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## A Psychic Interpretation Of The Professional Mourner In Zakes Mda's *Ways Of Dying*

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**Abstract:** An art form constituting the interlocution of human psyche, emotions, subtlety and other forms of creativity confirming the mastery over artistic merit can be accounted as literature. In this aspect, literature evokes rationale and critical thinking in human psyche. Furthermore, literature connects the readers through various modes of literary composition and enriches social consciousness and aesthetic appreciation at the peripheries. Being located between the Tropic of Cancer and Capricorn, Africa as a nation consists various ethnicities who would sensitise the sensibilities of nationhood irrespective of cultural diversity. Moreover, African Literature addresses the issues of slave trade, gender discrimination, racism and embodies literary aspects on slave narratives, postcolonial perspectives and trauma narratives prior to colonization. With the emergence of literary theories, psychoanalytic criticism facilitates the reader in analysing the psyche of characters in literary texts. In this view, Zakes Mda, South African novelist depicts the Post-apartheid South Africa in one of his works *Ways of Dying*. Toloki, the predominant character, was marginalized and traumatized by the society finds solace in his own community. The chief motive of the paper is to analyse the traumatic events encountered by Toloki in his lifetime in the violent city of South Africa.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Postcolonialism, Post-apartheid, Psychoanalysis

Literature is a discourse that addresses human follies, rejuvenation, humaneness, expurgation and other sounds of unanimated emotions that are recumbent at human psyche and soul. Being located between the Tropic of Cancer and Capricorn, Africa as a nation consists various ethnicities who would sensitise the sensibilities of nationhood irrespective of cultural diversity. Moreover, African Literature addresses the issues of slave trade, gender discrimination, racism and embodies literary aspects on slave narratives, postcolonial perspectives and trauma narratives prior to colonization. With the emergence of literary theories, psychoanalytic criticism facilitates the reader in analysing the psyche of characters in literary texts.

Most renowned and acclaimed South African writer Zakes Mda – with his pen name Zakes Mda was born into the Apartheid system is a versatile writer, painter, music composer, Professor Emeritus of English at Ohio University, and Director of NeoZane, a publishing house and animation film production company, Johannesburg. To his credit, he has published 22 books including fictions, plays, poetry and a monograph on the theory and practice of theatre for development. As an acknowledged novelist, Mda has received many awards, including the Amstel Playwright of the Year Award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Africa. Currently, he is a patron of the prestigious Etisalat Prize for Literature.

In general, fiction involve characters infused with imagery including philosophical themes regarding the human condition and will of nature. It also comprises literary devices such as symbols, metaphors and allegory. Published in 1997, Mda's *Ways of Dying* is set against the background of an unnamed South African city during the transitional period in the history of South Africa. The elements of power politics, history and hegemony are vividly present in the novel with substantial events that occur in the violent city.

With the emergence of literary theories, psychoanalytic criticism facilitates the reader in analysing the psyche of characters in literary texts. Since its establishment, the predisposition between literature and psychoanalysis are both structural and cultural. In its structure, psychoanalytic criticism elicits stories from the narration and complexities of human nature. It is the mechanism used to correlate the propensity between the unconscious and the subconscious. In this view, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* depicts the Post-apartheid South Africa in which Toloki's personality alongside his experience as a professional mourner will be analysed in this paper.

The novel projects span of one week between Christmas and New Year before 1994 elections. Moreover, the predominant characters – Toloki and Noria- their life at the settlement; past and present occurrences are conditioned when the writer toggles to and fro in depicting the social and psychic trauma. Eventually, the novel opens up with an alarming note where Noria loses her second child as: “It is not the first time that we bury little children. We bury them every day. But they are killed by the enemy...those we are fighting against” (Mda, 1). It is evident that killing of children is not unusual wherein the psyche of the community is disturbed in such stances. At the funeral, the chief role played by the nurse is remarkable because they are the fortunate ones to see the deceased alive. The nurse will address the gathering on behalf of the family members and will let people know what has actually happened to the deceased.

The principal character – “Toloki the Professional Mourner” (Mda, 9) will obviously make his presence in the funerals to mourn for the dead. “In his profession, people are paid for an essential service that they render the community. His service is to mourn for the dead” (Mda, 15). In his childhood days, Toloki was an obnoxious child with no talents. He came to the city because his father Jwara, has beaten him up because he strongly opposed the archbishop while performing the Easter rituals of the church. It was three months of long journey to reach the city. Even in his childhood days, Toloki did not receive no appreciation and love from his parents for what he had actually done, drawing, for instance.

The experiences that he has undergone throughout the journey haunts him even after becoming an established professional mourner. For the first time in his life, he has begged for food, swollen foot, dog-tired, and had terrible pain in his stomach. The sole purpose of his escape from village to city is the quest for love and fortune. Mda describes Toloki as:

He is quite short, in fact. But what he lacks in height he makes up for in breadth. He is quite stockily built, and his shoulders are wide enough to comfortably bear all the woes of bereavement. His yellow face is broad and almost flat, his pointed nose hovers over and dwarfs his small child-like mouth. His eyes are small and have a permanently sorrowful look that is most effective when he musters up his famous graveside manner. (Mda, 11)

As rightly pointed out by the psychoanalytic critic Sigmund Freud in his Personality Theory (1923) highlights the tripartite of the human personality akin to Id, Ego and Superego. As id remains unfledged, it is identified that Toloki falls in line with extending hands to his own community especially getting into good terms with Noria. Only at the settlement, Noria and Toloki re-establish their relationship in the middle age. During their childhood days, both of them exchanged only controversial exchanges – Noria was filled with zeal on one hand and Toloki looked gloomy on the other.

Toloki learns that Noria had also come to the city through sea of turbulence in her life. Determining her loss of the second child, Toloki aids her to overcome the agony and turmoil. Moreover, he helps her to rebuild the shack in the settlement because he identifies her shack to be burnt down since then and again the settlement was often captured by Battalion 77 and migrants from the hostels. With the help from Shadrack and Bhut’Shaddy, Toloki was able to make a living filled with colours. As the phase of Ego conquers Toloki, it is recognised that he identifies a compromising and satisfying a job as homeboy in an informal settlement and the social realities eschews the door of contentment.

Toloki has endured horrors of life from being employed as a *malayisha* that is, loading and unloading the bags of maize and mealie-meal to the standards of professional mourner. To an extent, Toloki was marginalized by Nefolovhodwe who possessed carpentry skills then became the wealthiest man in the city now. Being established himself as the best coffin maker, he could not recognize Toloki, son of Jwara, when he asked for job. Eventually, he offered Toloki a menial job to supervise the corrupt practice that affected his business. In this respect, he advised him to look after every funeral that occur in the city, wherein he used to watch the coffins during the night time.

Even though, Toloki feel happy that he has found a job, the irony reflects on the question of his living condition. In order to guard the cemeteries, Nefolovhodwe states:

You are to go to the cemeteries only after funerals where a Nefolovhodwe has been used. Your task will be to hide, and wait there until someone comes to dig the coffin up. I want to catch those all undertakers who are making illicit profits from my sweat. You must admit it’s an ingenious profit-making scheme, this digging up of my coffins. I should have thought of it first. If anyone is going to profit from a Nefolovhodwe, it should be Nefolovhodwe himself, don’t you think so, young man? (Mda, 130)

It is vivid that Toloki was being mistreated by Nefolovhodwe in many cases. It is alluring that now and then Toloki leads his life on his own. In a stance, Shadrack was admitted in the hospital after being attacked by three white men. Noria and Toloki learns of this from Bhut’Shaddy pays a visit to him at the hospital. Irrespective of ailments, Shadrack never considers the presence of Toloki and continues to talk only with Noria, wherein Toloki feels dismissed.

As the novel progresses, Noria and Toloki continue to foster their life together. While rebuilding their shack Toloki finds the beautiful pictures of kitchen, bathrooms and living room respectively are collected from magazines and made as collage. The wall is being plastered with these pictures and considers it as their dream home. Toloki tries to heal himself and Noria from the tragedies of the past. They reconcile with each other where Toloki continues to be the professional until the figurines of Jwara reaches him. Toloki wonders at his father's creation and adds: "how a simple village carpenter with little or no education managed to acquire this vast amount of knowledge" (Mda, 209). On seeing the figurines, the children in the settlement rejoice themselves with relentless laughter. Ultimately, dignified Toloki was amazed on looking at the cheerfulness on the face of Noria and way back with people in the whole community. Mda beautifully sketches the phenomenal transformation within Toloki and the community that surrounds him. Thus, the key traits such as persistence and perseverance of Toloki despite hegemony and power politics reveals the innate love for the community.

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