

Tiv Satire As A Tool For Social Control: A Study Of Faga Adinge’s Song, “Chata-Man”

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ABSTRACT: *Satirical poetry constitutes one of the several oral poetic art forms that are performed in Tiv land. It consists of derisive songs that are used to ridicule, caricature or lampoon perpetrators of evil in Tiv communities. In this paper, Faga Adinge’s song, Chata-Man has been critically examined in order to show how Tiv oral satire serves as a useful tool for social control. The paper equally highlights the appropriate and effective use of literary and poetic devices by the artist to ensure that his message makes the desired impact on the audience. The paper concludes that Tiv satirical songs are indeed, used to enhance cohesion, unity, brotherliness and above all to facilitate the development of their communities.*

Keywords: *Satire, Social Control, Oral Poetry*

I. INTRODUCTION

Webster’s Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus defines satire as “ a literary work in which folly or evil in people’s behaviour are held up for ridicule”(417), while the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines it as “ a way of criticizing a person, an idea or an institution in which you use humour to show their faults or weaknesses”. Satire ridicules or criticizes with a view to bringing about a positive change. In order to ridicule, the satirist uses exaggeration and falsification to persuade the audience to momentarily experience his ‘truth’.

According to Charles Sanders, satire is the impulse to give form to divergent opinion, denunciation and irreverent mockery. He further states:

The target of that impulse may be practically, anything from a person or community, a convention or idea, to an institution- whatever, because it is actually inconsistent with what is generally thought or claims to be, Provoke anger, contempt, disgust, or amusement(1).

The satirist’s territory is between illusion and reality, therefore he presents us with a world that is double in nature. “ His purpose is to hold up to scorn a person, idea or institution; the object is generally familiar and contemporary taken for granted, perhaps ignored(Sanders 5).

II. TIV ORAL SATIRE

The Tiv are the most populous ethnic group in Benue State, Nigeria. The name Tiv is also regarded as the name of a real person who is believed to be the real father of all Tiv. Some similarities in Tiv language and the Bantu language also give credence to the belief that the Tiv might have originated from East Africa.

Satirical poetry is one of the several oral poetic forms that the Tiv use for entertainment social control and education to enhance development in their communities. Just as the Tiv celebrate genuine successes of their children, they are equally quick to indict, criticize and condemn those involved in vices. Satirical songs are therefore used to castigate, ridicule and make mockery of perpetrators of evil in the land. Also, emphasizing the edifying function of satire, Nwoga argues that rural communities employ satire in particularly effective ways to check the conduct of their members because of the face-to-face nature of social interactions that are typically conducted in such places. He observes that the close-knit environments in which they live ensures that everyone knows everyone else, and no one wants to be the object of gossip or ridicule among his or her neighbours.

Homogeneous, kindred societies depended on the sense of full human dignity being shared by all the members. To find oneself regarded as in any way below the standard, to become the object of ridicule, or of children pointing fingers at one and sniggering, was punishment of a great dimension. Satire was the verbal equivalent of actions like tying a stolen object around the neck of the thief and parading him through the village (Nwoga 162).

This measure is intended to help in sustaining a disciplined, upright, stable and peaceful society.

III. BRIEF PROFILE OF THE ARTIST

Faga Adinge was born in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. He started singing quite early in his life and used the income to complement the meagre income of his poor parents who were subsistence farmers and could not afford sending him to school. He was never the less, a highly talented and prolific singer who performed praise, political and satirical songs. Faga believed in using his songs as a tool for social and political reformation in the society. He lived his life travelling from place to place to practice his art until his eventual death in December, 2008.

IV. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

This paper is premised on the Sociological Approach to the study of African oral literature. The approach seeks to know what role literature plays in the society and whether it reflects the current culture and social order with more or less directness. It also looks at the aesthetic value of oral literary forms.

The song under study was sourced from one of the several audio-cassettes of the singer's works that were produced before his death. The song was then transcribed and translated for the purpose of this analysis.

V. LITERARY ANALYSIS OF "CHATA-MAN"

The Tiv value system encourages mutual fidelity in marriage. Both the man and the woman are expected to be faithful to each other. Extra-marital affairs are condemned, therefore a wayward woman or a promiscuous man often have songs composed to ridicule them. This is supposed to deter others from indulging in this ignoble act.

The song, Chata-man (charter man) was thus composed and performed by Faga Adinge in order to ridicule a certain charter man that took over the poet's wife, Rahel Agbe. In this paper, a thematic and stylistic analysis of the song has been undertaken with a view to pointing out its social function and also highlighting its literary quality. The first stanza of this song is an introduction of the subject matter. The singer informs his friend, Ute Ikyombo that his wife has eloped with another man. He sings:

Tiv

Ute Ikyombo
Alu we a zua amo
We pine tar
Yô pinen wan Iorzua tseghee
Kua wan Ayua Abah,
Wan Akeeke u Agbe
De pinen ga.
Ngula mough her amo,
Man a erem wan ifer;
Ifer la ka i hungur mo ga.
Wan Agbe kuram akôr
Tee ka sha Jato-Aka
Sen tee shin Adikpo
Shi ngu yan ve a mbakusa
U tuhwan mo---

English

Ute Ikyombo
Whenever you meet me,
And you are asking about life,
Ask about daughter of Iorzua only.
And daughter of Ayua Abah;
As for the daughter of Akeeke Agbe
Don't ask me.
That one has left me
And has offended me badly,
That offence, I cannot forget.
Daughter of Agbe packed my yam seedlings
Sold at Jato-Aka
And sold in Adikpo
And is spending the proceeds
With young men and insulting me

The singer is badly hurt by his wife's misbehaviour as he discovers that she is selling his 'yam seedlings' around. The yam seedlings here are a metaphor for the poet's wife's body which she is selling at Jato-Aka and Adikpo. She is therefore a prostitute. He therefore promises never to forget or forgive her. He says:

Tiv

Sha kwagh la, ka ma yav
Mnyam me kôrôn mo ga,
Ahii-i! me er nena?
Ayuu-u, me er nena?

English

For this reason,
Even when I go to bed, sleep eludes me,
Ahii-i! what shall I do?
Ayuu-uu! What shall I do?

The Tiv poetic device used in the last two lines above is onomatopoeia. It has been used simply to express the singers intense moment of despair. The songster's confused state of mind makes him to end this stanza with a rhetorical question as he wonders what action to take next.

Another poetic device which the singer has used copiously in this song is repetition. Apart from using this device to prolong the performance, he also uses it to emphasize certain portions of the song. This therefore makes the song to have a more lasting effect on the listeners. For instance, the first stanza is repeated twice, the rhetorical question at the end of the stanza is also repeated twice. Line eleven is again repeated in line three of the second stanza as shown below:

Tiv	English
Wan Agbe kuram akôr	Daughter of Agbe packed my yam seedlings
---	---
Wan Agbe kuram akôr tee tsô,	Daughter of Agbe sold my yam seedlings,
---	---

The songster alleges further that, apart from stealing his yam seedlings, she also packed all his household items as stated below:

Tiv	English
Ikyav mbi ke iyough	Even household items too
Kpa, wan Agbe kombol cica.	Daughter of Agbe cleared all.

Attempts by the songster to recover the bride price which he paid on her often met a brick wall, as he tells us that his in-laws are not willing to co-operate.

Tiv	English
Nyaregh ki sha ana,	Even her bride price,
Kpa ke ma pine	When I ask for it
Ter na, ka a gbidyem.	Her father beats me up.

This implies that the songster's in-laws are probably in support of their daughter's action. The singer therefore does not spare them, as he lashes at his estranged wife and her lover. The singer finds this attitude of the in-laws disturbing because good parents should be the first to condemn their daughters who desert their husbands.

The songster goes on with his satire of this demeaning act in the second part of stanza two. He employs the use of the device called climax as he reveals the identity of Chata-man, without necessarily mentioning his name. He sings:

Tiv	English
Wan or geen la	There is a certain man
Ngu sha Jato-Aka,	He lives in Jato-Aka,
Or ka a nenge amo yô,	Whenever he sees me
Wan or a gba molon iyol	He starts to brag
Kaan er, wen hembra kwaor	Saying he is more handsome

His wife's lover is usually proud that he has snatched someone else's wife due to his handsomeness. In Tiv culture, such a man should be despised publicly and ridiculed for this debasing act. The singer reminds him that he has no reason to boast about because the woman in question is worthless.

Tiv	English
De mongol hi we u hembra ga,	Stop bragging about
Daan kwagh shon	That worthless thing;
A wa iyol dedoo	Her body structure is good
Kpa ishima i kuma ga,	But she lacks good manners,
Ishima ngi ga	She is quite empty
Bee gbande avaän.	Like an empty arrow sheath.

Beauty is supposed to be both within and without, therefore the singer invariably advises men not to look for only the physical beauty. They must ensure that the women they choose to marry are equally well-behaved, to avoid having the bitter experiences he has had. In the last line of the above quotation, the singer uses simile as he likens his estranged wife to an empty arrow sheath. An arrow sheath usually has a hollow that is filled up with arrows. When there are no arrows in the sheath therefore, it is empty just like his estranged wife that has no good manners and is thus empty.

The songster believes that the degree of rot or decay in his estranged wife is such that, only an equally rotten man can tolerate her. He puts it:

Tiv	English
Wan or la je kpa	Even that man
Ngu a shima,	Has a big heart
Ga ve zua a zua.	Else, they are a good match.

The third stanza of this song opens with a beautiful proverb as the singer further expresses his disappointment with his wife's recent action. He sings:

Tiv	English
Mhende ihyande wam mbee,	I have safe-guarded my farmland
Gba nanden toho tsô	So, you can set the bushes on fire,
Ahor Zege,	Ahor Zege,
Chief Commissioner	Chief Commissioner,
Nande kera;	Burn them out;
We asooga yô nande ihia,	You can burn the bushes
Zan-zan i kôr sha Gatu,	All the way to Gatu hill,
Ikôr sha Akôvul shaala.	And even extend to Akôvul river.

The above excerpt has to be understood at the metaphorical level. The singer tells 'Chata-man', his object of ridicule that he has already used the most succulent part of his wife and even had children by her. He is therefore no more interested in the chaff. The 'bushes' that he says should be burnt here are a metaphor for his estranged wife. The singer has no objection to anyone taking her away because she is more or less no more exciting to him. He concludes this stanza with the theme of betrayal, as he tells his mother that there is no true love in the present world. Those who claim to love you are indeed enemies, therefore one should be wary of friends. With the experience the singer has had with his wife, he concludes as we see below:

Tiv	English
Ngôm, wan Agema	My mother, daughter of Agema
Mama tar u higen ne	Mother, this present world,
Ka wea soo or,	When you love somebody,
Or la nan gberugh gatee	He strikes you with an axe
Sha ityo je,	On the head,
Wan Agema ngôm	Daughter of Agema, my mother
Ihembe u ityough.	And breaks your head.

In stanza four the singer further pursues this issue of distrust and betrayal, common in Tiv land. His emphasis on this theme is understandable because this canker worm has stunted the growth and development of the Tiv society for several decades. It therefore needs to be eliminated, if meaningful development must be achieved in the land. The songster therefore, in line six of this stanza metaphorically says, such people who betray the trust of their fellow Tiv brothers are wolves. He states:

Tiv	English
Ior mba genegh	Some other people
Mba a shima i gbaseela;	Have a wolf's heart;
Ka ve soon a or	They make friends with you
Nana na jime, ve nyima.	But bite you from behind.

Just as wolves are usually out to kill and destroy, such people try to pull down what others have built in their communities. Chata-man and the poet had actually been friends before the former snatched his wife. The Tiv society believes that no matter the achievements of a woman, she does not deserve respect if she is not married. Similarly, parents who encourage their daughters to remain single, or the married ones to desert their husbands for pecuniary rewards are often objects of ridicule or satire. It is also believed that most often than not, a woman with bad character comes from a bad home with bad parents. This is one of the issues which the singer explores in stanza five. The songster alleges here that the bad character of his estranged wife does not surprise him because her father, Akeeke Agbe is equally a very irresponsible man. She is therefore just a replica of her father. He puts it below:

Tiv

Terem Wende Kaaungwa-ooo!
Gema alu wea zenden toho
Wea nenge kwagh
Alu ke toho
Kwagh a nger yô,
Ka ter u kwagh a nger
Ve wan kwagh kpa a nger.
Wan Agbe bee ter na gande,
Akeeke wa iyongo
Ka ve shi zenden ajir
Sha Jato-Aka,
Ka inja ve ooo.

English

My father, Wende Kaaungwa,
When you go out for game hunting;
If you see a creature
In the deep forest,
And the creature has stripes on its body,
Its father too has those stripes
That's why, it also has the stripes.
Daughter of Agbe resembles her Father;
Akeeke is very troublesome,
They are always going to court
At Jato-Aka,
It's their nature ooo.

Proverbs are a very important device that is common in African discourse. Hardly does an adult speak in Tiv land, and indeed in Africa without using one proverb or the other. They are words of wisdom and also a sign of adulthood for the user. Moreover, Tiv elders feel that certain issues or discussions by are too important and serious to be discussed in simple or plain language. Proverbs are also used by adults to limit the understanding of some important issues to the intended audience. The singer therefore, at this point uses a proverb to express his predicament in the hands of his wife, the daughter of Akeeke:

Tiv

Igbe Yaadi Kpela Kende,
Mtôô kon, iyon
Ngi nyiman mo ganden,
...

English

Igbe Yaadi Kpela Kende,
I'm carrying ants infested wood,
Ants are biting me too much,
...

In the above proverb, the "ants infested wood" here refers to his estranged wife, Rahel Agbe with her bad character. The manifestations of this bad character in the elopement with another man, and the stealing of the singer's yam seedlings and other property, are the ants that are biting the singer.

The songster in this next part of the song blames himself for not being careful enough in his choice of a wife. He stresses the fact that there is a difference between appearance and reality. What may appear beautiful is not always so in reality. The daughter of Akeeke appears beautiful physically, but she literally makes her husband insane with her behaviour. She is like an apple, rotten at the heart. The singer expresses regret for wasting his money to acquire a worthless 'thing' like her as we see below:

Tiv

Yotam Ichul
Mnenge iyol tseer,
Mnenge ishima ga tsô
Mtôô naira av deri,
Yan mfa ga tsô mtôô
Mtôô naira av deri
Mza pav wan ibuma kwagh,
Nyion la bee

English

Yotam Ichul,
I relied only on beauty,
I did not see the character
Before I took my hundred naira
Out of ignorance
I took my hundred naira
And settled her medical bills
And she got cured of her ailment

The first part of stanza seven is basically a repetition of the first stanza, where the subject matter that led to this composition was introduced. The use of repetition here is to again remind the listeners of the grievous offence, committed by the singer's wife. In satire, often the real names of the people being criticized are not mentioned for obvious reasons, especially in political satires. In the same way therefore, throughout this song, the songster has avoided at any point, mentioning the name of the man that took his wife. He is simply known as 'Chata-man' (charter man) because his business was to charter lorries and convey passengers at a commission from the lorry owner. We can therefore say that, anyone who takes another's wife is Chata-man. The songster further gives a vivid description of Chata-man, such that it becomes obvious whom he is singing about. He states:

Tiv	English
Or u nan yem akôr	I know the man that
Sha Jato-Aka la, mfa nan,	Ate my yam seedlings at Jato-Aka;
Or la nan vese indi ga	The man is not fat,
Ityaven or tav kpishi ga,	He is not very tall,
Or pav mba ukari sha ishi,	The man has tribal marks on the face,
Or la sanger anyi a sha,	He has scattered upper front teeth,
Kpa mtese ka ikyav-ooo!	But, I'm only making a description-ooo!
...	...
Yô nenge nen,	Look out,
Or shon ngula yemen la,	That's the man going there,
Ngula yemen veer u	Look at him going towards the area
Pasinja ka ve tile la.	Where passengers usually stand.
...	...

In as much as the singer tries to avoid mentioning the name of his object of ridicule, he nevertheless makes the description such that the picture painted looks ridiculous and unattractive. This therefore leaves us wondering why the singer's wife was attracted to him in the first place. In the next excerpt, the singer resorts to the use of derogatory and debasing terms or expressions to address Chata-man. He begins by mockingly calling him chief, as we see below:

Tiv	English
Mo de kera yuen mo ga	Don't be angry with me,
Zaki, mzamber we,	Chief, I beg of you,
Chief 'Commissioner'	Chief Commissioner
Mzamber we ooo	I beg of you ooo
Wan or chata-man, mzamber we,	Chataman, I beg of you.
Zaki, kanyi u nenge amo	Chief, why do you wear a long face
Man u yuen mo?	Whenever you see me?

Of course the singer knows that the illiterate Chata-man is not a chief and cannot be one, but in mockery calls him 'chief' or 'Chief Commissioner'. Chata-man cannot be a commissioner either, except of course the singer means that he is chief as well as commissioner in the act of taking other people's wives. The mocking tone in this stanza is probably because of the singer's recent discovery that chata-man too, is on the verge of losing Rahel Akeke to yet another man. The singer is thus now excited that the slippery woman has now shown Chata-man her true colours. In mockery therefore, he sings:

Tiv	English
Me ka nyi u yuen mo?	Why are you angry with me?
Kwase kpa m nau,	I have already given you the wife,
Alu wea gema kwase	If you have given her
Wa na wan or sitoo	To the store-man,
Yô de yuen mo ga,	Then, don't be angry with me
Ibo ngi ken mo ga-ooo.	I am not at fault-ooo!

Events in the above quotation are meant to serve as a warning to all those who indulge in one vice or the other in their communities. The song shows that, the evils that men do, live after them.

The last stanza of this song is again based on a proverbial expression in lines seven and eight. The proverb goes:

Tiv	English
Yese ngi a ahenga ga, ka i amar	The scorpion has no nose,
Ônov kpa, ahenga nga ga,	So, its offspring too don't have noses
...	...

The above proverb is a repetition of an earlier statement, that a bad home, with bad parents often produces bad children. The songster's in-laws are thus the scorpions, without noses because they lack good manners. The scorpion's offspring therefore refer to his wife or the children that come from such a home, who are usually as ill-mannered as their parents. The singer puts it succinctly:

Tiv	English
Or u nan lu a inja ga,	If someone has bad character,
We a mar wan kpa	When he bears children,
Inja ngi ga-a;	They too will have bad character;
Or u nan we daang yô	Someone that is wayward
Ka wa mar ônov	When he bears children,
Kpa, ka daang tsô	They too will be wayward.

In Tiv society, the 'ityô' which usually refers to one's patrilineal kinsmen is regarded as the supreme authority in the land. The *ityô* has the power to authorize the 'mbatsav' (witches and wizards) to either kill a recalcitrant member or to rescue an innocent victim from attack. Decisions taken by the *ityô* are usually final and binding on all. The singer warns people like Chata-man who have no respect for the 'ityô' to remember that, soon there will be no hiding place. The singer concludes that he was tempted to seek for revenge against Chata-man, but restrained himself because the Tiv value system condemns vengeance.

VI. CONCLUSION

The paper has on the whole attempted to show how the Tiv use their oral literary forms to regulate the behaviour of their people and thereby enhancing a peaceful co-existence. This then paves the way for greater unity and consequently, more development. Satirical poetry is thus used as an effective tool for social transformation. The poet employs appropriate literary and poetic devices to pass the message across to the audience. Tiv oral literature is therefore not just art for arts' sake, rather it is an important aspect of their culture that performs a crucial social function.

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