

POETIC APPROACH IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN NIGERIA: A SOCIALIST READING OF MTSHALI AND OSUNDARE'S POETRY.

Jam, Damian Terkaa¹

Torpev, Terver Francis²

^{1,2}Federal University, Dutsin-Ma, Nigeria

*Corresponding Email: ttorpev@fudutsinma.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

The need for effective teaching and learning has called for various approaches in impartation of knowledge, skill, attitudes and values among learners in school system. The paper attempted to employ poetic approaches in implementation of school curriculum for social change in Nigeria. Consequently, the paper used poems written by Mtshali and Osundare to present an ideal society and need for social change. The poems so used were: sound of cowhide drum and eye on the earth. The paper concluded that social change is not only a requirement for societal development, but also a condition for harmonious living. To achieve this there should be a deliberate effort to train learners who are leaders of tomorrow to embrace social change. This could help in improving their leadership potential and efficient governance which has always been lacking among many societal leaders as exemplified by many crises in African societies and beyond.

Keywords: Poetry, School curriculum, Mtshali, Osundare, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Literary scholars believed that literature serves as one of the viable tools for transforming and liberating the society of its ills. This paper explores the use of poetry as a viable tool to enhance teaching of morals in a decaying society.

The question for implementation of school curriculum to meet contemporary societal challenges has called for a holistic approach and didactic effort from all academic endeavour. Poetic approaches are one of the strategies that have been on the fore front adopted by scholars to address issues that will make school curriculum relevant to societal development.

The importance of social change for effective societal development cannot be over emphasized as it forms the basis for societal development and progress. It is against this backdrop that literary devices have to be put into use to orientate the students toward achieving societal change.

According to Hornsby Dictionary (2010) poetic expressions refer to the use of words that could approve deep feelings on a particular issue. The use of this literary device is very paramount as it is believed that it serves as one of the viable tools for transformation and liberation of mankind from ignorance and societal ills. The imaginative or deep feelings as mentioned earlier ignite inner thoughts for critical reasoning, careful examination and assessment of issues presented before people. The motive behind this strategy is to avoid dogmatic acceptance of issues.

Considering the fact that secondary school segment of education is a major segment that its curriculum contains the much of literature. It is imperative to use poetic device to equip the knowledge of the learner on the societal changes and its contribution to nation building.

This paper is therefore an attempt to pragmatically approach social change through poetry which is one of the genres of literature. Poetry as a genre of Literature is a creative and universal means of communicating the emotional, spiritual, social, political or intellectual concerns of mankind. Poetry also deals with the experience of a poet with the special techniques of literature. It is anchored in Literature in English as one of the major segments in Secondary School Curriculum. The Secondary School Students who undergo through this learning experience are expected to change their orientation from passive way of reason to more critical approaches to issues.

The Concept of Social Change

Social change is difficult to define, because there is a sense in which everything changes, all of the time. Ajir I.W. (2009) observes that:

Social change is brought about by the economic influences. Conflicts between classes provide the motivation for historical development, they are the motor of history. All human history is the history of class struggles (pp31).

Identifying significant change therefore involves showing how far there are alterations in the underlying structure of an object or situation over a period of time. In the case of human societies, to decode how far and in what ways a system is in a process of change, there has to be an indication of modification of basic institution during a specific period.

This explains why (Giddens, 2011) refers to social change as:

Fundamental alterations in the patterns of culture, structure, and social behaviour over time. It is a process by which society becomes something different while remaining in some respects the same.

Social change confronts people with new situations and compels them to fashion new forms of actions. Many factors interact to generate changes in people's behavior and in the culture and structure of their society. Literary scholars identify a number of particularly critical factors, the impact of which differs with the situation and the time and place. This paper will consider the poetic approach in the implementation of senior secondary school curriculum, using the socialist literary theory.

Theoretical Framework

The socialist literary theory is also solely based on conflict perspectives. For instance, conflict theorists hold that tensions between competing groups are the basic source of social change. Nowhere does one find a clearer exposition of the conflict perspective than that provided by Karl Marx, particularly as it finds expression in his notion of the dialectic.

It is in respect to the above reality that poets in Africa over the years have through their poems shown great concern and worry and feel that their expressions as contained in the secondary school curriculum will go a long way in addressing societal ills. In their poems, they address various issues bothering on the general welfare, life and future of the continent with a view of drawing attention to such issues and also calling for change that would benefit the generality of the populace.

Socialist Lessons In Mtshali and Osundare's Poetry

Oswald Mtshali's 'Sounds of a Cowhide drum' and Niyi Osundare's 'Eye of the earth's' portray literary techniques of socialist literature. They observe that art is not for arts sake, that arts must be a medium of social change. It should be an instrument for a change particularly on the part of the learner.

Social change undoubtedly has a lot of influence on many poets. It is therefore pertinent to state that African writers and critics have had to discuss the relative idea of commitment. When discussing poetry as a means of social change, Oswald Mtshali's poetry readily comes to mind. His debut collection of poems, 'Sounds of a cowhide drum' achieved much in the protest against apartheid in South Africa.

In Niyi Osundare's 'Eye of the Earth'. The major concern is the rampant inequalities and injustices all over the world. For instance, in 'Forest Echoes' the poet condemns the unholy realities of social decadence, moral atrophy, potential gambit and disappearing laughers in the face of humanity and equates the contemporary imperfections and impermanent to the flora, the disappearing trees and forest, arising from man's cruelty to his environment.

The poets revolutionary commitment also finds a place in 'Former born' where the poet strongly criticize the worrisome problem of food scarcity in contemporary society, due to the general disregard for farming, the tendency of the modern man to identify only with fanciful modern civilization and the hypocrisy of the upper class, who have relegated farming to the dustbin.

In 'they too are the Earth'. Osundare draws a parallel between the rich and the poor the Swansongs of beggars sprawled out in brimming gutters' the world sprawled out in brimming gutters paint the terrible and without hope, poverty of the poor. He parallels them with the rich under snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tires. The following lines clearly gives a mental picture he holds about humanity.

They too are the earth
The sweet and grime of
Millions hewing wood and hurling water
They are the earth
Mudding every pore like harked moles.

In view of this, he expresses dismay as he maintains that the poor who produce wealth yet hardly benefit from such labour. This goes with the saying that one works like an elephant but eat as a grasshopper.

Oswald Mtshali's collection 'Sounds of a Cowhide drum' deeply conveys a message of inequality. This experience is vividly conveyed due to Mtshali's relationship with his immediate environment. His philosophical approach is also married successfully with his styles and intention as captured in his poem 'If you should know me' is express in the following lines!

Look upon me as a pullet crawling
From an egg shall
laid by a zulu hen
Ready to fly in spirit
To all lands on earth.

This is Mtshali's stylistic and philosophical presentation and these lines captured also his responsibility as writer of social justice.

Mtshali's most striking poems are often those whose verbal magic in this sense the creation of mood or sense of place-contains a sting that finally shrivels the verbal magic away, leaving a question or statement burning in the mind. The lovely evocative simplicity of 'The shepherd and his flock', which begins with

The rays of the sun
Like a pair of scissors
Cutting the blanket
Of drawn from the sky

It ends with a sudden insight into the mind of the boy greeting the white farmer's children as they go to school; will he ever go to school, too? In Boy on a swing, pure sensation is conveyed making by naming with heady brilliance, out of the disorientation-in-space of swinging, the 'four cardinal points meet in the boys head and the cardinal questions of the child's life are flung out centrifugally'.

Where did I come from?
When will I wear long trousers?
Why was my father jailed?

These questions, contained objectively in totally different categories, fuse together in the context of a black township child's life and thereby tell us everything we need to know about apartheid.

Osundare also expressed the same concern for the masses in 'They too are the earth', the poets dialectical and revolutionary commitment to the cause of the down trodden is evident. Osundare envisages a glorious future of equal opportunities for all in what the earth said', the personified earth in the poem urges the masses to unite for a possible and total elimination of the exploiters of man.

'Our earth will not die', climaxes Osundare's revolutionary intention. Here, the bourgeois not only threaten humanity, but the environment. They 'lynched the lakes'. 'slaughtered the seas', and 'mauled the mountains for profit'. Thus, even if the mercantilist go hyenatic and at random destroy nature endured lakes with the arsenic urine from the bladder of profit factories, this feeling of hope shall forever sustain and eternalize the universe, up to a time when.'

Our earth will see again
Eyes washed by new rain
The westening sun will rise again
Resplendent like a new coin
The wing, unwound, will play its turns
Trees twittering, grasses dancing;
Hill sides will rock with blooming harvest
The plains batting their eyes of grass and grass
The sea will drink its heart's content
When a jubilant thunder flings open the sky gate
And a new rain troubles down
In drums of joy

It is obvious that Niyi Osundare uses poetry to make commentaries on the social economic and political experience of his people. Whether he is addressing plants or animals, man or beast or even both, from his output literarily African society is seen to be essentially cannibalistic. His work and commitment as an artist only gives artistic solution to what is happening in the society.

Oswald Mtshali's songs of innocence and experience place him along with Blake and his gifts of colloquial irony with the tradition of Auden, and his almost surgical imagery along Sylvia Path. On the rare occasions when Mtshali turns to symbolism and metaphor, as in 'Ride upon the death chariot', where Ceasars Empire is used as an equivalent for one nearer home, at a close of the poem he slashes away with a single image, the comfortable remove of history at which he has revealed. The woman who comes to wipe the faces of the vagrants.

Whose papers to be in ceasers empire
were not in order
Is suddenly poignantly localized;
she carried a dishcloth
full of bread and tea.

Oswald Mtshali is a poet of the peasant:

Thick-limbed labourers
In vest baked
Brown with dust
and the black miner_
Face Daubed with gold-tinted cohre

... armpitsmouldy with sweat of pushing
acocopun...
He shakes a plastic skal in a noicybeerhall
And gulps down the bear
And strikes his chest,
A victor over a days work!
Hurray I'm the brain-
And you're the brain.

Mtshali has revealed everything about the black man's rural heritage. Compare the pith of his "Birth of shaka" with the overblown rhetoric of Senghor's epic poem about Shaka. But he proves pre-eminently the poet of the black johannesburger, a villain of sweto, the voice of that

Itchy-footed man
Reeking from a beershall
Shuffling to jail
Swanying to hospital.
Township bully, road ganger, clerk, drink,
Chauffer, night watchman
(TheJemmy boys
Have not paid him a visit
But if they come
He will die in honor,
Die fighting
Like a full bloodedzulu-
And the baas will say
' Here's ten pounds.
Jim was a good boys)

-he sighs of all these, and of their other collective identity in the city as eternal suspect-
for being poor, for being black, for rousing guilt:

I trudge the city pavements
Side by side with 'madam'
Who shifts her handbag
From my side to the other...

This is a city poet's tongue, quick as a chameleon's and rasping as a tigers. The white man's conscience may be locked safely with bonds and securities in a Chubb safe

sarcophagus but perhaps the white man's skin may not be quite impervious to irony. This collection says all we need to know about the behavior of man in a marginalize society and this of course has great lessons for humanity.

CONCLUSION

The campaign for social change has featured prominently in poems written by these two African poets as discussed above. It is important to understand that the messages in these poems hold the key to change and transformations. As long as society exists as long as Africa remains, the reality of social class society will still be there and leadership will continue to be required for the overall development of the continent.

Social change is not only required, it is necessary and so there is the need for more efforts to be made to train leaders and to expose such leaders to the rudiments of excellence in governance. The potential for greatness, efficient governance which has been lacking to a large extent.

Lessons from the poems explored above are available for appreciation and it is left for stake –holders to do some homework with regard to ensuring that whoever is to lead is first competent and is trained with good experience to balance up with it. The damage of the past has already been done but from now on, African countries should work hard to ensure that good leadership and excellence in governance is achieved in order to move Africa forward.

To achieve this, the starting point has to be at secondary school curriculum where the students who are leaders of tomorrow will be well cultured through the use of various poetic techniques in changing their orientation for a better Africa tomorrow. It is therefore, recommended that all students at secondary school be encourage to study literature as a subject so that they will be exposed to the societal issues as imaginatively presented for critical analysis and development of sense of responsibility.

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