

WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*: A CHRONICLE OF BLACK PRIDE

Misba Majeed¹, Dr Munejah Khan²

¹Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor Department of English Language and Literature
Islamic University of Science and Technology J&K

Abstract

Wole Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman* (1976) is a valorous attempt to lionise native Yoruba culture in order to combat the colonial ideology implicit in European discourses about Africa. The play addresses the erosion of traditional Nigerian culture and rituals as a result of the propagation of the culture of the coloniser. The European intervention and the attempt to slaughter the sacred tradition of Yoruba people is explored in the play, when the Yoruba King's Horseman is disallowed to perform a ritual suicide, prescribed by the tradition. Soyinka's major concern in the play is why the sacrifice of Elesin, the king's horseman in consonance with the native culture should be termed as barbaric, when the slaughtering of countless soldiers in the name of colonial expansion is hailed as patriotic sacrifice for the cause of nationalism. The play uncovers the trauma of colonialism, manifest through its effect on the psyche of the colonised and the attempts on the part of the colonised to act against the colonial authority. The play also exposes the conflict between the native culture and western culture with the imposition of colonial rule on the lives of Yoruba people. This paper argues that the white imperialists tried to 'civilize' the 'native' by detaching him from his culture. The play is a chronicle of black pride that emphasises a return to indigenous culture and African way of life.

Keywords: colonialism, cultural clash, Yoruba culture, black pride

Introduction

I

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) Edward Said discusses the impact of imperialism on society, tradition, culture, and economics. Said explores the European imperial endeavour and its intersection with the native culture. The imperial exploitation is maintained and justified by propagating the superiority of one culture over the other. As Said puts it:

Culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates "us" from "the", almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent "returns" to culture and tradition...Now the trouble with this idea of culture is that it entails not only venerating one's own culture but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world. Most professional humanists, as a result are unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of such practices such as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction and philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other. (xiii - xiv)