

THE PLACE OF LITERARY ARTS/DRAMA/THEATRE IN ELECTIONEERING CAMPAIGN

Abdullahi Kadir Ayinde

Introduction

The power of literary arts, drama and theatre as an instrument for influencing people and effecting changes in society is well known. Theatre used to be very popular art in traditional African society. It used to be point of intersection where members of the community come to entertain themselves. In the traditional contact of African drama, theatre is a popular and respectable institution which preserves the people's culture and tradition. Theatre is popular because it emphasized community participation, peace and progress. The presentation focused on the people's lives, their aspirants, fears, and hopes.

Given the fundamental position of drama and theatre in Africa, it plays a crucial role at various levels of national life. Thus, the act of singing, dancing and play acting can serve as a veritable tool for electioneering campaign. The activities of dramatic performances, according to Oladele Taiwo, "are based on 'doing' and active participation rather than 'listening' and passive reception"¹. This factor underlines the importance of drama as a tool of political mobilization. At every stage in life, drama and theatre, if properly utilized, bring about a desirable change in behaviour and political maneuvering.

This paper intends to examine the role of theatre and drama in electioneering campaign. The procedure is simply pedagogical. We start by looking at the issue of the definition of theatre and drama. This, of course, will be followed by examining the emotional and psychological significance of arts, drama and theatre in electioneering campaign.

Drama/Theatre: Definitions

Drama is a genre of literature. Thematically, it serves the purpose of shaping the human condition into the norms of the society. Drama and theatre portray human feelings, thoughts and insights. All that people have ever thought, done or dreamt lie waiting to be discovered in dramatic performance. Drama offers several benefits to man. It offers pleasure. It can satisfy the emotional and psychological problems of daily life experience. Little wonder that moon light gatherings constituted one of the most important literary fora in the culture of many Nigerian societies. Story telling and dramatic theatre constitute the bulk of activities which people engaged in during moon light play sessions. The stories employ a wide variety of themes and settings.

Akande and Ibrahim say that: "the authentic yard for evaluating the success of a play is to stage it. In other words, drama is literary form designed for the theatre"².

Drama deals with life in a more distinctive way. It is an improvisation or recreation of life³. The real world is presented as an illusion of reality. Aristotle according to Akande says "a drama represents people in action. It is an improvisation or representation of an action". Thus drama is but a stage⁴.

Drama and theatre are closely related. Drama is audio-visual in nature, while theatre accommodates the stage, heavy lighting system and other essentials.

Olu Obafemi posits that:

Drama, ordinarily refers to playscripts, while theatre means performance and its process, including play-making. However, when we note that the Greek word from which drama emerged means deed, what is done, in other words, performance, it will immediately occur to us that definitions can be problematic and an ignorable in an intellectual discussion of drama and theatre⁵.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that drama is a dynamic discipline that defies a specific definition. This, notwithstanding, scholars have been able to put forward some (above) seemingly possible definitions. The importance of drama in human society can be viewed from various perspectives. Its social impact on human society is well known. Drama has a great effect on the ethical and cultural interaction of the people.

At present, the role of literary arts in Africa is still that of didactic. It is easy to see that the literary concept of 'art for art sake', whatever may be its joy, will seldom be seen in its glory while the problems facing the continent have still to be grappled with. As for African drama, in spite of certain faults of sentimentality on the one hand and literary obscurity on the other, it is clear, even to the outside observer, that it marks a great leap forward in the evolution of creative writing in the continent. It is clear that drama has already made a great impact than any of the other literary forms.

The Psychological and Emotional Significance of Drama/Theatre in Electioneering Campaign

African governments have long recognized the centrality of drama in fostering indigenous arts and thus bringing together dancers from the country's different tribes. The establishment of National Theatre Troupe and State Arts Councils in many African countries has helped greatly to foster a national rather than tribal consciousness. The sense of pride in the traditions of the people has also been built up in television coverage of local festivals.

In Nigeria, politicians have used dance troupes in political rally and election campaign and the Yoruba 'Agbegijo' masquerades have been used to present satiric songs and skits aimed at political opponents⁶.

Drama and theatre, occupy a central place in mobilizing the electorates for better political awareness. In using drama for electioneering campaign, certain considerations are necessary: firstly, how edifying the information contained in the drama piece is, and how relevant and appropriate the materials in helping to integrate the voters to the political culture of the society.

A drama piece that is intended for electioneering campaign must provide necessary motivation through a proper ordering of material in an exotic and exciting way. The content should be broken into small, assimilable units for easy presentation and digestion by the target voters. A politician can later test the voter's understanding of his manifestoes and programme of action through a practical application of the principles involved. This is very easy to do, since in drama, the electorates use his mind, body and voice. It is therefore possible to test the material in a concrete manner and see what change there has been in the behaviour of the voter as a result of his recent experience.

James asserts that:

A Nigerian play on a Nigeria stage provides the most interesting example of audience participation, which can be found anywhere. This audience participation is best seen in a successful play on the 'cultural conflict' theme. The uproarious laughter, clapping and cheering which often interrupt the play and prolong the time of production are usually a tonic to the players.

The place of drama in electioneering campaign is that, it develops the voter's imagination, opens for him horizon, gives him creative insight and reinforces his sense of value for things of great cultural and political worth. The goal of art in campaign is to project in an imaginative manner the condition of man in the society so that the voters become a very active participant of the political process. It helps them become very useful members of the society.

Drama as an instrument of electioneering campaign helps the voters to expand their political horizon and experience of the real world in order to create a make believe world. For drama to be politically meaningful and satisfying, it must be intensely stimulating and enrich the minds, and feelings of individuals. Drama should be a combination of both motivation and self-discipline and the participants must work with integrity and feeling and thought.

In the drama, decisions must be honoured, consequences faced and responsibilities accepted. Reflection on these, will play an important role in the political process. Since the primary aim of drama in electioneering campaign is to win the confidence of the electorates, materials that will improve the insight and understanding of people are desirable. Voter will ultimately assimilate the truths that reveal genuine political behaviour and its consequences. Again, if drama is to be employed effectively in electioneering campaign, it is important to be cleared about the kinds of conviction that voters are expected to achieve. Politicians must be satisfied that drama will be the most appropriate means of promoting their objectives. Voters will be aware that their drama world is an imaginative

product to which they apply factual knowledge in order to sustain dramatic credibility. Chief among the roles of drama in the political processes, is to reinforce this awareness.

Using drama for electioneering campaign affords the voters the opportunity to escape the more familiar pattern of language interaction which exists in daily life. It offers a new range of possibilities in communicative process.

In the recent time, drama has been employed as a weapon of ideological propagation. Political theatre which began in German through the innovation championed by Edwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Terry Eggleton and August Boal at varying degree, is the most enduring and influential on twentieth century theatre across the world. It is a theatre of social action with a clear purpose of revolutionizing society. It arises from Marxian conception of changing the world through man's awareness of possibilities internal to himself⁶.

A parallel development was championed by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in collaboration with Micere Mugo in their effort to reconstruct the history of Dedan Kimathi, the man who led the mau struggle for independence in the fifties through the sixties in Kenya. Even the post independence writing of Ngugi as reflected in *The Black Hermit* provides a clear perspective in the use of drama and theatre for political mobilization.

In Nigeria, Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Biodun Jeyifo, Bode Sowande and others have proposed a radical alternative of literature and society. The activities of using drama as a weapon of ideological change began to gather momentum around 1976, which stands as landmark year in the development of African drama⁹.

The foregoing discussion underscores the place of drama and theatre as a weapon of political mobilization. Drama brings us to realities, human situation, human problems, feelings and relationships. It serves as a pleasure giving medium in a tensed up situation. It creates room for the kind of enthusiasm people get as they watch play acting. Drama also instructs, it gives man some didactic lessons and precautions thereby, broadening individual's outlook.

Drama helps to develop the mind critically. It awakens man's reasoning faculties, mental reflexes and thus aids quick appraisal of situations and the reaching of rational judgement of events.

The place of arts/drama and theatre in electioneering campaign cannot be over emphasized. In the words of Fayose, drama performance in Africa is replete with themes such as honesty, hard-work, perseverance, the value of friendship, allegiance to one's society, consideration for others and a host of other issues deemed necessary for survival of particular society. Drama thus, appears to be the most dependable and enduring cultural practice ever devised by man. It has consistently remained the most humanist approach to promote the emotional, cultural, and psychological development of people. Drama has always been source of information and it provides pleasure and comfort for the people who know how to use it. In this respect, drama can provide a sustainable medium for political mobilization and electioneering campaign. Critics have argued that political mobilization as the primary impetus for writing belongs more to the world of propaganda than to creative literature, yet drama has been employed in a variety of ways to propagate ideological lineage.

Summary

Africa of the present age is pre-occupied with many problems yearning for immediate solutions. The continent is facing hydra headed challenges on the political, social and economic scenes. In a world where science and technology are seen as the solutions to these problems, little attention is paid to the literary arts and theatre. Drama in particular is often rated very low on the utility scale. Today, many in Africa, look at drama and theatre as mere thing of fun, a joke so to say.

Paradoxically, drama and theatre, if taken seriously, have the potential to serve the purpose of creating enduring political awareness and as catalyst for sustenance of democratic order. Literary drama emerged as a creative work in Nigeria as a result of the activities of the British missionaries who introduced formal school education around 1842. Since then, Nigerian people have continued to derive their literary and aesthetic pleasure as well as functional education and political mobilization from dramatic art. Drama is used in its wide sense to include verbal art musical instrument. The place of drama in electioneering campaign is effectively for democratic dispensation.

References

- 1) Taiwo, Oladele (1998). *Social experience in African literature*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. P. 125.
- 2) Ibrahim, B.G. and Akande, F.F. (2000). *Rudiments of literature in English*. Ilorin: Haytee Press & Publishing Co. p. 37.
- 3) Ibid. P. 37.
- 4) Ibid. p. 38.
- 5) Obafemi, Olu (1999). The fundamental of drama, theatre and performance. In E. Adegbija (ed.). *The English language and literature in English*. Ilorin: Dept. of Modern European Language, Unilorin, p. 283.
- 6) Anthony, Graham White (1970). *West African drama*. Michigan: Standard University Press. P. 154.
- 7) Hensraw James Ene (1967). *Dinner for promotion*. London: University of London Press. P. 9.
- 8) Obafemi, Olu. Op. Cit. P. 40.
- 9) Raji Wumi (1997). Dream seeker and the diving chain: A tribute to Femi Osofisan (An Article in *Ilorin Journal of Language and Literature*. Department of Modern European Languages, University of Ilorin, pp. 17-20.
- 10) P.O. Fayose (1995). *Nigerian children's literature in English*. Ibadan: AENL Edue Publishers.

* *Abdullahi Kadir Ayinde is in the Dept. of English, Kwara State College of Arabic & Islamic Legal Studies, Ilorin.*

