Purse, Soul and Intellectual Poverty: A Self-Infested Cause in Ben Tomoloju’s ‘Jankariwo’

Itsewah Steve James

Department of Theatre and Media Arts
Federal University Lafia
itsewahjames@yahoo.com
stivoryamb@gmail.com

Nigeria is a nation blessed beyond the borders of lack, yet Nigeria may be described from the planes as an impoverished state. A cross section of the dissection of the problems anchored within reveals that poverty and lack are the sole conditions upon which evident incongruities rest. Poverty of the soul, purse and of the mind or intellectual rationality are the major tripartite wheel upon which the glitches of the nation is foregrounded. This is manifested in the application of followership and leadership traits, the ways and manners that issues and concerns are treated are evidences of capricious leadership. It is believed that when leaders do the needful and are sensitive enough to the provision of basic amenities to the citizenry, Nigeria state would have been one of the world powers. But the insensitivity and venality of our supposed leaders are unforgiveable and unforgettable, which has afflicted and infested on many families’ purse, soul and their intellectual deficiency. Evidences of aforementioned are captured in the play “Jankariwo”. This paper intends to chronicle the manners in which our leaders perpetrate their nefarious, callous, and ferocious acts with impunity, which has brought the country and many Nigerians to their knees via poverty affliction. However, the paper shall harvest the sociological theory and analytical methodology in dilating the level of these leaders’ ungodly act infested on those who voted them into power through Ben Tomoloju’s ‘Jankariwo’, (Cobwebs).

Keywords: Poverty, Cobwebs, Impunity, Afflictions and Insensitivity.

INTRODUCTION

The concept ‘Poverty’ as a word is relative in all ramifications. Depending on the conceptual and contextual usage or application of this word, the constancy of its meaning and relevance rests on certain synonyms adopted to drive this discourse. This word is applied as a tripartite concept in relation to Purse, Soul and Intellectual rationality. ‘Purse’ conveying the statuesque of human capital for immediate need or daily acquisitions, the ‘Soul’ describing spiritual characteristics inherent in human physicality whereas the intellectual rationality basically address the acquisition of knowledge for priori and posteriori applications. This word ‘poverty’ therefore as applied in this discourse is synonymous with scarcity, lack, inadequacy, and the unavailability from the point of view of the three concepts described above.
Today, Nigerian state is described as the giant of Africa. It is neither a rumor nor hearsay that the level of poverty in Nigeria state is alarming, sparing nobody whether class or creed. However, the impunity in the system of Nigeria leaders is so outrageous that, even angels weep for the country that is blessed with abundance in all resources that makes a country great. Nigeria as a country has no major devastating disaster whatsoever, like tsunami, earthquake, civil war etc, but it is believed in so many quarters that the major disaster Nigeria as a nation has is its leadership which has been the bitter pill to swallow. Achebe (91) posits:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is basically nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, or climate or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to responsibility to the challenges of personal example which are hallmark of true leadership.

The insensitivity and carelessness of those entrusted with power in Nigeria is contemptible, unspeakable and barbaric. Power is sweet but a dangerous weapon in the hands of a fool, this is why it is often said that absolute power corrupt absolutely. Leaders come to power only to enrich their pocket, better their lots and gallivant around like demi-gods forgetting their campaign promises to those who fought for their victory at the polls. The garment of corruption fits most of Nigerian leaders like three piece suit or complete baba riga, they are so shameless that theyflounder and regal in murky deal with pride. They kill at random; destroy the future of the coming generation with impunity, lawlessness and disregarding whose butt is gut. Jankariwo as a play, elucidate the actual picture of a tropical Nigeria leader in and out of power, when they are in power, they act as ‘god’ and when they are out of power they sometimes turn banana or fizzle out of circulation like smoke.

Sapon:

But you were once a god,
Anjowon.in the days of politics,
you were a god.
Until the soldiers came and disorder you,
you were a god.
(Anjuwon is quiet)
say one more word,
and I will peel the scab
that covers your sore
Before your very eyes,
Your chimp that walks on two left legs
and dips one in marsh of excrement.
People, he wants to trade words with me.
(23)

The main question in our mind is always, what runs in their (leaders) minds while in power, do they ever think of leaving power one day or they believe it goes on forever?. The ways, attitudes and mannerism of these so call leaders does not show any sign of someone who has conscience or human feelings. Ayem (112) asserts that:

In restless run of locust, Osofisan has provided what he considers to be indices of political failure. It must be noted that although the playwright has shown his anger with the political class, it does not suggest that he hates politics. His main concern is that the actors in the game of politics have erroneously decided to regard politics as dirty game that is meant for participants without conscience and moral consideration.

He reiterates further that
Politics has been mostly a game of musical chairs among the greedy, parasitic elites from both the civilians and military sectors, who are grown increasingly vicious against one another as mere fodders in power grabbing tussle. And I need not tell you how disastrous for the nation all this has been…how this decay of government has led to wrecked economy, characterized by starting ironies such as a rich oil producing country where nothing works, a boastful super elites with extravagant habit of consumption but no productivity…. a huge annual financial budget which produce massive inflation, unemployment, a multiplicity of educational institutions with unpaid teachers and no book and therefore a wretched and wounded populace. A Nation where the streets in towns and countryside are ruled by death, anguish, disaster and disease.

**Poverty in Content and Context**

Wealth is generally interpreted as abundance of goods or money, however, biblical reference to wealth is always within the framework of economic, social, cultural, spiritual and political setting of the people, therefore, terms such as ‘rich’ or ‘poor’ are relative to the context in which they are used in the bible. Poverty in the real or reality of situation in Nigeria as the case maybe is the Insufficiency of social amenities to the populace, such as infrastructures, food and lack of financial muscle to meet daily need of the immediate family, social strata and standard of living. The business dictionary describes poverty as “condition where people’s basic need for food, clothing and shelter are not been met”. However, poverty is contextually based, which depend on the area of perception and perspective, either religion, knowledge acquaintances or personal prowess. The poverty of the soul in this context is spiritually inclined and very deep for those who believe in religion and other supernatural powers or metaphysical impetus. But, nonsensical in the mind and soul of others who neither believe nor accept such superstitious beliefs. When we talk about poverty in all ramifications, we mean or refer to the body, soul and mind which form the being of a man. If the physical body as in the structural frame is not well, it affects the mind and the soul, because the mind will not be straight while the soul will stray. ‘The word poverty paints a picture of hopeless despair. The emphasis of our efforts should always be on preaching the gospel to the poor because the greatest poverty is poverty of the soul. Social programs cannot heal the human heart” (Christian today.com) AlsoYesmin Mogahed in her speech ‘Poverty of the soul: united for change conference’, reiterates: ‘We need to understand that there is external poverty and there is internal poverty. And one is far more dangerous than other, because while one form of poverty determines how we live temporarily, the other form how we live eternally’.

While intellectual poverty is the deficiency/ignorance in basic knowledge of common things around one, that one could not acquire due to some factors beyond ones control or self-infested condition or circumstances, either by ones action or inaction, or by powers that are oppressive in society such as the Nigerian politicians. They (the politicians) are usurpers that have denied many people the opportunities to acquire basic knowledge of things around them by not providing the necessary and basic amenities for learning, instead embezzle the fund; such is the order of the day in the Nigeria system. Kuku (142) asserts:
Everywhere there is greed and graft, cheating and profiteering bothering on cannibalism: paupers transmogrify into millionaires overnight, money, easy-easy naira has deified itself in psyche of almost every Nigerian. The Nigerian level of political, social and cultural awareness is abysmal low, the topical Nigerian been hidebound, parochial and stifled by narrow tribal loyalists.

It is suffix to know that one can be educated and learned but still deficient intellectually, been educated does not really mean intellectuality, one who did not attend any institution of learning could be more informed and intelligent than the educated one. However, this study does not want to deal with that issue for now but the issue of those ones deprived of right to know but were denied such right(s), and left in the pool of knowledge deficiency both in academic and basic knowledge. These are the ones that the politicians either bought or covered their future, conscience and being with bag of rice, small change and empty promises. They are the concern of this study, but not ignoring the fact that many are knowledgeable but deficient intellectually.

Leadership and Followership: Nigeria Factor

Leadership in Nigeria is an issue that has been a great concern to everyone, even the world at large. Since inception, apart from our forebears, like Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikwe, Tafawa Balewa and many others, numerous to mention, who had the love of this country at heart, work selflessly and tirelessly for the growth and survival of it, every other leaders that came after them were notorious vagabonds. Like Fela said they are animal in human skin, barbaric, callous, dubious, nonentities whose conscience are dead and inhumane. They have no human feelings whatsoever; all they care for is their personal aggrandizement and self-glorification, while corruption became the melody of the singer, the wig of the lawyers and the garment of glorification for almost Nigerians.

Economic situation where too many people go after a limited numbers of employment opportunities, where businessmen at making maximum profit without effective performance and where corruption reign supreme disturb most writers. Corruption is not only limited to private sector. The public sector, especially government establishments are run on the wheel of corruption. The materialistic obsession which seems to be part of the psyche of Nigerians has forced Ososfan into suggesting that the people should take the initiative and bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Kuku (144)

The gullibility of the followers, the masses as they are rightly called is outrageous and unspeakable. One cannot do anything free in Nigeria of today without giving or taking bribe even in the hospital at point of death. These so call masses are tools used by the politicians to perpetrate their corrupt act both in private and public establishment, like kuku rightly said, they are the wheel on which corruption runs. The psyche of almost all facet of Nigeria organization is corrupt and decay. Hammed (103) posits that “this exemplified in security challenges, absence of maintenance of culture, inefficiency in public service, obsession for power, nepotism, and sectional interest, mismanagement of fund, eye service and bootlicking”.
Dilating Self-Infested Poverty in Jankariwo

It is a basic fact that most of Nigeria’s impoverishments are self-infested, own to the fact that we lack leadership, vision and purposefulness in all our endeavors. For instance, someone entrusted with leadership position and in charge of funds meant for drugs in the hospital, building and maintenance of roads, and construction of classrooms for schools but embezzled such money, and people died in such hospital due to lack of drugs and accident on the road due to bad road, while many could not access school due to non-availability of classrooms and material for learning. Ben Tomoloju portrayed such personalities in his play which is embedded in Anjunwo the councilor, the bank manager and Babulukudi in connivance of reaping the general populace of their entitlement with impunity and disregard for their wellbeing.

Councilor:

Hello, Alhaji, good morning. You’ve kept me waiting. Why?...but this business is so urgent. The import license is ready. The construction engineers have almost completed their work. We desperately need to find money to buy the machinery and also secure the confidence of our foreign partners…the money for the farmers’ loan will certainly not be enough. I see. I’m happy you know that.... The bank manager is there with you?... come again, please… he said the money for the teacher’s salaries is ready…. Already lodged in his bank?...then why are the delay? Let’s do something with it urgently… I’m sure the teachers will not starve to death.. yes right away. I will be expecting both of you. (35)

Remilekun:

Tell your principal that we will send our contributions. In fact, I have thought of donating a computerized siren to your school. When next I go to America, or Japan. I will get one. A computerized siren would be better alternative to the bell-ringing during your of- lesson. When next I go to Moscow… (27)

These two lines or dialogues are at different times but depict the callousness and animalistic attributes of a topical Nigeria politician and his wife in their foolery and insensitivity to the yearning of the man, woman and children who entrusted in them the power to be who they are. Therefore, the questions in minds are who is to blame for the insincerity and insensitivity of such leader(s) that are self-centered, greedy and heartless? Has he not infested poverty on the populace by denying them of their salaries as we witness in many states in Nigeria of today? Has he not denied many the rights to knowledge, health care and life? Has he not killed many even while living? The cannibalism and nefarious act of our leaders is satirically caricatured in ‘Jankariwo’ by ben Tomoloju. ‘Jankariwo’ (cobwebs or spider webs) is like two edged sword that pears through the outrageous behavior of the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, the shameless and disgraceful act of the leaders with impunity in our society, the carelessness, insensitivity to the yearning of the masses whose back they rode to the position and the abuse of power while in office. Ben Tomoloju built in Anjuwon and Remilekun his wife’s character the topical Nigerian politician, their trait, mannerism and nuances. However, the character of Sapon
as the voice of masses was well articulated as he narrated the ordeal of the politician, their misguided utterances, and disrespect for elders, extravagancy, flamboyant life style, excess overseas travelling and neglect of the home front. All these are the thematic pre-occupation addressed by this play. As its name implies, ‘Jankariwo’ (cobweb); it is a web that connects and conjures all atrocities of individuals in a given society. He avoided the pitfall of dramatist that merely flaunt the supernatural and traditional (antiquities) as a metaphor in content and style to dramatize unfolding events in our social reality. Employing true to life characters and everyday English, the playwright captures the politicking and self-infested injuries by us to us and for us. All life characters were represented in the play which gives a wide range of understanding of a topical Nigerian society of decay and immorality in the highest places. However, he projected a society that has lost its moral, spiritual direction and purposefulness; he presented the characters as unwholesome, ludicrous and repulsive so as to describe the general atmosphere of defeat and despair.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, there is no doubt that most of us are the enemy we seek elsewhere; we kill ourselves by infesting poverty on one another through our greed, obsession for wealth, corruption and what have you. But we blame the government of the day for every mis-deed in the society where we live. For instance, when the market woman get wind of increment in civil servant’s salaries, she automatically increase her wares, the bus driver increase transport fare immediately there is fuel scarcity but when the scarcity is over the transport fare remain and sometimes when there is rainfall, it is another chance to take advantage of the commuters by hiking the fare. They are numerous to mention, it happen in all facet of our lives, particularly in Nigeria, we take advantage of ourselves in any slightest opportunity regardless who is involved, family, friends, co-worker, boss, apprentice, even in the church and mosque.

It is therefore, as matter of urgency for the government of the day to quickly put in place measures to curb the menace of these unscrupulous nonentities before destroy the very existence of our being. Firstly, by making the elective posts less attractive, reduce the grandeur attached to each office in the service, get rid of godfatherism, money politics and hooliganism. Access declaration when and after the occupying an office, life imprisonment for any corrupt public officer and seizure of all properties acquired while in office that is not commensurate to his salaries as when in the office. However, kudos and encomium should be showered on any officer(s) found diligent and trustworthy when and after service to encourage many others’ aspiration.

WORKS CITED


