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FOCUS ON LITERATURE AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

John Audu V.

Dept. of English Language, FCE, Pankshin

Abstract

Culture is the bedrock of development. It encompasses the entire spectrum of relationships and activities in any given society. A healthy culture is one of equality, free from all forms exploitation, corruption, and oppression which could be rooted in the true tradition of the people. This paper focuses on the central of literature as an important unifying tool for national development. It tools at the role of a literary artist as an educator, a historian and a critic in the midst of a historic effort to balance society's weakness and strength for a healthier future, a society devoid of scarcity and wants.

Introduction

Literature is not necessarily history but it can be history as it has the ability to preempt an unacceptable historical future by providing a model in fiction to construct the future. Literature relates to history by being a product of history upon which it depends for its various constituents, it uses what it takes from history to reconstruct history according to the visions of literature. Literature can take from the historical processes of the past and the present to construct the future. The artist could start from a dissatisfied present, peeps into the past to see what it was like and make a selection from both to predict the future, shaping its both according to the existing literary.

Importance of the literary artist and literature in national development

Every society has a history which literature captures. History is a double edged sword which has the ability to change society either positively or negatively. For the creative artist revisiting history is always with a view to checking individual or community excesses or to relive those good virtues of society and bring them to bear on a prevailing situation with a view to making amendments. The literary artist weights these happenings, makes judgement and predicts (is possible) the future. The process of an imaginative revisiting of the past helps to bring out the developmental stages of a given society up to its present to judge the present and reshape the

future. By so doing, it does not only expose corrupt and tyrannical leadership tenure but it also vindicates the just. To this end, the creative artist takes keen interest in the politics of his people as he criticizes and wans where necessary. In doing this, he takes sides in confronting the problem of good and evil.

Nigeria's quest for National development is long overdue. National development is the quality of development of institutions that make a country or nation. It is the progress of a nation through the determination of Social, Culture, political and Religious structures which can be compared to the developmental process of other countries. It is the raising of people's intellectual power for the growth of a country. Therefore, for Nigeria to actualize its vision, she must not forget both good and bad reigns in her history and possibly ensure that the lineage of bad rulers are not allowed to rule again.

Literature, studied conscientiously, helps us to understand ourselves as a people and to promote a deeper understanding of where we have been and why we are, who we are because literary arts nourishes and sustain justice and freedom which are necessary ingredients to national development. For this, aesthetic literary creation is gift to the future and to neglect the generation of literary artists and our literature is as good as condemning our country to oblivion.

Our future development depends on our having a better understanding of our literary culture. Reading books, revisiting our historical culture with our authors and trying to determine how we evolved as a people is a necessary and laudable step toward self-discovery and national development. It is important that we organize and mobilize our cultural capital through literature. Nigeria cannot be a society if she rejects those who struggled to make us be what we are today: We cannot forget what all our heroes did to shape our political and social selves. If we do not read our literature today we will not benefit from our writers' wisdom. A school teacher cannot teach social and moral values of which he or does not know how our forefathers resolved moral issues that faced their societies in their generation. That is why Cudjoe (2004) cautions:

We squander our cultural capital if we do not make our cultural heritage a means of entering into some of the substantive concepts of nationhood.. No representative: our lives (Cudjoe, 2004. [http](http://)).

Remi Raji, (2010) in a paper titled "the Roles of Literature in National Development" explains among other functions of literature that it is a way of fostering unity which is a revolutionary force to destabilize the roots of oppression and tyranny.

Ngugi attests to the revolutionary function of literature and asserts that:

Violence in order to change an intolerable unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust oppressive social order is criminal and demoralizing (Nwankwo, 1992:8)

So, for us to memories history and immortalize our people's civilization and the imaginative genius of our people, we have to depend on literature and the respective roles it provides towards national identity and national development. This is because literature restores pride, A sense of belonging and a great deal of nationalism upon which national development subsist.

It is difficult to separate politics from literature and literature from politics because each of literature while literature on the other hand is known to influence the political developments influences the other. This is because political development influences the quality and course of a nation. It is therefore possible that Achebe's *A Man of The People*, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born* are all products of political development in their different countries and at different times. They exhibit the level of disillusionment of the Post-independent era in Africa in different texts. This disillusionment is better summed up by the unnamed "man" in Armah's text thus:

So this was the real gain. The only real gain. This was the thing for which poor men had fought and shouted. This was what it had come to; that is, few black men might be pushed closer to their master; to eat some of the fat into their bellies too. That had been the entire end of it all (Armah, 1981:126).

Nigeria in her quest for development in future years must reflect on the importance of literature and her writers. The lives of Achebe, Amadi, Soyinka, Osofisan, Hagher, Moriyunye, Adichie and a host of others who are moralists and have laudable ideologies that could move Nigeria to greater heights since literature have beneficial functions.

The literary artist is more concerned with themes and issues that concern the collective destiny of a nation. Political development and literature are interwoven when the fate and destiny of a nation or society are threatened. These are times when external influences endanger the future of a nation state and the future becomes bleak. In Nigeria, such forces are not just external. There are internal forces too by way of corruption and self-centeredness, and when the people's cherished cultural, moral and religious values are eroded and the society is in a state of anarchy and lawlessness. Nigeria fits this description and period like a "second skin"

Ngugi captures and sums up the African society and Kenya in particular before the advent of colonialism as that of a serene and peaceful society filled with love for one another. A society in which there were age-grade and community leaders checked individual and community excesses. That was when everybody was his brother's keeper. An agrarian society devoid of exploitation and corruption.

In those days, there were no vultures in the sky waiting for the carcasses of dead workers and no insect-fleas feeding on the fat and blood of unsuspecting toilers (Ngugi, 1977:120).

Then suddenly, these vultures came in the form of colonial masters and the missionaries to disrupt hitherto existing African society and introduce oppression, exploitation, corruption

thuggery and self-seeking individuals as politicians and many other vices which are a complete characteristic of Nigeria today.

The literary artist is and must therefore be a historian and a critic until such an agrarian Society that existed before colonialism is reinstated in which there will be economic emancipation and abundance of all basic social amenities are in place and there is absence of scarcity and want. The contemporary Nigeria artists are at present in that quest as they have now focus attention on the most pressing needs of the people which are socio political affecting Nigeria.

If Nigeria is to achieve her vision of development then, politics and all policies affecting the general mass of the people must be followed to the letter, and played by the rules must be a re-visitation of history by our leaders and all so that we can tap from the rich reserve that literature offers especially at this crucial time when Nigeria needs total re-examination self.

The above argument conforms to Obiechina's assertion that the Nigerian writer should have special allegiance to the downtrodden in the Nigerian society, to the socially handicapped, to the women, the children, the unemployed the sick: all those who are not able to fight their own battles. The writer should put on his armour and charge into battle in defence of the defenceless. It is my view that the writer in Nigeria of today has to take his position against oppression of the people, all forms brutalities and unwanted violence against the masses (Obiechina, 1988:4).

Literature is a powerful tool for national development due to its ability to influence decision makers and people's way of life. That is why there is need to continue publishing user and quality literature which promotes a positive attitude towards development. The essence is to educate future generations on the importance of traditional and cultural values which existed before the advent of colonialism to check society.

In the olden days, with the presence of community organizations, elders and age-group to check societal excesses, there was that collective spirit of accountability by office holders and those who were chosen to serve strived to maintain good family and community name for the glory of the family and the entire community, Those kinds of men seem to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Today, most of our aesthetic cultural values and morality are eroded by the influence of western culture. Most parents, in a bid to make ends, do not have time with their children to tell them stories as was the case in the past. Most of our young people do not know their roots because they are cut off from their traditional society which is a major reserve of traditional culture where morality thrives. When stories were told to children and even adults, the aim was to teach morality and inculcate discipline in the listener.

Today, western technology and culture has overshadowed our culture heritage and has affected the psyche of many Nigerians who are now more stern than the white man in their dealings. Therefore, Nigerian's rebranding process must start with re-branding of the hearts of Nigerians to see pride in themselves and in their dealings as Nigerians. Nigeria must go back and learn how the Africans of old managed their economy and wealth distribution as well as inter-personal

relationships. This can only be done through literature. Only then would Nigeria step foot on the path of development.

A situation where the Nigeria polity is filled up with self-seeking, corrupt and hypocritical politicians who see politics as a stepping board to material aggrandizement and accumulation of wealth for generations yet unborn, development in its proper sense will continue to elude us unless our political leader see themselves as servants and not lords over the mass majority of Nigerians. There will not be any development when the mass majority of Nigerians continue to live in abject poverty without the basic necessities of life which are food, shelter, health care and education that are the basic problems of an average Nigerian today. This problem still remain with Nigeria and many other African nations because

The economic, political and cultural structures of colonialism have more or less remained intact. There had been no dismantling of the colonial state. The result has been the gradual political alienation of ruling elite in these countries and the way they have responded to the political alienation has been repression. They have been making sure that all centres of democratic expression or opposition are crushed. For this is the only way they can maintain themselves in power (Ngugi: 1984, 10).

It is only when these anomalies are corrected that Nigeria and indeed Africa will think of national development.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Culture and development are interwoven and literature is at the centre of educating the human mind for social cohesion and long term national development. Our traditional culture which is embedded in our literature has a vital role to play in Nigeria's quest for socio-political development by in future. This is necessary because literature plays a multidimensional role of bonding the diverse cultural values of the people which are expressed through folklore. The strength of this is that it is transmitted orally through the various genres of literature that exists among the people. The aesthetic qualities of this form serve as store-house of knowledge for future generation.

Despite having over 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria, Nigeria will unite and move forward if the culture heritage of the diverse groups are properly harnessed because unity is a prerequisite for national development. Literature then comes in as it helps to uplift cultural values and pass on historic values of the society to the younger generation. Nigeria must not lose sight of the above in her attempts at achieving national development in future.

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