

# In how tagore conveys the changes essay



**ASSIGN  
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Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Africa" explores the negative impacts of Western imperialism on the traditional cultures of Africa. The destruction of these traditional cultures, and with it, the inherent values of the people can be seen through the structure of three stanzas. A contrast is conveyed between the period before the coming of the Europeans, the time during colonization and the post-colonial period, clearly demonstrating the hypocrisy and horror of Western imperialism. Tagore, who lived in British colonial India, wrote the poem originally in Bengali and it was translated by William Radice into English sometime later. As a supporter of Indian nationalism Tagore identified British imperialism as a "political symptom of our social disease".

"Africa" was written in response to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and is a polemical poem influenced by tribal art and Tagore's interest in prehistoric cultures. Through the use of language in this poem, Tagore manages to represent the changes that Africa went through because of Western colonization. The form of Tagore's poem "Africa" is written in three stanzas showing how Africa has moved from its natural state, ending up as "despoiled". The poem is written with no rhyme scheme which demonstrates the lack of order that colonialism has washed over Africa, and the use of very few full stops in the first stanza illustrates the dynamics of Africa pre-colonisation. The long stanzas in the poem imply the never ending feeling of colonialism for the people of Africa and the overall tone seems to refute Western imperialism as being what Africa needs to develop because instead Tagore conveys the negative effects on Africa post-colonisation. The opening stanza recalls Africa before colonization, and Tagore uses specific diction to

connote Africa as enigmatic and wondrous such as “arcane” “impenetrable” and “invisible magic”. This lexis connotes what has been lost in Africa through colonialism because the wondrous place is no longer wondrous, post colonization. The stanza is written in past continuous which illustrates that Africa was already evolving towards civilization by doing all it could before the Europeans conquered it, thus, there was no requisite that Africa be conquered by Europe.

Language is chosen specifically to intensify the descriptions of Africa before it was conquered. The diction ‘learnt the arcane languages’ suggest that because of Western colonialism the learning and growing of Africa was slowed down, thus, Tagore conveys the negative changes which have taken place. The poem suggests the destruction of nature through colonialism, and the reference to “The Creator” is an allusion to God who created Africa being destroyed. There is a second reference to God by referencing the Hindu God Shiva (God of destruction) dancing to destruction. This links the British Raj to Africa through their shared rituals and suggests how they both suffered from Western imperialism. The phrase “dancing to the drumbeats of chaos” has been chosen specifically, as the lexis choice of chaos illustrates colonialism to occur without order. Likewise, the alliterative plosives of ‘dancing’ and ‘drumbeats’ create a harsh, discordant sound which further illustrate the turmoil that colonisation brought upon Africa. This also foreshadows the destructive nature of post colonialism as Tagore uses personification to describe the sea as “angry”.

This demonstrates that the power of Africa growing independently is taken away by colonialism and the diction ‘angry’ suggests that God who created

nature disapproves of this conquest. This is further supported by the reference to “ water, earth and sky” and “ immense trees” as the description of nature propose that God’s natural creations are being destroyed. This clearly shows the changes to the physical environment, through the introduction of a newly imposed social system. Furthermore, Africa is personified as the child of Mother Asia. This can be seen in line 6 as the phrase “ snatched you from the breast of Mother Asia, Africa-” illustrates the disaster that colonialism brought upon it. The negative lexis “ snatched” suggests Africa being separated from Asia. The parallel structure in ‘ you ridiculed horror ..

. you cowed fear’ emphasizes Africa’s triumph over these traditional enemies of humanity which highlights Africa in a positive light. This increases the sense of sorrow at the continent succumbing to European ‘ contempt’. From Tagore’s description of pre colonial Africa it is evident that he condemns the conquest by Europe, as the natural ability of Africa to develop and mature was “ snatched away” to be controlled by Westerners, resulting in ignorance and slow growth. The conquest of Africa and the changes that it went through can be seen more clearly in stanza two where the lexis connotes Africa as a dark and mysterious place. The diction “ shadowy” sets the tone as mystifying and places the image of Africa as sinister. Tagore uses anthropomorphism to describe the conquest by Europe: ‘ under your black veil..

. Your human aspect remained unknown’ and this connotes how Africa’s very ‘ otherness’ was misunderstood by the invaders who failed to realise the potential of Africa’s human resources. The lexis ‘ iron manacles’ emphasizes

the oppression of Western civilization and contrasts to the nature described in stanza one. It is evident that by conquering Africa, its natural beauty is diminished. The metaphor to describe the manacles ' sharper than the claws of your own wild wolves' explains how the invaders are more predatory and animalistic than the wolves of Africa, therefore forcing change contrary to the traditions of the people. Additionally, the alliterative phrase ' wailed wordlessly' enhances the anguished tone of the onomatopoeia ' wailed', which combined with the ' blood and tears' in line 31, creates an aural and visual picture of the violence and grief caused by imperialism. The metaphor of the boots sticking ' gouts of stinking mud/Forever on your stained history' in lines 32 and 33 demonstrates the permanence of the corrupt mark imperialism has branded into Africa. From the second stanza it is easier to see the changes that Africa went through when conquered by Europe.

The changes are illustrated through the negative diction which Tagore chooses to use when addressing the conquest. There is a contrast between the first and second stanzas as the first stanza was more dynamic whereas stanza two is ominous and is able to conclude that the colonization of Africa by Europe has forever left a mark in African history. In Stanza three, post colonial Africa and the changes of Africa are most evident because the hypocrisy of the conquering nations is made clear by Tagore. The juxtaposition of ' conquerors' with ' prayer' emphasizes the hypocrisy of worship in first world nations. This is because religion was imposed by the missionaries on the native people, and to see the conquerors turn to religion degrades the solace that religion gives the Africans. This gives prayer an ironic image and illustrates the conquest as tragic. The hypocrisy is further

illustrated by line 37, ' morning and evening, in the name of a loving god' which intensifies the irony of the West's devotion as they go ' morning and evening' to worship. The ' poets .

.. hymns to beauty' and the mothers who ' dandled babies in their laps' contrast with the ' iron manacles' and ' naked inhumanity' in stanza two and this is further highlighting the hypocrisy of the colonization by Europe, showing the starkness of the changes. Symbols are used in stanza three to show the changes that Africa went through post colonization. The ' imminent evening storm' casts a portentous cloud over ' the West', a symbol of catastrophe, and the ' ominous howls' at ' the closing of the day' foretell the ' end of the age' as animal savagery emerges from ' secret lairs'. This connotes the end of Western civilization and the negative image that Western colonialism has made for itself as Tagore illustrates that it goes nowhere. This is further highlighted by the diction ' constricted' that implies how Tagore doesn't agree with colonialism. The onomatopoeia ' howls' is sinister in tone, and the heavy vowels suggest hunger in Africa.

Tagore is prophetic about the hostile future of civilization and his hope is that the last words ' midst of murderous insanity' are for forgiveness, that the hypocrisy of the West will cease to exist. The lexis choice of the soft plosives midst and murderous leave the reader with a mystifying feeling to the effects of post-colonization. Tagore uses the 3 stanza structure to connote the changes that Africa went through pre and post colonization and it is clear to the reader that Tagore feels that the imposition of Western civilization placed upon Africa was murderous and against the natural order. Tagore condemns the West in his final stanza with the symbol of a ' dying

light' showing that Western colonialism receives no support from him. This is clear in his use of the phrase "despoiled Africa" which shows how little has been left for the traditional inhabitants. In a powerful suggestion to the transgressors, Tagore wants to seek acknowledgement of their actions as they plead for forgiveness. Tagore demonstrates that the conquest by Europe is barbaric because it changes and destroys the potential for African cultures to develop in their own time.