

**Artistic Direction and Directorial Exploration in Bakare, Ojo
Rasaki's *The Gods and The Scavengers* and *Once Upon A
Tower***

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Introduction

Plays, which are the intellectual product and the artistic creative invention of a playwright, can be made unambiguous when directions are provided. This is because, providing direction promotes transparent synergetic relationship between the playwrights, the artistic directors, the audience and the society at large. We have observed that lack of synergy has been responsible for why playwrights stage a walk out of theatres because of the "bad way" their creative works was handled by play directors. There is no doubting the fact that most of the 'celebrated' artistic works of many playwrights' today have suffered from poor patronage because they lack direction. This perhaps is the reason why the works of a few playwrights are recycled year in year out. In this study, we examine the concept "direction" as well as the concept "exploration" and how they have helped our understanding of the two play texts under review: *The Gods and the scavengers* and *Once upon a tower*. We interrogate the work, using Graham Hitchen's Directional thinking theory. The *Directional thinking theory*, which was propounded in 2006, is: "a *dynamic* approach to strategy and project development – focusing on the longer-term, by helping to create new programmes, projects and future plans which can test the appetite for change and to help make it happen".

This theory is apt considering the predominantly directionless approaches that mars Nigerians focus on issues. Nigeria with her abundant human and material resources, still gropes in the forest, without a visible direction. These selected theatrical pieces provide a dynamic approach that would engender new directions toward positive change. The theory emphasises amongst others; leadership development, relationship and stakeholder

engagement, team building and change management. This we consider as a welcome approach to complimenting numerous efforts of scholars, socio critics and human right activists who have devoted their lives and resources to seeing Nigeria advance in a purposeful direction.

In this paper, we shall examine the issue of 'direction' from two perspectives; one from sociological standpoint and the second from the artistic directorial exploration perspective. By sociological direction within the content of this work, we refer to the direction for achieving egalitarianism and objective socio-political standard. These we found in the two plays under examination. On the other hand, an exploration of the artistic directions, which we refer to as directorial exploration, is to educate us on how the playwright wants his concept in the interpretation of their creative works to be sustained when play directors put the plays on stage for performance.

As we engage in the analytical dissection of the two play texts, we are overwhelmed by the direction provided by the playwright as he addresses the realities of the events around him and us. Bamikunle (2001, p.v) in his forward to the play *Once upon a tower* identifies these when he describes Bakare's work as reacting to the "very stark realities of events around [him]...presented in an artistically significant way". This will be one of the directions that we intend to explore in the two play texts. We are not oblivious of the fact that playwright don't just write, they are induced by the happenings in and around their environments. They capture, using their artistic view lenses what they have seen, heard or read. In *Once upon a tower*, we see the muse in Bakare pointing to the decays that have enveloped our citadels of learning, which he puts together in a most compact and down-to earth manner. In the same direction, in *The Gods and the scavengers*, we were confronted with the stark reality of the degree of corruption that the Nigerian society has had to contend with; orchestrated in different metaphors of dramatis personae that run through the play. Having critically examined the two plays, which we describe as didactic pedagogic artistic

works, we observe that the two play texts also shocked us into the realities of the menace of the societal ills in our society. It is also gratifying that the playwright made significant attempt to provide directions towards eradicating them.

Some concepts will run prominently in this work, we consider it apt to illuminate on them. The concepts are; '*Direction*' and '*exploration*'.

Direction and Exploration are very common concepts, which should not be subjected to any misinterpretation.

Direction, according to *Webster Dictionary* retrieved from *Webster.com* (2014) is "the course or path on which something is moving or pointing". It also defines it as: "a statement that tells a person what to do and how to do it; an order or instruction". However, for the purpose of this study, we shall adopt the latter definition. Bakare's artistic packages in the two play texts made statements that tell us what to do and how to do them.

Exploration that we made reference to reveals how one (a playwright, director) intends to discover his literary and artistic directions. Therefore, '*exploration*' as defined in the *Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia* (2014 np), is "the act of searching for the purpose of discovery of information or resources" In this work, we shall examine direction and the exploratory approaches adopted in bringing the content of the art work to the fore.

Digests of the play: *The Gods and the scavengers and Once upon a tower The Gods and the scavengers*

The metaphor of the scavengers employed in the play; *The Gods and the scavengers*, portrays the pathetic characters that citizens of Nigeria are turned into by the leaders who they elected into office with their votes. The scavengers, who are turned to the wretched of the earth and social outcasts, because of the greed and the corruptible dispositions of the leaders they elected. They decide to take their destiny in their own hands by revolting against the corrupt leaders, who are epitomised in the elected

local government Councillors, representing the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Bakare, in demonstrating Uka's (2006) as well as the conclusion of Etop Akwang (2006), a critic/dramatist comments at the back page of the script describe the play as: "Bakare's artistic rebellion" and the play which "lampoons the political gangsterism in Nigeria" respectively. Truly, we found this artistic rebellion uneconomically demonstrated but with positive intention's in the play.

Also, in *Once upon a tower*, Bakare presents starkly, the rot in our citadel of learning. He exposes in an unambiguous term the kinds of leaders that our society breeds as epitomised in the antecedents of the Provost, College of Medicine of the Mariapinto University Nigeriana. Three students whose careers are cut short in their primes decide to take their pound of flesh from the provost on the day of the school's convocation ceremony and this buttresses the misnomer in our institutions of higher learning. The students, armed to the teeth, on a vengeance mission made their way to the office of the Vice Chancellor, where the Chancellor and the Chairman governing Council and of course the Vice Chancellor are basking in the euphoria of the success of the Convocation Ceremonies of the Mariapinto University Nigeriana. The armed students, who after manhandling the trio, demand that the Vice Chancellor should produce the atrocious Provost or else, they will be made the sacrificial lamb, have their request met. The atrocities of the provost and his crony lecturers, the corrupt Chairman, Senate House Committee on Education are blown open, before the Chancellor, the Chairman of the school's Governing Council and the Vice Chancellor. Little did these atrocious fellows know that their corruptible tendencies, which they perpetrated, perhaps at a time that they thought no one will know, will later in their lives result in cycle of terrible events. This are the directions that Bakare points us to in the two works under review.

The Playwright, Bakare, Ojo Rasaki

Bakare, Ojo Rasaki was born fifty years ago in Aramoko Ekiti, precisely, on November 8th 1964, Professor Rasaki Ojo Bakare

became the first Nigerian Professor of Choreography and Performing Aesthetics, having drawn his artistic inspiration from his mother. He started his theatre career from being a theatre apprentice under Chief Jimoh Aliu and late Hubert Ogunde. Rasaki took a leap in the pursuance of his theatre career by attending University of Calabar where he obtained his B. A. (Hons.), Theatre Arts and M.A, Play Directing and Playwriting. He had his Ph.D. in Choreography and Dance Studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Prof Bakare's career as a University Teacher and a theatre practitioner has earned him many awards. He has handled over 200 major command performances both nationally and internationally amongst which include the command performances for the presidential inaugurations of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Alhaji Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and his successor Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The opening ceremonies of National Sports Festival 2004, Under 17 World Cup 2009, NUGA 2008, NAFEST 2005 and many others were also in the track of his directorial exploits.

Exploring the Direction in *The Gods and the Scavengers*

The truth that playwrights do not just write from a vacuum, but in reaction to situations around them, is made manifest in the artistically woven dramatic piece in, *The Gods and the scavengers*. The play incises the corruptible tendencies that are deeply entrenched in the socio-political and economic diversities in our land. The play definitely, is an eye opener to the ugly leadership misnomers that have made our political system look like it is a government without direction.

The first two words in the prologue "total darkness" (p.vi) present the Nigeria situation as it was and still is. One would imagine that since 2006, when the playwright identified that Nigeria was in darkness, up till now, the situation has remained, if not darker than what the situation was in the past. The first stanza of song raised by the lead singer below, which captures the essence of the dark nature of our nation blazed the trail:

Lead: Yes, it's the dawn of a new morning but the promise land is still far away, our destiny is in our hands, we must rise up now or else we perish (p.vi)

When one looks at the period when the play, *The Gods and the scavengers* was written, in 2006, it is clear that the period being referred to was the Alhaji Shehu Shagari, era (1979-1983) the Nigeria first republic era and the military regimes of Major General Buhari/Idiagbon (1983-1985) and subsequently, the Ibrahim Babangida/Shonekan and the Sanni Abacha/Adulsalam regimes between 1985-1999. The reason advanced by the various military regimes that took reign of government from their preceding governments, then, was hinged on the fact that the nation was plunged into barrages of corruption. This situation, the play text under review tries to recall. The story reveals the political travail of a Local Government Chairman, who intends to be transparent but is smeared by his supervisory Councilors on one side and by his own chameleonic tendency to amass wealth. His Councilors who are to be the eyes of the people in his local government administration happen to be the ones extorting from people that they are representing.

The people of the land of Nigeria, as Bakare describes the setting are presented citizens in the metaphors of the market men and women. Invariably, they represent the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria who congregate in the market square to protest the corruptible tendencies perpetrated by their councillors who are supposed to be their representatives at the Local Government. The people whose businesses were almost wrecked decide to rise to the challenge with the charge from the Iyaloja (Head of the market men women)

Iyaloja: Yes, that some hoodlums in the name of councilors try to perpetrate irregularities, fraud and long throat should not make us hopeless. We have hope in our Chairman, we have a chairman that listens

...let us rise and complain to our Honourable he has ears he will listen.

My people this is not the time to sit and mourn, this is the time to rise and act. (p.16)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) a French philosopher and writer philosophically describes how corruption crept into our societies when he observes that: "everything is perfect coming from the hands of the Creator; everything degenerates in the hands of man". Bakare in the play under examination, exploring *Graham Hitchen's* directional thinking provides us with a direction, charging that sitting down and folding our arms is definitely not the way out; rather, we should take action by crying aloud and protest to the appropriate quarters, barring violence and wanton destruction of properties. On many instances, Nigerians have taken the latter in their actions to protest against what did not go down well with them. They have implored the means of arson and all sorts of violent approach, thinking that when such approach is explored we will make responsible leaders out of our leaders but it has not worked. The Bakare's option of a violent free protest seems to be the right action in the right direction as he enumerates in Iyaloja's submission.

In another direction, the Chairman, of the Local Government, Hon. Anago, who demonstrates that that there could be leaders who have exception to corruption, Bakare exemplified this in the Chairman's refusal of gifts offered him by the market women. He tries to demystify the culture of bribing our way to the heart of our leaders before getting their attention as he expounds in the dialogue below:

Anago: Why? Why that? That dispensation has come to an end. I am your Chairman. Why are you giving me gifts for doing my job? I am only doing what I am supposed to be doing, sharing thoughts and sweat with my

subjects. Why must you go hungry because of that? Why starve yourselves because you must give the Honourable gift? I appreciate your gift but take it away and sell it (p.13).

This prescribes the direction that true leaders should toil. As if that is not enough, the Chairman (Anago) also shows his exception and zero tolerance to corruption, when he openly disagrees with his councilors who pleaded that he forgives the night-watchman that he personally set a trap for and caught red handed collecting bribe from a stage managed armed robber. The Chairman (Anago) uses the scenario to demonstrate his vehement opposition to acts of greed, cheating, stealing and other unbecoming tendencies of his councilors thus:

Anago: (*Rises fiercely in anger*) No way!

No way! Gentlemen, I told you, dishonesty will not have a way in this dispensation. Insincerity, greed, love of wealth, love of power, desire to amass wealth at all cost ruined this land during the days of my fathers. I am here to stamp these vices out, no matter what it takes. Zaki, take the man into the underground cell. There he shall spend the rest of his life. (p.23)

The plea of the councillors prior to the Chairman's antiphon, accentuate the caricature of the dispositions of our leaders to issues of corruptions in Nigeria. It reveals how those that we call leaders of the people celebrate pleasure of milking dry their citizens. It also lays bare the different approaches they deploy to perpetrate all kinds of misdemeanour, which manifest in stealing and looting the resources of the country. To get out of our predicaments, Bakare made the above speech in the character of the chairman to engender change in our leaders and point them in a new direction.

Scavengers in the play text under examination denote the metaphors of the hard-working citizens, the downtrodden who, in spite of the very unpleasant economic situation, which the nation is confronted with, take pleasure in scavenging left-overs from garbage bins, to make ends meet. They jettisoned their skills and qualifications, swallow their prides, and take their destiny in their own hands to become relevant in life. For instance, Scavenger 1 reveals the stuff that some of the scavengers we see around are made of in his self-description thus:

Scavenger 1: My name is Prof, suggesting I am schooled. I teach in the

morning, in the noon and in the night. I studied in Ibadan and not in Toronto so, my papers can be screened, and they are not obscured. But the men from Toronto are the gods of my land; they cheat, they brag. Indeed their fakery is complete (p.2).

So also are Scavengers 2, 3 and 4 who are healer (Doctor), farmer and technician (pp.2-3) respectively but who our corrupt leaders, cheaters, liars, looters of our treasury and the so called political leaders turned to scavengers. Sometime ago in Nigeria, we recall with nostalgia the different investigation panels set up to confirm the authenticity or otherwise of certificates presented by some major key position holders in our land.

Bakare, in his nine movement play shows how we allow ourselves to be used against each other. We blindfold ourselves to see reason, whereas we allow those that we call politicians whom we elected with our own votes to set us against one another. As he laments this unfortunate situation, he opens our eyes to what should be our disposition to the antics of our corrupt leaders in the speech of scavengers 4 and 2 respectively thus:

Scav 4: How can you make yourselves so cheap for these rogues to manipulate? They come telling you stories of how they have been fighting for your rights and how it is the other man who is

frustrating it, and you draw daggers at one another. Come on! These folks are common thieves, they are not fighting for anybody's interest (p.59).

Scav 2: If you doubt what we tell you, listen to this; didn't they pretend to you that they were enemies of each other over there? It is a lie. Look we caught them a couple of minutes ago dining and winning together in the Chairman's lodge. It was there we arrested them (p.59).

No doubt, the two dialogues above present the stark prototypical sarcastic political comedy that we experience in Nigeria. In the same direction, Essi, (2014, p.195) observes that "the maladies of corruption and bad leadership have continued to impede our country's march to progress" The question that keeps ruminating in our minds would be, shall we fold our arms and watch these situations? Definitely not, rather we shall be guided by the submission of Scavenger 1 who submits thus:

Scav 1: ... We shall bury our dead, try to forget our losses and forgive ourselves for our ignorance. Two, these criminals shall not only cease to be our leaders from this moment, their blood shall wet our road to freedom and their children must never be allowed to taste power in future.

This is a bold initiative, a wise counsel no doubt, but who will bell the cat? The Nigerian political terrain has been one that is full of the most unpredictable summersaults that have not brought any tangible dividend to its citizenry. Since we have tried a few political policies that do not seem to be beneficial, the time has come to redirect our focus towards egalitarianism. It is however, gratifying to observe that in this theatrical piece, Bakare Ojo

Rasaki has provided a direction that our destinies are in our hands, and we are in a position to change it for the better.

In the *Once upon a tower*, Bakare deploys another approach to expose the rot in our citadel of leaning. Of course, one can always appreciate the truthfulness in the power-packed theatrical piece in *Once upon a tower* when one counts the number of years that Bakare, as a University lecturer has had with students. No one could better enumerate the rots that have enveloped Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. He stripped naked the garbs of pretence that most lecturers robed themselves in, by revealing how some university teachers in the euphoria of self centeredness, delight in murdering the eminence in some promising students. Professor Kurumbete Ijakadi stood proxy for such numerous foxes that devour the flowers of promising students at their prime.

Omowaiye Pedro, by all standards, is a promising eminent gynaecologist who studied Medicine at the Mariapinto University Nigeriana. He graduated after ten years of studentship due to incessant lecturers' strikes and the syndrome of putting the square peg in a round hole - employing incompetent teachers to teach students. Pedro unveils this when he sharply sarcastically rebuffed the consoling interjection of the Chancellor who ignorantly says "it is the will of Allah" thus:

Pedro: The will of Allah? Is it also the will of Allah that a professor who was supposed to nurture (sic) my growth should play politics with my future and as a result stuff me with ignorance? Professor Kurumbete (*Points to him*) wouldn't mind whatever becomes of the future of an innocent student as long as his professional monopoly is permanently guaranteed and his imagined enemies ruined (p.13).

Professor Kurumbete actually did all that Pedro accused him of as he further reveals how the Professor uses his dull, academically backward Girl-friend to set up and expel Dr Akitikori. Dr Akitikori is an innocent but very hard-working and brilliant lecturer who any serious student would have yearned to come across as a lecturer. Pedro reveals below how he is unceremoniously relieved of his job, exposing the role played by Professor Kurumbete:

Pedro: Through the Bandleader of Amebo voices (*points to Band*) Miss Julie, the then girlfriend of yours, the very girl that was used to set Dr Akitikori up? She is the bandleader. Remember she could not complete her medical studies and opted for a combined honours in Music and Drama (p.14).

As highlighted above, Dr. Akitikori's appointment is eventually terminated on the recommendation of the almighty Professor Kurumbete, the Provost, paving way for a mediocre lecturer, one of his cronies, to teach a course he has little knowledge about. The result of the bad teaching is what led to Pedro's misapplication of medication on a patient, his girlfriend on whom he performed an operation on. The misapplication of drug eventually led to her death as Pedro reveals in the dialogue that ensue below:

Olusola: How did you know the precise dose appropriate for her? Ketamine is dispensed at 1 to 4.5mg per kilograrnrme (sic) of body weight.

Pedro: No it is 14.5mg per kilogramme of body weight.

Olusola: Stop clowning Pedro!

Pedro: But I am correct. That is what my Ana 604 note says, I consulted my note before administering the drug. (p.56)

Indeed, an outcome of a bad foundational teaching and the result of the evil done in the dark as it is later revealed in the cycle of effects that manifests later as Pedro narrates in his story below:

Pedro: I was taken to court after several months in the remand home. The presiding Judge was lenient. He handed me a seven years jail term. That was two years ago. However, there in the prison cell, my mind continually tells me that if the minor evacuation had been successful, I wouldn't be a prisoner today. If my teacher had done his job well, I would have been the proud husband of Khadijat today. But Mr Teacher, you taught me nonsense and messed up my life. My liver raged for revenge and I got in touch with my hitmen outside the prison. I escaped in the night and got connected to my men and here we are to accomplish one mission; snuff lives out of all those who made me a half-baked Medical Doctor (p.58).

The father of the late Khadijat, Pedro's girlfriend is the Chairman, Senate House Committee on Education who cornered the contract to supply laboratory equipment to the University but would not. His daughter happens to be the one on whom Pedro uses an overdose sedation drug before performing an evacuation operation on her. Pedro points to the senator his own faulty area thus:

Pedro: ...Now Mr Senator, I need no psychiatrist. You were not my teacher, but you constrained my teacher from teaching me properly. Tell me, what do you know about contract? What do you know about chemicals...what do you know about laboratory equipment that you cornered a contract meant for their being supplied to the University? Of course, you diverted the money into your bank account and supplied nothing. After graduation, I was still a stranger to some facilities I should have been familiar with even as a student. Do you know

that was partly responsible for my using the wrong stuff to sedate your daughter and she died in the process? The reason for which I was sent to seven years imprisonment...(p.63)

Overtly or covertly, we tend to downplay the likely negative future effect of our action as Arinde (2013, p. 29) observes that: "we pretend to be oblivious of the negative effects of these incongruous attitudes. We also downplay the attendant harm that they bring to our society". Professor Kurumbete is a prototype of some very senior, self-centred, self glorifying, and outdated academics that litters, our universities and other institutions of higher learning, who take delight in sacrificing merit for mediocrity, just to pad their egos. We note that when these kinds of lecturers sneeze, their cronies catch a cold, which is the reason why they have the effrontery to witch-hunt anyone who stands up for the truth and challenges their turpitude.

Bakare, as a social critic, theatre director and a non-verbal art communicator, exposes the ills in our society and provides direction of identifying them, invariably pointing us to the direction that we can explore to avoid making the same mistake.

Bakare Ojo Rasaki's directorial exploration

All through the two plays under examination, we are bold to say that Bakare explores both artistic direction and directorial elements that navigates us into the ethics of egalitarianism. He made manifest his directorial exploration in the application of the fundamentals of play directing; composition, picturisation, movement, rhythm, pantomimic dramatisation and lavishly embellished the two plays with total theatre idioms with spices of technical effects.

Explicating on his composition, Bakare faithfully applies features of composition picturisation, which Dean and Carra (1965, pp. 109 and 173) describe as "the structure, form, or design of the group...visual interpretation of each movement in the play". For instance, in *The gods and the Scavengers*, Bakare manifests his

composition and picturisation exploration as he compose his stage directions that usher in each movement. We shall illuminate on a few of them. For instance, he directed the composition of this scene thus: (*At upstage centre, the other scav5 kneel in prayerful position facing stage left as they sing while scav5 became the choirmaster*) (p.4). The placement of the actors reveals the composition of the scene while their action (praying) tells the picture of the action. Also, in *Once upon a tower*, we benefit from Bakare's compositional skill and his picturisation thus: *A bare stage in a dark auditorium. A musical band placed at a conspicuous location in the auditorium play highlife tune and sings* (p.1). Bakare did not only lead readers to direction, in this instance, he grants liberty to any would-be director of the play, the choice to place on stage the musical band at any place on stage that he may consider conspicuous.

Also in movement one, Bakare, shows the composition of a convocation arena in *Once upon a tower*. He showcases this in the stage direction as follow: *The stage is flood lit. A University convocation ceremony. Mid stage right is a podium on it stands the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar who mimetically reads a list of names from a document*. These various directorial explorations run through the two plays.

Bakare also showcases movement and rhythm as part of his directorial exploit. For instance in *Once upon a tower* in Senator Abdul Rahamon Ikeanobi's sitting room in the stage direction on (p. 46) movement is indicated that: *Senator runs inside and re-emerges with Khadijat. Ogbuefi had moved to the left of the room where he is admiring a work of art...* In movement eleven, Bakare dictates the movement in character, Khadijat when he indicates in a part of the stage direction that: "... *She moves furiously towards the exit*. Showcasing what Dean and Carra (1965, p.18) describe as "the stage picture in action".

In analysing Bakare's exploration of rhythm in the plays under examination, a lot of rhythmic elements run through the work providing what Dean and Carra (1965, p.234) call "aesthetic

pleasure". One of such is found in *The gods and the scavengers* where it is indicated in the stage instruction: "(The volume of singing and instrumentation reduces drastically as they speak. The following lines are rendered in the singsong chant called rap). This situation indicates the aesthetic pleasure that one can derive from departing from a noisy situation to a lower, sonorous, satisfying and pleasing pitch.

Bakare also made it artistically clear that it is not only through the use of dialogue in plays that message could be passed, he underscores pantomime. In the stage direction that ushers in movement one in *Once upon a tower*, during the school's convocation ceremony, he indicates that: "...On it stand the Vice chancellor and the Registrar who mimetically read a list of names from a document". (P.5) and in movement eight he also explores mime when he directs that: "... This scene is purely enacted in mime and dance movements. (P.36) The use of this element makes the enjoyment of theatrical performance more appreciated, which is in tandem with Dean and Carra's (1965, P.257) observation that "most people are visually minded and therefore are more deeply impressed by what they see than by what they hear".

In analysing his total theatre idiom, we can submit, without prejudice that Bakare, uneconomically employs songs to accentuate mood, which is one of the idiom of total theatre. The songs run through pages vi, 1, 4,5,7,13,15, 16, 33-36,45, 51 and 52 in forms of singsong, chant, rap, richly in operatic nuances in *The gods and the scavengers*. As well as on pages 1-3, 5-614-15,22-23, 27-28, 36, 49 and50 in *Once upon a tower*.

Conclusion

We have in this work examined direction as a guide to achieving egalitarianism in our society, especially in bringing good governance to the people of our nation. We have also examined a few directorial skills that are exhibited in the plays; *The gods and the scavengers* and *Once upon a tower*, which the playwright, Bakare, Ojo Rasaki employed to bring his message to the people.

It has become crystal clear that our society needs to collectively, in one voice, irrespective of our race, creed, position or affinities, imbibe and embrace the concept of zero tolerance for corruption if we must make our society a better place to live. We also found in Bakare's display of artistic skills, warming directorial explorations, which we realise bring aesthetic pleasure to his audience, considering the way he used music, dance and dialogue to accentuate moods in the plays. We, therefore, recommend that playwrights should take a clue from Bakare by writing plays that will show direction to the path of equality, social justice and respect for the opinion of others.

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