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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**CHARACTER, POWER, AND THE BURDEN OF TRADITION: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS OF JAMES ENE HENSHAW’S THIS IS OUR CHANCE AND ITS
CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE**

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Abstract

This paper provides a critical examination of James Ene Henshaw’s seminal play, *This is Our Chance* (1956), widely regarded as the first published full-length play by a West African playwright. Through a focused analysis of characterisation and setting, the study explores how Henshaw crafts a narrative that illuminates the complex power dynamics inherent in traditional African societies during the colonial transition period. The paper argues that the characters in the play serve metaphorical and allegorical functions that project power structures, patriarchal authority, generational conflict, the marginalisation of women, and the tension between enculturation and acculturation, which remain strikingly relevant in contemporary Africa and the broader global context of 2025. Employing qualitative textual analysis and drawing on existing scholarship, the study reveals how Henshaw’s seemingly simple narrative contains intricate commentary on governance, gender relations, cultural identity, and the moral dilemmas facing societies in transition. The findings demonstrate that the play’s thematic concerns, particularly regarding women’s political participation, the persistence of colonial legacies in African governance, and the cultural disconnect between generations, mirror ongoing challenges in contemporary Africa. This paper contributes to the re-evaluation of foundational African literary texts as living documents that continue to offer insights for addressing present-day socio-political and cultural challenges.

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Introduction:-

James Ene Henshaw’s *This is Our Chance* occupies a distinctive position in the canon of African literature as the first published full-length play-text by an African playwright from West Africa (Betiang, 2012; Yeseibo, 2013; Okeyim, 2014). Written during the twilight of colonial rule in Nigeria, the play emerges from a period of profound transition, a moment when African societies stood at the crossroads between indigenous traditions and the encroaching forces of Western modernity. Henshaw, a Nigerian of noble birth who received his tertiary education in

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Ireland and Wales, brought to his dramaturgy a unique multicultural perspective that enabled him to observe and critique the nuanced differences between coloniser and colony, tradition and modernity, power and powerlessness. Set in the fictional West African village of Koloro, *This is Our Chance* presents a Romeo and Juliet-esque narrative of forbidden love between Kudaro, princess of Koloro, and Ndamu, prince of the enemy kingdom of Udura. Beneath this seemingly simple romantic plot, however, lies a richly textured exploration of power dynamics, cultural conflict, and moral choice. The play's enduring significance lies not merely in its historical position as a pioneering work of African drama, but in its penetrating examination of how power operates within traditional societies, through patriarchal structures, through the authority of tradition, through the counsel of elders, and through the silent resistance of the marginalised.

This paper argues that the characters in *This is Our Chance* serve metaphorical and allegorical purposes that project power dynamics still observable in contemporary African societies in 2025. The central research questions guiding this study are: How does Henshaw employ characterisation and setting to illuminate power dynamics in traditional African societies? In what ways do these dynamics reflect the colonial transition period in which the play is set? And most significantly, what contemporary relevance do these dramatised power relations hold for understanding and addressing similar dynamics in Africa and the world today? The paper begins with a comprehensive literature review that situates Henshaw's work within the broader context of African drama and scholarship on power in traditional African societies. It then outlines the qualitative methodological approach employed in the analysis. The findings and discussion section examines key characters, Damba, Ajugo, Enusi, Ansa, Kudaro, Ayi, and Bambulu, and the power dynamics they embody, before exploring the contemporary resonance of these dynamics in three key areas: cultural identity and generational conflict, governance and the legacies of colonialism, and the marginalisation of women. The paper concludes by reflecting on the play's enduring relevance and its call for thoughtful engagement with tradition and change.

Literature Review:-

James Ene Henshaw and the Emergence of African Drama:-

The emergence of written African drama in the mid-twentieth century represented a significant moment in the continent's literary history. Henshaw's *This is Our Chance* (1956) stands as a foundational text in this tradition, yet scholarly attention to his work has been relatively limited compared to later giants of African drama such as Wole Soyinka and Ama Ata Aidoo. Betiang (2012) provides one of the few comprehensive surveys of Henshaw's dramatic oeuvre, noting that his plays "reflect the tensions of a society in transition, caught between the pull of tradition and the push of modernity" (p. 122). Yeseibo (2013) offers a comparative study of characterisation in Henshaw's play and Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, arguing that both dramatists explore the relationship between ancestors and descendants, though through markedly different aesthetic approaches.

Omobowale (2002) provides perhaps the most detailed analysis of Henshaw's engagement with intercultural diffusion and African identity, situating the playwright within broader debates about cultural hybridity in post-colonial Africa. Omobowale contends that Henshaw's drama "projects the possibility of a harmonious synthesis between African traditions and Western modernity, provided that Africans approach this encounter with discernment rather than wholesale rejection or uncritical adoption" (p. 345). This perspective is crucial for understanding the nuanced position that *This is Our Chance* occupies, neither a wholesale condemnation of tradition nor an uncritical celebration of modernity, but rather a call for thoughtful engagement with both.

Power Dynamics in Traditional African Societies:-

Understanding the power dynamics dramatised in *This is Our Chance* requires situating the play within the broader context of scholarship on governance and social organisation in pre-colonial and colonial Africa. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's (1940) foundational anthropological work, *African Political Systems*, established a framework for understanding the varieties of political organisation on the continent, distinguishing between societies with centralised authority (such as kingdoms and chiefdoms) and those with segmentary lineage systems. Conrad (2005) and Mohamed (2023) have extended this analysis, examining how power operated in the great empires of medieval West Africa and their successor states. The role of kings and chiefs in traditional African societies has received substantial scholarly attention. Bekker (2008) examines the establishment and legitimation of traditional leadership, noting that "the authority of African rulers derived not merely from their political functions but from their position as custodians of tradition, intermediaries with the ancestral world, and symbols of communal identity" (p. 5). Palagashvili (2018) offers a comparative analysis of chiefly governance under colonial rule, demonstrating how indirect rule systems transformed but did not entirely displace indigenous power structures. The position of

councillors and king-makers within these systems is equally significant. In many African polities, rulers shared power with councils of elders whose authority derived from lineage, age, and knowledge of customary law. Mohammed (2023) notes that “these councillors were not merely advisors but often held the power to install and depose rulers, creating a system of checks and balances that tempered the exercise of chiefly authority” (p. 3298). The dynamic between Damba, Ajugo, and Enusi in Henshaw’s play must be understood within this broader context of shared but contested authority.

Women in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Africa:-

A substantial body of scholarship has challenged colonial and post-colonial narratives that portrayed African women as uniformly marginalised and powerless. Van Allen’s (1972) pioneering study of Igbo women’s political institutions demonstrated how colonialism systematically undermined women’s autonomous organisations and political voice. Subsequent research by Allman, Geiger, and Musisi (2002) and Cooper (2020) has further complicated understandings of women’s agency in colonial contexts, revealing both the constraints imposed by colonial rule and the strategies women employed to resist and negotiate these constraints. Adjepong (2024) provides a comprehensive historical analysis of women’s political roles in pre-colonial Africa, documenting instances of women rulers, military leaders, and economic powerhouses across the continent. Similarly, Abass and Doskaya (2017) and Agyeiwaa (2019) examine women’s contributions to social and political development in Ghana specifically, demonstrating that women’s marginalisation was neither universal nor unchallenged in pre-colonial contexts. This scholarship provides essential context for understanding Henshaw’s portrayal of Ansa, Kudaro, and Ayi, characters whose power is constrained but not entirely extinguished by patriarchal structures.

Colonialism, Cultural Transition, and Conflict in Africa:-

The nineteenth century, in which *This is Our Chance* is set, was a period of profound transformation for Africa. Ajayi’s (1989) edited volume on Africa in the nineteenth century provides a comprehensive overview of this period, examining the internal dynamics of African societies as well as their encounters with European colonialism. Parker and Rathbone (2007) offer a concise introduction to African history that situates the colonial encounter within longer trajectories of social, economic, and political change. The relationship between colonialism and conflict in Africa has generated extensive scholarly debate. Achankeng (2014) and Gilpin (2016) examine the colonial roots of contemporary conflicts, arguing that colonial boundaries, governance systems, and economic structures created conditions for protracted violence. Tshitereke (2003) and Annan (2014) explore the economic and social origins of conflict, while McGuirk and Burke (2017) provide quantitative analysis of the economic factors associated with violent conflict. The United Nations (2023) continues to grapple with these legacies, acknowledging that “the root causes of conflicts in Africa must be addressed beyond traditional responses” (p. 1).

Acculturation, Enculturation, and Generational Change:-

The concepts of acculturation and enculturation provide valuable analytical tools for understanding the cultural dynamics dramatised in *This is Our Chance*. Kirshner and Meng (2011) define enculturation as “the process by which individuals learn and internalise the values, beliefs, and norms of their native culture” (p. 3), while acculturation refers to “the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into continuous contact” (p. 4). Kim and Alamilla (2017) review the extensive literature on these processes, noting that they are neither linear nor unidirectional but involve complex negotiations of identity and belonging. Contemporary scholarship on generational change has examined how younger generations, particularly Generation Z and Generation Alpha, navigate cultural identity in an increasingly globalised world. Mohr and Mohr (2017), Lopez and Abadiano (2023), and George (2024) explore the characteristics of these generations, noting their immersion in digital culture and their often-tenuous connection to traditional cultural practices. Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya, and David (2021) examine how collective consciousness shapes Generation Z’s identity, while Spilinek (2024) explores the influence of pop culture on young people’s sense of self. This scholarship provides a framework for understanding the contemporary relevance of Kudaro’s character and her apparent rejection of Koloro’s traditions.

Gender and Political Representation in Contemporary Africa:-

The question of women’s political participation in contemporary Africa has generated substantial research and policy attention. Allah-Mensah (2005) provides a comprehensive analysis of women in politics and public life in Ghana, documenting both progress and persistent barriers. Trivedi (2019) and Okpe, Othman, and Osman (2021) examine women’s political representation across Africa and Asia, identifying factors that facilitate or impede women’s access to political power. Recent scholarship by Walters, Chisadza, and Clance (2021) explores the

relationship between historical factors—particularly slave trades and kinship structures—and contemporary women’s political participation in Africa. Alber, Bauer, and Darkwah (2025) offer a timely reassessment of women’s political power in West Africa, noting significant gains in countries such as Senegal, Cabo Verde, and Sierra Leone, while also acknowledging persistent challenges. Aidoo’s (2022) reflection on women in Ghanaian history and culture provides a powerful reminder that contemporary struggles for gender equality are rooted in longer histories of women’s agency and marginalisation. This review of literature reveals that while substantial scholarship exists on Henshaw’s play, on power dynamics in traditional African societies, and on contemporary challenges of governance, gender, and cultural identity, there remains a gap in connecting these bodies of knowledge. This paper seeks to address this gap by demonstrating how Henshaw’s mid-twentieth-century drama continues to illuminate twenty-first-century realities.

Methodology:-

Research Design:-

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach, drawing on methods from literary criticism and cultural studies. Qualitative textual analysis is particularly suited to examining how dramatic texts construct meaning through characterisation, setting, and dialogue, and to exploring the relationship between literary representation and social reality (Martin, 2004; Owusu, 2016).

Primary Text:-

The primary text for this analysis is James Ene Henshaw’s *This is Our Chance*, originally published in 1956 by Hodder and Stoughton Educational as part of the “Plays from West Africa” series. The analysis draws on the published text, with page references corresponding to the standard edition.

Analytical Framework:-

The analysis is guided by Martin’s (2004) and Owusu’s (2016) frameworks for understanding characterisation in dramatic literature. According to these scholars, characterisation can be analysed through five key dimensions: (i) what the character says about themselves, (ii) what the character says about other characters, (iii) what the character does, (iv) what other characters say about them, and (v) what the author reveals about the character through stage directions and other narrative devices. The analysis also draws on theoretical frameworks from post-colonial criticism and feminist literary theory to examine how the play represents power relations, cultural transition, and gender dynamics. These frameworks enable attention to both the manifest content of the play, its plot and characters, and its latent content, the underlying assumptions, values, and critiques embedded in its dramatic structure.

Analytical Procedures:-

The analysis proceeded through several stages. First, a close reading of the play was conducted to identify key characters and their functions within the narrative. Second, each major character was analysed according to the five dimensions of characterisation outlined above. Third, patterns of power relations were identified, including relations between ruler and subjects, men and women, elders and youth, and tradition and change. Fourth, these patterns were examined in relation to the historical context of colonial transition in which the play is set. Finally, the contemporary relevance of these patterns was explored through comparison with scholarly literature on contemporary African social, political, and cultural dynamics.

Limitations:-

This study is limited by its focus on a single text and its reliance on published scholarship rather than primary historical research. The analysis of contemporary relevance is necessarily selective, focusing on themes that emerge most prominently from the play itself rather than attempting comprehensive coverage of all contemporary issues. Additionally, the study does not engage with performance history or reception studies, focusing instead on the text as a literary artefact.

Findings and Discussion:-

Characterisation as a Window into Power Dynamics:-

The characters in *This is Our Chance* function not merely as individuals but as embodiments of particular positions within the power structures of Koloro society. Through their interactions, Henshaw illuminates the complex ways in which power operates, through formal authority, through tradition, through counsel, through resistance, and through silent suffering.

Damba: The Burden of Authority:-

Damba, ruler of Koloro, stands at the apex of the play's power structure. Henshaw characterises him as "an elderly man, tall and powerfully built... hot-tempered, but full of wisdom" (Henshaw, 1956, p. 3). This description immediately establishes the paradox at the heart of his character, the combination of volatile emotion and considered judgment that defines his rule. Damba's power derives from multiple sources. As ruler by lineage, he embodies the continuity of Koloro's traditions and the authority of ancestors. As judge and administrator, he holds the power of life and death over his subjects. As a father, he exercises patriarchal authority over his household. Yet these sources of power are not always aligned, and the play's central conflict emerges from the tension between Damba's duty to tradition and his love for his daughter.

The finding that Damba represents "the older generation and the disconnection between it and the younger generation" (Boateng, 2020, p. 4) illuminates one dimension of his character. His decision to send Kudaro to school in the big city reflects a desire to equip her for a changing world, yet this very decision creates the conditions for cultural conflict. Damba's lament that formal education threatens "the preservation and sustenance of indigenous customs, beliefs, practices, norms, traditions" (p. 4) reveals his awareness of the paradox he has helped create. More significantly, Damba embodies the moral dilemmas facing those in positions of authority. When faced with the choice between upholding tradition (which would mean Ndamu's continued imprisonment and Kudaro's death) and choosing his daughter's life (which means defying tradition and accepting his own death), Damba chooses the latter. This decision reveals that even within apparently rigid power structures, space exists for moral agency. Damba's declaration that "principles are principles" (Henshaw, 1956, p. 29) is ultimately superseded by his recognition that principles without humanity are empty. The contemporary relevance of Damba's dilemma is profound. Leaders across Africa and the world continue to face choices between institutional loyalty and human welfare, between tradition and innovation, between the demands of office and the claims of family. Damba's eventual choice, to prioritise his daughter's life over his own and over tradition, offers a model of humane leadership that remains urgently needed.

Ajugo: The Danger of Dogmatic Traditionalism:-

Ajugo, the Prime Minister of Koloro, represents perhaps the most complex and troubling character in the play. Henshaw characterises him as "elderly, with a long beard" and notes that he has "a very intimidating and aggressive personality" (p. 5). His office, handed down through generations in his family, positions him as the chief custodian of tradition and the primary check on Damba's authority. The finding that Ajugo is "a die-hard, a follower of the tradition of Koloro, even if it means putting his life and lineage on the line" (Omobowale, 2002, p. 342) captures his essential nature. Yet as Bambulu perceptively observes, "he is not a villain but a die-hard... if there is any villain, therefore, it is Tradition, and not this man" (Henshaw, 1956, p. 37). This distinction is crucial for understanding Ajugo's function in the play. He is not evil in any simple sense; rather, he embodies the danger of dogmatic adherence to tradition regardless of its human consequences.

Ajugo's power derives from his position as chief councillor and his mastery of customary law. When Damba wavers, Ajugo reminds him of his obligations. When Enusi proposes peace, Ajugo denounces it as weakness. When Damba chooses his daughter over tradition, Ajugo invokes the ultimate sanction, the death penalty for the ruler who defies custom. Throughout, Ajugo acts not from malice but from conviction that tradition must be preserved at any cost. The contemporary resonance of Ajugo's character is evident in multiple contexts. Religious fundamentalism, ethnic chauvinism, and cultural purism all reflect the same impulse to elevate tradition above humanity. Across Africa, conflicts fueled by rigid adherence to ethnic or religious identities continue to claim lives and displace communities. Ajugo's banishment at the play's end, accompanied by Bambulu's recognition that "there goes a light out of this room; steadfast and honest, even to the point of cruelty" (p. 38), offers a nuanced resolution. The virtues of steadfastness and honesty are acknowledged even as their misapplication is rejected.

Enusi: The Voice of Reason and Reconciliation:-

Enusi, the second minister, provides a counterpoint to Ajugo's dogmatism. Henshaw characterises him as "calm and not belligerent" (p. 6), a man who "sees no sin in the people of Koloro marrying from Uduura" and "does not think that the people of Koloro are superior to the Uduura people" (p. 6). His proposal that Ndamu be exchanged for Kudaro, "this is Damba and Koloro's only chance to end the age-old enmity" (p. 29), positions him as the voice of reconciliation. Enusi's power is limited within the formal structures of Koloro's governance. As a junior councillor, his voice carries less weight than Ajugo's. Yet his persistence in advocating peace, even when it upsets Damba, demonstrates that moral authority can exist independently of formal position. When Damba faces death, Enusi's

offer to accompany him reveals loyalty that transcends institutional obligation. The finding that Enusi “represents hope for humanity, especially for the cause of humanity to be championed over any other thing else by figures in high places” (p. 6) captures his significance. In a world marked by conflict and polarisation, Enusi embodies the possibility of reasoned dialogue and peaceful resolution. His promotion to Ajugo’s office at the play’s end signals that these qualities are essential for Koloro’s future.

Ansa: The Silenced Voice of Wisdom:-

Ansa, the queen of Koloro, represents the paradox of women’s position in traditional African societies—dignified yet constrained, respected yet silenced. Henshaw characterises her as “gentle, calm and good-natured” (p. 5), qualities that align with traditional expectations of womanhood. Yet beneath this gentle exterior lies wisdom and courage that the play’s patriarchal structures cannot accommodate. The finding that Ansa is “a prime example of a respectable, virtuous woman in the traditional African sense, docile and forever agreeing to whatever her husband says and does” (Omobowale, 2002, p. 338) captures the expectations placed upon her. Yet Ansa transcends these expectations in her single public intervention. When tensions between Koloro and Udura threaten war, she speaks directly to Damba, proposing that women might succeed where men have failed: “Send word to the wife of Mboli. Perhaps the women can settle this where the men have failed” (Henshaw, 1956, p. 25).

Damba’s response reveals the depth of patriarchal power: “Sit down. You are not yourself, or else you would not talk like that Ha-ha-ha-ha!... The women will solve the tradition. I know you are not well... You are too soft, Ansa” (pp. 25-26). His dismissal, attributing her courage to illness, mocking her proposal, and contrasting her “softness” with his “lion-like” strength, silences the very voice that might have prevented tragedy. Ansa’s subsequent death from grief and illness becomes an indictment of patriarchal structures that refuse to hear women’s wisdom. The finding that she “represents the calm spirit of women all over the world... everything cherishable in queenship, motherhood, and womanhood—love, care, and thoughtfulness” (p. 5) is accurate, but incomplete. Ansa also represents the cost of silencing these qualities.

Kudaro: The Rebellious Daughter:-

Kudaro, the princess of Koloro, embodies the generational and cultural tensions at the heart of the play. Henshaw characterises her as “a teenager of about 18 years of age... very naïve, as is quite typical of girls her age” (p. 6). Her education in the big city has created distance from her village, leading her to describe Koloro as “worse than simple villagers” and the palace as “dull” (Henshaw, 1956, p. 11). The finding that Kudaro “represents the younger generation who have been led to believe that anything not Western-oriented is ‘primitive’ or ‘archaic’” (Boateng, 2020, p. 7) captures one dimension of her character. Yet Kudaro is more than a critique of Westernised youth. Her rebellion against the taboo on marriage with Udura reflects courage and independence. Her willingness to risk everything for love demonstrates agency that transcends the passive femininity traditionally expected of young women. Kudaro’s redemption through saving Ndamu’s brother with Bambulu’s anti-snake venom is symbolically significant. The vaccine—a product of formal education and scientific knowledge—becomes the instrument of reconciliation between Koloro and Udura. Kudaro, who seemed to reject her culture entirely, becomes the bridge between tradition and modernity, between enemy peoples. This transformation suggests that the younger generation’s apparent rejection of tradition may contain the seeds of cultural renewal.

Ayi: The Voice of the Voiceless:-

Ayi, the royal maid, occupies the lowest position in Koloro’s hierarchy, young, female, and a servant. Yet Henshaw gives her one of the play’s most powerful speeches. When Damba wavers, torn between tradition and his daughter’s life, Ayi speaks: “But, Sir, where would principles be without men to observe them? And where would men be without a human heart beating within them? ... I must speak my mind. For long I have seen her serve and love you as never a woman has... I have seen her trying to do everything to make you and this village worthy of her. And yet as she lies dying, tortured by all that your stubbornness has brought to her, you sit here and talk of principles, of customs and traditions, and listen to the advice of a man who has no feelings at all” (Henshaw, 1956, pp. 30-32).

The finding that Ayi “represents a new spirit of and for the woman in an African context... a spirit to assert her rights and not cower in her plight” (Omobowale, 2002, p. 341) captures her significance. From the margins of power, Ayi speaks truth to authority. Her courage demonstrates that moral agency is not confined to those with formal positions. Her willingness to risk her position, indeed, to request permission to leave, reveals that freedom sometimes requires leaving oppressive structures rather than reforming them from within.

Bambulu: The Bridge Between Worlds:-

Bambulu, the educated tutor, represents the possibility of constructive engagement between tradition and modernity. Henshaw characterises him initially as arrogant, “a peacock” who “wastes no time flaunting his intellect” (p. 8). His dismissal of the fortune teller, “Listen to that. This is the rainy season and a time of great winds; what bright prophecy have we this morning?” (Henshaw, 1956, p. 14), reveals contempt for indigenous knowledge that initially blinds him to its value. Yet Bambulu undergoes transformation. His anti-snake venom vaccine, a product of formal education, saves the day, but so does his eventual recognition that “the fortune teller’s prophecy was indeed correct” (p. 8). The finding that Bambulu is “the one destined to transform his community from darkness to a glorious dawn” (Yeseibo, 2013, p. 39) captures his function as “the connective tissue, the bridge between the old way of life of Koloro and a new way of life” (p. 8). Bambulu’s significance for contemporary Africa is profound. He embodies the possibility of what Omobowale (2002) calls “intercultural diffusion”—the selective, thoughtful integration of elements from different cultural traditions. His journey from arrogant dismissal of indigenous knowledge to respectful recognition of its value models the attitude required for constructive cultural hybridity.

Setting as a Mirror of Power:-

The setting of *This is Our Chance*, the village of Koloro in the late nineteenth century, is not merely a backdrop but an active element in the play’s exploration of power. Henshaw’s choice to set the play during “a time when Koloro... is making that distinctive and sensitive transition in their history, from a traditional way of life to modernity” (p. 8) positions the narrative at a moment of maximum tension and possibility. The finding that “Koloro is in no specific African locale but could be anywhere at all, and it incorporates many African societies into one” (Omobowale, 2002, p. 335) is significant. By creating a composite setting, Henshaw invites readers and audiences to see Koloro as representing Africa as a whole, or indeed, any traditional society facing the pressures of modernity. The names, Ansa, Ajugo, Damba, Bambulu, Enusi, draw on multiple linguistic and cultural traditions, reinforcing this pan-African vision.

Koloro’s social structure, as revealed through the setting, is hierarchical and patriarchal. Power flows from ancestors through Damba, is mediated by councillors like Ajugo and Enusi, and radiates outward to encompass all of Koloro’s inhabitants. Yet this structure is not monolithic. The court, with its mix of nobles, servants, and visitors, becomes a microcosm of Koloro society, a space where different voices can, sometimes, be heard. The setting’s temporal dimension is equally significant. The late nineteenth century was, as Ajayi (1989) and others have documented, a period of profound transformation for Africa. Colonialism was well established, technological change was accelerating, and traditional institutions were being challenged and transformed. By setting the play in this period, Henshaw invites reflection on how societies navigate moments of transition, a question as relevant in 2025 as it was in 1956.

Contemporary Relevance in 2025:-

The power dynamics that Henshaw dramatises through characterisation and setting remain strikingly relevant in contemporary Africa and the broader global context of 2025. Three areas of contemporary resonance are particularly significant: cultural identity and generational conflict, governance and the legacies of colonialism, and the marginalisation of women.

Cultural Identity and Generational Conflict:-

The tension between enculturation and acculturation that runs through *This is Our Chance* has intensified in the decades since the play’s publication. Kudaro’s discomfort with Koloro’s “dullness” and her longing for the city’s waltzes, parties, and parks find contemporary parallels in young Africans’ engagement with global popular culture. The finding that “younger people, whom older folks call ‘Gen-Z’ and ‘Gen Alpha’, seem to have no regard for cultural norms, values, and virtually all material and immaterial aspects of culture” (p. 14) captures a widespread concern. Yet Henshaw’s treatment of this theme offers nuance that contemporary discourse often lacks. Kudaro’s apparent rejection of Koloro’s culture is not simply a loss; it contains the seeds of renewal. Her courage in defying the taboo on marriage with Udura, her willingness to risk everything for love, and her eventual role in reconciling the two kingdoms all suggest that generational change can be creative as well as destructive. The challenge for contemporary societies is to create spaces for cultural hybridity that neither dismisses tradition wholesale nor rejects innovation uncritically. Bambulu’s journey, from arrogant dismissal of indigenous knowledge to respectful integration of multiple cultural traditions, models the attitude required. The anti-snake venom vaccine, product of formal education yet deployed in the service of communal reconciliation, symbolises the possibility of constructive cultural synthesis.

Governance and the Legacies of Colonialism:-

Damba's dilemma, torn between tradition and his daughter's life, between the demands of office and the claims of humanity, resonates with contemporary challenges of governance in Africa. The finding that "the threat posed to Damba's chieftom by the contemptuous aspects of a new culture serves as a wake-up call for Africans and the people of the world to re-examine their current governance systems" (p. 15) is particularly significant. The colonial encounter fundamentally transformed African governance. Indirect rule systems, introduced by European colonial powers, co-opted traditional authorities while fundamentally altering their relationship with their subjects. Post-colonial states inherited boundaries, institutions, and legal systems that often bore little relation to pre-colonial realities. The result, as Acemoglu, Chaves, Osafo-Kwaako, and Robinson (2014) document, has been state weakness and persistent conflict.

Yet Henshaw's play suggests that the problem is not simply colonialism but the attitude toward tradition itself. Ajugo's dogmatic traditionalism, elevating custom above humanity, is as dangerous as the uncritical adoption of foreign ways. The challenge for contemporary African governance is to navigate between these extremes, drawing on indigenous traditions of consultation, consensus, and accountability while adapting institutions to meet contemporary needs. The finding that international organisations, alliances, and policies have "done more harm to the parties involved than good, keeping former colonies in Africa seemingly forever tethered to the colonial legacies of their former colonialists" (p. 15) reflects growing frustration with post-colonial arrangements. Debates about monetary sovereignty, trade relationships, and security cooperation all reflect the continuing relevance of questions Henshaw raised decades ago.

The Marginalisation of Women:-

Perhaps the most urgent contemporary relevance of *This is Our Chance* lies in its treatment of gender. The finding that "to a substantial degree, women are still limited, relegated, abused, and held back from attaining the freedoms, rights, security and sustainability they deserve as human beings" (p. 16) reflects persistent realities across Africa and the world. Ansa's silencing when she proposes peace, her dismissal as "too soft" and "not yourself," finds contemporary parallels in the underrepresentation of women in political office, the persistence of gender-based violence, and the cultural stereotypes that limit women's aspirations. The finding that "women in other places in the same time period as well as in pre-colonial times did hold enviable positions of high status that beget dignity and respect" (p. 16) reminds us that women's marginalisation is not inevitable but historically constructed, and therefore can be deconstructed.

The progress documented by scholars such as Alber, Bauer, and Darkwah (2025) and Walters, Chisadza, and Clance (2021) is real and significant. Women's political representation has increased across much of Africa. Legal reforms have expanded women's rights. Educational attainment has improved. Yet the finding that "there is still work to be done concerning this sensitive issue at hand even in a supposed egalitarian world as today in 2025" (p. 17) acknowledges persistent gaps between aspiration and reality. Ayi's courage in speaking truth to power, even from the margins, offers a model for contemporary activism. Her willingness to risk her position, to name injustice, and to demand accountability demonstrates that change often begins with those who have the least to lose. Her request for permission to leave, "permit me to leave this village", acknowledges that sometimes freedom requires exit rather than voice, a choice that many women in oppressive situations continue to make.

Conclusions:-

James Ene Henshaw's *This is Our Chance* is far more than a simple romantic drama or a pioneering work of African literature. Through careful characterisation and setting, Henshaw illuminates the complex power dynamics that shaped, and continue to shape, African societies. Damba, Ajugo, Enusi, Ansa, Kudaro, Ayi, and Bambulu are not merely individuals but embodiments of positions within power structures: the burdened ruler, the dogmatic traditionalist, the voice of reason, the silenced woman, the rebellious youth, the courageous servant, and the bridging intellectual. The play's setting in late nineteenth-century Koloro, at the moment of transition between tradition and modernity, captures a pivotal moment in African history. Yet Henshaw's treatment transcends historical specificity to engage questions of enduring relevance: How do societies navigate cultural change without losing their identity? How should leaders balance institutional loyalty against human welfare? How can marginalised voices be heard within hierarchical structures? What is the role of youth in cultural renewal?

The contemporary relevance of these questions in 2025 is profound. Across Africa, debates about cultural identity, governance reform, and gender equality continue to shape political and social life. The cultural disconnect between

generations lamented by older Africans finds expression in youth engagement with global popular culture. The legacies of colonialism continue to constrain African agency in international affairs. The marginalisation of women persists despite decades of advocacy and reform. Henshaw's play offers no simple answers to these challenges. Its resolution, Kudaro's heroic return, the reconciliation between Koloro and Udura, Damba's vindication, and Ajugo's banishment are perhaps too neat, too optimistic. Yet within this resolution lie insights of enduring value: that tradition, while valuable, must be assessed by its human consequences; that change, while threatening, may contain seeds of renewal; that wisdom can emerge from unexpected sources; and that courage, whether from rulers or servants, can transform communities.

The finding that Henshaw "sought to give the world a lens through which Africa can be viewed in its entirety, but in explicit simplicity, to show authenticity and proffer its posterity for prosperity" (p. 1) captures his project. This is *Our Chance* is a lens, not a comprehensive account, but a focused perspective that illuminates essential truths. Its simplicity is deceptive, for beneath the straightforward plot and accessible dialogue lie complexities that reward sustained attention. For contemporary readers and audiences, the play offers both a mirror and a window: a mirror reflecting our own challenges of cultural identity, governance, and gender; and a window into a past that continues to shape our present. The finding that "this is our chance to revisit literature that bears a portal to revisit the past gender struggles and make the necessary amends for a better tomorrow" (p. 17) applies equally to the play's other themes.

Henshaw's voice, speaking through his characters across nearly seven decades, remains relevant. Damba's dilemma, Ajugo's dogmatism, Enusi's reason, Ansa's silenced wisdom, Kudaro's courage, Ayi's truth-telling, and Bambulu's bridging, these are not merely dramatic creations but enduring human types whose struggles illuminate our own. The play's title, *This is Our Chance*, is both an assertion and a challenge: an assertion that moments of transformation offer unique opportunities for positive change; a challenge to recognise and seize those opportunities when they arise. In 2025, as in 1956, Africa stands at a crossroads. The legacies of colonialism, the pressures of globalisation, the aspirations of youth, and the persistence of inequality all demand attention. Henshaw's play reminds us that how we navigate these challenges matters—that our choices today will shape not only our own lives but the inheritance we leave to future generations. This is our chance, indeed.

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