

## **Niyi Osundare's Village Voices as People's Determination and Collective Will**

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### **Abstract**

Niyi Osundare is a leading poet in Africa today. Though a Yoruba by birth his poetry speaks to the pains and sorrows of ordinary people in Africa and other third world countries. This therefore examines socio-political predicament. Sorrowing ordinary people found in the villages and market places. It equally appraises the manner Osundare appropriates myths, folklore and oral song in his poetry to make it historically appealing to the yearnings and aspirations of the people. As a result, the poet is generally regarded as an audience conscious poet.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Niyi Osundare is one of the Africa's leading poets. His poetry collection was generally acclaimed as a huge success in the African Poetic scene. What are some of the attributes that make Osundare's closer to the audience? This article provides some answers to this question. It argues that Osundare's themes, images, symbols and diction are uniquely blended so that they can serve the rural folk as he always focus his poetic deluge to the service of humanity.

Village Voices (1984) is one of the most promising poetry that reflects the vision of the "Alternative Poetry Tradition". It is similar to Osundare's first volume Songs of the Market Place in terms of thematic focus and style. In this collection, Osundare dwells on the prevailing circumstances of social and political predicament. His unreserved social commitment in the poems of this volume reaffirms the silence of the poverty-stricken citizenry. Emmanuel Ngara (1990:177) noted:

Osundare has published several volumes of poetry including Village Voices, in which He devotes his poetic energies to the service of the exploited African rural peasantry.

This will no doubt locate Osundare as a poet of the people. He appropriate myth and folklore in this collection in order to address contemporary issues. Abdu (2003:29) holds that:

Osundare's choice of people oriented themes assures the need and sustenance of such devices in his poems. His themes and correspond are both informed by the ideological orientation of the Alter-native Tradition poets.

The poetry of the new generation generally serves as a potent weapon for the elimination of injustice and other social vices. Village Voices begins to mark Osundare as a poet of great repute. Adagbonyi explains that (1996:25):

This is the volume where Osundare's use of Illustration reaches high point. With the 16 Instances sited, no other volume matched Village Voices in the use of pictographs. They not only Complement the poems but help in their in their Contextualization. They also illuminate the poems.

#### **DETERMINATION AND COLLECTIVE WILL OF THE PEOPLE**

Village Voices consist of thirty-eight poems. In this volume, Osundar express concern for the socio-economic situation among rural dwellers. Thus, analyzing the unpleasant realities in the rural areas, the poet highlights the contradictions in the lives of rural folk. The poetry collection comes close to a survey of moral virtues, which still exist among rural communities. In many ways, some of the poems seem to be a general revolt against economic exploitation. In a different way, it reflects the poet's background in rural Ikere-Ekiti. It is divided into three segments: rising voice, voices and coming and going and voices of anger and indictment. In the first poem, "I Wake up this Morning", the poet declares:

Have borrowed the earful glamour of the  
town crier Gained the unkillable clarion of  
the gong Cushioned my throat with velvet  
Feathers of the dove Charges my words with  
fiery urgency of the thunder When I sing ears  
shall bend my way (p.1).

In these lines, he takes side with ordinary citizens when he announces his presence to the community. "The earful glamour of the town-crier" is "charged" by his "words". Furthermore, the poet dwells on the rich cultural heritage mostly found in the rural areas. In addition to this, he expresses the contradiction that exist between the two worlds. In Akintunde, Come Home", the city where Akintunde lives seems to be a potential destroyer of human life. The images and symbols in the poem reveals a village of natural disaster occupied by the exploited majority. He writes:

Come back here Where the walls are mud  
and meatless meals quiet the howling  
stomach Come back here Where dreams  
Spun on campaign promises Snap in the  
noisy bellies of belching parliaments (.22-  
23).

Still on the same theme of rural poverty, Adagbonyin notices that:

Village Voices focuses on the village and its  
Rich cultural and tradition, its music and  
laughter. In addition to this, it accentuates  
Osundare's perception of poetry as  
relevance, participation and Performance  
(1992:26)

The foregoing excerpt sums up the poet's historical consciousness on traditional life. He is constantly sensitive to the plight of peasants. The volume provides us with a

panoramic view of rural poverty and its consequences to the nation's development. Here, the violent revolution and determination of villagers and collective will are symbolized by a series of powerful images. Okunoye (2005:165) also recognizes that "their collective voices articulated in this case by a number of the indigenous elite-gives expression to their damnable attitude and practices." The last stanza of the poem "Akintunde, Come Home" ends with an interesting Yoruba proverb which states:

Akintunde, Come Home for though a man's  
penis is small he will not borrow a bigger one  
to fill up his wife's nagging mouth (p.23)

In this stanza, like other poems in the volume, the poet's preoccupation is with the need to understand the condition of his people and the existing gap between the haves and the have-nots. This is achieved by virtue of his understanding of Yoruba oral poetics, as explained:

My Vision, I think is going to be constant. I  
can't see any way I can collude with injustice:  
I don't see any way I could be settled. So in  
terms of subject matter, our world will keep  
on producing what there is to be written  
about. I think I will like to sharpen the lyrical  
edge of my poetry (1996:123).

In another poem entitled "A Dialogue of the Drums", the same theme is further advanced by engaging in dialogical statements between people with different artistic orientations. Osundare laments that:

Your drum is sounding too loud It may soon  
reach the tearing point you have reach the  
neck of the palm you may soon find the earth  
Cradling your broken head. Must we all  
extract paltry pennies from squalid lanes  
frequenting miserable ceremonies Like  
vulture bald as the drums we beat (p.7).

These lines indicate some ideological contradictions between the singer of royal songs and another singer, who takes his art to the market-place. They all speak in the format of a statement and a reply. For instance; one of the protagonists replies:

You, singer of royal songs  
Your drum, dumb I the market place,  
Only talks in the place of gold  
Your song extol these whose words  
Beheads the world (p.7).

In its thrust, the poem, "A Dialogue of the Drums" appears to consolidate several instances of social commitment all over the poems. The opposing forces are constant conflict. The poet goes further to enumerate the dangers associated with the compromise to "frequenting miserable ceremonies" like vultures. This is a terrible image of destruction. In another poem, "Not in my Season of Songs," the poet suggest the use of songs as the medium for biting satirical crises against corrupt

politicians. The lines are intended to raise social consciousness. On its part, the song is the forerunner of the poems in the collection. In the same manner, Osundare presents it in different forms through an array of traditional idioms, proverbs and metaphors:

You have poked your crooked finger  
In the hive of my mouth  
A chorus of bees would have stung  
Were this my season song (p.9)

A proper reading of this poem is essential for an informed expression of the entire collection. It is under this controversial circumstances that the song serves as a warning sign in the poet's quest to communicate with the exploited majority. The phrase, my "*Songless* day reflects the hopelessness of the people situation.

The poet recognizes the dual function of the song in a series of controversies at the country side. Apart from the exploiter's desire to have money, which Osundare refers to "ugly money", the common man is guilty of exploiting his fellows by collecting bribe in the name of fines after violating framed offences due to extreme poverty and ignorance. This theme of physical exploitation of the masses is further reinforced by the presence of the "D.O." an expression the poet says:

Let him peer into other people's faults  
The squirrel has lived down its fame for excess  
It has put the penis below the scrotum  
Had you meet in my season of song  
I would have told you what swept your  
Father to this land your father, the D.O's shit-  
Career,  
Who hounded king's men as tax debtors  
And drafted people into false labour  
For the crumbs of the white man's bread (p.10).

At the end of the poem, the "penis" and "scrotum" symbolize a scheme of things in a natural order. He employs male organs not to evoke laughter but aims at highlighting the extent of using songs in a traditional African setting to attack the violators of communal ethics. In essence, the poem explains some socio-political realities and criticizes the entire set up.

In Village Voices, the voice in all the sections of the volume are highly symbolic. They are the voices of angered and frustrated individual's whose fate relies solely on the ruling/running class. The poem "Eating with all the Fingers" exonerates on the exploitation of the common man by heartless Nigerian leaders as he states:

The affairs of this life  
are like people eating  
some deep ten fingers  
and clog their throats  
their greed chocks the land  
with sprawling dirt  
We will raise our voices  
and tell the world

we will not be watchers  
of others eating (p.15).

In this poem, the ten fingers used by the characters to eat is a technique the poet employs to sustain the mood and tension associated with greediness throughout the poem.

It is important to mention that the image of those fingers represent the exploitative tendencies of the so-called politicians in their efforts to enrich themselves. The voice is occasionally used to feel the presence of a helpless character who waits for his own share out of the national purse. The food is therefore symbolic, as everybody wait patiently for their turn. This potential victims are hopeful. They wait for the greedy to allow them to grab their own share of the food. Okunoye (2005: 175-6) observes that:

Osundare's effort in this sense is best understood not in terms of borrowing as the poet is deeply emersed in the tradition of his people but in making tradition relevant to the realities of his time by saving as the voice of the voiceless in the Nigerian society the poet is simply extending the relevant of the Traditional Yoruba poet. The poet is also conscious of The fact that writing in the context ca be a Dangerous business.

In this sense, the poets have to endure the pangs of exclusion from the affairs of the state, impoverishment, undue censorship and incredible political victimization. Even though this is a critical comment, it is an essential part of the poet vision of the Nigerian state in a deplorable condition. The main target in this poem is corrupt politicians who dominate the sphere of the nation's economy. The proceeding poem "Eating Tomorrow's Yam" expresses both foolishness and wisdom. The collective voices articulated in this case are relevant because they are the innocent victims of the nation. The proverb at the beginning of the first stanza is a humorous celebration of the new planting season. The questions in stanzas two and three are debates, between the politicians and the electorate in the discharge of their civic duties. He states that:

There is only yam left  
In the village barn  
the prodigal calls for a night  
what shall we eat tomorrow?  
The people ask  
"If we finish all the yam today  
Just how shall we feel  
when the dunghill has relieved  
stomachs of their improvident burden?" (p.16).

Osundare's use of the new yam festival in the poem as a sustainer of life, gives him enough courage to attack the Nigerian establishment as a result of its uncompromising attitude when it comes to address people's need. The village barn "in this poem refers to the states treasury. The government is too careless to save anything for the future generation. In "Advice", one of the short poems in the

collection, the poet takes the reader back to African tradition. Though the poem is short, it is metaphorically loaded with moral lessons:

To yourself  
Friend, be true  
You farm a hundred yams  
And tell us it is two hundred  
Alright  
After eating a hundred yams  
You will eat a hundred lies (p.19).

The poet employs images from African oral tradition to instruct people about the impending dangers of telling lies. The poem draws our attention to the importance of African Oral narratives, which Western scholars perceive as unconvincing. In essence, the lesson in this poem is the dangers involved in telling lies. The farmer that tells lies in the poem is left to eat a "hundred" punitive measures slated to those involved in telling lies or fake promises, especially among politicians with their fake campaign promises. The poem condemns in totality the act of pretence and hypocrisy in human relationship.

Similarly, in another poem, "Feigning Rebel" the poem is certainly interested in the elimination of social vices and pretentious behaviour. He begins by asking:

Tell us  
Are you real revolutionaries?  
Or feigning kings  
waiting for crowns?  
We have been roused  
countless times  
by mask rebels of the night  
telling us the system is bad  
and the only way it should go is down (p.90)

It shows that fake revolutionaries take part in the activities of the nation. At the end of the day, they loot government treasuries in the name of contracts and other unnecessary expenses. Sometimes this kind of people are referred to as comrades as they head trade unions and non-governmental organizations. The poet wonders about the sincerity of these people. In a real sense, they pretend to be what they are not.

In the final stanza of the poem, he repeats the question which reaffirms his apparent displeasure with the unscrupulous behaviour of the rebel. The poet perceives the action of the rebel as abnormal behaviour. He doubts the integrity of their as they are claimed to be "friends of the poor." The enumeration of decay and poverty in these lines explains that Osundare's sympathy with the violated and true patriots finds its most articulate expression here:

What it means to wake up  
without a penny  
to live without a roof  
In a family of disease and misery  
we ought

they had arrived  
who know the agony  
of soles without shoes (p.20).

The above account of misconducts are clear indices of failure of leadership that is obtainable in rural and urban centres. The rate of poverty is very high, where some people live in a family of disease and misery. The problem of the betrayal of trust and inhumanity extracted from the feigning rebel is alarming. That is why the poet dissociates himself from such acts of misconduct. He considers self-discipline and hard work embarked upon by real revolutionaries will displace the dictator and "feigning kings" waiting desperately for their own share. The images of fire, sun, darkness, harmattan, daybreak and dawn in this poem indicate some unpleasant realities and possibilities of hope in the struggle to eliminate all forms of injustices.

The poet here portrays a sensitive individual who bears with the situation of his people. He paints a picture of grief, sadness and suffering in the voices of rural peasants who are the real victims. The poet also reveals the identity of masked rebels countless times as they appear with false impressions of helping the villagers. But the moment they achieve their aim, they reveal their true identity. The villagers have suffered several times from the hands of these masked rebels. Osundare alerts them to find out who are the actual revolutionaries. It is like a new military leader who came to power as a result of harmful policies that bombard the well-being of citizens. This is exactly what happened in Equatorial Guinea and Republic of Niger recently.

In the poem "Akintunde, Come Home" the poet's anger is directed at the city gate where life has become a game in which everybody struggles to survive. In the process of winning this game, the strong trample the weak. Charles Badunde laments that:

Osundare express a concern for the social situations within the rural setup. He exposes the contradictions that exist between the city life and the rural bucolic tradition (see Na'Allah 2003:276).

The above remarks shows that this volume attempt to the dangers that are closely associated with city life. The critic is aware that the general hope of every villager is to come to the city and enjoy abundant resources but in the real sense the reverse is the case.

In this regard, "Akintunde, Come Home," is one of the luminous poems of the volume that occupies a prominent position, which forms that subject matter of the volume. Here, Akintunde is presented as a prodigal son of the soil, who is who is desperately in need of reconciliation with the local community after many years of living in the city of ruin and destruction. Like the prodigal son in Christopher Okigbo's "Mother Idoto," the home where Akintunde was raised in the need of his presence. Osundare paints a clear picture of Akintunde's homestead in a vivid language:

Come back here  
where the walls are mud  
and meatless meat quiet

the howling Stomach  
Come back here  
Where dreams spun on Campaign promises  
Snap in the noisy bellies  
Of belching parligmants (p.23).

As the title suggests, the poem exposes the full plight of a common man. Osundare's concern with this unhealthy development lies behind Akintunde and the volume as a whole. He uses images and symbols like the Iroko tree that are mostly familiar in the locality to enhance meaning in this volume.

In three successive stanzas of the poem, the poet – protagonist expresses his high regard for poetry as a medium of communication through associating it with actions and images sourced from its immediate environment. Aristotle's definition of poetry in his *Poetics* on the other hand, emphasizes as the primary form of expression. In the last stanza of the poem, Osundare restates his determination to fight corrupt politicians and military dictators. He warns Akintunde several times to "come home" for "though a man's penis is small/ he will not borrow a bigger one/ to fill up his wife nagging mouth". In the article "Sexual Discourse in Osundare's Poetry", Samson (2005:6), Dare notes that:

His (Osundare's) handling of the issues as well as the accompanying linguistic choices is not totally without control, an indication of the fact that he is conscious of the limits imposed on him by the social conventions that impinge upon his writing.

From the above extract, Osundare's use of sexual images is not a coincidence. It is an eloquent illustration of controlled linguistic expression, as the critic sees it as "a liberty in their linguistic choices", a situation made possible by that phenomenon called "poetic licence". In the final stanza, the poet reaffirms the need for the prodigal son to come home through a man's penis, which nullifies the city life when compared with the realities in the village.

In another poem, "The Prisoner's Song" (p.24), the poet uses dangerous image of the prison where innocent and the less guilty suffer from "the famine of freedom." The chains, bigger doors with bigger padlocks, barbed wire and cages are clear manifestation of human suffering created by men of authority and influence in the society. The poem affirms the solidness of the prison-house as an oppressive and unjust place where enemies of the state are kept under the custody of warders. The warder, clearly refers to Son of Tanimola," who obeys orders absent –mindedly from" a man of money from the city/ who wanted a private cocoa plantation (p.25). The greediness of these politicians continues to witch-hunt the villagers' life, as it occurs in the final stanza of the poem which reads:

Your father became ruthless  
like a bird without a nest  
your mother sold firewood  
to put up some heat in your following hearth (p.25).

It is from the background of the water that realize that he is also a poor man like Tanimola in which every member of their family is not hidden in that village. He

is not supposed to behave in such a situation where the wrath of the politician spares no life. Once more, the warder comes as a "belted boot man". In another stanza, he explains that:

We are prisoners both  
In this graveyard of freedom  
boots and brass buttons  
are flimsy costumes  
In this drama of oppression (p.24).

The word "graveyard" in this stanza is a depiction of perennial harvest of hardship, which confronts the inhabitants of the house that was deliberately contrived to dehumanize innocent people. From all indications, the so-called Nigerian leaders are not concerned with the welfare of their subjects. They use the poor man in their drama of oppression. They also secure places in lucrative ventures, such as banks, parastatals, oil and gas companies for their close friends and associates. The son of a poor man designated with the orders of open and close described in this stanza is a clear manifestation of injustice. He states that:

And so you left school at ten  
when you could hardly recognize your name  
you walk the streets like a ghost  
from the dry season's dust  
to the rainy's dust  
Your budding penis peeping out  
of your tattered shorts (p.26)

The content of this stanza, especially with the presence of folk wisdom from the Yoruba oral tradition like "walked the streets like a ghost", vividly explains the plight of the common man as a security agent that obeys orders which he refers "come from the city where windows are glass/and the gates are gold." The warder's role in this poem is symbolic, as he represents village life and the government uses them as tools to exploit their fellows ignorantly.

Still on the plight of ordinary citizens, in "Reunion" Osundare explains his encounter with a former schoolmate who was pinned down by poverty. In the first stanza, he states:

We started school the same day  
and together bore the flaying fury  
of a teacher's ceaseless cane  
together we scribbled our first broken letters  
in the white man's tongue (p.27).

Through complex metaphors derived from the poet's immediate environment, both "The Prisoner's Songs" and "Reunion" condemn in totality the system that brutalized the common man. The two poems similarly carry Osundare's anti-capitalist agenda. He describes it as a system, which denies the common man some basic needs like education and health. For instance, in "The Prisoner's Songs", the warder left school at the age of ten, he does not have the basic requirements to further his education. In "Reunion", the same situation is applied to the protagonist

and other innocent victims all over the federation. On the other hand, the poet narrates his bitter experience when he finally recognizes his classmate:

After so many years  
here you are scorched like a sponge  
granite hands and a back bent  
by toil and want  
after so many years  
stooping to sir me  
who once shared your tattered mat (p.28).

In this poem, like most other poems of the volume, Osundare's major preoccupation is on the overhauling of the system, which dehumanizes individuals. He expresses the need for a proper dialogue with politicians in order to put things in the right direction despite the gross failure in leadership that allows inequality. In another stanza, he recalls some of these inequalities that exist:

So many things  
including innumerable treacheries  
of my new class  
who do nothing but  
swallow everything;  
their broken promises  
and your shattered dreams  
their city palaces  
and your village shacks (p.29).

The above accounts are indeed a clear evidence of injustice. The leadership has no meaning because some ordinary citizens like Akintunde, the warder, and his former classmate are denied the basic needs of life.

The final section, "Voices About Coming and Going" proceeds with an alarming voice, which clearly indicates Osundare's sympathy with the wider rural community. The rural folk in this sectioned Nigerian villages from where he obtains historical and sociological materials, including corrupt politicians and their allies. In addition to this poverty and ignorance, in "Mouth of Falling Leaves" (p.32) he employs symbolic figures, such as a dry season to show decay in the system. The evil-minded politicians come to the village when the villagers are needed, more especially during transition periods. On the other hand, the falling leaves is a harvest time when politicians are portrayed as the descendants of exploiters. They come and rob the farmers of what they produced through lending unsubstantial amounts in the name of loans. The poet's memory of the dry season when leaves fall in his rural background is artistically weaved to present a vivid description of decay arising from man's inhumanity to his fellow man through powerful images of nature, which threaten both man and his environment. The poem reads:

Come  
walk straight in  
and play my heart  
with your sandalless feet  
bathe their soles

in the supple cam wood of my soul  
while your toes rustle  
the velvet veins of my yearnings (p.32).

The poem concludes aptly that in such a situation the farmer has no option but to submit to the needs of his exploiters without resistance. This effective employment of verbally relevant phrases, as in "the supple cam wood of my soul" refers to the humble and submissive nature of villagers.

Baba, thank you today  
for the kindness of many years  
going I am now to my husband  
the son of Efurudowo whose ground  
owner of the powerful machete  
whose maize drills the molers  
like seasoned warriors  
my calabash tray will give way  
coming back from his farm (p.42).

The choice of the bride above is a deliberate attempt to highlight a breakdown in traditional values, as earlier cited in "Akintunde, Come Home" and "Messages". According to Charles Bodunde, the poetic figure in the "Bridal Song" is an example of moral virtues and therefore functions as an alternative to the lost child archetype obtainable in African oral narratives (see NA'Allah 2003:282). In another poem, "The Star Sob", establishes a close transition of the Yoruba dirge form. The poem emphasizes on a sense of loss between man and his immediate environment, There is a picture of a flamboyantly dressed bride with her handbag to show the cultural heritage of Africa, which is vibrant but ironically some people embrace alien culture that is not suitable to them.

At this point, Osundare borrows a leaf from Okot p' Bitek's Song of Lawino to express his emotional attachment to African traditional values. The phrase, "children playing in the moonlight", is a reflection of village life and the value attached to human fertility, which is celebrated as "child honour. Child is gold." The two lines in the final stanza of the poem is a prayer in which the protagonist seeks for immediate intervention of gods to come to the aid of those who lost their cultural identity.

In another section of the volume, "Voices of Anger and Indictment", the poet's anger takes another serious dimension. In the first poem of the section titled, "The Land of Unease", which describes the land as unjust to its inhabitants, the first two stanzas of the poem reads:

That land never knows peace  
Where a few have too much  
And many none at all  
The yam of this world  
is enough for all mouths  
which pay daily homage  
to the god of the throat  
enough for the aged

awaiting day's dust  
and the young peeping  
at tomorrow  
from mother's back (p.45).

The poet is not comfortable with this sharing formula. He observes that there is no equal sharing of resources of the land. As a result of this, people are disorganized. There is no peace and stability. Those who allow such things to exist have to suffer the consequences. The picture of the hand in the poem is illustrative of the total failure of the system in existence. These four fingers standing closely refers to the marginalized majority while the big finger, which separates itself from the many other fingers, indicates the position of the exploiter. The big finger distanced itself from the others to illustrate the wide gap between the ruler and the ruled. The "Yam" as a staple food for both the rich and the poor in this poem also constitutes the resources of the land. The poor observed that when such resources are shared equally, there should be peace. The sword of "Esimuda" and the fingers "Omodindirin" are two separate entities and they say the fingers are not equal. There is no justification at all when "the small die hungry deaths in village streets".

The big knives here are responsible for the existing gap between the fingers that are not equal. Whenever they ask why, the sharp difference exist, the answer is always the same: the fingers are not equal. The poor or the smallest finger is dominated by Esimuda's sword. In this poem, the issue of class difference and the exploitation of the poor are two major themes. In this poem, Osundare makes extensive utilization of images and symbols from the Yoruba oral tradition more especially with the position of the fingers. This figure is symbolic in many African traditions.

Another reference to the plight of the ordinary citizens, "A Villagers Protest", continues with the satirization of corrupt politicians. Like in the "Land of Unease", Osundare affirms the sharp practices engaged by heartless politicians in their attempt to achieve their selfish interests. He states that:

They come  
armed with sweet words  
inflated promises  
and a chest that bribes  
with countless prostrations  
like the agama on the rock (p.47).

The politicians come to the village square with countless programmes, bribes and inflated promises, which remain unfulfilled forever. The Mercedes Benz is the highest executive car possessed by politicians through ill-gotten wealth. They always drive through the nooks and crannies of the village to convince the villagers that they are for the people. The politicians also tour the country-side chanting anti-poverty programmes such as Health is Wealth, Farming for Wealth, National poverty Eradication Programme, Job for All whose impact on ordinary citizens is too far from the truth. This gap is too wide to be bridged. From all indications, the villagers have realized such tricks. The poet describes them as "men of deep unwisdom". Unknown to these politicians power is slippery:

Power is the bird of the forest  
which nest on one tree today  
and tomorrow pitches its tent  
on another (p.48)

This notion of instability in power is a moral lesson, but some of the politicians are not aware of this image. The image of Esuru is from the Yoruba oral tradition, which represents the wise villager who cannot be manipulated easily. In "The New Farmer's Bank", the poet re-iterates this theme of rural poverty where the common man is still surrounded with the crisis of existence. The Federal Government establishes banks, such as People's Bank and Micro-Finance Banks to eradicate rural poverty, but in essence, these establishments turn around to mortgage the entire life of the rural farmer. The poet describes the bank as:

A bank whose safe  
Is up in he sky  
A bank robbed in coat and collar  
Like the cricket in October (P.49).

The poet all forms of corruption in issuing loans to local farmers. The farmers are not allowed to reap the fruits of their labour. The crops are sold at a give-away price in order to settle these cooperative banks. The rich and elites in the cities consume the farm products but they know nothing about farming.

Your bags of government kindness  
Here money is yours  
just for the asking  
(and if too last to ask  
The government can ask for you)  
Just pawn five houses  
Surrender your ancestral land  
Thumbprint your livelihood away  
And carry home (p.50)

In this poem, the rural farmer continues to suffer from the hands of these policy makers. In reality, these banks are more affiliated to the needs of large scale farmers and relatives of bank executive or thieves. "A farmer on Seeing Cocoa House, Ibadan" is another sweat from the local farmer. The poor farmer, on seeing the house realized that it is our house":

Its walls are made of crushed cocoa pools  
the beams of cocoa branches  
its blinding glass  
of the farmer's glistening back (p.51).

The poet refers to the entire structure of the house as the sweat of the local cocoa farmers. Those who occupy the house are not the real farmers. They are "those coats and ties are the loincloths/of the farmyard (p.52). The farm products from the countryside are consumed in the city. The cocoa is known as a cash crop in western Nigeria. Ironically, those who know nothing about farming plant trees in confidential files. The farmer's money is meant for his own welfare but the men in power divert it

to satisfy their selfish ends. The farmer who approaches the house in Ibadan appeals to the government:

Tell the men of power, today  
Tel them, and tell them loud,  
we like the shining house  
they built for us  
its gatemen have told us  
we are welcome anytime  
provided we wear velvet gloves  
on our calloused hands (p.52).

The farmer wants the profit of his farm to be reinvested for his own comfort. There is an option. If the farmer cannot get the proceeds of his farm, he needs an equivalent of a cocoa house where he can live. "The Politicians Two Mouths" is another poem which deals with the horrible experience of the oppressed during the political era. At this point, Osundare acts as a witness to the events, a participant as well as a potential victim of the politician's "two mouths." The people are generally under pressure during political rallies characterized by unnecessary human destruction. The situation is so traumatic that it affects their psyche very severely. The two mouths could therefore, be a metaphor of the unfulfilled campaign promises, as in:

Whoever believes what the politician says  
his ear is blocked by the carcass of truth  
A politician tells you to wait  
and you heed his words  
ah friends,  
your sole will tell you  
the biting pains of folly (p.57).

The most controversial thing in the poem is that "we cannot see the inside of a lying wolf". So, its effectiveness derives from the voice of the first person plural "we", which aptly expresses the collective will of the masses. The politicians will no longer confuse the villagers, who have now realized the sharpness of two mouths. The edges of the mouth was compared with "Esimuda's" Sword and the white man's razor. All these attributes are targeted to elongate the tenure of the man in power. Sometimes they hide under the edges of constitutional amendment in order to achieve their desired goals. The phrase, "his mind squats like a hungry dog" (p.57), justifies the unending desire of the politician to continue without any transitional failure.

Osundare uses the images of Esinuda to express the exploitative nature of politicians. Most of the poems analyzed in this section are interrelated in terms of form and content. "The Villager's Protest" (p. 47) and the "Land of Unease" (p.45) and the "Politician's Two Mouths" translate the socio-economic and political realities in Nigeria. The village set up represents the nation where corruption, undemocratic activities, violation of human rights and ethnicity are legalized by politicians, who cut up the country like an "unending cake". Thus, exploitation, bad governance, unnecessary strikes by labour unions, revolt by the masses, for instance, the

construction of the Bakalori Dam in Sokoto State in 1981, are the major concerns of the poet in *Village Voice*.

In *Critic as Terrorist*, Olu Obafemi notes that, "The disillusionment that follows independence in Nigeria is one of Osundare's major concern (p.25). In one of the poems, "Sleeping, at Five and Twenty" (p.11), Osundare present the state of the nation as a lazy man sleeping and snoring while others are busy with meaningful jobs:

At five and twenty  
there you are  
your palms thick like hippo Skin  
your mates wrestle in the village square  
your grapple massive morsels  
in your mother's kitchen  
where a bowl of yam  
put your flat on your slothful back. (p.11).

Constant repetition of these figures "at five and twenty" in almost all the stanza denotes hopelessness, which is supported by the twin evils of poverty and ignorance. In a similar poem, "We have waited so Long", Osundare blames the ruling class for their uncompromising attitude towards human development.

Citizens anxiously wait for the independence but after decades of military and civilian dictatorship, there is nothing to exhibit. "The Passing Months" metaphorically refers to a series of leaderships without defined objectives. The feeding items represent the under-nourishment of Nigerian masses who live below the poverty line. Commenting on Osundare's sympathy with the poverty-stricken majority, Biodun Jeyifo (1988:318) observes that:

The dispossession of the majority of our people  
and more specifically of the rural producers, may,  
in fact, be said to be the grand theme of Osundare's poetry.

Here, he uses highly irresistible images and symbols to expose the attitude and practices of political leaders, which scatter people into waterless holes. It is no longer a myth, the military dictator's burning days of horror are back. The masses cast their votes for local and national figures, they fall sick or die from the denial of hope. There are no jobs to engage the youths while politicians live in happiness. It is unfortunate that retired generals and greedy politicians continue to manipulate the electorate. Most African leaders ride into office on a popular horse and depart on a stretcher of the disappointment of and condemnation by their subjects and the international community. That paralysis in leadership has virtually frozen service delivery, decision and policy making. Despite the presence of anti-people decrees promulgated by military dictatorship across the continent, there is a wave of attacks on the ruling class in the poetry of the 1980s.

Dr. Ngozi Okonja-Iwela, the Minister of Finance and former World Bank executive in charge of Asia and Africa, agreed that, in general, poverty is still wide spread throughout Nigeria despite the increase in oil prices. Some signs of Nigeria's new wealth are evident, particularly in Lagos and Abuja, where there is a growing number of new cars on newly constructed roads driving past new hotels, restaurants and

business that spring daily. The poems in the third section of the volume Village Voices relate that our people do not benefit from the wealth extracted from their land. They live in abject poverty even though farm products and oil wealth led to a huge boost in the economy. There is also a big gap between the rich and the poor and that gap is increasing. In the Critic as Terrorist series (undated), Olu Obafemi says that:

Osundare's concern is indeed for the masses; it is a deep commitment to the yearnings and aspirations of the populace; the hewers of wood, the makers of mound, and the hawkers at the market place. He traces the sorrows and sufferings of these people, the untold deprivation foisted upon them daily to the deficiencies in the socio-political order, and on the basis of this, the poet advocates for a radical change (p.23).

#### CONCLUSION:

The poet wages a war against all the tiers of government that allow its people to suffer while the leaders and their relatives become sacred cows that graze all over the place, getting fatter and fatter and the common man is driven to hunger. The poet is on the right track by focusing his searchlight on the rural community in Village Voices.

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