

Tradition Vs Modernity in *The Lion and Jewel* by Wole Soyinka

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Abstract

*The conflict between tradition and modernity in *The Lion and the Jewel* is the subject of this research paper. The drama depicts a cultural clash between traditional African rituals and contemporary Western influences, and it is set in the Nigerian town of Ilujinle. Wole Soyinka examines the conflict that arises when deeply ingrained indigenous customs are challenged by colonial education and foreign values through humor and satire. The purpose of the study is to examine how the play's characters represent conflicting ideas and how this conflict affects the plot's resolution. *The Lion and the Jewel* presents tradition and modernity as competing yet interconnected forces within African society. The play highlights the complexity of cultural transformation and emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural identity while confronting modern influence. This paper argues that Soyinka does not completely reject modernity, nor does he blindly glorify tradition. Instead, he presents a balanced critique of both. Lakunle's modern ideas are shown as immature and impractical, while Baroka's traditional authority is portrayed as clever and adaptable.*

Keywords: Tradition Vs Modernity, Cultural Conflict, Colonial Influence, Cultural Identity

Wole Soyinka's satirical comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* examines the conflict between modernity and tradition in post-colonial Africa. The play, which is set in the Nigerian town of Ilujinle, depicts a struggle between deeply ingrained African traditions and Western concepts brought about by colonial influence. Soyinka employs sarcasm and comedy to explore how cultures react when new perspectives question established beliefs. Lakunle and Baroka serve as the primary characters that reflect the struggle. The young instructor Lakunle is a representation of modernism. Western-educated, he advocates for gender equality and opposes customs like paying the bride price. He envisions the hamlet being a sophisticated, forward-thinking community with cutting-edge facilities and new social mores. Soyinka, however, presents Lakunle as immature and unrealistic. His speeches are exaggerated, and his understanding

of modernity seems superficial. Without completely comprehending the cultural significance of tradition, he rejects it.

Baroka, the village's Bale (chief), on the other hand, stands for custom. He cherishes social structure, norms, and rituals. He does not completely against change, even though he is in favor of polygamy and traditional authority. Baroka is smart and flexible. He shows his intention to shield the village from fast modernity by purposefully blocking the railway from going through Ilujinle. He demonstrates that tradition may change rather than vanish by using certain contemporary technologies to preserve his legacy. Between these two powers is Sidi, the village's "Jewel." After her photos are featured in a magazine, signifying the influx of contemporary influence, her pride grows. But in the end, she decides to wed Baroka rather than Lakunle. Her choice demonstrates the resilience of tradition and implies that, in spite of contemporary challenges, cultural identity is still significant.

Soyinka does neither wholly reject modernity or naively exalt tradition through satire and vibrant discourse. Rather, he offers a fair assessment of both. Baroka's ancient authority is shown as shrewd and flexible, but Lakunle's new views lack practical understanding. The play ultimately highlights the complexity of cultural transformation and emphasizes the need to preserve cultural identity while carefully engaging with modern change. Furthermore, Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* ultimately portrays the struggle between tradition and modernity as a necessary and continuous dialogue rather than a straightforward confrontation. The play shows that cultural transformation is complicated and cannot happen by totally rejecting the past; through Lakunle's failure and Baroka's success, Soyinka demonstrates that for modern ideas to be meaningful and effective, they must be rooted in cultural understanding.

The play's conclusion, in which Sidi selects Baroka over Lakunle, represents how tradition endures despite outside pressure. This result does not, however, mean that modernity is completely vanquished. Rather, it implies that civilizations need to adjust gradually and carefully. By being adaptable and strategic rather than inflexible, Baroka's persona demonstrates that tradition may endure. Lakunle's character also emphasizes the perils of mindlessly copying foreign ideals without taking into account regional traditions. The play's message is reinforced by Soyinka's use of sarcasm and comedy. He challenges the audience to think critically about their own society by making important cultural concerns lighthearted and enjoyable. The drama serves as a reminder to readers that balance is necessary for real advancement. A society that rejects change may find it difficult to develop, while one that totally gives up its customs runs the risk of losing its identity.

Soyinka's use of dramatic devices to emphasize the conflict between tradition and modernity is another significant feature of the play. The diversity of African theatrical traditions is reflected in the use of dance, mime, music, and narrative. In addition to providing entertainment, the "Dance of the Lost Traveler" and the mimed scenes support Ilujinle's cultural context. Soyinka enhances the presence of indigenous culture within the dramatic form itself by designing the play to resemble traditional Yoruba performance. In addition, the printed magazine with Sidi's photos represents technological progress and Western modernism. The larger cultural conflict is symbolized by the disparity between oral performance and printed media. Lakunle's interest in Western education and advancement contrasts with the village's collective, performing customs. By using these dramatic techniques, Soyinka shows how deeply ingrained tradition is in both creative expression and daily life, making it considerably more robust than Lakunle believes.

The drama also examines how tradition and modernity interact to define gender roles. Although Lakunle says he is in favor of women's equality and liberation, his actions with Sidi frequently come across as condescending and self-serving. He declines to pay the bride price because he believes it to be a "barbaric" custom that goes against his contemporary values rather than solely

out of respect for Sidi. But he doesn't take into account how Sidi's reputation in her cultural setting would be impacted by this rejection. Baroka, on the other hand, is aware of and adept at manipulating the village's social structure despite being a symbol of patriarchal tradition. He is socially conscious and culturally grounded, but his treatment of women reflects the injustices ingrained in tradition.

As a result, the play ends with the notion that modernity and tradition are intertwined forces that shape African society rather than being diametrically opposed. According to Soyinka, combining the advantages of both is the key to meaningful growth, protecting cultural heritage while cautiously embracing modernization's favorable elements.

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