

**FEMINISM AND THE CHANGE MANTRA IN AKINWUNMI ISOLA'S
DRAMATIC TEXT OF MADAM EFUNROYE TINUBU:
THE IYALODE EGBA**

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Abstract

*People from all human endeavours are pessimistic about change and this includes women. Feminism is the scientific study of female gender and their concerns. Men and women alike have become advocates of feminism. It has been observed since creation that some women rose to prominence as a result of their resolution to liberate themselves and their fellow women from male's dominance, which have subjected them to much hardship and injustice in their immediate societies. The worse vilification of women persists more in Africa where women are considered as chattels as well as objects to be seen and not to be heard. This tendency has been challenged by women in their attempts to break the barrier and demonstrate the relevance of women in their communities. One notable woman among them was Madam Efunroye Tinubu, the Iyalode of Egba. She was a merchant who supplied different farm produce to European merchants who used Lagos as exit point for exportation. With their interaction with the indigenous people of Lagos, the British merchants extended their concerns beyond merchandise and began to poke their nose into governance. This was met with stiff opposition from Madam Efunroye Tinubu who boldly attempted restricting them to partnership in trade than intruding into governance of which they were novice. King Dosunmu did not see anything good in what Tinubu was championing. This uncompromising move consequently led to her banishment as they saw her enormous power culminating into a hard nut for them to crack. The leadership role she played though not appreciated, resulted in a leadership institution that served as road map for other women to follow. For this reason, this paper examines the text: **Madam Tinubu: The Iyalode Egba** written by Akinwunmi Isola as historical performance narration that epitomizes the role of women in governance and activism. The text exemplifies the presence of women fold in societal building.*

Introduction

What is constant in human lives is change. Change began when a child is born because change becomes noticeable few minutes after the birth of a child. Despite the predominant changes life cycle goes through, human still exercise fear to abide with change. When a situation remains without witnessing development human tagged such situation as moribund. Looking at this situation confuses a right thinking person why human is afraid of change then. A man born will one day marry and have a change of status from bachelor to married man and vice versa of a woman too. From the fore going change is an evidence of development. Change could be positive and negative, depending on process and reason that warrant such change at the time occurs. System, government, human and some unforeseen forces can mastermind change. The process for change is dependent on the situations that warrant it. Haralambos, Holborn and Heald posit their opinion about development and changes distinguish between the pre-modern and modern societies. The distinction is a very general one and can neglect differences between the societies of each type (5). People have identified some key changes that have taken place in human history. They have been able to discuss the significance of these changes. Some by no means, argue that a new type of society, the postmodern society has recently developed or is developing. Change goes along with event of time and the demand of people. No matter the people's reaction, change is inevitable in human societies that is why elements of the society react positively or negatively to process of change.

Feminism, according to Hornby, is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men (395). The feminists have put up struggle to achieve this aim overtime when discriminations against women seem to become a transitory culture of Africans. Feminist is a person who supports the belief that women should have equal rights and opportunities as enjoyed by men counterpart. Feminism blurred the boarder of either gender in achieving the struggle for equal treatment. From all indications, the struggle to put away bond of stigma on women has been the fight of minority among both men and women. Women themselves have resorted to fate in the struggle to emancipate their gender in the process of change. Many of them have demonstrated self-defeat of the highest order by allowing man fold to continually dominate them in all areas of life, especially when the process of change is not very distinct to them. Culture, religion and society have enough folktales and baseless theories that circulate overtime to allow for man's dominance with impunity.

Cultural beliefs have made equality between men and women impossible as women at certain stage of cultural deeps; women are barred from crossing the

bounds deliberately created so as to uphold the level of men's superiority over women. Religion has its own restriction for women and any attempt to cross the perceived restriction is considered as contempt or religious sacrilege. Culture and religion are the bi-product of the society; they therefore took their cues from what is operative under the cultural and religious barricades. In his capacity as a feminist, Idowu made reference to Charvet when he observes that:

Radical feminism alone attaches no value what-so-ever to the differentiation between the sexes, which apart from its physical form in the sexual organs and other possible physical characteristics; it seems as something not determined biologically, but by and in the interest of men. Furthermore, it alone sees all traditional social orders as founded on the domination of women by men. (129)

In one African parlance that is common among Yoruba tribe, it is believed that women are structurally weak with seven bones that make the skeleton while that of man has been nine in skeletal structure. This notion on many occasions form the basis for what a woman is allowed to engage in, in the society. Radical feminists do not believe in the demarcation created through culture between men and women but consider sex organ as the only existing difference but not a determinant factor for decision making on matters concerning gender. Because of cultural demand, women are barred from taking part in decision making in an African family. It has been found out that many women have good intellectual ability to proffer solution to lingering societal problem, which remain unsolved by men. Because of this, change has allowed women to find their way into governance. Despite this feat, it is surprising that men have not allowed women to exercise their potentiality in many spheres of human lives. Women have been facing this problem from time immemorial and for this reason; this paper looks at the historical account of Madam Tinubu, the Iyalode Egba as she broke even with mantra of change without considering such usual demarcation artificially created by men.

Briefs on the Life of Madam Tinubu

Madam Efunroye Tinubu remained the wealthiest woman in Yorubaland in the 19th century. She had over 360 slaves and trade alignment with people from home and abroad. She was a Queen who helped to install kings. She was not comfortable with European dominance over the people of Madam Efunroye Tinubu. In retrospect, Tinubu was born in Abeokuta sometimes around 1805. Her

mother was Nijede and the father was Olumosa. He first married Degolu who did not live long before she died and thereafter married Tinubu's mother. They lived around the bank of Ogun river, then known as Odo-Ose where their daughter Tinubu was born. They gave her these names in full Yoruba pronunciation as Efunporoye Osuntinubu Lumosa. The parents were Osun worshippers and the name Osuntinubu was coined after the Osun goddess that is *Osun-ti-inu-ibu-wa* (*Osun goddess came out of river deep*) (www.amazon.com).

Osuntinubu's grandmother was an Owu trade mogul in herbs, roots and animal skins. She transferred the art of trading to her granddaughter who later became notable and affluent trade mogul among the natives of her time. She became so influential through her versatility in buying and selling farm produce for end users. She grew up around Ijokodo area of Gbagura and was popularly called Tinubu as a short form of her full name from birth. At the age of about 20, she married an Owu man and gave birth to two children for him. Tinubu was a radiant beautiful Yoruba woman all the men were hunting for where she lived then. The charming existence of Tinubu came crashing during the war of dispersals in Yorubaland. Around 1930, when Sodeke was the crowned king of Egbaland, the environment in existence then made her to mingle with her age contemporaries when thousands of Egba people found refuge under the Olumo rock. She eventually lost her husband in death and because of this for her to be consoled, her wealthy father assisted her with fund to cushion the effect of her husband demise on her trade.

As time went on to be precise in 1833, Adele, a member of royal family from Lagos fought for the Obaship in Lagos and lost. He came to Abeokuta on a goodwill visit in other to thank the Egba people for their goodwill and support during the time he fought for the throne in Lagos. He saw Tinubu during his visit and was attracted to her beauty. He asked for her hand in marriage which she accepted and later brought her to live in Badagry, a suburb of Lagos. Tinubu found Badagry to be good for her trading business; she therefore expanded her trade tentacles with trades in arms and ammunition. Tinubu also engaged in slave trade. In her stay in Badagry, she experienced a tragedy when malaria affected her two children and killed them. Since then, she never bore any child for the king. Akioye said that Prince Adele won the right to the throne and returned to Lagos with his new queen, Efunroye Tinubu. Her marriage to the Prince did not bear any children however; the stage was set for one of the greatest amazons to grace Western Nigeria to flourish. Tinubu extra-ordinary life had begun (1). This submission indicates that Tinubu was not bogged with the death of her children to engage in activism.

Adele died in 1837 and Tinubu married a war veteran named Yesufu Bada. After her marriage to this war veteran, her business began to boom and she started to expand the business. As fortune began to smile on her and the husband, she paid undivided attention to the expansion of her trade involvement while she combined politics along with it. She became noticeable and vocal among the traditional chiefs in political matters as the successor of her husband Oluwole continued to reign. Not very long war broke out between Oba Oluwole and his nephew, Kosoko. This necessitated the enthronement of Akintoye and because Tinubu was known for her political interference, she has to proceed on exile to Badagry with her husband in 1845.

Her business exploits of all rural Yorubalands continue to soar and no merchant from home or expatriates could rob shoulder with her merchandise. She became prominent slave trader when she realised that the Europeans were coming because of slaves to Badagry. She used her fame in business to comb the hinterland for slaves she later sold to European slave traders. This added more to her wealth because she employed shrewdness into the business relationship that existed between her and the White slave traders. She therefore monopolised the trade and prevented the Europeans from having direct contact with hinterland to buy slaves except with her liaison. Tinubu therefore had many slaves; they numbered over 360, who ran her trade for her. The merchandise widened and she added the trade of palm oil, cotton, elephant tusk, alcohol and drinks among many other things she traded. The colonialists saw the economic potential of Lagos and felt that it should not be monopolised by an illiterate woman called Tinubu. That made them to dabble into political affairs of the Oba of Lagos. They plotted problems among the natives dethrone any monarch in Lagos who felt too powerful and arrogant to heed their biddings. The wrangling and political interference of the white colonialists affected the reign of Akintoye and he went on forced self-exile to Badagry. His arrival in Badagry became noticeable to both Tinubu and her husband who showered a first class hospitality on the exiled monarch. The stay of Akintoye became the sole responsibility of Tinubu and her husband.

In 1852, their hospitality towards Akintoye yielded fruit. When Akintoye was restored back to his throne on December 1, 1852, he went back with Madam Tinubu and her husband to Lagos. On her arrival in Lagos, her influence took different dimension when she noticed that the governance and various local activities were in the hands of the Europeans. She acquired so many landed properties with her wealth. *The African Times* of 23rd April 1862 posits that her (Tinubu) empire had become so successful that by 1855 she has few rivals among

traders in Lagos. Many Oba ceded properties to Tinubu for helping them to achieve outspokenness with their subjects against human right syndrome of the colonialists. She began to notice the shenanigan and hypocrisy of the British colonialists, for this, she developed abhorrence for the way the Europeans were treating the natives. She rekindled her involvement in the governance of Lagos. Akinoye buttresses this when he says that she (Tinubu) began to dabble into politics exerting tremendous influence over the affairs of Lagos, especially concerning trade with the British and the West Indians (3). This is also corroborated in *Asiri Magazine* that Tinubu came into political limelight when Akintoye and Kosoko (nephew and uncle) engaged in a battle struggling for the throne of Lagos where Madam Tinubu supplied Akintoye's forces with arms and ammunition and later regain his throne on Thursday, 1 January, 1852 (2).

During the reign of Dosunmu, Kosoko was banished to Epe, a suburb of Lagos after the demise of Akintoye. Tinubu assisted Dosunmu as he did to Akintoye. The reign of Dosunmu was too inclusive that Tinubu found it so difficult to bear-up with the way he was attending to vital Lagos issue. There were many lingering problems during Dosunmu's time to the extent that the then Lagos people knew the differences that existed. The colonialists concocted an intrigue that influenced the Oba to banish Madam Tinubu to Badagry. While he was expelling Tinubu, he (Dosunmu) said, 'I found Lagos to be too small for you, so you are hereby banished to Badagry' (Akinwunmi 23).

Akinwunmi Isola's Presentation of Tinubu

In the text of *Madam Efunroye Tinubu, the Iyalode of Egba*, Akinwunmi Isola traced the life of Tinubu dramatically with her prowess, wealth, and the way she exemplified rulership of the natives by the natives. The text aims at bringing out the womanhood in Tinubu, and to exhibit a woman to champion what men at times are afraid of executing. The British colonialists purposely came to ravage Lagos and cart away her economic proceeds to Britain. Tinubu, a woman among other white cap chiefs was bold enough to challenge the British consul with his mistreatment of indigenes of Lagos. According to Akinwunmi, she said the consul does not have right to poke his long nose into the affairs of Lagos (23). The British consul did an overview of Tinubu's activities and tagged them as excesses that must not be left without account. She was often referred to as 'terror in Lagos'. He (the consul) began to intimidate Tinubu even through indigenes of Lagos that have received western education, just to ignite a fight that will indict her. One notable among such educated Lagos indigenes was Adejumo who

bragged by making several attempts to confront Madam Tinubu. One of such was a time when the white traders arranged a riot in the market place in which the market women were beaten and dispersed from their goods. Attempt was made to get rid of Madam Tinubu after this incident when the consul insinuated that Bada, Tinubu's husband, caused the riot. On hearing this, he (Dosunmu the king) asked him to be locked-up in the prison until the case was heard. Tinubu heard about the Oba's decision lock-up her husband and she violently confronted the king in his palace where she demanded with unspeakable sentences for unconditional release of her husband. The king acceded to her demand and released Bada, her husband unconditionally. Oba Dosunmu now felt that what Tinubu did was insulting to his throne therefore took counsel from consul and few chiefs in solidarity on what to do on the matter at hand. The consul was quick to recommend total banishment to Madam Tinubu and promised a military support from his home country to give Dosunmu a security in cases of reprisal from Tinubu or her allies.

The announcement to banish Madam Tinubu rented the air and it came as a surprise to many members of Dosunmu's cabinet. Everybody became so jittery about the consequence of that action because the woman in question was not a small fry among the people living in Lagos. Dosunmu in his action to pre-empting the after effect of this decision put his loyal chief and consul on red alert for in cases of Madam Tinubu's bid to fight back. The whole city was in turmoil and it looked as if they were all sitting on a keg of gunpowder ready to explode any moment. Dosunmu himself panicked as his body shakes to its marrow in confused state of not knowing the strategy of the culprit. As if the trouble was not enough for him, the market women who were liberated by Madam Tinubu protested their shock on the decision to expel her from Lagos. The aged women cultists were not left out in the action and they also exhibited their grievances in full glare of the people as their solidarity for Tinubu. The silence of Tinubu did not also help matters as everyone was eagerly awaiting her reaction to the king's decision. She finally decided to sheath her sword after consultation by the eldest woman among the cultists who encourage her not to fight in retaliation and she agreed. She therefore conveyed her decision to leave Lagos to the King and that came as a surprise to even the king who was baffled for not able to preempt what her final decision would be. Though at the stage in which Tinubu decided to leave Lagos Dosunmu was planning to reverse the banishment order on her but she has decided and all effort to persuade her not to leave fell on her deaf ear. Finally, Tinubu left for Abeokuta her birthplace and not Badagry as directed by Dosunmu the king. She bade all Lagos people farewells as she was seen off by large chunk

of Lagos people who were persistence in telling her to change her decision to leave Lagos.

The fear of Tinubu's exit from Lagos continued to hunt the then Lagos people because of:

- Fear of unknown
- Fear of perceived exploitation from the colonialists

The two situations mentioned made people to be restless because the entire peasant populace felt that absence of Tinubu would spell doom for them in the hands of the foreigner who were too powerful for the king to curtail their excesses. They also have the premonition that the attempt by British allies to control Lagos economy will be realised and before they know it foreigner who knows nothing about their cultural welfare will take over the governance. This perceived change continues to be the concern every tom, dick and harry in Lagos. The only person who they relied on and was bold enough to checkmate the excesses of the foreigners had left Lagos for Abeokuta. After Tinubu exited Lagos, things began to take a different direction as the British consul clandestinely removes the authority of Lagos from the King. He put up many intrigues to lure the king into believing that without the help of Britain, Lagos commerce will not flourish. In styles, Lagos was under the control of the Britain and the natives were not able to make decision on their own without recourse to Britain. Madam Tinubu would have averted this latter trend had it been the king and few Lagos people were not stampeded into believing that she was their enemy who did not want good things for them.

Inference Lesson

The ancient axiom that women should be seen and not to be heard necessitated the move for affluent Lagos people not believe in Madam Tinubu as a leader that will rescue them form the hands of tyrants. Being a woman also put her at the other side of the people's divide when the man who should have acted were fearful of the foreigners and a bid to challenge them became difficult despite their suffering in silence. It has been forgotten that achievement is not successful as a result of gender. Okoh in her submission argues that creator endowed both sexes with equal potentials and capacities, but these are taken away from women through the process of socialisation (124). Women need power of self-definition instead of retiring the bid to challenge to unnecessary dominance the culture has inflicted on their existence. Many women have fought for the emancipation of women fold in the past and they have left their footprint on the soil of civilisation process. For example, Mrs. Fumilayo Kuti of Abeokuta, Queen Aminat of Zaria,

Queen Kambasa of Bonny, Queen Idia and Emotan of Benin, Omu Okwei of Osomari, Efunsetan Aniwura, the *Iyalode of Ibadan*, Moremi of Ile Ife, Inkpi of Idah, Queen Daura of Daura, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Professor Dora Akunyili, Jessica Matthew, Folorunso Alakija to mention but few among many women of repute. Such women have risked their lives to fight one injustice at a time, to break the fried nut of fathomed inequality men have persistently exhibited for their selfish existence in corridor of power. Akinwunmi placed emphasis on the potential of women in this play to show that when a woman decides to achieve she does not look back; she pursue the change intended to a logical conclusion. The text is exemplifying the potential inherent in women and this should not be underrated like decorative articles in homes instead of allowing them to put to use their endowed ingenuity.

Okoh therefore opines that every mother should create in the mind of every daughter the desire for knowledge, the love for autonomy, the spirit for competition, fearlessness, dauntlessness, and an enterprising spirit (124). Men should not just make women sex machines or children production factory confined to the bedroom and kitchen but make effort to institutionalise them to draw out their potentials. History has shown that when a woman leads an organisation, failure becomes minimal. Sometimes, a woman does what a man is afraid of doing with great results. Mrs Fumilayo Kuti and Aba women played vital roles in stopping the exploitation of women through taxes then. Another good example is the story of war in Ile Ife, when marauders were killing and carting away their livelihood even their beautiful married and unmarried women. Moremi sacrificed herself to avert the marauding trend that men were unable to curtail. Oral tradition and surviving traditional religions support the participation of women in the ancient politics just Madam Tinubu was made the *Iyalode* among other chiefs. Public domain should not be considered as the preserve of men, instead both sexes should be allowed to operate according to potential endowed by creator.

Conclusion

Men have records of domination from the creation onward. The emergence of scientific process of fighting for women equality called feminism has put to check some of these excesses. The issue of civilisation was used at the beginning to camouflage the move to take away the right of women. The involvement of women in the community politicking yielded good fruit. Women were known for their patience and ability to pursue a course to a logical conclusion. However, many of them were frighten by men imposition to cave into cowardice to

demonstrate their potentials. But among them we have those who are ready to fight their course to finish no matter the roughness of the process. Because of this doggedness, some women rose to prominence because of their resolution to liberate themselves and their fellow women from male's dominance in human societies. The worse vilification of women persists more in Africa where women are considered as chattels as well as objects to be seen and not to be heard. We have example of such women who defy men barrier to go for the course they believed in. Madam Tinubu has laid a good foundation for other women to build on. Had it been she was allowed to go ahead with the fight to exemplify the indigenes, Africa may be would have developed beyond this stage. She combined industry with governance and she excelled in all of her effort. Though she was not appreciated but she was dogged and the history of her exploits remain an extant lesson. This text *Madam Efunroye Tinubu: The Iyalode Egba* encourages women to forward match in whatever they believe and pursue it to fruition. Men in position of authority should assist women to attain their potentials. Husbands should treat their wives as compliment and treat female children with equality with mind-set that they will achieve their potentials if given opportunity like male children. Women are not to be confined to living room, bedroom and domestic kitchen.

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