

## Exploring the Unique Role of Dramatic Literature as Catalyst for National Integration and Peace: Lessons from Ahmed Yarima's *Pari*


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### Abstract

*The high level of anxiety occasioned by prevailing realities in the society is so alarming, as it affects almost every aspect of life. Nigeria being a multi-cultural nation with too many ethnic diversities and interest, often experience recurring social-political issues, agitations and other conflict situations. Hence, the unity, development and peace of our nation have come under serious threat as a result of prevailing anxiety. The paper, which highlights the challenges of conflict situations and the need for peaceful resolutions, using Ahmed Yarima's *Pari* as paradigm, x-rays the importance of dramatic literature in conscientising the society towards national integration and stability. It submits that dramatic literature should be encouraged as a vital means of transmitting important information and awareness objectives. It concludes that dramatic literature will go a long way in reshaping and re-engineering society towards lasting peace and unity; and recommends that more dramatic play texts exposing the dangers and effects of violence, and re-educating the populace, especially youths on terrorism eradication be encouraged and made available in educational environments and the society at large in driving desirable attitudinal change.*

**Keywords:** Attitudinal change, conscientisation, dramatic literature, national integration, peace.

### Introduction

Dramatic Literature, efficiently designed, as a means of communication can influence human thought and mind positively. Although a naive mind may question the importance of dramatic literature to national integration and peace; however, the contribution of dramatists to national

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integration and socio-political related issues cannot be overemphasized, as they invariably create within the distinctive contexts of their social milieus. Dramatic literature has been channeled as agents of change and social mobilisers. Hence, it may not be far-fetched to assert that without them, society will be a hot bed for human survival considering prevailing concerns of corruption, bad governance, poor leadership qualities, disrespect for rule of law and socio-political conflict situations in most societies now. Akaenyi and Chukwu-Okoronkwo [2024] in reinforcing the foregoing, assert that “the pervasive nature of corrupt activities and ineffective political leadership in Nigeria have led to lack of trust in government institutions”; a development which they stress, “fosters discontentment and forces the people to adopt extremist ideologies as an alternative political order” (p.62). As Atanda [2016] rightly opines, writers, including dramatists, have espoused through their works the awakening need to engage socio-political situations in their immediate societies (p.173). Little wonder why Igboekwe, Ngerem and Chukwu-Okoronkwo [2022] have tried to generally assess the importance of literature as a vital instrument for early childhood education in Nigeria. There is, therefore, the need for new generation literary dramatists to tackle unnecessary socio-political, ethnic or religious inspired conflicts through quality awareness, communication and information that can recreate positive changes of attitudes.

Dramatic literature has always been directed at character development and training; and aimed at the conscientization of individuals to embrace peace, patriotism, unity and truthfulness in all ramifications. Thus, it is needful for the society to embrace these qualities since the rank and file of Nigerian citizens seem to have jettisoned these values and moral qualities today. Hence, agitations, tribalism, corruption and various conflict situations and disorderliness have become the order of the day. Apparently, many people in society today have lost touch of tolerance and genuine forgiveness. It is obvious that many political and religious leaders, even ethnic groups in Nigeria cannot tolerate others outside their group. Such intolerance is what drama condemns; as such intolerance often breeds hatred, tension and violent agitations in society. Therefore, the development of peace, tolerance, forgiveness, and unity, which will support the sense of accountability, integrity, and selflessness in society, requires the necessary knowledge and ethical reorientation that dramatic literature provides. Dramatic literature has undoubtedly been used to document problems, creatively explore facts, and suggest a path toward enduring peace. Hence, the dramatist’s ability to create awareness is an important key for positive change and re-direction in each environment.

Dramatic literature serves as a reflection of human values, offering insights into right and wrong, and shaping attitudes. It plays a significant role in human experience, addressing various aspects of life and highlighting the consequences of chaotic situations like war, terrorism, and violence; it boosts positive change awareness on the youth, since they are more vulnerable to such acts of violence and unprovoked destruction of lives and properties. Dramatic works serve as a mirror through which society taps from in resolving conflicts and like situations. The dramatist aims to make characters in his play realistic and visible as to reflect real life experiences, so that the reader/audience will feel and understand the conveyed message/information well enough, to therefore evaluate the attitudes the characters express or portray. This process helps the reader/audience to think and reflect towards his own society and ensure the safety of his environment; because of the level of awareness gained from such dramatic work.

In fighting prevailing challenges of terrorism, conflict situations and violence in society, it is only pertinent to state that dramatic literature in all ramifications has an all important role to play in aiding the moral awareness and development of the people and consequently engage the gear towards peaceful resolution of conflict issues for general peace and development. However, it is unfortunate to note that the moral awareness and standing of many Nigerians is very low; hence, dramatic relevant materials are required to elevate the values, norms, moral standard and general attitude of the society. This is because of their relevance in providing effective and comprehensive interpretation of fundamental facts and the events that are pertinent to them. Beyond its critical relevance, dramatic literature certainly has an influence on how men order their socio-political, ethnic, economic, cultural and moral attitude. It is what is required expediently for impactful conscientization and restructuring in all ramifications. Thus, the major preoccupation of dramatic literature as reflected from ancient, past and in modern era, points to creating impactful communication and awareness in society and to foster effective alignment to peaceful conflict resolution that can drive social stability, unity and national integration among people living in the same environment or geographical location. As Achebe [1983] opines, “An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa, will end up being completely irrelevant like the absurd man in proverbs who leaves his house burning to pursue rat fleeing from the flames” (54). Hence, Chukwu-Okoronkwo [2011a, b, c] reinforces that art and drama by extension remains an effective means of representing socio-cultural and political realities.

Dramatic literature aims to generally inform and redirect the conscience of society, since it inspires the mind and motivates retransformation in every aspect of human existence in fostering peaceful co-existence, unity and national integration in all aspects. Drama is expected to push more towards projecting national interest, tolerance, peaceful resolutions and integration in the nation. It should refocus and redirect the interest and attention to intense situations that would build ethnic and tribal oneness, acceptance, togetherness and harmony. This is what Ahmed Yarima's [2016] *Pari* stands for as it recreates real life experiences in order to aid the society reflect on it positively and emulate ways of peace and social stability in society.

### **Dramatic Literature as Tool for Achieving National Integration and Peace**

National integration emphasizes a sense of unity and shared identity among citizens, transcending individual differences and fostering a collective sense of belonging to one's nation. Nation building and integration are a highly composite goal to achieve with many associated preconditions to its success. The basis is the gradual achievement of creating a joint society out of dissimilar, isolated and even antagonistic groups. It is not an easy task to make people from different regions, ethnic groups, tribes and religious backgrounds work together in unity. According to Omoregbe [2004], "the progress and security of any nation depends upon national unity and emotional integration" (p.124). This reinforces the need for dramatic literature texts to address and educate the society towards acquiring social efficiency, emulating nationalism and patriotism through practical relevance of drama. Drama should create a lively realization among the people of society, that they are all members of one world.

Dramatic literature as an instrument of communication is the avenue through which information is communicated to the public. The messages sent across through dramatic literature are so influential that they in turn influence the thought process of the receiver. Drama plays a vital role in promoting national unity, integration, and development. Hence, effective governance and responsible leadership require a strong medium like drama to educate, mobilize, and sensitize both the public and leaders. According to Sogolo [2019], "in a diverse society such as Nigerian, we need an information order built in Cordial relationship and understanding between the state and communication medium, between the leadership and followership, between the elite and the people at the grassroots level" (p.19).

In all, dramatic literature as an effective tool has a vital role to play in societal awareness and development and also in peaceful co-existence of the society and should aid in the preservation,

propagation and sustenance of cultural values, harmony and heritage in any given environment. National integration through dramatic literature is a unique strategy to social, economic and political development and stability, especially in post-conflict situations. The need, therefore, for drama to create a new ideology of oneness which will foster common goals, focus on peace and aspirations from otherwise homogenous, scattered, primordial tribal communities, encapsulates its importance as the hub of national integration; thus reinforcing the essence of imbibing some form of ideology through which a justification of the national integration concept is realized and sustained. Drama should be used to re-educate the Nigerian society to discontinue to see themselves primarily as members of specific tribes – Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Fulani, Ijaw, etc. – or religious assemblages – Christian, Muslim or African traditional religion, etc. This shows that with such negative notion, achieving a peaceful, stable and unified nation will hardly be realistic. Thus, the duty of drama here is to create a unifying ideology of oneness, to overcome all tribal, ethnic, religious and regional isolation, agitations and self-interest. This statement points to the fact that at this present time in Nigeria history, there is a great need for more improvement in dramatic literature for its importance, objective and quality to be fully realized in the society. Dramatists should be encouraged at all costs by society and not to be neglected. The efficacy of dramatic materials in inculcating right moral values on individuals and the society at large cannot be overemphasized. Thus, drama is the root of human experiences, such that it teaches and reshapes individual characters through expressive ideal morals, ethics and values.

One of the major objectives of dramatic literature in Nigeria should be to checkmate moral decadence in society by emphasizing on national unity, integration and moral values which are considered as ethical essentials. Drama as an effective tool should identify these norms, moral values and ethics that foster peace, harmony and oneness and promote them accordingly. Drama should serve as a vehicle for the advancement of the core values of respect, fair play, tolerance, peace, sexual morality, strong families, and brotherly love. The government should be more committed to backing up initiatives that foster the importance of dramatic literature as an important and effective tool for realizing national goals and aspirations. Massive support from the government would certainly improve the dramatists' motivation and morale in charting a path towards national integration. European nations realized the importance of literature even before the Second World War and began to use it appropriately.

Drama inculcates in the people those peace-enhancing attitudes that are often learnt outside the school setting: at home, churches and mosques. It stipulates ways of life that reflect and inspire

good human values. Gaining more knowledge through drama is vital to the society since “knowledge is power”. This gives the opportunity for the people to be tolerant, listen carefully and respectfully, show sensitivity to each other’s feelings and exhibit patience and be friendly. It enforces the people to use non-violent approaches in dealing with issues.

### **Synopsis of Pari**

The play opens with Pari’s mother who is evidently consumed by grief over her daughter's kidnapping. She desperately seeks her daughter's safe return, even considering abandoning her Christian faith for Islam, hoping to appeal to the kidnappers' beliefs and find solace. Pari apparently centers on Hyelapari (Pari), a Chibok school girl kidnapped by Boko Haram, who escapes with the help of her captor-husband, Ibrahim, who also escapes with her for the safety of his own life. Pari's sudden return home, facilitated by the government, brings a mix of relief and disappointment. She is physically and emotionally scared, and her surprising early motherhood starkly contrasts with her parents' long-held aspirations for her future. To make matters worse and strange, Pari’s “husband”, Ibrahim, suddenly shows up. Pari, traumatized and changed, feels an unbreakable bond with her estranged husband and child; and despite her family's pleas, she chooses to reunite with them, leaving her parents feeling helpless and bewildered.

Evidently, *Pari*, is an emotional and heart touching dramatic work, literarily representing the common day to day life of individuals on the script, showing the pains and untold trauma of conflict related situations for us to really reflect on. It highlights the traumatic experiences of the Chibok girls' families, anxiously waiting for their loved ones, while the girls themselves endured extreme physical and emotional abuse, including rape and degradation. The Chibok girls' experiences of forced marriage, brutality, and forced religious conversion have left lasting scars, changing them forever. Ahmed Yarima's play, *Pari*, no doubt sheds light on the trauma and devastation caused by conflict and instability, prompting reflection and calls for social change.

### **Lessons from the Play Pari**

The play *Pari* reflects on Nigeria's experience with terrorism, specifically the Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping by Boko Haram, where over 250 girls were taken from their school in Borno State and remain mostly unaccounted for, with uncertainty about their fate. Sanni Oluyemisi [2015], stresses that:

In northern Nigeria, boko haram terrorist activities have resulted in the deaths of numerous individuals, the destruction of communities and displacement of families, and the closure of schools and abduction of teenage girls as part of their fight against Western education. (p.51)

Yerima's goal is to effectively convey the play's message, prompting reflection on moral choices and their consequences, while evoking the intended emotions and sparking critical thinking. The play aimed at the conscientization of individuals to emulate peace, unity, patriotic and truthfulness and avoiding violence. The play, *Pari*, highlights the devastating impact of religious and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, shedding light on Boko Haram's violent attacks on lives, properties, and places of worship, and the immense suffering inflicted on victims and their families. In the play, as part of efforts in craving the return of kidnapped *Pari* and her school mates, prayer sessions are held in her parent's house. However, on this occasion, the family prayer could not hold at the sudden news of another bomb blast at another location where a clergy man and others were killed, as established here:

HANNA: Then you have not heard the news.

AMA: Heard what?

LUKE: The dreaded boys attacked, burnt and killed thousands of our church members in Mubi and Uba. They burnt down the church ... killed the Pastors.

AMA: Jesus!

TADA: Mubi! Wayo Allah! How about my little cousin? He was just posted to Uba as Junior Reverend.

LUKE: You speak of Reverend John?

AMA: Yes.... And my Sister, Vero, his wife. I hope they are well?

LUKE: Sister Vero escaped. She was home having just lost her pregnancy ... but Reverend John gave up the ghost while gallantly fighting for Christ. (p.19)

The above dialogues highlight the audacity of Boko Haram's insurgency in Nigeria, underscoring the need for dramatic works like *Pari* to raise awareness and critique the authorities' failure to protect citizens and stop terrorist activities, particularly in the North. This is what Yerima is trying to expose and correct in society; so that through awareness the people can be conscientized and the issues of conflict resolved amicably. This constant issue of conflict recurrence means proper measures to resolve the problem have not been addressed or met. Yerima [2015] suggests that theatre feeds on the culture of the society; as it affords



playwrights the opportunity to observe and put down their observation in plays which must give meanings, understanding and form to the subconscious thought of the society.

Therefore, dramatic literature should be used to divert the attention of the people and contending tribes and communities from violence and destruction; and instead, educate them on tolerance, oneness, peace and re-integration. This will make people think meaningfully and be psychologically prepared for a decent existence within a non-violent environment. This will aid in stopping negative attitudes and solve the problem of violence and the restoration of peace and harmony in every part of the nation. It suffices therefore to say that the consequences of conflict and terrorism have severely impacted Nigeria's economic growth, investment, and tourism. Repeated exposure to violence and trauma from seeing lifeless and mutilated bodies, especially of loved ones, has also taken a toll on people's mental and emotional well-being. Pari's experience evidently exemplifies the consequences of conflict and terrorism.

PARI: Two years. For two years, I lived my life with him ... dodging bullets and bombs. He taught me how to clean his AK 47 gun, how to cry and how to muffle tears and pain with honour. He even showed me the dark shade of death and the clownish face of life. We would run barefooted for miles, sometimes we even played foolish roles of Prince and Princess scuffling food that was liberated from the attack front. Most times, in between movements from one camp to another, we scrounged the bins for food or begged forcefully from people too scared to die. And in moments such as that, our heartbeat measured the distance between our miserable live and quick unmourned death ... (p.68)

Nigeria's insecurity situation has become increasingly complex, with far-reaching consequences that go beyond direct costs. The emotional toll on victims' loved ones, survivors, and communities has unarguably hindered development and economic growth. These violent activities do not only hinder Nigeria's economic and technological progress, leading to dependence, but also lead to loss of human resources, and widespread discontent; and unless squarely addressed, the nation will likely remain unstable and underdeveloped. Therefore, dramatic literature has a lot to do towards re-engineering the mind of people. Nigerians should embrace a good reading culture that will aid in educating and re-shaping the society more on diversity of religion, tribes, culture and other major barriers to national integration in our nation. For the dramatist to create an atmosphere that will reveal, educate and conscientize society, it most point towards proper awareness means and strategies through entertainment. In many countries of the world, dramatic literature has been used to engage the interest of large numbers of people with the aims of achieving community control, character restrictions and conflict resolution. Drama is involved and concerned with social change, peaceful co-existence and harmony; thus, should be seen as a vital tool for correctiveness in every society. This shows



that drama functions as social advocate, cultural integrator and most vital or significantly as unbiased moral censor. It is important to note that exposing children to dramatic literature and activities early in life at home and in school will enable them to imbibe moral values and make proper choices.

## **Conclusion**

Dramatic literature, apart from being a major source of communication and awareness tool, has the power and ability to conscientize the human mind towards positive change. It is only obvious that drama can provide society with effective motivation and confidence to eradicate conflict, especially as it relates to ethnic, religious or political indifferences. This will accordingly foster national integration, togetherness and understanding among one another. The work, therefore, offers insights into achieving peace through dialogue, rather than violence, and highlights the power of dramatic literature to inspire positive change and promote social stability in society.

## **Recommendations**

Having carefully highlighted the unique role which dramatic literature can play as catalyst for national integration and peace, anchoring on lessons from Ahmed Yarima's *Pari*, the following recommendations are hereby advanced:

1. Dramatic works should be given more attention to in the society. This is reinforced by the fact that drama aids in the general development of the mental, physical and other aspects of human life, all of which facilitate the attainment of good behavioural change and positive lifestyle.
2. Effective development programs should be instituted for dramatists in order to enhance their creativity, growth, focus and roles as agents of national integration and peace.
3. More quality plays that have peace and conflict resolution strategies be written for the Nigerian society; as they will aid to impact on the effectiveness of drama as an instrument of conscientization, sensitization and mobilization for effective and healthier stability and sustainability of our environments.

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