



PHILOSOPHICAL EXPRESSION ON ECOSPHERE AND CONCEPT OF HUMAN'S RELATIVE WANTS IN YORUBÁ WRITTEN POETRY OF AKÍNWUMÍ ÌȘÒLÁ

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Abstract

Akinwumi Isola demystifies, through his poem, the concept of human existence and the anxiety to survive in a world filled with unrealistic socio-cultural influences. He explores psychological distress and the paradoxical misperception of the world (ayé) presented to his readers. The main focus of this paper is to examine Akinwumi Isola's philosophical stance on human existence, communal philosophy, and survival mechanisms in an estranged world, using himself as a case study. We analyze the theme of human existence and the urgent issue of survival in modern times as portrayed by the poet. The selected poem, "Mo Ju Ayé Lọ," is divided into sub-themes and subjected to literary analysis utilizing rhetoric and moral theory. The materialistic nature of humanity and the theme of "survival of the fittest" through the "rats' race" are prominent in Isola's poems (1978). The poet clarifies the readers' understanding of human aspirations, ingenuity, survival instincts, and disillusionment, especially as maturity develops. Though written in 1978, the poem is rich in poetic language and practical illustrations of human efforts to dominate the natural world, often futile. Phenomena and the desire for further exploration of both the "known" and the "unknown" are essential and integral parts of human social life. The instinct for human expression and the unsuccessful efforts to "conquer" the world are depicted poetically and reflect a philosophical stance.

Keywords: Human Existence, Paradoxical misperception, Communal Philosophy, Akínwumí ÌȘòlá, "Survival of the fittest," Philosophical stance

1.0 Introduction

More often, at every stage of human life, man's wants often override his basic needs, which could make him relatively comfortable. However, due to egocentricity, insatiability, self-aggrandizement, or materialism, man, naturally, always clamors for more like Oliver Twist. ÌȘòlá effectively exposes the human and ethical challenges of making ends meet at every stage of life within a community system like Yorubá society, which can be daunting for some. Although every person aspires to succeed in life, like the poet, this ambition is not always smoothly achieved due to many unforeseen factors. The saying, "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride," is hard to dispute. This study critically examines how the poet ironically mocks the human journey and the fleeting pleasures of life, emphasizing how individuals struggle through this brief journey called "world" (ayé). It is more effective if a poet, whether oral, written, or spoken, addresses socio-economic or philosophical issues that may seem distant, using self-inclusion. Using himself as the broader perspective in the poem allows even readers with limited understanding to connect more easily with the poet's words and worldview. Therefore, since no one is exempt from life's challenges, a poet like ÌȘòlá becomes an authoritative source of reliable insight, offering reflections on societal issues related to human existence, survival, and environmental concerns. He accomplishes this skillfully through his literary works infused with personal life experiences. This approach, linking personal history with wider issues, is common among Yorubá poets. Examples include the poems of Sóbò Arobíodu, Adébáyò, Èlèbùibon, Akíwumí ÌȘòlá, Adébáyò Fálétí, Olúgbóyèga Àlàbá, and Àtárí Àjànàkú. Such depictions allow readers or researchers to critically assess how intentional, pragmatic, down-to-earth, and objective a poet is regarding their themes.



The theme of principled living, linked to existentialism as pragmatically reflected in Ìṣòlá's work, undoubtedly relates to people's greed and Yorubá ethical values. Ìṣòlá's insightful ideology about the world, conveyed through his poetry, philosophically affirms life's apparent meaninglessness.

2.0 The Concept of Moral Philosophy and Rhetoric on Human Wants

"Moral philosophy, also called ethics, designates two distinct but related kinds of inquiry: substantive and analytical." Substantive ethics deals with the question of what is right or wrong, good and bad, in respect of character and conduct. It aims to formulate standards of correctness for evaluation and decision-making. It is also called normative ethics, since it can be said to deal with norms of conduct. Moral theory is the term frequently used in the second half of the twentieth century for a theory of substantive ethics that aims to be comprehensive and systematic. The ambition is that such a theory, usually conceived as a theory of what is right or wrong, would ideally have the virtues of a good scientific theory: simplicity, unity, explanatory power, etc. An adequate moral theory is often also expected to provide a procedure for finding the right answer to all moral questions about what to do" Mautner, 2000:367).

"Rhetoric is 'the power to see the possible ways of persuading people about any given subject. Persuasive evidence is of two kinds – the extra-technical, which already exists and has only to be used (such as witnesses, torture, documentary evidence), and the technical, which have to be invented by the speaker. Of the latter, there are three species: those bearing on the character of the speaker (i.e, devices of speech by which he induces his hearers to form a favorable opinion of his character), those which consist of the arousing of emotion in the hearers, and those which produce proof or its appearance by sheer force of argument. The third species of persuasion is considered first. It has two main sub-species, for example, the rhetorical counterpart of syllogism. Of these, the latter is the rhetorical method par excellence, the body of persuasion," (Ross, 1966:271).

The persuasive language of the Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá, through a logical perspective, on human basic needs, illustrates the unnecessary anxiety man often engages in with pragmatic submissions, according to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy model of human needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological theory that proposes human motivation is based on fulfilling a series of five needs, often depicted as a pyramid. The model suggests that individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before they can focus on higher-level ones. The five levels are: physiological (basic survival needs like food and water), safety (security and stability), love and belonging (social connections and intimacy), esteem (respect and achievement), and self-actualization (achieving one's full potential).¹

3.0 Methodology

The analysis of the selected poem, "Mo Ju Ayé Lọ," from Ìṣòlá's (1978) anthology Àfàìmò àti àwọn àròfò mǐràn, is based on its relevance to the topic of this article and how well the poet portrays the theme from a philosophical point of view. The poet's scientific approach and his variance with societal norms and values in tackling certain problems informed our choice of ethical theory. The poem is well-suited to literary analysis using moral philosophy, applied method, and analytical method. The poem was read, and the theme of human existence was identified as portrayed by the poet. The poem, "Mo Ju Ayé Lọ," is segmented into sub-themes and has been subjected to literary analysis using rhetoric and moral theory for our examination. The materialistic nature of humanity and the theme of "survival of the fittest" through "rats' race" loom large in the poems of Ìṣòlá (1978), "Mo Ju Ayé Lọ,"



4.0 Literature Review

Previous works related to Poetic study, Philosophy, and Ecosphere, among others in Yorùbá studies, did not engage in a philosophical analysis of the concept of human existentialism and human survival in a seemingly hostile and friendly environment. Through a comparative study of ancient and modern contexts from a poetic perspective. Ọlátúnjí (1984), Ajíkòbí (2007), Akinwotu (2016), Fátùróti (2018), Oyèwálé (2020), Ọláolúwa (2025) have all examined different themes or concepts of Yorùbá' poetry from different perspectives and related critical analysis. However, there is still a dearth of literary appraisal of the poetic levels of the seasoned poets' comparative levels. Therefore, it is more evident today that the topical issues relating to our study are worthwhile to be examined from poetic perspectives in the context of modernity. The study examines the theme of worldly creation within the scope of socio-cultural and economic perspectives, and how it significantly affects human needs in adulthood, as exemplified by Ịṣòlá in his poem, "Mo Ju Ayé Lọ." by the poets.

5.0 Objectives:

The objectives of this study are:

- (i) To identify and redefine the theme of empirical philosophy and human survival in the Yorùbá written poetry of Akínwùmí Ịṣòlá,
- (ii) To highlight the socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by the poet, which is akin to perennial problems in modern Nigeria,
- (iii) Discuss the significance of Yorùbá written poetry as it demystifies the seemingly complex life for the accomplished personalities,
- (iv) Critically discuss the topical issues addressed by the poet as a probable solution to ethical issues in modern Nigeria,

6.0 Definition of Terminology

Ecosphere: - Ecosphere is another word for biosphere - the area around a planet that contains everything that's needed to sustain life. The biosphere (from Ancient Greek βίος (bíos) 'life' and σφαῖρα (sphaîra) 'sphere'), also called the ecosphere (from Ancient Greek οἶκος (oîkos) 'settlement, house' and σφαῖρα (sphaîra) 'sphere'), is the worldwide sum of all ecosystems. Ecosphere is used as a synonym of biosphere and as a term for zones in the universe where life as we know it should be sustainable. Humans impact the physical environment in many ways: pollution, burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and more. Changes like these have triggered climate change, soil erosion, poor air quality, mass extinction, and undrinkable water, among other effects. The ecosphere is the global sum of all ecosystems, encompassing all living beings and their interactions with the environment. The term ecosystem could best be regarded as a habitat, environment, biosphere, or ecology are all scientific terms that can refer to spaces or systems in which plants and animals (including humans) live in relationship with each other and with the surrounding physical conditions.

A balanced ecosystem is a result of multiple factors that work together to create a harmonious relationship between living and non-living components in an environment. These factors include natural cycles, food chains and webs, biodiversity, and human activities.² But, incidentally, this expected harmony or symbiotic relationships is not being conscientiously practiced as evident in the blueprint of the Yorùbá cultural heritage due to many variables.



7.0 “Ethical Issues in Hustling”: Comparison of Ancient and Modernity in Ìṣòlá’s Perspective

There is no gainsaying the fact that human beings are living in a challenging world where socio-economic and political problems are integral parts of what makes the world a difficult place with peculiar sweet-bitter memories or experiences for virtually everyone in society. In Yorùbá society, where an individual is not physically or mentally incapacitated, everyone is, logically and morally, responsible, either directly or indirectly, for practically every obligation at the attainment of adulthood. Thus, the word adulthood, in human existence, varies in every clime and epoch as well as from one culture to another. For example, what is termed as adulthood in the ancient Yorùbá world is quite different from what the terminology means in the modern-day Yorùbá world.

In the early centuries of Yorùbá history, being legally empowered, morally upright, and high level of maturity were the criteria for tagging a man as an adult. But the Yorùbá is going through some kind of civilization rebirth, which engenders the jettisoning of the norms and values of ancient times. The paradigm shifts and the appalling trending phenomenon of “get-rich-quickly” syndrome among most contemporary youths and their fiendish approaches to “hustling” are what Ìṣòlá poetically condemns as being ethically wrong. As each culture is self-motivated and society is evolving, the linguistic transformation is occurring in the perception of what is ethically right or wrong is dynamically changing. Notwithstanding, the Yorùbá people, from a cultural perspective, have a strong belief that once a man attains “matured age,” he should possess the capacity and know-how for tackling considerable daunting tasks.

This is underscored with a Yorùbá proverb, “ìbì tó bá lè láà ñ b’ómòkùnrin” (an ideal man is always at the forefront of tackling life challenges). Given the communal nature of the Yorùbá culture, there is virtually nothing ethically wrong in helping a married man at every developmental stage or in all ramifications. Nevertheless, it is often somewhat difficult to “help” a typical married Yorùbá man with personal justifications or societal expectations for him to maintain marital status, pride of being able to fully provide for his immediate family. There is no reasonable purpose in the Yorùbá cultural milieu why anybody will be enduring hardship without sharing his or her problems with people for communal assistance. However, a man may be passing through a psychological ordeal of coping with emotional and financial obligations, as expressed by Ìṣòlá, in “Mo Ju Ayé Lọ” and still be resolute on endurance with moral justification of “akò igi kò gbọdọ soje” (an ideal man must not reveal his emotional feelings, which is typical of a weakling), as applicable to or portrayed by the poet. The situation, according to cultural beliefs and religious doctrine, affirms the reality that men are under a heavy burden to provide for their families and extended families, regardless. Hence, the word “world” is merely being personified by Ìṣòlá in situations of joyous moments, self-induced problems, or societal inflicted misfortunes, as there are virtually no differences between all seasons.

Ìṣòlá speaks symbolic words in contrast to Yorùbá cultural norms and values on what is culturally considered as ethically right or wrong in rendering moral support or inflicting pain on people. Ìṣòlá itemizes the qualities that fitted him as an adult who, upon personal self-consciousness, as a man (òlómòkùnrin/géndé), illustrates his practical experiences on hustling as a skilled worker and struggling for survival and attainment of marital status. As a fully grown man, the poet expresses his desire, aspirations, get-up-and-go, frustrations at his workplace, and determination, with optimism of a promising future and much to do to make ends meet, as concisely portrayed in the poem.

The declaration title “Mo Ju Ayé Lọ” in Ìṣòlá’s poem is best translated as “Master-craftsman,” thus providing further evidence that the poet is being philosophical. The immediate application of this poem has implications for human experience of maturity in interpersonal relationships and how it enhances the achievement of life goals. Struggling and hustling sound like the only logical or systematic approach to most youths as the fastest and best way of making it in life in contemporary



society. Whereas, the poem, from personal and moral perspectives, debunks such a notion based on the Yorùbá belief that *isẹ̀ kọ̀ lowó*, (work does not determine wealth), his personal experiences about life generally.

The Yorùbá world before now has always been very traditional and pragmatic in resolving personal or communal conflicts or problems using the potency of verbal communication, natural remedies, or humanistic principles, without any side effects. Therefore, we can affirm that one of the best strategies is to learn how to cope more effectively with circumstances by learning from a poetic point of view or devising the most suitable coping mechanisms, as applicable to personal situations. Thus, it is so important for society to make conscious and pragmatic decisions, as when due; in line with Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá's line of his propositions. However, it is logical to add that, sometimes, problems (s) shared with people of like mind or passion are half-solved, as sometimes portrayed in poems.

8.0 Analysis of the Poems

Ìṣòlá can be accurately described as a self-assured, ambitious individual who concentrates on fundamental life principles, like the Biblical request for “give us our daily bread.” To him, anyone trying to succeed in life through dishonest means is likely to regret his decision, assuming he lives long enough to share his story. However, the fact that people might misunderstand the poet's words indicates that Ìṣòlá is overly confident in his worldview and speaks plainly. It's clear that the poet possesses deep Yoruba native intelligence and is highly principled ethically. This comes from his experiences with elders, his cultured background, and a degree of self-discipline in understanding the logical meaning of human life, wealth or materialism, life's vanity, and their practical purposes.

The significant role of a poet is that of mediator, in the sense of a communication link, especially between the ancient and modernism, which Ìṣòlá serves adequately. Ìṣòlá, which takes the role of a go-between between mature adults, young adults, and teenagers, has been depicted in his poem, “Èwe Ìwòyí,” and books *Ogún Ọmọdé*, and *Ó Le Kú*, his two sociological novels, among others. His motivation and emphasis are to balance the ignorance about cultural heritage or strike an equilibrium in terms of societal gaps that naturally or artificially exist due to immaturity or lack of native intelligence. These variables, as a missing link, have greatly influenced the so-called civilized youth or computer-age, negatively. This, to a large extent, has truncated and battered or balkanized the valued ethical norms in the modern Yorùbá society, as sociologically depicted in Ìṣòlá's poem.

8.1 The Concept of Being a Man and the Nature of Man in Relation to Human Needs

The saying, “to be a man, is not a day job, perfectly describes Ìṣòlá's rural and urban rugged life as being pragmatically portrayed, first in *Ogún Ọmọdé*, and his poem “Mo Ju Ayé Lọ,” that we analyzed.” The character, jovial to the core, is his peculiar style of writing, which dominates the poem, “Mo Ju Ayé Lọ,” alludes to a real-life situation. The fact that many, in the modern-day context, often misunderstand what the word “being a man” entails inspires Ìṣòlá to narrate his personal experience. He recounts:

Bí mo ti tó géndé tán, ni mo wówó yá.

Mo gbàwìn èwù, gba ti sòkòtò,

Mo diṣu dèlùbó, mo gbágbòn, ó dilé àna.



Mo láya tán, mo bímo tán,

Mo tòjàngbòn lọ bẹrẹ

Nítorí kín ni?

Ẹ dá mi lóhùn

Nítorí kín ni?

Ìṣòlá (1978:15)

As I attained adulthood, I borrowed money.

I bought clothes on credit, as well as trousers on credit,

I packed yams, yam flour, and packed baggage went to my in-laws' house

I gave birth to children after marriage

I gave birth to “troubles”

Of what essence?

Answer me

Of what essence?

The poet introduces his early life and humble beginnings as a man struggling to make ends meet. However, Ìṣòlá, as a seasoned poet, gives a view of reality that takes his reader beyond this ecosphere. The poet, recounting his personal experiences, shares his socio-economic and developmental stages in life and his urge for marital achievements or expectancy. His eagerness to get married against all odds is well justified, having attained marriageable age. So, rather than engaging in an unrestrained, frivolous life, he opted for traditional and legal marriage. The eagerness prompts him to go into borrowing clothing materials, foodstuffs, and other requirements, according to Yorùbá culture, from the in-laws. It is observed that the poet got married in modern times, as applicable to him, because a typical Yorùbá parent, by tradition, is usually responsible for the expenses of their children's marriages. Ìṣòlá integrated several ethical and foundational facts about the culture of marriage amongst Yorùbá people: the fact that at a certain age in a man's life, celibacy is critically or ethically frowned upon. As such, the societal expectations on a Yorùbá man, irrespective of his material possessions, are to get married and build a home together with a lawfully wedded wife.

Consequently, what is considered as man's adequate achievements that qualify him to get married differ greatly from one epoch and climate to another, with cultural dynamism. “Then, the question of ‘what is a man’ is logically complex. Condensed in it are many other logical questions that forcefully reveal themselves the moment we attempt to proffer answers. Apart from this, philosophers have attempted to probe into the ‘essence’ of man with an intention that is not radically different from those of scientists, anthropologists, theologians, etc,” Ogbinaka, (2002:23-24). Going by what is trending in the modern Yorùbá society, the word “man” is measured by many illogical variables: huge physique, good job, furnished apartment, educational qualification,



‘substantial liquid cash,’ ability to procreate, among others, that is devoid of “inborn astuteness” that could sustain a couple in marital storms of life.

However, most ladies in the contemporary Yorùbá society appear to be hard-pressed to rush into marriage without having an understanding of the nitty-gritty of marriage and the challenges involved. How many times are modern-day youths so eager to go into ‘unplanned marriages’ rather than spending time to learn the indigenous etiquette and nitty-gritty of marriage for emotional, social, and financial navigation before venturing into the journey of matrimonial life? The most important fact of all is that marriage, irrespective of status attained, is full of different intricate encounters, which must be jointly surmounted by a couple.

8.2 Human Natural Futile Efforts to Conquer the Ecosphere and Vanity of Life!

The source of power and human positive influence or achievements does not exist in properties that are acquired, either through legal or illegal means. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect in the world of the poet is the pathetic world of humanity and the futile struggling for vanity as exemplified by Ìṣòlá. The poet, in derision, laments:

Bá a sàré, sàré, tá kólé mólé

Tá a fiyámóyà bá a ralè mólè

Bó wulé, ilé a wó, bó wòjò a sàirò.

Sàré sèjì, sàré sèta, bó bá yá ikú a dé.

Ilé ayé, nítorí kín ni?

Ìṣòlá (1978:15)

If we hustle and hustle, and build houses upon houses

And we also endured and bought acres of land

Sometimes, the house could collapse, and rain may refuse to fall.

Quickly do this, quickly do others, and afterwards death will occur.

This world, of what essence?

The poet captures human passion and persistence with a strong focus on progress in life through individual efforts. In the poet's words, man is figuratively portrayed as having socio-economic and political vision, life ambitions, and goals for achievement and security in the first four lines of the excerpt. By mentioning some admirable projects like houses and land, the poet explains that people make untold sacrifices through a moral approach to financial gain for a seemingly lifetime achievement. He clarifies his point in the excerpt for a better understanding of the challenges of ethical demands that man faces in achieving life goals. Shelter, land purchases, and other investments are viewed by the poet as a kind of disillusioned wealth, which is part of illusion and self-promotion.



Virtually every individual or family is usually passionate about making progress in climbing the ladder of success or career development, as expressed by the poet. To the poet, the fundamental idea in achieving these goals should be “slow and steady wins the race,” or “no hurry in life.” Throughout history, mythology, real-life situations, and personal experience, the poet demonstrates that nothing is worth dying for or truly permanent in life. The ethical message about life achievements is that they are best accomplished with the principle of “one day at a time!” However, more often than not, most people in the world are overambitious, overly anxious, and consumed by greed. Thus, the poet warns:

Omọ ẹni ò ní kọgbọ̀n, bá a kú tán, a gbalé,

A tẹ́rí gbogún tẹ́rí gbàyà, tẹ́rí gbàjàngbọ̀n.

A bèrè àròyè, a kó sí wàhálà,

Bónií ti rí, làná rí, bèè nìjẹta, bèè lojọ́ gbogbo

Ìṣọ́lá (1978:15)

One's child would not learn; he would inherit the house after one's demise

He would inherit properties, inherit suffering, and inherit troubles,

He would start lamenting and enter into trouble,

As today is, so it was yesterday, so was three days ago, so is every day

After recounting his personal experience about the necessity of the futility of life and its rooted disheartening ends, he then focuses directly on engaging his children in pragmatic counsel to be able to acquire knowledge in taking life as it is, rather than delusive influence, and immoral possessions. Sometimes, children might have an erroneous impression that their father's ideology, philosophy, fundamental issues, or problematic world has no fundamental bearing on their own lives. But within the domain of every human heart lies the urge to get-rich-quickly, either morally right or through dubious means.

Hence, the poet admonishes his children to learn from seemingly old-fashioned ideas to avoid making costly and unredeemable mistakes. Ìṣọ́lá again persuasively lays claim to be a mentor to his children, who might not have enough knowledge or understanding to learn from him in the first line of the excerpt. The moral lesson or inherent acumen that could be acquired from parental guidance on the mysteries and ephemera of life is very germane in the poet's point of view. This profound perspective, a food for thought, is very germane in the home-training of every child to learn from parents, the principles of life, especially in a world that is filled with many delusive and attractive enticements.

The poet's doxology raises two important moral questions: should the children in question not aspire to achieve material things or marital status like their father? While the poet is highly interested in making it in life, possibly like his contemporaries, he makes it clearer that human beings should not be deeply engrossed in an unending, earthbound future for the robust expectation of the uncertain future, which may be guaranteed today and be heart-disheartening tomorrow by unforeseen calamities. Much as working through pragmatic efforts, making ends meet, and having



great accomplishments are integral parts of human desires, the poet warns on the ethical principle of striking a balance as opposed to willfully doing something unethical. He observes:

Àisùn, àìwo, nítorí kín ni?

È yojú wò gboro, ẹ wòsì, ẹ wàrà,

Básínwín ti ń sínwín, larọ ń wó.

Onígégé ń fọrùn jálẹ̀kẹ̀, atiro ń fẹ̀sẹ̀ gòbẹ.

Adẹ̀tẹ̀ ń fí kùkùràkù tọ̀rọ̀ owó

Mo wò kan tíí, àtàyà, àtẹ̀yìn – gbandukan.

Gbogbo wọn ni ò fẹ́ kú, wọn wayé máyà.

Wọn kó ‘tíjù tà, wọn dẹni tí ń tọ̀rọ̀ kó tó jẹun.

Ikú yá jẹ̀sín, lòwẹ̀ àgbà, àbí mo sìfọ̀?

Ìṣọ̀lá (1978:15)

Not sleeping, not resting, for what reason?

Peep into the town, look at poverty, look afar off,

As a madman is displaying lunacy, so a lame person is crawling.

Goiter is breaking beads with the neck; a limping person is getting hurt with a knife

The leper is using short hands to beg for alms

I observed one for a while, the chest and back, laden, protruding

All of them do not want to die; they cling to worldly things

They discarded shame, and they became beggars before they could eat

Death is better than shame, is the proverb of the elderly. Did I speak wrongly?

There is no gainsaying the fact that hard work is an essential prerequisite for humans' ultimate existence, survival, and success in life. However, the poet cherishes and affirms that the obligation and warmth of moderation cannot be overemphasized. A Yorùbá adage, *bí a ò kú ìṣe ò tán*, (there is hope for the living), underscores that, with optimism, virtually everybody has the potential of making it in life. Hence, a natural tendency to morally justify the essence of making extra efforts with the hope that natural human capacity, coupled with providence's assistance, will eventually yield fruitful results.



Ìṣòlá discloses and also condemns the dangers of departing from the ethical habit of overworking without adequate rest, which is peculiar to human nature. The poet satirically describes how people with diverse physical and health challenges are bravely finding strength and holding on to life in the “survival-of-the-fittest” despite the socio-economic challenges in a keenly competitive communal system. The physically challenged people mentioned by the poet, preferably, depend on soliciting for alms rather than turning to the buoyant magnanimity of societal assistance for moral support for survival. Despite the fun-loving tone with which the poet illustrates the health condition of each ‘character’ in the excerpt, he emphasizes the optimism they hold onto as applicable to Yorùbá ideology about the essence of existence in a peaceful cohabitation. For self-belonging, the Yorùbá moral law for assisting one another, “àsà-ìranra-ẹ̀ni-lọ̀wọ̀,” is not a mere external set of ethos, but naturally permeates an individual’s sense of empathy. This ideally motivates beyond verbal expression of care or love, and translates into action of benevolent giving to the needy as part of one big family in every Yorùbá community.

The ethical message is that whatever an individual’s current state, within the time or space of his or her existence, he or she remains an active participant in ameliorating individual or societal problems, in the best way possible in the cosmic environment. “Cosmos ordinarily means ordered universe, or just “ordered” as opposed to ‘chaos,” Ògúndówòlé (2002:38). More often, human beings rebel against the reality of death through ways of life that contradict health principles as dictated by nature. Consequently, man usually makes a pragmatic attempt to run away from death despite the self-induced potential of dying untimely.

8.3 Fighting for Longevity with Natural and Unnatural Means against Death

Ìṣòlá considers the world “ayé” as a human manual on how best to interpret, living longer morally and peaceably. Nevertheless, the poet opines that only a few people who have an understanding of the “world” adhere to the guide, whereas, substantial number of people disregard the longevity principles. He enumerates:

Èlẹ̀sẹ̀ kan ò gọpẹ, bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni kò jagun ọ̀ba.

Bá á kú, ẹ̀ẹ̀kan là á kú,

Ọmọ ẹ̀ni, wọ̀n a gbé ni sin.

Kín ní ń bẹ̀ láyẹ̀ tá ń fúnwọ̀ mọ̀!

Ìgbádùn wo ló pò tó bẹ̀ẹ̀ tí a ń so gbékúdè mórùn.

Ìgbésí-ayé ò nítumò, bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni kò ẹ̀ pàtàkì

Kò ẹ̀ pàtàkì, ọ̀fọ̀, ọ̀jọ̀ kejì ọ̀jọ̀ àdájọ̀nà.

Èni táyẹ̀ bá yé ló yẹ̀ kó máa gbé ‘lé-ayé.

Bí kò bá yé ọ̀, gbìyànjú o ní sùúrù,

Bí bẹ̀.ẹ̀ kọ̀, ẹ̀ bí ọ̀kùnrin.

Ìṣòlá (1978:15)



A one-legged man could not climb a palm tree

Man dies, but only once

One's child would bury one.

What is on earth that is worth tight-fitting!

What type of enjoyment in the world is worthy of holding onto

What great enjoyment is there that makes us tie death's preventive charm around one's neck

Life is neither meaningless nor is it important

It is not important, as empty as a day after a communal market day.

Whosoever understands the world should be the one living in the world

If it is not clear to you, try to exercise patience

Otherwise commit suicide

The world is very mysterious, complex, and complicated for human full comprehension, as the poet affirms. The poet opines that the seemingly obscurity of the world makes it extremely difficult for some people who lack understanding to make right or wrong ethical decisions in problematic situations confronting them. Though making a right or wrong decision is logically somewhat a relative term, however, the moral justification of every human decision is usually subjected to or weighed vis-à-vis the Yorùbá norms and values or community lore before the advent of Islam and Christianity or the constitution. In a critical situation, a human being is subject to making wrong decisions due to illogical thinking, wrong counselling, or hasty decisions. Hence, the poet urges people to internalize wise counsel, "using the metaphor of having a deeper knowledge and understanding of the world to the fullest.

In view of Ìṣòlá's steadfast stance on his principle on his reasonable understanding of the emptiness of the world amidst the inclination of the "rat race," about materialism reveals that his realistic assessment of human aspiration as totality vanity. His assertion might be informed by what was apparently obtainable in the ancient Yorùbá society and the prevailing modern phenomenon whereby people are passing on without much to show for it, regarding memories of their achievements or contributions to humanity as a legacy for posterity. It was customary in Yorùbá antiquity for people to be relatively modest in dispositions, and even in their words. This includes some wealthy people, who had a better understanding of the principle of give and take, as the pillar of interpersonal relationships in every clime and epoch.

Traditionally, family members, strangers, or society at large, culturally, stand to benefit from the material possessions of an individual, Adérinkòmí (1978:165), using "Ogbè Alára" to illustrate the necessity of helping others, especially the common men, less privileged or strangers, the outcasts, as the essence of living and reciprocating good deeds. Consequently, the Yorùbá society was peaceful with minimal vices, and people then lived longer than what obtains now because of a lack of avarice.



8.4 Ìṣòlá's Antidote for Life Crucible and Self-Control in Celebrated Moments

The poet further expounds on life problems, which he asserts to be an integral part of human life. He affirms:

Báyé bá díjú, tó fọjú, tó n dá gbáúgbáú,
Ìbàà rò sòmù, dè gbèdè, yòtòmí àtàtà
Kò ẹ nńkan kan, kò ẹ pàtàkì, kò nítumò.
N ò jé sáré owó, kí n bá wọn ẹ́ẹ́sọ
N ò sì jé sùn, sùn, kí n gbàgbé ị́ẹ. òwúró.
Báyé bá gún régé, bíí kí n maa jó kó.
Báyé bá sì diyà, dòsì, d'ìjàngbòn ràbàtà.
Kì í ẹ bíí kí n gbé májèlẹ̀ mì;

Ìṣòlá (1978:15)

If the world becomes so difficult, chaotic, and breaks into pieces
If the world becomes so pleasant, pleasurable, and rosy, or easy as pie,
It does nothing, it is insignificant, it is meaningless.
I cannot run after money, and get involved in money rituals
I cannot oversleep and forget my early morning work
If the world is perfect, it is not for me to be dancing
If the world is in anguish, in impoverishment, in a troublesome form
It is not for me to take poison.

By using several terms with related but distinct meanings, the poet illustrates understanding of what people naturally consider as either the best option for celebrating or expressing emotional feelings in comparatively “good” or “bad, circumstances.” Ìṣòlá directly links what society deems good or bad to ethical issues, which are daily common occurrences. In human existence, no matter how hilarious or terrible people may view one another's different experiences, they are meaningless and inconsequential to the poet. “Tied to African culture is the cult of personality. The humaneness, moralism, beliefs, and customs are the non-material aspects of culture that the individual African has inculcated and internalized to form his personality. The African personality, therefore, includes those things that essentially make African “selves” distinguishable. The African personality is, however, tied up with philosophy,” (Oláṣoba, 2005:36).



As a food for thought, the poet, with a metaphorical statement, opines that it behooves everyone to perceive the ephemeral world with the simplicity it deserves. Despite the pleasant time that life could sometimes bring, the poet asserts that it does not call for much spectacular celebration or joyous moments. To him, the world is filled with sweet-bitter experiences in human existence. This backdrop debunks people's optimism in holding on to life, as illustrated in the anxious query of the poet as to when the world will treat everyone with fairness and equity. Thus, the incredible societal dysfunction revealed in his poem could not destabilise him, emotionally or otherwise. Ìṣòlá professes that he has a working knowledge of what to do in different situations, which would not make him lose his senses, sleep, peace, and mental health for what he considers as side-distractions of life. His coping mechanism makes the world practically the same, year-in-year-out, with no expectation of spectacular changes, is a food for thought.

Historically, the trending situations, over the years, show that the perennial financial and socio-political problems identified and forecasted by the poet are on the increase at an alarming rate rather than abating. The greatest challenge the poet poses to his readers is: what words of lamentation do they engage in due to the turning of events in their lives, especially when things are not going well. The fact remains that “our world is known for its disorder, troubles, wars, and conflicts. All these factors affect our lives at the personal, community, and national levels.³

On the other hand, do they often forget that good or the perceived evil of life are somewhat synonymous, whenever they are overjoyed with life accomplishments? A Yorùbá axiom, *ire wà nínú ibi, ibi wà ní nù ire* (good is embedded in evil and vice versa), pulls together the concepts of what could be defined as good or bad, which essentially is a relative term. The poet, in affirming that human existence and his condition, in this world, are as unstable as water, and the only hope or tenacity to transcend personal or societal problems, in every place or era, is what matters. “The best indication of a man’s internal disposition is his feeling of pleasure or pain in the doing of virtuous or vicious acts. Pleasure or pain may indeed be called the subject-matter of moral virtue,” Ross (1968: 193).

“Aside from the incessant wars that ravaged the Yorùbá societies, the Yorùbá tribe could be well described as a relatively stable people in ancient times,” (See Lloyd, 1987:205-223). Besides, the poet clearly shows that life, in this world, amid thought-provoking situations, does not always play out as individuals or society might have imagined, planned, or wanted.

8. 5 The Poet’s Declaration on Self-Assertiveness over Life Circumstances

Perhaps the most salient idea in the self-claim assertions of Ìṣòlá about his life experiences is his self-proclamation to be above life generally and whatever it could offer! With adequate preparation of mind, the poet succinctly and metaphorically expresses that he is greater than the world from different perspectives. In his words, he affirms:

Ayé yé mi yéké, MO JU AYÉ LỌ.

Mo jù yà lọ, mo jà yọ lọ, kò sóhun tó kàn mí.

Ayé ẹe mí ní kà, ó ẹbí n ò mò,

Bó ẹe mí lóoore, n ò jé dúpé.

Ibi kò korò, oore ò dùn.



Àimòkan ló ñ sòsìkà, ẹni a ẹ níkà ñ finì rẹrìn-ín

Oore a máa gbé, Ìkà náà a máa gbé.

Ẹ ẹ wọ̀,

Ẹ sinmi agbaja!

Ìṣòlá (1978:15)

I thoroughly understood the world, I AM MORE THAN THE WORLD

I am more than suffering; I am more than joy; nothing concerns me

The world did evil to me, it thought that I did not know

If it did good to me, I will not show gratitude

Evil is not bitter, a good deed is not sweet

Evil evildoer is in ignorance, the victim of the evil deed is holding one in derision

Good deeds are uncompensated, evil deeds go Scot-free

Take it easy,

Stop vexation

The most deceitful thing in life is the human heart due to the accelerated speed of light at which it processes information, issues, or misconceptions, either morally or otherwise. The poet 'dissects' the human mind in the light of how well familiar human beings are with their ecosystem and the mysteries thereof. However, Ìṣòlá philosophically claims that he is greater than the world, despite its vastness, space, and time of its age of existence.

In his words as a poet, he modestly asserts that he fully understands the world far better than being troubled or disillusioned by seemingly joyful things the world offers as enticements or allurements. His expression adds interesting details of the world as two sides of a coin: which is good and bad, professing that either of the two is meaningless to him. By human nature in the world, it always seems to have more material possessions than what could be accounted for. The principle of servant-leadership has gained currency among management and leadership theorists.⁴

Ìṣòlá, in his realistic assertion, demystified the seemingly insurmountable circumstances in the human world and the world with his poetic words. Though some might not understand or appreciate how individuals impact the natural world, the Yorùbá prose narratives and mythologies reveal that humans' positive influence is measured against the backdrop of individuals' contributions to society or community. The word of wisdom, as aptly articulated by the poet, is akin to a roadmap to a desirable destination with respect to a fulfilled life with longevity.



End Note:

- 1..<https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+the+maslow+hierarchy+of+needs&oq=What+is+the+maslow+> (Accessed on 28th October, 2025)
- 2..https://www.google.com/search?q=What+is+the+meaning+of+Ecosphere+as+a+Philosophical+term&oq=What+is+the+meaning+of+Ecosphere+as+a+Philosophical+term&gs_lcrp. (Accessed on 20th October, 2025).
3. Adult Sabbath School Guide. Denis Fortin (Ed.). Old Columbia Pike Silver, Maryland: U.S.A (2018:264).
4. Adult Sabbath School Guide. Denis Fortin (Ed.). Old Columbia Pike Silver, Maryland: U.S.A (2016:97).

Conclusion

Beyond all reasonable doubt, Ìṣòlá is a philosophical Yorùbá poet. He has shown practical ways for saying no to evil without being emotional about perceived “good deeds” from humanity in the course of one’s existence. He affirms that both concepts are similar terms that express the same idea in human existence or survival within his ecosystem. He establishes that a self-disciplined life is so crucial in gaining wisdom on human inter-personal relations, especially in a communal setting like Yorùbá society, where symbiotic culture is a norm. To this end, we submit that understanding the consequences of having a down-to-earth poet, like Ìṣòlá could help in no small measure to appreciate the philosophical stance of a poet that somewhat deviates from cultural norms and values on ethical values. We deduced from his poem that wisdom is associated with life, philosophy, and a poetic point of view on matters relating to human existence and pragmatic ways of exploring human survival in the ecosystem without much ado. Within the context of the poet’s word, Ìṣòlá sensitizes the contemporary Yorùbá society that there is a need to reconsider the fundamental role of a philosophical poet as well as meaningless perspectives about life generally. He further reproves, reforms, and expounds on certain societal maladies through his poem. He further clarified how one can best handle or relate to a pleasant situation or difficult life, as individuals with a measure of calmness and maturity, as each situation arises. The poet noted that more imperfect things one could observe in the world could, likely, engender a sorrowful heart. He, however, asserts that these irregularities, upsetting as they may be, do not warrant much ado but to develop a coping mechanism, such that they would not debar anyone from achieving life goals or accomplishments. Ìṣòlá charges his readers to recognize, and warmly accept socio-economic problems with resilience as preventive measures against distress, transfer aggression, and depression that are very common in modern times. The illustrations of the poet, comparatively, try to strike a balance and proffer a probable solution to socio-cultural problems, especially in the light of modern-day reality, where everybody is greatly battling with financial constraint or obsessed with materialism. Nigerians, as a larger society, need to understand the deep veracity and logicity that are embedded in the philosophical statements of Ìṣòlá, and apply the same ethical principles embedded. Evidently, his stance in the poem reveals the ethical values he imbibes from home-training, which fortified him with “native intelligence” coupled with self-discipline and the dint of hard work, which are the fountains of life in his existence. We may be right to conclude that the poet lives in his poetic world, which is far from the Yorùbá cultural belief.



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Appendix I – The Poem of Study and its Translation

Mo ju ayé ló
Mo sáré, jí, mo bójú kíá.
Mo wè, mo jẹun, mo dè wèwù.
Mo gbápò, mo dì gágá, ó dì'bi isẹ.
work

Nítórí kí nì?
Mo dé 'bi isẹ, isẹ tún díjù,
Oríc ñ gbóná, ojù ñ pón, eegun ñ r oni.
bones.

Mo sàyà gèngè, orùn tìpònà,
Mo gbèsè, mo rìn gígíjé, mo pebi mọnú,
Nítórí kí nì?

Mo tún síwó tán, àtidélé didán,
Àtòjò, àtòòrùn, okò ni ò gbàyè,
season is obvious

Ká bùrìn, bùrìn, ká sùré sésé
Ení kòsè lówò òyìnbó fí 'ra rẹ sọfà
Bó o pẹ, wọn a níṣe tán,
Bí o tètè jù, wọn ò sílèkùn

Nítórí kí nì?
Bí mo tí tò géndé tán, nì mo wówó yá.
Mo gbàwìn èwù, gba ti sòkòtò,
Mo dìṣi dèlùbò, mo gbágbòn, ó d'lé àna.
Mo láya tán, mo bímọ tán,
Mo tòjàngbòn ló bèrẹ.

Nítórí kí nì?
È dá mi lóhùn.
Nítórí kí nì?
Bá a sáré sáré, tá a kólé mólé
Tá a fiyámóyà ba' ralè mólé,
Bó wulé, ilé a wó, bó wòjò a sàirò.
Sáré sẹjì, sáré sẹta, bó bá yá ikú a dé.
comes

Ilé-ayé, nítórí kí nì?
Omọ ẹni ò ní kògbòn, bá a kú tán, a gbalé.
after the demise

A tẹrí gbogún tẹrí gbàyà, tẹrí gbàjàngbòn.
A bèrẹ àròyé, kó sí wàhálà.
Bóni ti rí, bèrẹ nìjẹta, bèrẹ l'ojó gbogbo.
Àisùn-àìwo, nítórí kí nì?

È yojú' wògboro, ẹ wòṣi, ẹ wàre,
Básínwín ti ñ sínwín, larọ ñ wó.
crawling

Onígègè ñ fòrùn jálèkè, atiro ñ fèsè góbè.
injured by a knife,

Adètè ñ fí kùkùràkù tọrọ owó.
Mo wo kan títi, àtàyà, àtèyìn,- gbadíkan.
Gbogbo wọn ni ò fẹ ku, wọn wayé máyà.

I am more than the world
I woke up, and I washed my face
I bathed, I ate, and put on my clothes
I carried my bag, well-dressed, and I headed to my

For what reason?
I got to work and work became difficult
I was having a headache, reddened eyes, with painful

I chested out, stiff necked
I walked groggily, sluggishly, I endure hunger
For what reason?
To get home after closing is so difficult
Inadequate space in a vehicle during the rainy or dry

To walk fast, to walk run briskly
The person who trains with white is a serfdom
You get fired if you come late to work
If you come early, they will not open on time
For what reason?

I borrowed money when I became an adult
I bought clothes and trousers on credit
I packed yams and yam flour. I went to my In-Laws
I got married, gave birth to children
I got in more trouble.

For what reason?
Answer me.
For what reason?
If we struggled, and built houses
If we made sacrifices and bought an actress of land
The house could collapse, and rain might refuse to fall
While trying to do many things, death will eventually

This world, for what reason?
One's child would learn, they will inherit the house

He will inherit the properties and inherit the problems.
He will start complaining and get into problems
Today is similar to three days ago, and so is every day
Restlessness, for what reason?

Pip into the town, look to the left, look to the right,
As a madman goes about lunatically, so is the lame

Someone with goitre tore beads, a limping person

A leper issuing a half-cut hand to beg alms
I look at one critically, both front and back overshoot
All of them do not want to die.



Wọn kó' tǐjú tà, wọn ǵenítí ń toro kó tó jeun.	They overlook shame; they were begging for alms
Èsín yáá jukú, àbí kín lẹ t iwi?	Shame is better than did, or what did you say?
Ikú yá jèsín, l'òwe àwọn àgbà, àbí mo sìfò?	Death is better than shame, is an elderly proverb, did I say it amidst?
Bó jìyà, bó ǵesín, kó ǵá má ti kùú.	If it is suffering, it is shame, just not to die
Nítòrí kín ni?	For what reason?
Níjò tí Lágbájá tẹ, ó wólé, ó w' onú igbá,	The day somebody was ashamed, he entered his room
and behold the calabash	
Níjò tí Tàmèdù tẹ, ó tòbẹ bọfun è;	The day somebody was ashamed, he slits his throat
Ó kófun jáde, ó ǵesín rínlú já,	He brought his intestines and rode a horse around the town
Ó délé, ó kú, kàkà kó dọbálẹ fún yà!	He got back home, he died, instead of prostrating for punishment!
Mo ǵope, mo rébọ, itan rún wómú.	I climbed a palm tree, I fell, and my thigh was fractured
Onísègùn yàdà, a fi bó ǵé mi l'ésè sònù!	The medical Doctor brought the surgical blade to amputate my legs
È dákun, ẹ fàdà pamó, èmi kì í ǵe háràhàrà	Please, keep your surgical blade, I am not an amputee
Bílẹ bá ti yá, k' rọjú ká relé.	If it is time to die, let us endeavour to go.
Èlèsè kan ò ǵope, bẹẹ ni kò jagun oba.	A one-legged man does not climb a palm tree, nor can he fight King's war
Bá à kùú, ẹẹkan là á kú,	If we want to die, it is only once,
Omọ ẹni, wọn a gbéni sin.	One's children will bury one
Kín ní ń bẹ láyé tá ń fúnwọ mọ!	What is it in the world that is so spectacular about clinging to it
Ìgbádùn wo ló pọ tó bẹẹ tí à ń so gbékúde mọrùn.	What enjoyment is therein that warrants tying death-antidote charms on the neck
Ìgbé-ayé ò nítumọ, bẹẹ ni kò ǵe pàtàkì.	Life is meaningless, it is not important, as well
Kò ǵe pàtàkì, òfo, ojọ kejì ojà àdájóná.	It is not important, it is empty like a second market day
Èni táyé bá yé ló yẹ kó máa gb'lé-ayé.	It is only those who understand the world that deserve to live in it
Bí kò bá yé o, gbìyànjú o ní sùúrù,	If you do not understand it, try to be patience,
Bí bẹẹ kọ, ǵe bí ọkúnrin.	Otherwise, try to commit suicide.
Báyé bá díjú, tó fọjú, tó ń dá gbaúgbáú,	If the world is breaking, bewildered, breaking into pieces
Ìbàà rò sòmù, dẹ gbèdẹ, yòtòmì àtàtá	If it is rosy, easy, enjoyable with groovy vibes
Kò ǵe nńkan kan, kò ǵe pàtàkì, kò nítmọ.	It does not matter, it is not important, it is meaningless
N ò jẹ bá wọn sàré owó kí n bá wọn ǵesó	I will not engage in get-rich-quick syndrome and do money rituals
N ò jẹ sùn sùn, sùn, kí n gbàgbé ǵé òwúró.	I will not oversleep and forget my morning occupation.
Báyé bá ǵún rẹǵé, bíi kí ń máa jó kó.	If the world is stable, it does not warrants my dancing
Báyé bá sì diyà, dòsì, d'ìjàngbọn ràbàtá.	If the world is filled with immeasurable troubles.
Kì í ǵe bí i kí n gbé májèlé mì;	It does not warrants poisoning myself
Ayé yé mì yéké, MO JU AYÉ LỌ.	I understand this world very well, I AM MORE THAN
THE WORLD	
Mo jùyà lọ, mo jayọ lọ, kò sohuntó kàn mí.	I am more than suffering, I am more than joy, I am not bothered about anything
Ayé ǵe mì níkà, ó ǵebí n ò mò,	The world did me harm, it thought I did not know
Bó ǵe mì lóore n ò jẹ dúpé.	If does me good, I will not appreciate it.
Ibì ò korò, oore ò dùn.	Wickedness is not bitter; kindness is not sweet.
Àimọkan ló sòsìkà, ẹni a ǵe níkà ń finì rẹrìn-ín	A wicked person is ignorant of his deed, a victim is laughing



Oore a màa gbé, Ìkà a máa gbé.
not be repaid.
Ẹ ẹe wọọ,
Ẹ sinmi agbaja!

Kindness might not be rewarded; wickedness might
Take life easy,
Stop fussing about~