

"Kgadi'a Bakone" N. S. Puleng

Abstract: - Poetry continues to be read as the subjective expression of an individual voice, but it is a voice that continues to be increasingly opposed to or separated from society in relation to its deeper meaning and reference. While there is no such thing as a "typical" language of a poem, certain aspects of the writing of language in poems like that of N. S. Puleng have become heavily identified with and reflect issues as specific as sexism. In this poem sexism is manifested in many ways-in phrases with negative stereotypes of women, in writing that actively represents the natural presence of the speaker behind the poem and in poetic writing that presupposes praise but emphasizes the forces of patriarchy which pervade many societies.

Re golele Mosebjadi wena tshilo le lwala tseso,
Re golele kgadi' a Bakone bokamoso bjeso,
Re fegollele tse borala mampsa re lapa melala;
Re tlepesetse mononong re none ka mananose a atla tsa gago,
Re go beile ntaka mesepelong le medirong ya gago,
Re tla sima re tlaparile thipa bogale kgadi yeso,
Re rute gore tshemo ya mosadi ke atla tsa gagwe,
Re rute ka metlha gore mosadi ke tshwene o lewa mabogo,
Re tla dika re kgatlha lehwiti tshemong ye,
Re tla dula re fefera ditlhoka mabeleng a,
Re re lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi-o tsebe go tloga lehono,
Re re bogadi go dula digadi esego dingangele,
Re re bogadi ke bogadikathaka wa gadika phodi e ka swa,
Re re otsebe gore mosadi o roka molomo ge monna a bolela,
Re re mosadi ke theko ya lerumo re fosa kgole,
Re re theka la mosadi ke pcu ya morarele kgorosamantho,
Re go botsa tsebe gokwa gore mosadi lesako o a lebetla,
Re ka se go rutolle nnete ya bosadi gobane ke thopa,
Re re tsena ntlong o bone kunutu la basadi baenasesane,
Re budusetse tselakgolo molapomotle re be ngatatce.
O mphabadimo mphiwafela kgorosaditshadatsaba,

Thaga tsa melomomeso di hlamuketse maledu di tlile ka wena,
Wena Mosebjadi sako la makgontheakgoduakgokgo,
O mphabadimo bjalo ka mphatlalatsane naledi ya masa,
O phadima phadiphadi gare ga mpa ya bosego bone la boitshepho,
O na bjalo ka rothi la pula torong ya selemo marega,
O tsela ya leratorato bjalo ka Phosia mogatsa Brutase,
O rata go tseba khupamarama tsa banna twehlanyamantho,
O bjalo ka beine ye bose yeo monwi a hlalalago ge a e nwele,
Gola bjalo kgadi yeso, re golele botlana la Bakone beso,
BoAdam ba phenkgollotswe tulong tsa borena tshemong ya Eden,
BoSamson ba utolotse sephiri bakeng sa gago,
Mmuso wa bona wa tekema lehu khudusabophelo la ba aparela,
Ke mehlala ya leleme la gago le boreledi,
O tshabi ya dira lehumo la thakatshemane, Ba ile batho go setse wena fela lewatle
leo le homotsego.

Images of a woman in a marriage N. S. Puleng (Translation)

Mosebjadi grow for us, you the mill and the grinding piece
Grow old for us woman you are out future
Display to us the surprise you have for us
Indulge us and spoil us, until we are bulging and getting big due to your labor
We have placed our faith in your ways and mannerism
We will hold on to your teachings and strength
Teach us that a woman depends on her hands for a living
Teach us that women should be industrious
As we will always expect to be fed through her hard work
We will always cherish her hard work and oppose anything that indicates
otherwise
We say that a good wife's grave is at her in-laws
We say only the valorous and not hellcats stay at the in-laws. We say only the
strong hearted endure at the in-laws
You in-laws are like your mates you have to meet their requirements without
being destructive
We say you should know that a wife shuts a mouth when the husband speaks
We say the wife is like a handle of a spear, to throw far away
We say her loins is complicated seed that breeds human life
We strongly tell you that it's a woman's responsibility to keep her house intact
Hence we can never teach you enough about womanhood
We say procreate and experience women's privacy and secrets
Sharpen for us the great bristling path that unites us

You are indeed a gift, a free gift from our ancestors to bear us many children
 All this men with big beards are here because of you, woman
 You are indeed a true and very strong pillar compound
 You are an ancestral gift like an early morning star
 You are an ancestral gift shining brightly at midnight; you are a trusted light to many
 You are like a soft rain in a midsummer winter dream
 You are the way to true love, like Brutus' wife Portia
 You are eager to inquire into men's privacies, you who cause rivalries
 You are like a fine and good wine that elates the drinker
 That's how it is, we say grow for us the Bakone's
 Honorable Adam was dethroned from his royal seat in the Garden of Eden
 Honorable Samson had his secrets revealed because of you
 Hence their rule was overthrown, and death rather than life overcame them
 Because of the way your smooth tongue operated on them
 You betray us to our enemies; you are their useful traitor. People have died save you silent sea

A gendered critique of a poem entitled "Kgadi'a Bakone"
 By N. S. Puleng

Given the increasing disquiet about the language of the position of women in marriage relationship, family, community and society at large, there has always been a concern about the impact of this language on women. Although the author of "Kgadi'a Bakone" (wife in a marriage relationship/ images of women) purports a praise on women's role in a marriage, the language used however strongly position women as a category that is responsible for household workload and reproduction purposes. The poem begins with an ironic comment on the significance of a woman and her public manifestation.

This language use by the author to position women in this instance indicates that although the contemporary feminist movement has challenged the division of labour within the home and the workplace, women are still expected to take the primary responsibility for the well being of the home and family. Whether women and men accept, reject or modify this expectation or what the author purports, it still has an impact on their lives. No matter how poetically praising or patronizing the author may be in some instances (i.e. re golele kgadi'a Bakone bokamoso bjeso-line 2), the author and society at large has to understand that the "laws" of language and social laws are systems, which "bind" the women.

The point is the language used does not encourage any enthusiasm for

independence by women, future planning and pride by women other than within the household and marital home front. The poem fails to recognize the need and opportunity for women to become self sufficient and intellectual contributors to their community and family other than being reproductive contributors (i.e. re theka la mosadi ke peu ya morarele kgorosamanto (Line 16) - meaning a woman's pride should be in bearing her husband children, many children, o mphabadimo mphiwafela kgorosaditshabatshaba (Line 21)- a woman here is depicted as a free gift, given to men by his ancestors to bear children and not a partner in marriage). This metaphoric depiction has an unintended devaluing of a woman's image because "mphiwafela" is usually something that one has not worked for and therefore in many ways less worthy. This is demoting to a woman woman's image even in a democratic society with bill of rights a woman cannot be a gift but an equal partner.

It is our contention that it is the use of language like in the poem and the interpretation herewith that present the role of women as that of a mother, wife and uneducated household employee. We believe that if the teacher presents a poem such as this focusing on the varied roles of women, male students are likely to extract from the readings one or several qualities portrayed by the author about a woman's place and position. It is also our belief that they are bound to imitate such thinking to other women. I do acknowledge though that the poem is written in a traditional, paternalistic and patriarchal social milieu. Lines 8-14 clearly depict the era and social attitudes towards gender relations. It is the current reading and interpretation that of this poem that create a platform for concern for gender relations.

However in the same token a woman is projected as a very important being (i.e. Re golele Mosebjadi wena tshilo le lwala tseso-Line 1). "Tshilo le lwala" in a traditional agrarian community are instruments of sustenance. This reflects a depiction of a woman as the pillar of the house who is supposed to be concerned only with the survival of the family and foresee the nutritional needs of the family. This further reinforces the importance of a woman in a family (i.e. bokamoso bjeso, our future-Line 2). Future is often times viewed in a positive light. It always brings hope. Despite the positive presentation of a woman's image in a positive light most of the lines except only two in the poem condemns a woman into the kitchen and marriage.

The mood or tone of the poem indicates that once it was obvious that there is a so called feminization of the role of women or of the images of women in marriages, then the hierarchy of what was most respected and admired just became a little bit different, more subtle, so that you have this kinds of positional oppositions between women and men about images of women and their role in a marriage

relationship and in society. This reflect the fundamental ideological choice that was made by the author about leaving the control of wealth, resources, decision making to men - not that men would complain - and at the same time poetically coerce women not to challenge the decisions made on their behalf (i.e. re re bogadi go dula digadi esego dingangele-Line 12/ only the obedient and humble ones will stay in a marriage) about their role.

The basis of the poem is on women's responsibility to adhere to confined marital roles, work and work hard to please men. This suggest the perception held by many in societies that 'men lay the ground rules' and 'women obey without question' (i.e. re re otsebe gore mosadi oroka molomo ge monna a bolela-Line 14- meaning a woman must keep quite when a man (husband, partner) speaks, there is no talking back by a woman to a man) This is a very standard situation. In other words a woman is stripped of all critical ability of thinking and reasoning as a human being. This is in line with the masculine claim that a wife is a first born of her husband. Thus hers is to be the recipient of orders from her husband as he decides on her reproductive activities and dictates the spacing and number of children to e born in a marriage. What begrudges me about the kind of poems like this one is that there is a tendency for one to be drawn into them by the beauty of their opening lines and then further down the lines one is pushed out of the poem. The poem may be good but it also proves that a common language exists among men about women. I stand outside of some of these poems and watch the men nod as they read.

Lines 10-16 clearly intend to imprint a permanent sense of guilt on a woman's consciousness by citing biblical expressions. A staunch Christian in particular, usually takes such poetic biblical expressions literally as describing the narrative or describing the nature of things or universe. From these lines a woman will suffer from the "guilt of the original sin" (from the garden of Eden). This further creates self-doubt in a woman's conscience that women are by nature not trustworthy, they are treacherous and prone to betraying their husbands (i.e. Bo Adam ba phenkgollotswe tulong tsa borena tshemong ya Eden, - Adam was betrayed by a woman (Eve) to eat the forbidden fruit from the garden of Eden thus God was angry with him,/ BoSamson ba utolotse sephiri bakeng sa gago,- Samson did tell the secret of his strength and might to a woman (Delilah) making it possible for the Isralietes to be defeated by the Philistians)

While the title of the poem virtually presupposes a praise for women's role in a marriage the language does not show that a difference exist in terms of appreciation of the significance of a woman's image and the primary expectation on the role of women in a marriage - absolute obedience and reproduction. There

are several possible explanation for this seeming lack of consistency in the poem:

Firstly the author's style and tone from a feminist perspective is based on assumptions, attitudes and practices that are more likely to benefit men than women. Men are already systematically advantaged by having institutionalized supports within and outside home that are closely adapted to their needs and experience whereas women are, ascribed tasks at birth to make arrangements for everybody and to keep a lot of the details of life together that a man doesn't think about. Secondly this poem along with most others, is constructed on the assumption that there is someone else at home to attend to a man's domestic and family needs. Men (married or not) have the benefit of a two-person work standard of living when one considers the direct or indirect assistance tasked for the wife, while women are likely to be part of a single-person double work/shift standard of living. While there may be no conscious attempt by the author to discriminate but to praise the role or images of women, if the effect of the language is such that one group has an advantage over the other, the intent, if indeed it is beginning, is irrelevant and,

Lastly sexism is present when institutionalized power is combined with prejudice against women. It is with poem like these or the interpretation thereof that the effects of sexism have been particularly strong against women, as marriage itself as an institution or partnership with men has been even less responsible to women's needs.

This indicates that there is nothing gendered about the poem that may have been the author's intention. However it is seems the writer fails to understand that one must understand that men are not born with the faculty for the universal, and that women are not all reduced at birth to the particular. The author and society at large for that matter has to understand that the universal has been and is continually at every moment appropriated by men. This does not necessarily follow that women must fight with the male tradition for power over the universal or even in marriage because to do so might well be to imitate a linguistic political practice which does not merit imitation.

From this poem one realizes that men are portrayed as "demi-gods" who act freely without reproach and their follies are celebrated with praise while women do not have to pursue change of their image in a marriage so that the clockwork is not reversed. Thus when casting a look at the images associated with women in the bond of marriage, one is struck by how women's status is relegated through the use of a specific language to that of subordination and lack of effervescence. This is the case with patriarchal societies, women do not own anything including the children they endure maternal labor to bear. All wealth regardless of whether it has been generated by them through their own means belongs to their husbands or

fathers as heads of household

What society requires is a common language of and for women. Although the struggle to transform inherited meaning is where the real strength and specificity of the poem lies, as presented this poem appears as if the author indulged in the personification of an abstract concept. Thus it became all too easy for the writer to lapse into cliché, to sound tedious or worth of all to seem trite and cute to the point of preciousness or patronizing on a subject matter that promotes marriage as a social institution but perpetuates the subordination of women in it by reducing their role just household and reproduction duties. Thus the poem portrays the very clockwork of a system that seems to eliminate women not so much through malevolent disobedience to good rules, but through making up rules to suit half of the population.

Biography of N. S. Puleng

Samuel Nkomo Puleng as known to his audience was born on 10 January 1958 in Bengweni a "Black people only" township as identified during the apartheid period situated outside Randfontein a "Whites only" area. He is one of the two children and the only son of Rev. P. W. B. Nkomo of Rhodesia (known as Zimbabwe since independence) who came to South Africa as a missionary and Mrs. P. P. Mmapoo a qualified general nurse and midwifery. His father was a Dutch Reformed church leader which is remarkably indicated in Puleng's writing thus reflecting the father's biblical influence on his son's future writing. In 1970 he moved to Seshego to live with his only sister Mantsho where he obtained his primary school education at Kgobokanang Primary School. He proceeded to Hwiti Territorial School to do his high school education and it is where through participating in debates he developed a liking for the language in particular Northern Sotho (The language used in this poem). His language skills and participation won him a National Road Safety Speech competition in 1977, a prize previously won by his fellow student and mentor - P. Sekhukhune who further influenced his liking for Northern Sotho and inspired him to write. In 1978 he moved to Boleu high school in Tafelkop where he completed his matric. He proceeded to Mookopane Training College between 1980-1981 where he obtained his Primary Teachers' Certificate (PTC) and where he experimented in writing with friends among others H. J. Thema both of whom reflected classically common socio-political themes in their poetry. He furthered his education at the University of the North where he obtained B.A. degree and Higher Education Diploma (HED). In 1994 he registered for B.A. Honours at the University of Pretoria and went further to study for his M.A. studies in narratology (youth novel). His early efforts at writing as S. Nkomo bore no fruits until he adopted a pseudonym by changing his names around to N. S. Puleng which gave him new

Period of the Poet of N. S. Puleng

Puleng's writing period was around periods of political uncertainty in South Africa during 1976 and leading to the beginning of the end of apartheid with the students' political uprising of June 16, 1976. From a feminist perspective he writes also at a period in his life when his mother became the source of inspiration to him (time preceding the death of his father and during his schooling) as she showed love in times of dire need and desperation being the only source of support both financially and emotionally. This was also a period in society when gender dynamics in relation to the female gender were strongly characterized by marginalization and subordination wherein overall while all suffered the effects of colonialism and apartheid, women as compared to men suffered more marginalization in relation to men as their husbands, fathers, grandfathers and sons.

Short Review of N. S. Puleng's Poetry

N. S. Puleng's poetry works reflect his own life's riddle which the reader continues to guess at throughout the text. His dramatic texts according to Mokgoatsana (1999) depicts a window through which the reader can examine him under a different guise as he continues to mentally engage and challenge the reader with the way in which he refuses to be turned into a literary subject. His poetry adds meaning to the skeletal suggestion made in other writings as the readers are drawn into his journey as you go through his works and his search for identity of the fragmented self (Mokoatsana, 1996) as a son of a Black Missionary in South Africa from Zimbabwe writing in Northern, Sotho a South African language of his mother which he uses to find a way to create space for self definition. N. S. Puleng is one of those poets who reflect on the socio-political nature of the South African life. His poetry does not only mirror the hardships and impact of colonization and apartheid but also transcends the limits of protest against imperialism and goes further to lash at social improprieties without regard for the problems of race and class.

