

My Children! My Africa!

In *My children! My Africa!* (1989), Athol Fugard attempts thoroughly to dismantle the racist society of South Africa and establish a unified culture respected by Whites and Blacks irrespective of their skin colour. The play can be seen as a recognition that apartheid society is on decline and a new generation of young people from Black and White community, are to witness the dawn of a new future. Soon they will be able to get rid of the restraints of racism and set up a new society never visualised by their parents.

The play was written and performed for the first time on 27 June 1989 at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg but its setting is in 1984. The playwright was inspired by an actual incident that occurred in the Eastern Cape where a school teacher was killed, because he was suspected to be an informer. The first Cape Town run started at the Baxter Theatre on 4 October and in 1990 it was presented at National Theatre in London. On both the overseas occasions, it was Fugard's daughter Lisa who played Isabel. Some of the critics are of the opinion that the play was largely inspired by Fugard's daughter who was suffering from the problems of growing up in such a country where skin colour is the criterion for superiority or inferiority. However, the main source for this play was the realization, during 1980s, that the end of apartheid can be felt in the continuing acts of violence. In the Foreword to the selection of the plays including *My children! My Africa!*, Fugard wrote:

.... *My children! My Africa!* was written out of the darkest decade in my country's history. It was a time when the prophecies of a bloodbath seemed to be coming true, when to have any hope in the future seemed the height of idiocy. (vii)

Like Fugard's other plays racism is apparent in '*My children! My Africa!*' too. Fugard has discussed racism in every walk of life in South Africa. He reveals racism in family as in *Blood Knot*, racism in Society as in *Boeman and Lena*, racism at work place as in *Sizwe Banzisi is Dead*. In this play, he has discussed racism in school and has expressed his anger against educational policies of apartheid regime.

In '*My children! My Africa!*' racism in education is contextualised in an actual classroom. The educational policies of the National Government played pivotal role and gave Fugard an impetus to demonstrate its ramifications, it would be appropriate to briefly critique the educational system for Blacks and Coloureds before the advent of apartheid regime. Before the advent of National Government, education, for Coloureds and Blacks, had often been in the hands of Christian missionaries and there were more than three hundred and forty thousand students in these schools. In most of the mission schools, all the teachers were Africans who themselves were not well educated and they were assigned a syllabus to teach, in keeping with the requirements of White children. However, the majority of the students from Black and Coloureds community during apartheid era had to struggle for any reasonable form of education without bias. In 1946, the government's expenditure on the education of White children was twenty times more than on the education of Black children. When the policy of new National Government was formed, Verwoerd expressed his disagreement to leave the education of Black children in the hands of missionary schools, because these schools were unable to fulfil, in any case, the rising demands of African population. Moreover, when the economy expanded, the demand for semi-educated and literate Black workers increased manifold. Consequently, by the Bantu Education Act 1953, the National Government took over all educational systems for Africans. This was extended to Asian and Coloured children in 1960. Though education expanded, it still remained tightly controlled and strictly segregated. By 1979, nearly three and a half million children from Black community were enrolled at school. Even this expansion was not without bias: the government was spending ten times more per capita on the education of White children than of Black. The Bantu Education Act aimed at stifling ambition and confirming that the training will be available only to an unskilled or labouring class. Introducing the act in 1953, Dr Verwoerd announced:

I just want to remind the Honourable Members of Parliament that if the native in South Africa is being taught to expect that he will lead his adult life under the policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. The native must not be subject to a school system which draws him away from his own community, and misleads him by showing him the

green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze.
(Goddard 35)

The discrepancies in education and the impact of this policy on Black people are at the centre of *My children! My Africa!*.

The play is primarily concerned with the nature of so called ‘old style liberal education’ during apartheid era in South Africa and its impact on all the three major characters. Fugard presents the dilemma of Bantu (or ‘Separate’) Education in a fragmented society of South Africa as the paradigm to show case conflicts between a Black school teacher, his favourite Black student, and a White female student from nearby Girls High School. The play begins with the debate in the classroom between these two pupils which proves so effective that the teacher determines to pair them as a team in the Standard Bank Grahamstown schools festival competition. The subject of the competition comprises British Romantic writers such as Keats, Byron, Shelly, the Bronte sisters, Dickens and Wordsworth. The play also throws light on the relationships between the Black and White characters during preparation for the competition and the friction that arise because of their socio-political background.

Fugard demonstrates his theatrical ability by situating the events in a specific type of classroom. The opening debate has many audiences from Black community, who are themselves the real umpires of the debate. The political reality is so pervasive in the classroom that no worthwhile teaching is taking place because the education is provided in accordance with the socio-political context. Fugard’s concept of education, as depicted in the play, reminds of the core concern of the Romantics. As the Romantics believe that all the people are equal and united by a “collective soul” so is the case with Fugard. If the society is tyrannical, it is the struggle for the soul and basic humanity that can alter the experience of socio-political oppression. That is why Fugard considers the classroom or the theatre a safe laboratory to search for common good of humanity. He projects classroom as a place of discussion about all the things that are good, true and beautiful. Classroom is the place where ideals can be learned, knowledge can be accomplished and friendships can also be developed. However, it must not be forgotten that the attainment of knowledge, the borders of trust and friendship and the ability to define goodness, truth and beauty are socio-political constructs. Fugard is well aware of the fact that socio-political backdrop can

only serve as a reference point to expose the human drama of betrayal and frailty. It is for this reason that classroom is used as a call to strengthen humanity not a call to fight against prevailing ideology. Fugard's concept of the contest elaborates this problem. In 1984, the date of the play, a number of similar events related to such competition took place that provided a clear background to the authors writing in English. Fugard used one such competition to propagate his version. He has drawn the competition in such a way that sets up a double paradigm: the world which is shown in the play and the world in which the play is performed (the real world). Each of the two worlds has its own demands.

Unlike the opening silences of *Blood Knot* and *Boesman and Lena*, this play begins with the noise: "everybody is speaking at the same time" (155) because an inter-school debate is in progress between Thami Mbikwana, a Black student and Isabel Dyson, a White girl, in the class at the Zolile High School which is supposed to be the main setting for the play. Mr. M is a teacher who is "*at a table with Thami and Isabel on either side of him*" (155). Thami and Isabel are speaking at the same time in such a manner that Mr. M is compelled to intervene:

Mr. M: Order please!

Isabel: I never said anything of the kind.

Thami: Yes you did. You said that women were more-

Mr. M: I call you both to order!

Isabel: What I said was that women-

Thami:were more emotional than men-

Isabel: Correction! That women were more intuitive than men-

Mr. M: Miss Dyson and Mr Mbikwana! Will you both please.....

.....come to order! (155)

There is so much noise and indiscipline in the class that Mr. M thinks it necessary to interject about what a debate is supposed to be. Mr. M opens a dictionary and reads aloud the definition: "The orderly and regulated discussion of an issue with opposing

viewpoints receiving equal time and consideration” (155-56). If someone shouts at one’s counterpart, it does not comply with that definition. Mr. M gives three minutes to each of them to sum up their arguments. Thami Mbikwana, who is for motion, is asked to make his concluding statement. Thami stands up, receiving wild round applause from the audience and addresses an audience of his schoolmates. His concluding statement is “outrageous” and he is well aware of it and enjoys it along with his classmates. Thami requests his friends and classmates to close their eyes and forget his face and voice, because it lessens the seriousness of his final words. Thami thinks of his words “as those of the great ancestors of traditional African culture” (156). Discarding Isabel’s statement regarding “sexual exploitation” and “women’s liberation”, Thami claims that these are foreign ideas and requests his friends not to listen them, because:

They came from a culture, the so called Western Civilisation that has meant only misery to Africa and its people. It is the same culture that shipped away thousands of our ancestors as slaves, the same culture that has exploited Africa with the greed of a vulture during the period of the Colonialism and the same culture that which continues to exploit us in the twentieth century under the disguise of concern for our future. The opposition has not been able to refute my claim that women cannot do the same jobs as men because they are not the equals of us physically and that a woman’s role in the family, in society, is totally different to that of a man’s. These facts taken together reinforce what our fathers, and our grandfathers and our grand-grandfathers knew. (156-157)

Thami’s comment on “Western Civilization” is remarkable because it reveals racism inherent in it. It is this civilization that has been the cause of misery to Africans for many centuries. Western people had made their ancestors slaves. Further, they have not stopped exploitation of the Black people even today. They continue to exploit even in twentieth century.

Moreover, he argues that happiness and prosperity of the tribe and nation lies in the education of women when they take “these facts into consideration” (157). It is inappropriate to send the women to war while men sitting at sewing machine, because

he doesn't have milk in his breast to feed the baby. His concluding statement receives wild applause and whistles from the audience. Since the audiences are Black, Isabel receives polite applause when she stands to conclude her statement. Still, she speaks to them with direct and unflinching eye contact. She argues:

You have had to listen to a lot of talk this afternoon about traditional values, traditional society, your great ancestors, and your glorious past. In spite of what has been implied I want to start off by telling you that I have as much respect and admiration for your history and tradition as anybody else. I believe most strongly that there are values and principles in traditional African society which could be studied with great profit by Western Civilization But at the same time, I know and you know that Africa no longer lives in the past. For better or worse it is part now of the twentieth century and all the nations on this continent are struggling very hard to come to terms with that reality. Arguments about sacred traditional values, the traditional way of life... are used by those who would like to hold back Africa's progress and keep it locked in the past. (158)

Isabel's argument suggests that present-day "Western civilization" is both superior and dominant. In other words, Western civilization dominates other civilizations in the twentieth century. She underestimates African civilizations by saying that they are the things of the past. That is the reason they have been ineffectual in the present day. In her opinion, traditional values that are sacred obstruct progress.

Moreover, she accepts that there was a time in olden days when women were supposed to bear children and hoe the fields and men were busy with sharpening their spears for war, but now times have changed. There is no need to prize fighter to operate the computers that control today's world. She continues her argument that the American space program now has women astronauts who are doing the same jobs as men. The argument against equality for women, in education or any other field is based on prejudice not fact. She closes her argument asking the support from the audience. Isabel's concluding statement is so influential that she secures twenty four votes from Black audiences while Thami gets seventeen, though he is himself Black. Mr. M upholds Isabel's views by encouraging her:

And whatever you do, young lady, don't underestimate your achievement in winning the popular vote. It wasn't easy for that audience to vote against Mbikwana. He was one of them, and a very popular 'one of them' I might add. (160)

Not only he supports Isabel's ideas but the audiences also demonstrate their agreement by casting their votes raising their hands and hence according to Mr. M the real winners of the debate because Isabel and Thami just talk and argue and they had to listen intelligently.

Through the portrayal of the characters having different temperament, Fugard suggests learning process directly to the audience. The monologues delivered by each reflect their different point of views. Not only this, even the stage directions support the argument. For example, stage directions say about their roles that Isabel "*speaks*" and Mr M "*talks*". At another place there is a "*Wild round applause from the audience*" on Thami's closing remarks during the debate, but Isabel receives "*polite applause*". Fugard has deliberately implied different types of "applause" from the audience because he wants Mr M to organize the audience in order to respond and enter into the action. Stephen Gray states:

Votes are taken. The audience is forced to take sides too, for Fugard uses the Market Theatre ushers – strapping youths in shorts too short and stripped ties stopping at the sternum- as unruly checkers, Thami's classmates. Their interjections from all corners heat up the battle to violent pitch.

What is this but every South African's nightmare? Being caught up in the crossfire of your own most basic choices. (28)

Fugard puts forth the crux of argument in the debate by implying traditions- both African and Western. Thami favours African traditions that is 'outrageous' in Mr. M's or Fugard's view. Fugard considers such type of arguments irrelevant and suggests that not only he but most of the African will get this argument outrageous. The vote provided by the audience at the end of the debate – Isabel gets twenty four while Thami obtains only seventeen- itself indicates that Fugard discredits Thami's argument.

Fugard reveals racism through the conversation between Thami and Isabel after Mr. M. had left them alone in the class. Isabel starts criticising the awkward behaviour of the Black students during the debate. Since Thami feels shyness during the debate, Isabel mocks at him by gender joking saying, “you *boys* are all the same” (162), without thinking what meaning this denigrating slur carries in South African Black context? Her description of rules and regulation of debate in the Zolile High School is not free from racism and bias when she compares it to that of her own:

The debates at my school are such stuffy affairs. And so boring most of the time. Everything is done according to the rules with everybody being polite and nobody being excited...lots of discipline but very little enthusiasm. This one was a riot! (162)

There was such lack of rules and regulation in Zolile High School that Isabel considers it as “riot”.

When Thami and Isabel introduce their family to each other, it too illustrates the superiority of the Whites and inferiority of the Blacks. Their family background can be interpreted in terms of Marxist analysis. As it is assumed that the Marxist analysis interprets the text in terms of class, or economic oppression. In the context of South Africa, race and class became so conflated that even Fugard could not escape it and, ultimately, falls into this trap. The description of the oppressed or the working class struggling against the injustices and brutality of apartheid regime seems to be so obvious along the racial lines that cannot be ignored in any way. Members of all the races/ classes are inclined towards economic lines. The people of White regime in power used to form such policies (in every walk of life be in education or industry etc.) that made the people of Black community permanently suppressed. As such the White people became happier day by day and the conditions of the proletariats or the Black community became worse and worse. On the one hand, the White people left no stone unturned to suppress the Black people, and on the other hand, the Black people made their best efforts to dismantle apartheid regime as well as discriminations in every walk of life in order to restore equality in the society.

Fugard has set up such a structure in the play that interrogates the workings of class/race in South African context. Isabel represents the middle-class bourgeoisie as she introduces herself as, “sober, sensible, English-speaking South African...and she

is the third generation” (163). She asserts her affluence by claiming that she has an average sort of family and her father is a chemist who has a chemist shop in the town in which even her mother and sister work. Isabel’s description of her breakfast to Thami itself reveals that she is from well off family:

Auntie, our maid, put down in front of me a plate of steaming, delicious jungle oats over which I sprinkled a crust of golden brown sugar, and while that was melting on top I added a little moat of chilled milk all around the side. That was followed by brown-bread toast, quince jam and lots and lots of tea. (165)

On the other hand, Thami is the representative of the proletariat. He belongs to a working class family, living from the “dangers” of the locality where most of the working class-people live. It is remarkable how he introduces himself and his family to Isabel:

Mbikwana is an old Bantu name and my mother and my father are good, reliable, ordinary, hard-working Bantu-speaking Black South African natives....My mother is a domestic and my father works for the railways....I was sent to school in the peaceful platteland because it is so much safer, you see, than the big city with all its temptations and troubles. (165)

Thami tells that his description is a joke, because he is well aware of the fact that his location is not a safe place.

However, Isabel takes the register and calls many names and she also observes a few names carved into the wood of the desk. When she is unable to find Thami’s name, she is astonished. She asks Thami the reason. Thami conjectures:

Isabel, school doesn’t mean the same to us that it does to you.....I used to like it. Junior school? You should have seen me. I wanted to have school on Saturdays and Sundays as well. Yes, I did. Other boys wanted to kill me. I hated the holidays. (167)

Isabel is inquisitive. He replies “I changed.....things changed. Everything changed” (167). He is not sure about his future: “I am not sure anything yet” (168) replies Thami. He seems to be rebellious against Mr. M:

I don't want listen what he says and I don't do what he says.....It's just that he makes me so mad sometimes. He always says he knows what is best for me. He never asks me how I feel about things. I know he means well, but I am not a child any more. I have got ideas of my own now. (168)

Fugard is silent on Thami's disappointed regarding education. But, it later becomes clear that the formulation of 'Bantu Education Policy' prepared by apartheid makes Thami so furious exacerbated by Mr. M.

My children! My Africa! marks a departure in the unfolding of the narrative. In this play, the characters expose their background and thought processes through a series of self-revelation addressing the audience directly. Fugard calls them 'confidences' rather than soliloquies. Fugard has adopted such structure in keeping with didactic work. For this reason this play is taken to be one of the most powerful plays that provoke Black people for great revolution. Scene two is the example of self-revelation where Isabel is alone speaking directly to the audience. Isabel exhibits her racist tendencies while comparing Thami's and Mr. M's "location" to her town. She describes the pathetic conditions of Brakwater, namely "location" where Black people live:

There has been a lot of talk about moving it to where it can't be seen. Our Mayor, Mr Pienaar,...says to my dad that it was 'very much to be regretted' that the first thing that greeted any visitor to the town was 'the terrible mess of the location.' To be fair to old Pienaar he has got a point you know. Our town is very pretty. We have got a lot of nicely restored National Monument houses and buildings. Especially in the main street. Our shop is one of them. The location is an eyesore by comparison. (169)

She expresses her racial impression in a multiple manner. She describes that "most of the houses are made of bits of old corrugated iron or anything else they could find to

make four walls and a roof” (170). It has no garden or anything like that. The potholes and stones are in plenty on the road in such a manner that one has to drive always in first gear. When the wind is blowing, one has to bath in the dust and rubbish flying around. There is no electricity, no running water. Ultimately she expresses her happiness that she “was born with a white skin” (170), otherwise she might had to face the same problem.

How inferior the Blacks are in the eyes of the Whites is apparent when Isabel reaches Zolile High School along with her colleagues. One of Isabel’s friends suggests her to use simple English, because English is not the mother tongue of the Black South Africans: “Shame! We must remember that English is not their home language. So don’t use too many big words and speak slowly and carefully” (171). Her description of Number One Classroom in Zolile High School is notable, because it exposes how the apartheid regime has neglected Black school in South Africa:

Honestly, I would rate it as the most bleak, depressing, dingy classroom I have ever been in. Everything about it was grey- the cement floor, the walls, the ceiling. When I first saw it I thought to myself, how in God’s name does anybody study or learn anything in here. (171)

When she enters Zolile High School, she begins to realise that everywhere is not as “safe” as her own environment:

When I stood up in front of those black matric pupils in Number One Classroom it was very different story. I wasn’t at home or in my dad’s shop or in my school or any of the other safe places in my life. I was in Brakwater! It was *their* school. It was *their* world. I was the outsider....Standing there in front of them like that I felt... exposed !....in a way that has never happened to me before. (172)

Isabel says that when she was addressing the black audiences during the debate, they were staring at her in such a manner that she could feel it on her skin and it had become one of her unforgettable experiences. She never had such type of experience ever before:

I discovered a new world! I have always about the location as just a sort of embarrassing backyard to our neat and proper little white world, where our maids and our gardeners and our delivery boys went at the end of the day. But it is not. It's a whole world of its own with its own life that has nothing to do with us. (172)

After describing the pathetic condition of the location and its dingy environment, she expresses her desire to possess them, "I'm greedy. I want more. I want as much as I can get" (173). The way she describes the location and wished to possess it suggests White man's process of colonization. First of all the White man used to observe the condition of the colony and then express his sympathy mixed with greed to possess it. By doing so, he did not intend to improve the condition of the colony rather he wanted to hoard money and wealth by exploiting its natural treasures. The same attitude manifests in Isabel's desire to possess the colonized, not to improve their conditions but to enhance her condition. There is no indication in the play that she is really sympathetic with Black people and she wants to dismantle the system that brought about their miserable plight.

Isabel time and again refers to *their* world and *their* school which she does not, fortunately, belong to. She is far away from the world that White regime had created for its own purposes. The White government had created that world in order to exploit the people living in it in every walk of life.

Though Mr. M. is Black, but exhibits predilection towards White ideology. His congratulation to Isabel on her success in the debate proves it. He confides Isabel about Thami's friends teasing him on her failure in debate. Mr. M. does not want to see Isabel and Thami as two opposites in debate any more. He will prefer to see them as a team:

The standard Bank is sponsoring a new event: an inter-school English Literature quiz. Each team to consist of two members. I'll come straight to the point. I have suggested to Miss Brockway that Zolile High and Comdeboo High join forces and enter a combined team.... She has agreed and so has the Festival director.....I anxiously await your response. (176)

Isabel gives her consent to Mr. M. Isabel has been portrayed in such a fashion that her financial viability does not evoke any hostility by other classes. She is described by Fugard as a person who is gifted, individualistic and, since she comes from a White community, is comfortably placed in a position of power. She decides accessibility of the competition to Thami by agreeing to take part. It is to her that Mr. M makes a submission.

Meanwhile, Isabel expresses her racial impression about the unruly behaviour of the Black students in Zolile High School. When Mr. M asks her about her expectation from his people, he is in for a shock:

Isabel: You know, that everybody would be nice and polite and very,
very grateful.

Mr. M: And we weren't?

Isabel: You were, but not them. Thami and his friends. (*She laughs at the memory.*) *Ja*, to be honest, Mr. M. that family of yours was a bit scary at first. (178)

Isabel is anxious to know the response of Thami to participate as a team. Mr. M. feels uncomfortable with this question: "I haven't *asked* him Isabel, and I won't. I will *tell* him, and when I do I trust he will express as much enthusiasm for the idea as you have" (179). Mr. M. does not extend the same hospitality to Thami that he shows towards Isabel. This is indicative of his inclination and belief in White supremacy. Though he discloses his hopes and fears regarding Thami's future with her, yet he does not demonstrate any favouritism towards Thami. Moreover, on several occasions, he openly accepts the truth that he treats Thami differently because he instructs him. He does not use any condescending language for Thami as he uses for Isabel:

I am an old-fashioned traditionalist in most things young lady, and my classroom is certainly no exception. I teach, Thami learns. He understands and accepts that that is the way it should be ...We do not blur the difference the generations in the way that white people do. Respect for authority, right authority, is deeply ingrained in the African

soul. It's all I have got when I stand there in Number One. Respect for my authority is my only teaching aid. If I ever lost it those young people will abandon their desks and take to the streets. I expect Thami to trust my judgement of what is best for him, and he does. That trust is the most sacred responsibility in my life. (179-80)

Mr. M thus openly shows the different treatment he metes out to his two students in terms of race. On the one hand, he reveals his impression and approves the superiority of Isabel explaining his thought that she does not need the type of authority or command as Thami does. In other words, since Isabel is from White community, she automatically attains higher status. As for himself, he asserts that though he belongs to Black community, he has obtained the position and possessed the right authority to instruct.

During the conversation with Isabel, Mr. M reveals Thami's leadership quality. He appreciates him in comparison to other boys, "he wants to learn the way other boys want to run out of the classroom and make mischief" (180). Because, Thami has leadership quality, Mr. M is confident that if he cares for this he is cable of rising in life. He tells Isabel that Thami is "born leader". But subsequent rejoinder "I know it with such certainty it makes me frightened" (180) is surprising. If he has prepared Thami for leadership as later Mr. M claims, then what is it that frightens him. His fear shows that he has done something wrong with Thami- that is he supports Buntu Education Policy and teaches it and thus makes the Black people suppressed. The implication is that Mr. M is a character who is in dilemma throughout the play. He is not sure of himself on which side he stands. Sometimes, he takes the side of White and sometimes that of Black.

Due to perpetual suppression and subjugation, the Black people are compelled to raise their voice against brutality and injustice of apartheid. This is evident when Mr. M highlights the Black's hunger for freedom in Scene Four. They (Black people) are so enthusiastic for freedom that they seem to be mad: "I have got a whole zoo in here, a mad zoo of hungry animals....and the keeper is frightened! All of them. Mad and savage!" (183). Black people are hopeful of attaining freedom. For this reason Mr. M has compared "Hope" to freedom. But he is also conscious of the fact that "Hope" (freedom) is fraught with danger. It is as dangerous as "Hate" and "Despair"

would be if they ever managed to break out. Freedom is not an easy proposition in South Africa, because apartheid regime is so powerful and incisive that everybody is crushed with their “Hope”. Mr. M says “I feed young people to my Hope” (183) implies that those students who raise their voice against apartheid regime are buried with their “Hope”. Those people who are preparing for freedom are not aware of the consequences. They should be on guard regarding their plan:

Yes! The clocks are ticking, my friends. History has got a strict timetable. If we’re not careful we might be remembered as the country where everybody arrived too late. (184)

Though politics is an inseparable part of Fugard’s plays but nowhere it is heated with intensity as in *My children! My Africa!* In this play, he openly advocates a campaign against apartheid regime in order to save South Africa. Ian Steadman, a great critic, in 1989 newspaper article, throws light on this moment:

It has been fashionable in recent years to distinguish between cultural work which domesticates (showing how people should cope with things as they are) and cultural work which liberates (showing people how things can and should be changed). Much of Fugard’s previous work has been (somewhat unfairly) pigeonholed in the former category. With this play he takes his audience forcefully in a symbolic debate which is not merely liberal but liberating. (22)

Steadman understands in improvisation that Fugard has adopted for this play being different from previous works, is an expression of a very strong liberating voice. It does not mean that the other plays do not deal with the evils of apartheid. But the condemnation is complete in *My Children! My Africa!* Nearly all Fugard’s works echoes strains of rebellion, and the characters are aware of their situation and the need for change, but they are unable to do anything because of their powerlessness. Lena demonstrates her liberating force by not following her husband in *Boesman and Lena* Styles shows his liberating force by starting his own business and denying to be another man’s tools, but this force lacks in Hally and Gladys. However, Steadman’s point is noticeable which has been beautifully presented in this play.

During his intervention with Isabel, Thami informs her that though Mr. M is his teacher, yet he is not ready to follow him. According to Thami Mr. M is fulfilling the purpose of Buntu Education Policy. This response of Thami upsets Mr. M and Mr. M tells Isabel that if he is not careful, he will be in trouble:

Isabel: Thami is in trouble?

Mr. M: Not yet, but he will be if he is not careful. And all his friends as well. It's swimming around everywhere trying to stir up things. In the classroom, out on the streets. (187)

Mr. M speaks of brewing resentment, dangerous, reckless mood in the Black township. Black people are discussing the evils of apartheid day and night which is a disturbing sign. A silent revolution for freedom is stirring up in the township.

The political upheaval in South Africa during 1970s and 1980s was one of the major inspirations that compelled Fugard to write this play in this fashion. Freedom struggle was going on in many countries during the second half of the twentieth century, which had a profound impact on South African Blacks. For example, the calling in of the Chase Manhattan loan in 1985 influenced them a lot. It was non-violent action within the country that plays a very pivotal role in defeating the apartheid regime. If we observe from political viewpoint, we find that non-violent action or the passive revolution was the only internal choice that carried any real chance to success. The most effective tools that the Black people use in the campaign of non-violent action were strikes and boycotts. The general strike in 1974 that lasted for two days proved to be so terrifying for the Government that the nation came to a virtual standstill. Nearly one million people refused to go to work and half a million students boycotted the classes. 'Rent boycott' was one of the extremely effective boycotts that made apartheid regime realise its follies. By September 1986 around 60 percent of the Black population was not paying rent.

The National Government tried to control these strikes and other demonstrations as much as possible by labelling them as 'unrest' and putting a 'blanket of silence' over the whole affairs. The writers of the time expressed these events in their works in order to excite and provoke the Black community as Andrew Brink is summing up:

...a volcanic explosion of creativity in the country. Painters, sculptors, photographers, poets, dramatists, fiction writers, singers, dancers, all of them were drawn into a massive cultural movement that mobilised the masses into resistance by writing the history of their time in the form of fiction. (138)

Keeping this background in mind, Fugard designed *My children! My Africa!* making it in powerful political revolutionary statement of the time.

As the conversation between Mr. M and Isabel is going on Thami appears. Mr. M invites with quiz competition. Isabel and Thami have chosen nineteenth century poetry. The British Romantic writers are their major concerns. Fugard chooses some of the poets and writers in order to explain how these writers elucidate such themes and ideas in their works that seem universal. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, Byron, Shelly, Keats, Masfield, the Bronte sisters and Tennyson have been mentioned in the play. For example, Thami and Isabel are trying to show their knowledge of words while reciting 'Ozymandias' a poem by Shelley, which ends thus:

'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my works ye mighty and despair!'

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away. (195)

Isabel is aware of Ozymandias which is based on the political work of a great king of Egypt. The Egyptian king "erected many monuments...but whose oppressive rule left Egypt impoverished and suffering from an incurable decline" (195). The South African situation resembles that of Egypt a lot. Thami points out that there are some Ozymandias in South Africa too who are continuously making the country impoverished. They have to be pulled down because people of South Africa have decided to do that. A day will come when this will definitely happen. "Mr. M has been listening to the exchange between Isabel and Thami very attentively" (196), and as a confirmation enquires Thami if he is one of "The People" who would pull down Ozymandias on the ground. Thami retorts "If you choose to be" (196). It means if he

wants to be a part of the “movement” against apartheid regime he is always hailed. Initially, Mr. M agreed:

I am most definitely one of ‘The People’. I want freedom as much as any one of you. In fact, I was fighting for it in my own small way long before you were born! But I have got a small problem. (197)

Mr. M’s answer reflects that he is aware of the brutalities and injustices of apartheid and he wants to raise his voice against it. But the crux of the problem is that he is also a part of the White regime, as he is teaching Black people according to the Bantu Education Act. For this reason he withdraws his name and even threatens Thami: “Destroying somebody else’s property is inexcusable behaviour!....Don’t use me as an excuse for an act of lawlessness” (197). Mr. M believes in universal set of values such as rights of property, care for one’s own dignity and patterns of behaviour that are universally regarded correct and he appeals to maintain these values rather than transgress. It is this belief that makes him reproach Thami. He rebukes Thami for taking the matter in contrary manner. His views are diagonally opposite to his. And therefore, Mr. M wants to suppress any interpretation of the poem that goes against his beliefs. Moreover, he expresses his anger when Thami applies the themes of the poems directly to the social and political situation of South Africa.

Fugard again elucidates the spirit of freedom among the Black people when Thami informs Isabel about his people’s enthusiasm for freedom. This gives Thami a reason to ponder and question the reliability of Mr. M and his abilities. The students in Zolile High School in which Mr. M is teaching have joined the boycott of the Bantu Education system imposed by the White government. It is matter of introspection why the students have joined the boycott if Mr. M’s teaching is good, particularly those students who once voted for Isabel in the debate. Why do they, all of a sudden, turn around and join the mobs. Why are these students who are being taught to read and write and talk not ready to continue their education further? There are some possible answers. The first answer may be that Mr. M’s concept of education is wrong because his only purpose is to enable them to read and write and second may be that he teaches such an education that creates tension between the people of different races. Consequently, the students consider the current system of

education inadequate and they are compelled for boycotts and mass action. Thami accuses Mr. M of living in an Ivory Tower of his own, divorced from ground realities:

He (Mr. M) is out of touch with what is really happening to us blacks and the way we feel about things. He thinks the world is still the way it was when he was young. It's not! It's different now, but he is too blind to see it. He does not open his eyes and ears and see what is happening around him or listen to what people are saying. (200)

Non- White population of South Africa, Thami is of the firm belief, have exhausted their patience and are in no mood to wait. They want change immediately. In other words, people have started campaigning for freedom from the White regime. People have learned nothing from Mr. M because of his "old fashioned ideas" about change. As a result, their present conditions are worse than ever before. But now they are determined not to pay attention to his kind of talk anymore because:

It calls our struggle vandalism and lawless behaviour. It's the sort of talk that expects us to do nothing and wait quietly for white South Africa to wake up. If we listen to it our grand-children still won't know what it means to be free. (201)

Both Mr. M and Isabel articulate the struggles of the Black people for freedom as "vandalism and lawless behaviour". In other words, they want the current status quo world maintained. They deny or reject any sort of behaviour or action that challenges their perspectives. They are not ready to conceive of any other way of doing things other than their own. It means they support dominant culture and civilization. Consequently, the education that is being taught in the schools and the policy that put that education into practice is similar in one way or the other as Thami elaborates:

that classroom is a political reality in my life ...it's a part of a whole political system we are up against and Mr. M has chosen to identify himself with it. (202)

It is imperative to note here that the colonial system imposed a kind of education on the colonized which promoted self-hatred and subservience. It disconnected people from the masses as Mr. M in the play. "The educational system reflected this inequality and encouraged a slave mentality, with a reverent awe for the achievements

of Europe” (Ngugi, *Homecoming* 14). Racial discrimination was practiced even in allocation of schools and teaching facilities. Thami protests against the old-fashioned and the colonized outlook of Mr. M who supports the superiority of the European culture over that of Africa by chanting a Xhosa poem. As far as political reality of South Africa is concerned, it is a society built on racial pyramid: the White Afrikaners minority at the top, the Asian in the middle and the African at the bottom. For this reason Thami keeps himself away from the Eurocentric colonizing culture of Mr. M whose teaching glorifies it. In this regard, Frantz Fanon argues that “colonialism wants everything to come from it. But the dominant psychological feature of the colonized is to withdraw before any invitation of the conqueror” (63).

Thami’s childhood history in Scene Six gives clear picture of racism prevalent in South Africa. He is a Black student from working class family and eventually he has to endure all the injustices and prejudices done by the White regime. Thami’s schooling is different from that of Isabel. This is not only because of their familial differences that one is from wealthy family while the other belongs to poor family, but because of differences in their skin colour. All sorts of resources are provided by the government to the children from White community and withdrawn for the Black children. During his childhood Thami had insatiable hunger for knowledge, but in later years it changed because, as Thami says, the classroom is not a place for learning rather it has been a place for politics. He confides to Isabel:

I’ve told you before: sitting in a classroom doesn’t mean the same thing that it does to you. That classroom is a political reality in my life....it is a part of the whole political system we’re up against. (202)

The history of Black and Coloured education in apartheid era adequately explains Thami’s argument.

Writing in the *New York Times*, Frank Rich remarks that this script is under-written when the characters on the stage speak to each other, but he applauds Thami’s speech, that comprises the whole of Act One Scene Six, as the most ambitious piece of writing in the play that, just like Styles’ monologue, could also be performed in isolation from the rest of the play. (Shelley 228)

Thami embodies the aspiration of so many African parents for the education of their children. He was not like Shakespeare's "whining schoolboy creeping like a snail unwillingly to school". He was so interested in education that he had reached the school before the arrival of the caretakers. He was a very eager scholar, hungry for knowledge. His first scholastic achievement was a composition that he had written about himself in Standard Two. The composition was outstanding in his life because it not only got him top marks in the class but also made the teacher so happy and proud that she made him to read it aloud at assembly. Thami's composition comprises his own story. On one hand, it provides information about his family background, on the other hand, it reveals his aim of life at Standard Two that shows racial impact on his mind:

When I'm big I am going to be a doctor so that I can help my people. I will drive to the hospital every day in a big, white ambulance full of nurses. I will make black people better free of charge. The white people must pay me for my medicine because they have got lots of money. That way I will also get lots of money. My mother and father will stop working and come and live with me in a big house. (205)

But by the time he reaches high school, he nurses no ambition. Now he is able to realise and discover the real causes of pain and suffering of his people. Now he understands that it is not illness that causes his people's suffering and pain and that can be cured by the medicine. What his people really need is "a strong double-dose of that traditional old Xhosa remedy called *nkululeko*....freedom" (206). That is why his interest in education seems to be fading away:

That little world of the classroom where I used to be happy....that little room of wonderful promises where I used to feel so safe has become a place I don't trust any more. Now I sit at my desk like an animal that has smelt danger, heard something moving in the bushes and knows it must be very careful. (206)

Moreover, Thami's description of Mr Dawid Grobbelaar, the Inspector of Bantu Schools in the Cape midlands Region, who demands to be called Oom Daeie, exposes the hypocrisy and duplicity of racist society. Oom Daeie's promise to provide education to the Blacks: "we have educated you because we want you to be major

shareholders in the future of this wonderful Republic of ours. In fact, we want *all* the peoples of South Africa to share in that future....” (207) is completely an illusion. His hypocrisy stood exposed when Thami meditates the conditions of the Black people in South Africa and finds that most of the shareholders in the country are those men and women who are tired and defeated and who, at the end of day’s work, come back to their miserable *Pondoks* for the White *baas* or madam. He added that they are supposed to be lucky because they have at least got job. There are many people in the country who are jobless and who are wasting their lives waiting helplessly for a miracle to happen, but it continues to elude in reality. Those people are their fathers and mothers whom they have been seen begging food for years, though they are in the country of their births and their parent’s birth. Black people are the original inhabitants of this country and they have been living here even before the arrival of the White settlers in South Africa. Still, they are living in pathetic conditions. Is Oom Dawie unaware of all these facts? The White people have the big houses, the beautiful gardens and swimming pools. They have access to all luxurious comforts in their houses while the Black people are unable to get two meals. Does Oom Dawie not aware of it? Thami bombasts against the educational policy that creates an image of the European world as the centre of the universe and Africa being discovered by Europe and hence it promotes White Eurocentric culture. Contemplating colonial education, Thami finally breaks his silence:

Do you understand now why it is not as easy as it used to be to sit behind that desk and learn only what Oom Dawie has decided I must know? My head is rebellious. It refuses now to remember when the Dutch landed, and the Huguenots landed, and the British landed. It has already forgotten when the old Union became the proud young Republic. But it does know what happened in Kliptown in 1955, in Sharpeville on 21 March 1960 and Sweto on 16 June 1976..... We don’t need Zolile classrooms any more. We know now what they really are-traps which have been carefully set to catch our minds, our souls....We have found another school... the streets, the little rooms, the funeral parlour of the location...Tomorrow we start shouting AMANDLA! (208)

Thami epitomises the Black men’s enthusiasm for freedom. They are no longer dumb and mute. They are not blind anymore. Now they are in a position to understand each

and every strategy and policy of the White regime. Earlier they accepted everything that the White government provided on the name of education, but now they themselves can decide what they will learn and what they will reject. Earlier they were watching prejudices and injustices against their fathers and mothers silently, but now they have courage to speak out, distinguish between right and wrong. They are prepared to take action against any injustice and prejudice extended by the Government. It is for this reason Thami has started a campaign against the Nationalist Government and a struggle for freedom for Black South Africans. In other words, Thami's rebellion is a protest against the educational policy of apartheid which is meant to colonize the minds of the non-White population of South Africa. It can also be seen as one of the endless struggles of South African Blacks to liberate politics, culture and their economy from the colonizers to visualise a new era of self – determination.

Thami is aware of the potential validity of Isabel's and Mr. M's positions and the vulnerability of his and his people. That is why he is ready to give up short term goal and chooses the alternative action (movement) in the long term. Though Mr. M and Isabel condemn his action of compromise, he has firm belief that one day his struggle will bring the stubborn South African White regime to its senses and his people will be free. Freedom of the individual can be sacrificed for a short while, if humanity in general is benefitted by it. In other words, if there is equality in the society, all will have equal opportunities and individual choices. If there is inequality in the society, it is the responsibility of each and every individual to make effort to erase inequality in the society. In the play Thami sacrifices his friendship with Isabel for the sake of the freedom of his community. When Isabel asks Mbikwana that after the boycott is over, could they carry on their friendship, Thami expresses uncertainty. In his opinion, public good is more important than personal is. Isabel, to some extent, is aware of the fact that friendship between White and Black is not viable in South Africa. Yet she is eager to know the reason of not being friends:

There is something very stupid somewhere and it's most probably me but I can't help itit just doesn't make sense! I know it does to you and I'm sure it is just my white selfishness and ignorance that is stopping me from understanding (the struggle for freedom) but it still

doesn't make sense. Why can't we go on seeing each other and meeting as friends? Tell me what is wrong with our friendship? (214)

Thami does not want to go into details. He just drops hints to Isabel about the impossibility of carrying out their relationship. But when compelled by Isabel, he explains:

Visiting you like this is dangerous. People talk. U'Sis Pumla- your maid- has seen me. She could mention, just innocently but to the wrong person, that Thami Mbikwana is visiting and having tea with white people she works for..... I'm breaking the boycott by being here. The Comrades don't want any mixing with whites. They have ordered that contact must be kept at a minimum. (214)

Isabel is astonished to listen to Thami and expresses her surprise 'that is such a big crime!' (214). She questions him that does not constitute freedom when other people decide what he can do and what he cannot do; who can be his friend and who cannot be.

Mr. M seems to be a victim of the 'Bantu Educational Policy' of apartheid to alienate educated Blacks of South Africa from native history and traditions. In Thami's view, Mr. M performs his duty as a teacher in such an educational system that discriminates between two different races. Though Mr. M believes that real education is universal and transcendental, but the education he is providing to the Blacks of South Africa is far behind than being universal:

Thami:they (white government) have been forcing on us an inferior education in order to keep us permanently suppressed. When our struggle is successful there will be no more need for the discipline the Comrades are demanding.

Mr. M:So then tell me, do you think I agree with this inferior 'Bantu Education' that is being forced on you?

Thami: You teach it. (215-16)

Through this Bantu education, Mr M creates tension between literate and illiterate people. His teaching helps, to some extent, the people to read and write: "I wanted

you to know how to read and write and talk in this world of living, stupid, cruel men” (221). In his opinion, the people unable to read and write are cruel and stupid and those who can read and write are presumably the opposite. However, this concept proves the superiority of literacy over orality. Once upon a time there was a situation in South Africa when “oral traditions” was rejected. However, the major flaw in Mr. M’s character can be comprehended from the pupils he educates. Mr. M argues that though Thami has joined the ‘struggle’ now, it is he who has enabled him word-perfect. Moreover, he argues that if he had not taught them (black students) so, none of this (struggle and boycott) would have happened:

Where were you when I stood there (in the classroom) and said I regard it as my duty, my deepest obligation to you young men and women to sabotage it (Bantu Education,) and that my conscience would not let me rest until I had succeeded. And I have!... I have got irrefutable proof of my success. You!.... You can stand here and accuse me, unjustly, because I have also had a struggle and I have won mine. I have liberated your mind in spite of what Bantu Education was trying to do to it. (216)

But, Thami does not accept Mr. M’s argument that he has liberated his (Thami’s) mind. Rather he accuses him of imposing white man’s discipline on him. He imparts an education that makes them permanently suppressed. His lessons are in “whispering”. It is his people in the street who have taught him to shout. Besides, he asserts that the situation is such in South Africa that the big English words are unable to help the “struggle” any more, “the struggle doesn’t need the big English words” (216). Fugard has presented Thami to demonstrate the validity of Mr. M’s argument. Since Thami has become a very significant part of the “struggle” whose majority of the supporters are not literate up to the standard, he cannot argue logically or coherently. However, explaining the significance of words, Mr. M advises Thami:

....words are sacred! Magical! Do you know that without words a man can’t think? ...The difference between a man and an animal is that man thinks, and he thinks with words. (217)

Thus Fugard wants to say that words comprise thoughts that can be thought. Fugard suggests that words are necessary for understanding life: “If you have got a problem,

put it into words so that you can look at it, handle it, and ultimately solve it” (223). The climax of the play comes when Mr. M compares the usefulness of the words with that of stone. How beautifully Fugard has underlined the usefulness of the words through the articulation of Mr. M when he tells Thami that:

if struggle needs weapons, give it words, Thami. Stones and petrol bombs can't get inside those police armoured cars. Words can. They can do even something more devastating than that....they can get inside the heads of those armoured cars. I speak to you like this because if I have faith in anything, it is faith in the power of the word.
(217)

Here Mr. M describes the positive value of the words that can penetrate into the heads of the authorities. The power of words seem to be opposite of Zachariah's dreams and thoughts about Ethel in *'Blood Knot'*, that concerns his brother Morris so much. As we know that the centrality of the play is on the relationship between Thami and Mr. M, but the correlation of stone and word seems to be a powerful subtext. Thami represents one and Mr. M the other respectively that can be easily grasped by the reader. Both of them are partially true. Thami is wrong when he denies the importance of the words because while campaigning against the injustices of the White regime his people are in need of the words. Mr. M is equally wrong when he rejects the positive value of the arms and weapons. He should not be so unrealistic that he only believes in the power of the word expecting that the authorities would listen to reason in such a highly-volatile political situation of the late twentieth century. The English word has not succeeded in the play because Thami rebels against it. Though he has learnt Romantic poetry at the feet of Mr. M, but he is not ready to accept the liberal ideology that his teacher wants to propagate. Mr. M compares the effectiveness of the dictionary- the book- with the stone, but he forgets that both the things are objects of subjugation. On one hand, the stone represents apartheid's force that is used against "Black Consciousness Movement", and on the other hand, the book represents another weapon of the White regime, that is used to control or suppress the Black community- as it was for Sizwe in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Sizwe says about his horrible book that is not in order: "My passbook talks good English too...big words that Sizwe can't read... Sizwe wants to stay here in New Brighton and find a job; passbook says, "No! Report back" (*Sizwe Bansi is Dead*).

Mr. M warns Thami time and again not to take part in the boycott and if Thami continues he would give his (Thami's) name along with his friends taking part in the boycott, to the department. And when the boycott is over without fulfilling its purpose as it has happened earlier, they would be compelled to apply for re-admission. Thami had never ever thought that Mr. M would give their names to the apartheid regime to put them in trouble. Hence, he is surprised to listen to Mr. M:

Thami: Will you do it? Will you make list for them?

Mr. M: That is none of your business.

Thami: Then don't ask me questions about mine.

Mr. M: (*His control finally snaps. He explodes with anger and bitterness*): Yes I will!...And you know why? Because I am a man and you are a boy. And if you are not in the classroom tomorrow you will be a very, very silly boy. (218)

Thami is not frightened of Mr. M's threat. In fact he exhibits his eagerness for freedom in such a manner that he confronts him. He blames Mr. M of being White man's puppet. In his opinion, Mr. M has to secure his job though he has to lick the White man's arse and eat his shit. Fugard has created Thami as a character brimming with spirit of freedom and never afraid of consequences: "Don't wait tomorrow to make your list, Mr. M. You can start now. Write down the first name: Thami Mbikwana" (218). However, Mr. M does not accept the school boycott and endure his student's joining the movement. It is his stubborn passion that compels him to face the mob, later in the play, and, hence, is killed. Mr. M not only informs the White regime about violence and intolerance on behalf of Black community by submitting their names, but also works for the oppressor throughout his life. He is working as an ambassador of apartheid regime when he is teaching his pupils the liturgy of the supremacy of the English language. Apartheid authorities are fully agreed upon the plan to teach the oppressed the works of Wordsworth if it helps to divert their minds from thoughts of violence to overthrow the oppressor. But, unfortunately, language has betrayed Mr. M as he has betrayed his pupils. His love of English language and his veneration towards words is directly contrasted with one of the causes of the turbulence. This central issue attends the play's shortfalls as Hornby points out:

the tragedy of Mr M is that he does not take words seriously *enough*. Words are not just the substance of abstract discourse, they can provoke action. 'Rock' may be a single word in the dictionary, but it is there along with words like 'tyranny' and 'revolution'. (125)

Mr. M suffers from the same problem that Sizwe Bansi undergoes in '*Sizwe Bansi is Dead*'. Sizwe wants to work within the system for his own survival and to exploit the system for his own benefits, but he does not invade the system in order to change it. Mr. M repeats the same action in the play. He wants to work within the system as a teacher. He fulfils his responsibility as a teacher just for his own survival and benefits rather than for the sake of his community. Neither he invades the system nor does he become the part of the movement that makes tireless effort to change it. Thami decides to detach himself from the system so that he may attack it. However, Mr. M chooses to work within the system. He is agreed upon the ways and values of the system that the White regime has imposed upon the Blacks in order to maintain its superiority over them. The apartheid regime promotes the 'separate development' policy of White and Black.

Fugard again brings through Mr. M's reminiscence, the spirit of freedom of the Black South Africans into notice in Act Two Scene Two. Mr. M recalls black people's protest against apartheid and their passion for freedom on the way to school. Fugard comments on Mr. M's first sentence, "it was like being in a nightmare" (219) that indicates that it was not a good experience. On the way to school, he saw that "every road ...was blocked by the policemen and soldiers with their guns ready, or Comrades building barricades" (219). Everywhere he observed overturned buses, looted bread vans, the government offices burning and children were shouting "*Tshisa, Qhumisa! Tshisa, Qhumisa! Tshisa, Qhumisa!*" (219). Mr. M's description of the passion of freedom of a person who was not literate enough is remarkable:

There was little Sipho Fondini from Standard Six (8th grade--added), writing on the wall: 'Liberation First, then Education.' He saw me and he called out: 'Is the spelling right, Mr. M?' And he meant it! The young eyes in that smoke-stained face were terribly serious. (219)

"Liberation First, then Education" was the rallying cry for the people who rebel against the Bantu Education system. On the surface level, it suggests that political

freedom is more important than educational one. In other words, political freedom should be obtained before they are provided effective education. This reading is placed by Mr. M (and Fugard) on the slogan which they suggest, to some extent, is difficult. It suggests an idea that education is the path to liberation, not only of the soul of an individual but also of the community at large. In their opinion, it is through education, people can recognize and attain eternal values of life.

But, a counter-reading of education that is the reading of Thami and of Black community suggests that education is enslaving rather than liberating because through education, dominant value systems are spread as universal ones. As a result, liberation should include not only political liberation but also educational liberation. If liberation is theorized as the opposite state of what one has now or desire to have in future, for example for the most of the Blacks of South Africa, then education is enough to attain that opposite state. In other words, if the White regime wants to keep the Blacks permanently backward and suppressed, education alone can fulfil this mission. They prepare such a syllabus for the Black that it does not enable them to think against the ruling ideology. When one wants to attain freedom from particular constraints, he realizes its necessity in order to get freedom. However, whatever be the consequence, Black people are determined to get freedom.

However, Mr. M's realization of his folly comes to our notice when he stops his reminiscence in the class and cries with helpless gesture: "Oh my children! I have no lessons that will be of any use to you now. Mr. M and all of his wonderful words are.....useless, useless, useless!" (221). He hears the sound of breaking glass and watches stones landing in the classroom from outside. Meanwhile, Thami appears to warn Mr. M not to ring the school bell and suggests to join the school boycott, but it was futile because: "in my life, nothing more serious than ringing the school bell" (222) replies Mr. M. Further, Thami informs Mr. M that the Comrades are looking for him, because they think that he is an informer and if he does not join the movement they will kill him. Mr. M confesses his guilt:

That's right Thami. I'm guilty. I did go to the police. I sat down in Captain Lategan's office and told him I felt it was my duty to report the presence in our community of strangers from north. ...I gave the

captain names and address. He thanked me and offered me money for the information, which I refused. (224)

Mr. M's contradictory character at this juncture is most obvious. He is most honest and most deceived. When Mr. M accepts the truth that he has given the police the names of those who have started boycotting classes and who, as he claims, are agitators, Fugard points out that Mr. M did it out of love for Thami who was his favourite, and because of "loneliness":

Isn't that what you were all secretly hoping I would do...so that you would be proved right? (Appalled) Is that why I did it? Out of spite? Can a man destroy himself, his life for a reason as petty as that? I sat here before going to the police station saying to myself that it was my duty, to my conscience, to you, to the whole community to do whatever I could to put an end to this madness of boycotts and arson, mob violence and lawlessness... and may be that is true...but only may be...because Thami the truth is that I was so lonely! You had deserted me. I was so jealous of them who had taken you away. Now, I have really lost you, haven't I? Yes. I can see it in your eyes. You will never forgive me for doing that, will you? (225)

Fugard is unable to justify Mr. M's sudden weakness. He is described by his creator as 'flawed, beautiful Mr. M'. Trying to justify Mr. M's action, Fugard regards it individual weakness on the part of the character because very few people can repeat the act in South Africa with all its associated dangers. The above monologue and the "appalled" stage direction give some ambiguous clue that Mr. M himself has realized his fault what he has done and why he has done. This episode captures suffering of the entire play.

Fugard seems to portray Mr. M as classically 'tragic hero' who has a 'fatal flaw' that causes his death. Mr. M's flaw is his loneliness, or his humanity. Fugard's play becomes a document that depicts humanity's inability to act rationally and to evade its weakness.

Another example that explains Mr. M's contradictory character and remarks directly on the title of the play comes when Mr. M describes Thami how he is

fascinated by knowledge. He discusses an incident. Once upon a time he was standing on top of the Wapadsberg pass when he was a ten year old boy and he gazed to the north. At that moment something grabbed his heart, his soul and he squeezed it in such a manner that there were tears in his eyes. This reminds us of a very typical of Romantic reaction. When he asked his teacher what he would encounter if he started his journey toward north, he is answered that he would see all of Africa. Then the teacher paints the picture of Africa on the basis of his knowledge. He says that he would see the great rivers of the continent such as the Vaal, the Zambesi, the Limpopo, the Congo and the Nile etc. and the mountains like the Drakensberg, Kilimanjaro, Kenya and the Ruwenzori etc. Moreover, he adds that he has knowledge about these things from books not from being there. Concluding the story Mr. M tells Thami that ‘He was right... It is all there in the books...and I have made it mine (226). It was so interesting for him that he walked through Africa in the books whenever he wanted. It is remarkable how he shares the experience of walking through Africa in the books: “When I left that little room (his lodgings) I walked back into the world a proud man, because I was an African and all the splendour was my birth right” (227).

Mr. M’s description of the television image of a skinny figure Ethiopian ‘brother’ who was carrying the dead body of a little child wrapped in a few rags is very pathetic. The child had died of hunger in the famine. The lines of despair and starvation were obvious on the old man’s face. He was so weak that he could not kneel and lay the dead body gently in the grave, rather he opened his arms and it fell down. Fugard here points out extreme poverty of South African Blacks. Mr. M does not interrogate the causes of this event rather he laments on it: “What is wrong with this world that it wants to waste you all like thatmy children...my Africa!....My beautiful and proud young Africa!” (227).The images discussed above have been derived from two significant sources firstly from books, then from television. These images have been described not only by the writers of the books and the crews of the television but also by Fugard himself. All of them want to elaborate a particular point of view that Mr. M does not understand. They want to suggest that the books and television do not ‘lie’ rather they illustrate the true pictures of the society. From both the reliable sources, we infer that Africa is vast and highly divergent continent that contains hugely heterogeneous peoples. Moreover, all the places are not as beautiful

and majestic as Mr. M has suggested in the play. His description of being an African is as nebulous as being Caucasian. His view of Africa refutes its diversity. Hence his outcry about the Ethiopian child can't be generalized for all of Africa except by the bond of 'brotherhood of humanity' and that is not possible until racial discrimination is uprooted from South Africa.

The books that Mr. M reads are written and published by those who want to foster a particular image of the continent. They might have fostered it unintentionally, but it is still an integrated part of the ideal 'authority'. Therefore Mr. M relies on the accuracy of the perceptions of the authors. Whatever the matter be, he is an educated man who believes in truth. That is the reason he, being himself an African, claims entire Africa and its children as his domain and expresses sorrows on the waste of it all.

When Mr. M's confession is over, he starts to go outside the classroom, where Comrades are waiting for him. In spite of Thami's tireless effort to save Mr. M the Comrades kill him, which is evident from the following dialogue:

Thami: No! Don't go out there. Let me speak to them first. Listen to me! I will tell them I have confronted you with the charges and that you have denied them and that I believe you. I will tell them you are innocent.

Mr. M: you will lie for me, Thami?

Thami: Yes.

Mr. M: (*desperate to hear the truth*) Why?

Thami can't speak.

Why will you lie for me Thami?

Thami: I have told you before.

Mr. M: The 'Cause'?

Thami: Yes.

Mr. M: I do not need to hide behind your lies.

Thami: They will kill you.

Mr. M: Do you think I'm frightened of them? Do you thing I'm

Frightened of dying?

Mr. M breaks away from Thami. Ringing his bell furiously he goes outside and confronts the mob. They kill him.(228)

Mr. M as a victim of the educational policy of apartheid informs the official authorities about the protests and rebellions of his students and is subsequently murdered by his own students whose intellectual lives he wanted to nurture. One can claim that Mr. M's action shows White supremacist brainwashing. Submitting the names of the students engaged in protests and boycotts to the police was done as a part of his duty. Emmanuel Obiechina comments on that "the supreme sin of colonialism was its devaluation of African culture and alienation of educated Blacks from their native traditions and history" (80). For this reason, Mr. M is declared a traitor by his own students and his people and he has to pay the price of treason dearly in the form of execution. However, Mr. M's execution can be seen as a representation of the expectable consequence of South African resistance politics in general and school boycotts by the students in particular. Nicholas Visser argues: "Mr. M's chief dramatic and ideological function is to act as a ventriloquist's dummy, uttering as if with his own voice what are actually the anxieties and perceptions and aspirations of middle -class White South Africans" (494). But, for Athol Fugard and the liberal White middle classes, Mr. M represents a group of South African Blacks who prefer words over resistance. Mr. M can be seen as Fugard's mouthpiece who has firm belief in dialogue and discussion among people in South Africa. His approach to struggle is that both Blacks and Whites should sit together where they can construct a future based on dialogue, mutual respect and racial equality after long years of racial discrimination and violence. Mr. M's approach is reinforced through his statement: "In my humble opinion they are the real winners this afternoon. You two just had to talk and argue. Anybody can do that. They had to listen intelligently" (160). In this regard Visser says:

words are the only weapons in social and political conflict clearly lies close to the centre of Fugard's thinking... language is what should

happen between human beings. The alternative is bullets and bombs.
And that is barbarism. (492)

Mr. M seems to be an individual whose tragedy is the consequence of the 'politics'. He is torn between the two ideas: one is to be a part of the oppressor and the other is to be a part of the oppressed. However, Fugard has portrayed such a character that seems to be harmless but almost eccentric.

Isabel and Thami have been depicted as two counter-forces in Mr. M's life. Isabel does not change her view of the Black. She always considers them uncivilized, uncultured, ill-tempered and illiterate etc. Thami is a thoughtful pupil who always thinks for the betterment of his community. His major concerns are with the predicament of the Black people in South Africa. His justification to Isabel why the 'mob' encountered Mr. M is eye opener:

It was an act of self-defence.... He betrayed us and our fight for freedom. Five men are in detention because of Mr. M's visit to the police station....Anelya Myalatya did to them and their causewhat your laws define as treason when it is done to you and threatens the safety and security of your comfortable white world....When you judge us for what happened in front of the school four days ago just remember that you carry a share of the responsibility for it. It is your laws that have made simple decent black people so desperate that they turn into 'mad mobs'. (233)

Thami's explanation is on one hand a clichéd argument and on the other it is a hollow counter-accusation. In Mr. M's opinion, revenge is evil. He suggests that one must stoop to the tactics of the enemy in order to achieve one's goal that seems, in a way, impossible in South Africa. He argues that violence is self-defeating because it does not solve the problem rather it leads to counter-violence and revenge. However, this again seems senseless because there is no freedom in the colony without violence.

Thami's revelation about Mr. M "there was nothing left for him. That visit to the police station had finished everything" (234) surprises Isabel. Isabel is astonished to listen to Thami's claims that lead to Mr. M's death and Thami's flight. Still she asks Thami where he is going. Thami answers "I am going to join the movement. I want to be a fighter" (236). However, they say goodbye to each other in Xhosa

language. Thami is determined to go to north in order to join the movement struggling for freedom in South Africa. Fugard has never mentioned where Thami is going in north. There can be three possibilities: (i) he could be going into any other African countries in order to carry on his study, (ii) he could be going to join the African National Congress waging an armed campaign against White regime in South Africa, (iii) he could be going to join the Pan-Africanist Congress, a militant organization that claims that South Africa is for non-White Africans.

Fugard's liberal vision can be seen the way he chooses to conclude his play with meaningful messages when Isabel and Thami talk about what Mr. M stood for. Thami's decision to go north to become a strategist for the rights of Blacks and not to remain a member of the mindless mob, and Isabel's decision to be one of Mr. M's 'children' whose new role will be to devote herself for social change and reform clearly shows Fugard's liberal vision of South Africa. She goes to Wapadsberg Pass, where Mr. M has his first vision of South Africa: "The future is ours Isabel. We shall show this stupid country how it is done" (181). Isabel assures him that his children can still save South Africa as he did try in his life:

I am going to try my best to make my life useful in the way yours was.
I want you to be proud of me. After all, I am one of your children you know .You did welcome me to your family .The future is still ours, Mr. M. (238)

One may take this remark as a sign of optimism and hope for the better future for the Black and Coloured South Africans. But, it is not an easy road. Fugard reiterates his deep concern about such future for South Africans:

I am fifty eight years old and am resigned to the possibility that, in my lifetime, I might not see the fully democratic society that I so passionately wish for my country and its people. (Visser381)

The implication is that South Africa's journey to a just and decent society is not very easy. Hence, the continuing violence, unemployment and illegal immigration that still rack South Africa is a fair indication of the formidable hurdles that still lie ahead before South Africans can claim to become a civilized and equal society.

Since *My children! My Africa!* deals with politics explicitly, Fugard decided to perform it first of all in his own country. That is why "this one is between me and my country" appeared in *Time* magazine of 10 July 1989. Stephen Gray avers:

Nevertheless, Fugard the man of provocative stances meant it: South African audiences should have this play first...and for sound, practical reasons. Apart from the fact that *My children! My Africa!* will not play quite the same way out of here, Fugard knows there is a hard, tough core in the South African skull that loves a hefty moral pummelling, and that night after night guilt-ridden, unrepentant masses will stream into their community cockpit for something they are not getting in the world outside. And like any good Calvinist preacher, Fugard knows just how to dole out the punishment accurately. He also knows that South Africans are no longer impressed by *their* plays appearing at the National or on Broadway first. (25)

Mary Benson is of the opinion that Fugard copied *My children! My Africa!* from within the cauldron of the protest in the Eastern Cape. Despite its great success during its performance, Fugard in a letter stated: "I still wake up in the middle of the night and lie in the dark agonizing as to whether I gave Mr M, Thami and Isabel the life they deserve" (qtd Shelley: 221). Black schools were the place where Black youths started their campaign against apartheid regime and kept their anti-apartheid struggle in progress during 1980s. The knowledge that is imparted to the Black people in Zolile High School is primarily concerned with the self-education course. All the three characters argue in such a manner that the classroom becomes the arena for debating rather than a seat of learning. Though the debate begins with the subject of the equality of the sexes, but it veers towards the efficiency of the word versus the gun. The classroom also symbolises a battleground where each of the three characters fights their own separate wars and endeavours to understand what is happening to them until the play ends with a tragedy, though entailing a ray of hope. Their battles do not concern their personal advantage rather they deal with the political realities of the time. Isabel tries and understands the politics of the time, Thami raises his voice against it and Mr M reconciles his liberal views with the protest of the Black people going on outside his classroom.

My Children! My Africa!, clearly explicates that humanity has an ideal state or world within itself and also 'out there' to be attained, but it is only achieved if humanity listens to the promptings of its hearts leaving its shortcomings behind. Mr M expresses it while discussing Confucius:

But the words that challenge me most these days is something he said towards the end of his (Confucius's) life...(He)... said that he could do whatever his heart prompted, without transgressing what was right... *Anything* his heart prompted *anything* that rose up as a spontaneous urge in his soul, *without* transgressing what was right! ...Wouldn't it be marvellous to have a heart that you could trust like that?You will be free to obey and act out, with a clear conscience, all the promptings of your heartYou need have no fear of your spontaneous urges, because in obeying them you will not transgress what is right. (182)

This is a principal concern for Mr. M. This is not only his ambition but also the basis and foundation of his teachings. He wants to convey the message that humanity is innately good (liberalist view) and the imperfections in the society are prevailed only because humanity has evaded listening to its heart. The heart speaks a universal language that only can be understood through proper education and the person who can teach this education is he who has already learned to listen to the promptings of his heart as Mr. M. The debate and studying the masters or experts in this state of wisdom such as Romantic poets can help to learn this education easily.

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