero*. The play was occasionally accompanied by agit-prop sketches: Festac 77, Green Revolution, Ethical Revolution and others, known collectively as "Priority Projects". Here the means of social criticism were spectacle, simple dialogue, hard-hitting lyrics and good music. In July 1983 the songs were recorded and released on a record titled Unlimited Liability Co. The title song was one which
critiqued the Nigerian government tongue-in-cheek as a badly run company led by a chairman and broadcasted before the August national election. Soyinka released another song, “Take the First Step”. He released it just before Election Day to replenish the ammunition of the opposition parties in their campaign to beat Shagari and his National Party of Nigeria (NPN) at the polls. The elections were predictably violent and turbulent in some states. The results revealed Shagari as the victor once again. Soyinka went to London and through the British press and the African service of the BBC he described the background to the elections, including the manipulation of the western press and the distortions in the official results. He predicted that there would be “a coup or a civil war or a combination of both”. Soyinka returned to Ife in spite of threats of police and legal action against *The Man Died*. His predictions were proved right when, on 31 December, 1983, Shagari was overthrown by a coup, which brought Muhammad Buhari to power. The abuses of the Shagari government which Soyinka had already pointed out—a vastly corrupt administration, irregularities in the marketing of rice, the construction of a new capital at Abuja—were now cited by the coup makers.

During 1983-84 Soyinka had worked on a film, “Blues for a Prodigal”, which was originally planned, in Soyinka’s words, as a
“Straightforward propaganda film...and almost unambiguous call to arms” (Gibbs 17.) However, after the December coup of the Shagari government, the approach was modified. In February 1984 came the verdict on *The Man Died*. Despite the new government, the book was banned. In May 1984 a production of Soyinka’s play *The Road* opened in Chicago and, in December 1984, Soyinka’s *A play of Giants* premiered at Yale University, where he had been a visiting professor in 1981. Like *Opera Wonyosi*, *A Play of Giants* is a severe attack on contemporary African dictators like Jen-Bedel Bokassa, the malignant dictator of Central Africa of almost comic-opera proportions, Idi Amin of Uganda, and Macias Nguemo of Equatorial Guinea and General Yakubu Gowon of Soyinka’s own Nigeria.

In 1986 Wole Soyinka was awarded the Noble Prize for literature, too many the ultimate awards that can be won in one’s lifetime. However, Soyinka was not one to let any honour bestowed by the west muffle his tongue or blindfold his conscience. In his acceptance speech, “This past must address its present”, Soyinka launched a searing attack on the ingrained racism in many of the heavyweights of western culture, Locke, Voltaire, Hegel, Hume, and Montesquieu. He felt their works ought to be stamped with the warning, “THIS WORK IS DANGEROUS FOR YOUR RACIAL SELF-ESTEEM” (Maja-Pearce 21). He is amazed that the work of the ethnologists
Leo Frobenius, "a notorious plunderer, one of a long line of European archaeological raiders", who laments that the beauties of Yoruba art be left to such "degenerate and feeble-minded posterity" as the Yoruba people, is still revered, even by black scholars (Majapearce 18-19). Such an outspoken attack is typical of Soyinka’s courage of conviction and reminds us, what an important agent of social change the artist can still be if he or she is not afraid to speak out.

In 1988 Soyinka was appointed professor of African Studies and Theatre at Cornell University. Isara: A Voyage Around (Essay), the outcome to Ake: The Years of Childhood appeared in 1990 as did Mandel’s Earth and Other Poems. From Zia with Love (1992) is a cutting expose of contemporary Nigerian politics and society. It is written in much the same vein as Soyinka’s early play, Requiem for a Futurologist, except that the mood seems to be even darker. Soyinka’s disenchantment and disillusionment with Nigerian political leaders is by now quite deep rooted. This is undoubtedly a result of his long political activism, of being able to see these leaders from close quarters. The play A Scourge of Hyacinths was also written in the nineties. The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis (1996), an impassioned examination of the contemporary political turbulence in Nigeria, appeared in 1996. In
this Soyinka describes what he calls "my 'Rambo' departure from the Nigerian nation space". In this book Soyinka's fury is focused on a single day—June 23, 1993—and on one man—the brutal military dictator, General Sani Abacha whom Soyinka describes in 1997 as "the most ruthless, unconscionable dictator we have ever known in Nigeria". It was on that day that the country's free and fair elections were cancelled and the victor, Moshood Abiola, imprisoned. "Under a dictatorship a nation ceases to exist", says Soyinka in The Open Sore. Although in Nigeria the opposition has been exiled, imprisoned or driven underground, Soyinka hopes that they are quietly mobilising. The book was named one of the twenty-five best books of 1996 by the American publication The Village Voice.

Soyinka fled to the United States in 1995, fearing he was about to be arrested. In March 1997, he was charged with treason. Authorities under the dictator Sani Abacha claimed Soyinka and fourteen others were behind a series of bombings. Since Abacha's death in June, military ruler Abdul salami Abubakar has freed hundreds of political prisoners, scheduled elections and promised to return to civilian rule. Abubakar dropped the charges against the fifteen people, saying it was a reconciliatory gesture. While Soyinka said, "the right thing had been done", he refused to return to Nigeria. He has been a professor in African–American studies at Emory University, Atlanta, and
U.S.A since 1996. He travels to England and other parts of Europe to deliver talks or to conduct poetry workshops. In a 1993 interview with ‘Biyi Bandele Thomas he speaks forcefully about the mess Babangida created in Nigeria - A divided army, a divided nation, and all because of the.... quirks, of the irrationally of one individual and his tiny junta” (Maja-Pearce 148).

At one point he laments:

“Something is certainly required, call it ethical rearmament, call it human rearmament, we certainly need some kind of rearmament. And it can only begin with an improvement in the quality of the life of the people, with an evident, commencement of transformation of the physical environment, and of course a reduction of corruption” (Maja-Pearce 157).

Consequently it was seen that the issue that so ignited the young Soyink a are still close to his heart – the amelioration of the lot of the common person, civil liberties, a minimal degree of corruption on the part of the ruling classes accompanied by a large dose of efficiency. He is pragmatic enough to know that no corruption is impossibility. As he says in the same interview, he had preferred “a competent crook rather than an incompetent, inept angel as the head of state”
(Maja-Pearce 156). He tells John D. Thomas in 1997 that it is his “commitment to the cause” in Nigeria that allows him to teach only a single semester at Emory and to leave the other semester entirely free of his own work. The former military ruler Olusengun Obasanjo won the Nigerian presidential elections in spring 1999. For Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, ruled by the army for the past fifteen years, civilian rule appears very distant. Soyinka’s decision not to return is perhaps a wise one in the circumstances.

Yoruba Culture and Soyinka:

The Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic groups of Nigeria. There are fifteen million Yoruba people in south-west Nigeria and the neighbouring Benin and Togo. They are loosely linked by geography, language, history and religion. Most of them live within the borders of the tropical forest belt, but remnants of the powerful Oyo kingdom include groups that live at the fringes of the northern savanna grasslands. In the mid of the eighteen century the slave traders sent slaves of Yoruba decent to the Americas. Some of them resettled in Cuba and Brazil where elements of Yoruba culture and language can still be found. Traditional Yoruba city states were never signal political organisations. They were sub-divided into over twenty five complex, centralised kingdoms. Of this Ile-Ife is
universally recognised as the most senior and the most important Yoruba city. It was founded around 850 A.D. Its rival was the Oyo kingdom to the north-west which was founded around 1350 A.D. The Oni of the Ife and the Alafin of Oyo were the most highly respected Yoruba kings in Nigeria.

For centuries the Yoruba lived in large, densely populated cities which were able to practice special trades. Most of the people commuted to the countryside for part of the year to raise the staple crops - yams, corn, cassava, cocoa - on family farms. The economy is structured around agriculture, trade and handicrafts. Women do not normally work outside the home. They attain social status through their role in the market system rather than through their husband's economic status. Each city-state maintains its own interpretation of history and religious traditions and its unique art style. Yet all acknowledge the ritual sovereign of Ife, all consult Yoruba herbalists and divination priests, and all honour the pantheon of Yoruba gods.

The Yoruba towns were either farm-oriented or were located at the cross roads of the trade routes where traders stopped to rest. In most towns the market place was usually located in front of the king's palace in the centre of the town. The towns were founded by Baale (father of the land) who in turn was named king. He was the religious and political leader of the town. It was his job to name the
chiefs, Otun, the king’s right-hand man and Balogun, the war chief.
The king was considered a sacred being, like a living god. He could not be seen or spoken to directly. He could not eat in public. People believed that he did not die—he merely passed on his crown to another Yoruba.
There are a number of conflicting and confusing elements in Yoruba religion. The variety and lack of homogeneity is a result of the difference in religion between the different city-states and even villages. The same deity may be male in one village and female in another. The trickster god may have three different names within the same village. Also, certain elements of other religions, particularly Islam and Christianity also account for the variety.
To a person living in India the plethora of Yoruba gods should sound very familiar. Obatala and Olorun / Olodumare / Edunare seem to be the most important gods, the first the god of creation, the second a supreme deity who breathes life into creation. There exist also several hundred lower gods. The Pantheon of deities is called the Orisha or Orishala. It is referred to in both the singular and plural. In the oral tradition, there is a tale of the high god or ‘Supreme deity’ as Soyinka terms it, variously called Olorum or Olodumare or Edumare, asking the Orisala to descend from the sky to create the first earth at Ile-Ife. Orisala was delayed and his younger brother Ododuwa,
accomplish the task. Later sixteen Orisala came down from the heavens to create human being and live on earth. The descendants of each of these deities is said to have spread Yoruba culture and religious principals throughout the rest of Yoruba land. Some times Olorun and Orisala / Obatala are seem as one and the same. Obatala is the god of creation, often a sculptor god who has the responsibilities to shape human bodies. Physically deformed humans are supposed to be either his votaries or the victims of his displeasure. Olorun / Olodumare / Edumare reserve the right to breathe life into these bodies.

The basic pantheon of Yoruba gods is variously estimated at 201,401,601 or more. Some of these divinities are primordial, having existed when either Obatala or Oduduwa was creating the earth. Others are heroes, both male and female, who left and abiding impression on the people. Some of the divinities may also be natural phenomena - mountains, hills, rivers-that have influenced people's lives and history. The most popular gods are Sango or Shango, the god of thunder and lightening, Ifa or Orunmila, the god of divination, Eshu or Ishu, the messenger and trickster god, Ogun, the god of iron and of war, Olokun, the god of the sea, Shokpona, the god of the earth, and Oko, the god of agriculture. Fa or Fate is the hidden companion of the gods and of humans.
There is continuity between the divinities, the kings and the ancestors. The two major gods are Oduduwa and Sango or Shango. They are also believed to have had human forms and to have reigned in Ife and Oyo respectively. The Yoruba still refer to themselves as the children of Oduduwa. Sango or Shango creates thunder and lightning by casting "Thunderstones" down to earth. The Yoruba believes that these stones have special powers. Sango and Shango is said to have four wives, each of whom is represented by a major Nigerian river. The chief wife, Oya, is represented by the Niger.

Olorun, the owner of the sky, or Olodumare/Edumare, the almighty, is never actively worshipped. Unlike Sango/Shango, Olorun has no shrines and no priests and asks for no sacrifices. Although Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare is much akin to the Judeo-Christian creator of all things, the giver of life and the final judge, the Yoruba ignore him in their day-to-day lives. Some scholars conjecture that Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare may have developed through the influence of Islam and Christianity, as a simulacrum of the gods of those religions. The Yoruba possibly find the concept of an almighty god so overwhelming and remote that they cannot relate Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare to their quotidian reality.
Another important deity is Ogun, the god of war, of the hunt and of iron. *A Dance of the Forest* is the only play of Soyinka's in which Ogun makes an appearance. In Yoruba religion and myth, he serves as a patron deity of blacksmiths, warriors and all who use metal in their work. He also presides over deals and contracts. In Yoruba courts people swear to tell the truth by kissing the machete sacred to Ogun. He also stands for courage in battle and the spirit of pioneering, and he brings good luck to hunters. The Yoruba consider Ogun fearsome and terrible in revenge. If one breaks a pact in his name, swift retribution will follow. However, as Soyinka points out, Ogun's justice is "transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative," whereas Sango/Shango's justice is "primarily retributive" (Myth, Literature and the African World 141) Legend has it that the Orisha were trying to carve a road through the forest. Of the Orisha only Ogun accomplish the task because only he had the proper implements. Thus he should have been the king of the Orisha, but since he did not care for the position it went to Obatala. Some versions of the Yoruba religion combine Ogun with the trickster god Eshu. Ogun is associated with both creation and destruction and Ogun festivals include animal sacrifice and processions marked by metal-tipped palm fronds to please or to appease him.
Ogun seems to be a particular favourite of Soyinka's. In terms of Hellenic values he sees Ogun as a combination of the Dionysian, the Apollonian and the Promethean "virtues". To Soyinka, Ogun is, in many ways, the "first artist and technician of the forge," a creature who "evokes Nietzsche's Apollonian spirit, a 'massive impact of image, concept, ethical doctrine and sympathy.' Obatala is the placid essence of creation; Ogun the creative urge and instinct, the essence of creativity". (Myth, Literature and the African World 141)

We may recall that Prometheus, son of Lapetus, was the figure in Greek mythology who in one version of the creation myth, formed humans in the likeness of gods, using the clay and water of Panopeus in Phocis. (Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* 1-34)

Prometheus was also believed to have stolen fire from the gods to give to the mortals and was punished by Zeus for his pains. Soyinka sees Ogun as "the first actor—for he led the others... (the) first suffering deity, the first creative energy, the first challenger, and conqueror of transition. And his, the first art, was tragic art..." (Myth, Literature and the African World 145)

In an interview he says that he found Ogun not just a warrior but a creative influence, "by implication the father of poetry", and very liberating, "having grown up in a narrow form of Christianity" (Wole Soyinka on Yoruba Religion)
Significantly, the Yoruba pantheon has no evil gods. The trickster god, Eshu, is merely mischievous. Legend has it that posing as a merchant he once sold magnificent gifts to a man's two wives. The ensuing battle for the husband's favour tore the family apart. Eshu is also the guardian of houses and villages. In this role he is called "Baba" or father. Eshu is also the god of Ifa, a sophisticated and complex divinatory tool; some call it a form of writing, which uses nuts, signs, and increasing squares of the number four to predict the future.

Festivals are an integral part of Yoruba life. The three main celebrations take place in July (in honour of Ifa), in September (in honour of Orun) and in January. The last is called Bere and is the most important festival. It marks the end of harvest time. In all the festivals, processions and performances take place, but in the Bere festival, the fields are ritualistically set alight to celebrate and illuminate the fruits of the soil. The Yoruba New Year takes place in March, when the villages and towns take part in communal purification rites, helping each other to confess their sins and starting the New Year afresh together. Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* is modelled on this New Year festival.

The Yoruba treat their ancestors with great respect, which is only to be expected in a culture with only oral records of the past.
Anthropologists debate whether the rituals dealing with ancestry are religious in nature or simply a mark of respect. At least a few Yoruba tribes believe that their ancestors become demi-gods after death, but only once they have assumed the persona of the true deity. This belief resembles another facet of Yoruba faith—the phenomenon of possession—in which mediums take on the characteristics of one or another of the gods. The characteristics of some of the main gods are so well known that mediums as far off as Haiti can sprawl back their heads and cross their legs in the same way when possessed by, say, Sango/Shango, the lightning god. The earth is seen as the home of the ancestors' remains. When offerings are made to earth they also become offerings to the ancestors to make them comfortable in their new home. The dead ancestors are thus viewed as religiously significant and close to the earth.

Wole Soyinka describes the Yoruba religion as a "liberating" one because it is so open to other religions and so tolerant of them. "The Oba would go to a mosque even if he was a Christian," he says. Traditional religion is not only accommodating, it is liberating because whenever a new phenomenon impinged on the consciousness of the Yoruba...they do not bring down the barriers-close the doors....They do not consider it a hostile experience. That's why the corpus of Ifa is constantly reinforced and...
augmented....You have Ifa verses which deal with Islam, you have Ifa verses which deal with Christianity." For example, the myth of Moremi who sacrificed the only son to save the town has clear parallels with the story of Jesus. Soyinka claims that the Yoruba "had no hostility to the piety of other people" because they had the ability to see other beliefs as other systems and not as "pagan" or "kafir" or superstitious mumbo-jumbo. Soyinka is implying that Islam and Christianity do not possess the same tolerance towards other religions as does the Yoruba faith. 

According to Ngugi, in pre-colonial Africa, drama was not an isolated event but it was an essential part of the "rhythm of daily and seasonal life of community" (Decolonising the Mind 37) Often it drew its energy from other activities. It provided entertainment as well as "moral instruction". Even more than this it was "a strict matter of life and death and communal survival". It could take place anywhere, not necessarily on stage. For Ngugi the "real language" of African theatre can be found in "the struggles of the oppressed", the struggles which give birth to "a new Africa" (60). "The peasants and workers of Africa, Ngugi writes, "are making a tomorrow out of the present of toil and turmoil". The theatre which uses this language will find a response not only "in the hearts and minds of the participants".
but also “in the hearts of those living outside the immediate environment of its physical being and operation” (60).

No research work can be considered a research work until and unless it has got the destination to arrive at a definite aim and objective which guide the research work in a proper direction otherwise it arrives no where. The present work has been prepared with a definite aim and objective. Generally it is believe that literature springs from culture. A literary piece has to have the fragrance of that soil from which it springs. Recent critics may speak about the death of the author and birth of the reader. But it is next to impossible for any writer to escape from his life, age and culture in which he passes major part of his life. Knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, his culture and civilisation get reflected in his works. That is the reason why the man of the discipline of sociology and anthropology make use of literature as a tool to study society and culture. It proves that literature and culture are closely associated just like body and soul. What literature reflects is nothing but culture. A noted critic Saros Cowasji in his article, “Literature as Culture” mentions that every literary work is a social document, a cultural document in a sense that literature cannot part with culture”. Keeping in view this basic
observation an attempt has been made to find out how far and in what sense Wole Soyinka's works are the representative works of African tribal culture. An attempt has also been made to probe into what type of confrontations the tribal face in Africa and how those confrontations as well as interactions are captured by Soyinka in his works.

One more dimension that has been covered up in the present research work is the reaction of the African psyche to the colonisers, white masters, and the spokesman of the western culture. Any confrontations or interaction creates a chain of actions and reactions, acceptance and refusal. This effect of confrontation has also been tested in the present work.