

**ECHOES FROM BEYOND A PASS BETWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS  
(CHRISTIAN MISSION IN VENDA AS REFLECTED IN SOME  
CONTEMPORARY TSHIVENDA LITERATURE)**

**by**

**NDWAMBI LAWRENCE KHOROMMBI**

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**SUPERVISOR: DR NICO J SMITH  
CO-SUPERVISOR: DR TINYIKO S MALULEKE**

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I declare that **ECHOES BEYOND TWO MOUNTAIN'S PASS** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## SUMMARY

The thesis of this study revolves around the validity of Tshivenda literature as an authoritative commentary on Mission Work in Venda. The value of literary works by selected Tshivenda writers is explored on three important directions: (a) as a source of information on the Vhavenda world-view which is an important aspect in the Vhavenda's understanding of the Missionary message; (b) as a source of challenge to missiology, and (c) as a source of basis for an in-depth contextual missiology. The well-meaning contributions of the German Missionaries is appreciated. Their influence through the spreading of Lutheranism and also in the birth of Tshivenda literature is clearly recognized. My task has not only been to see these positive contributions, but also to problematise and explore both the missionary instrumentality and the local responses that are reflected in the Tshivenda literature.

Our first four chapters introduce the thesis, they cover political history of the Vhavenda which is fundamental in our understanding of their world-view and the early missionary works in Venda. Selected Tshivenda novels become the object of inquiry in the fifth chapter. The novels help us in our evaluation of Missionary Christianity. A wide variety of issues are contained in these novels which are significant in Mission work. The sixth chapter concentrates on selected Tshivenda short stories. In two of these short stories the issue of racism is highlighted. The seventh chapter looks into a few Tshivenda Poems. In two of these poems the Missionary-rejected name for God, Nwali, is heavily used. The last chapter contains the essential commentary of indigenous Tshivenda literature on Missionary Christianity as well as the implications for both global and local Missiology.

**KEY TERMS.** Indigenous Tshivenda literature, contextual theology, Tshivenda World-view, Tshivenda novels, Tshivenda short stories and poems, Berlin Missionary Society.

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# **ECHOES FROM BEYOND A PASS BETWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS:**

## **Trying to find a pass between the mountains**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **1.1 AIM OF RESEARCH**

Now that the missionary era seems to have passed one can objectively reflect on how missionary Christianity has influenced the people it formerly came to call. In this study missionary Christianity means the Christianity that was brought into Africa and in our case into Venda by German missionaries. It is a term coined by T.S. Maluleke (1995:1). My choice of this research was conditioned by three important factors:

- (1) As a pastor, interpreting the Christian influence in communities has always fascinated me. How present-day Vhavenda look at Christianity challenges me to try to unravel the reasons behind their particular attitudes.
- (2) Believing that Tshivenda literature reflects Vhavenda cultural living at a specific time and place, the study confines itself to that Western missionary Christian influence that filtered through into Tshivenda literature. The ease with which I could conduct such a study as a Muvenda, who could go and read the primary source, further motivated me to undertake it.
- (3) My desire to contribute a Post-Western missionary critique that would help to discard the biases present at the height of the missionary period, including a Western (White) sense of cultural superiority, negative attitudes towards the indigenous people's language and a failure to understand their religion.

The objectives of this study are to

- (1) show the importance of the relationship between Tshivenda culture and Christianity

- (2) use the study of Venda literature as a contribution to future missiological research
- (3) show the effect of Missionary Christianity on the traditional Vhavenda religious world-view
- (4) show the effect of written Christianity on the Vhavenda oral religious tradition
- (5) contextualise Missionary Christianity in Venda community life
- (6) contribute to contemporary South African missiology.

### **1.1.1 Historical**

For centuries Missionary Christianity has played a pivotal role in the development of African literature. Lamin Sanneh (1989:179-180) singles out the Rev. Christaller, a German missionary and linguist, who worked among the Akan people of Ghana. Christaller completed the translation of the Bible in 1871, which was followed by a dictionary and grammar of Twi language, crowning all this with a methodical compilation of 3,600 Twi proverbs and idioms. As will be briefly looked into in the other chapters of this research, it was the Berlin Lutheran Missionary Society, who pioneered missionary activities in Venda, which finally led to the introduction of Tshivenda literature (Mathivha 1972:41). These missionaries committed the Tshivenda language to writing, taught the Vhavenda to write and read and were responsible for the first printing press at Tshakhuma. This study will attempt to show the importance of the relationship between Tshivenda culture and Christianity.

Looking into Tshivenda literature is another way of re-establishing the ties between the missionary initiative in the beginning and the present Tshivenda literature. At present, Western missionary tutelage in literature has been done away with completely. In other areas a non-missionary literature has developed that at times becomes strongly opposed to Christian mission. We will be looking at "secular literature" (i.e. the

literature not directed or produced by the Church, including all non-spiritual literature), which has developed world-wide out of religious literature (Sanneh 1994:140). This historic relationship will help the Church in her mission even today, especially if it becomes a dialogical and not a monological relationship.

### **1.1.2 Effective Future Mission Strategies**

Missiology must always plan strategies for the future. For it to be effective, there is a dire need for missiology to enter into dialogue with the people. Missiology must get to know the people and must understand them through listening to them. To do this, missiology will have to listen to opinion-makers. Writers translate what people think and do for the ordinary person to know. Missiology can only ignore such to its own peril. Writers represent intellectual elite or intelligentsia.

In some Black churches there has been an alienation of the elite from the church. When the elite are listened to through what they write, it would help the church to understand them and develop strategies for a meaningful mission to them.

### **1.1.3 Influence on World-view**

This study wants to show how Missionary Christianity has influenced the traditional religious world-view of the Vhavenda. Some unnecessary missionary blunders were a result of not knowing the holistic view that the Vhavenda hold on almost everything.

### **1.1.4 Oral Tradition Versus Written Records**

It will also be the purpose of this study to show how Christianity in written form has stolen the original oral tradition in religious issues which was the Vhavenda way of keeping historic records. The result of this was the introduction of a bookish Christianity that proved in many ways relevant only to literate people thereby rendering most of the grassroots people unqualified for baptism in such churches. For example, Mrs

Mutshaeni, a spouse of the Venda missionary pioneer, had to wait for almost a year before baptism (Ndou 1995:17).

### 1.1.5 Issues of Contextualisation

Our task through this research will equally be to find out how Missionary Christianity was entrenched in the Black community, especially the Venda community. This clearly leads us to issues of contextualisation. In many ways Missionary Christianity sought to replace indigenous culture with that of the West. For the Vhavenda, the translation of the Venda word for God - *Nwali*, which was discarded for a Sotho word, *Modimo*, *Mudzimu*, is very disturbing indeed. For genuine contextualisation to take place, people's culture and religion must be known by the bearer of new concepts. Van Niekerk (1980:7) puts it well when he says:

The church is one of those who struggle for the minds of the people, and in the immense struggle of ideas, what is important is the ideas of people. In the struggle of ideas the Black poet plays a central role as witness and as primary source of ideas. Communication becomes possible only when the people who are to be reached are fully understood.

It should be added here that for people to be heard, they also need to bring their message within the world-view understanding of the recipients. Listening is very important. As we peruse Tshivenda literature we shall at the same time be listening.

Contextualisation must be seen in how the gospel has affected normal Vhavenda daily life. The Christian message must be able to give a certain interpretation of life. Literature serves as a vehicle of information in this regard. Studying their literature enables us to witness how Vhavenda go about their daily activities after a whole century of Western missionary showering. In this way literature itself should not be viewed as depicting just another literary life but true life as experienced by both the writers and the people that the writers portray for us. Literature itself provides us with

an agenda. It is when we listen to these writers that in turn we can begin to search for legitimate answers from the Scriptures. In this way Missiology will be contextualised.

### 1.1.6 Missiological Contribution

Finally, another important aim of this study is to contribute to contemporary South African missiology. Here mission is taken as “a liberating operation through which the church through the Holy Spirit tries to inaugurate the year of Jubilee in the world through ways and means that are at its disposal” (Khorommbi 1996:2). Mission calls the Church to dialogue with the world and further to identify itself with the world with an identification which is not uncritical because it has to do with a **lost fallen** world. Although the world needs church mission and cannot do without it, the world equally resents it for *missio Dei*, which does not only identify with the world but questions the world. The end result of all is that a new and better understanding of the bible will be forged, which will lead to effective missionary activities.

## 1.2 METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study will employ the thematic method whereby different works of art are grouped according to their respective themes. This approach has been taken with the understanding that it elucidates the different themes of literature. Selected works by Vhavenda writers will be considered and grouped into the genres of historical and biographical works, novels and plays and poetry. The study will restrict itself to a few selected works since this is not an exhaustive study of Tshivenda literature. Written works will serve as primary sources of this research. Oral evidence and tradition as reflected in *Ngomalungundu*, a historical legend written by Mudau (1940), makes it apparent that “oral tradition takes one into a certain kind of history ... that of personal memory rather than the written word; that is the recollection of facts and happenings which affected those relating them, and therefore, does not necessarily reflect events as they actually occurred” (Canerly 1994b).

Textual analysis is the complementary method that will be used as well. Through this method the meaning of a few specific literary texts will be analysed in greater depth. This will be employed especially in the poetic analysis. The comparative method, which “seeks to reflect on a variety of bases, the similarities and differences in themes, subject matter, imagery, symbolism, sense, feeling and tone” (Milubi 1988:4), will also be used.

In conclusion an attempt will be made to compare cardinal views of missionaries to those of the indigenous Tshivenda writers. The thematic method will therefore be complemented by other methods. Through all these an understanding will be reached on whether Missionary Christianity is, indeed, deep-rooted in the Vhavenda people or whether mission has failed.

### **1.3 LITERARY BACKGROUND**

When one looks at Tshivenda literature one immediately realises that it is highly impoverished. One can bemoan the absence of a plethora of things in the world of such literature. The literature seems to be monolithic. There are several reasons for this. The Tshivenda writers were victims of three brutal forces that paralysed many.

The first force was the missionary stance. The missionaries themselves, being human, had their own biases and prejudices. The German Chancellor, Von Caprivi stated publicly in 1890, “We should begin by establishing a few stations in the interior, from which both the merchant and the missionary can operate, gun and bible should go hand in hand” (quoted in Bosch 1993:304).

The missionaries themselves had a double agenda that in most cases they could not hide. The mission field was in many ways regarded as being composed of dark, barbaric heathens. An extract from *The Vhavenda of Spelonken* (Wessman 1900:64) can be of help here:

According to Vhavenda opinion, one must pull a goat's tail off before killing the animal. There are many other disgusting cruelties which characterised a people

devoid of humane feeling. The Vhavenda mothers subject their babies to great torture. The Vhavenda are, like all other African Natives, accomplished natural liars.

It was therefore very difficult for Black Christians to express an opinion that differed from that of the missionaries. To differ with a missionary was catastrophic to one's acceptance into the community of believers. The result of such attitude permeated almost everything black. Consequently it was felt that African literature would not offer any literary richness because Africa was seen as a backward continent with a literature unsuitable for any serious attention by Western World Scholars. Milubi (1988:4) quotes W.F. Burton to help us to understand what has been happening: "The savage custom of going naked, we are told, had denuded the mind and destroyed all decorum in the language."

This is a classical example of how Western scholars would approach African literature. Tucker (in Milubi 1988:5), in reviewing Zulu Praise Poetry, is quoted as realising that he was equally caught in this web of Western bias towards Africa: "Savage Poetry is disorderly and without any formal pattern acceptable in our language."

Such people are ignorant about important historic happenings that took place in Africa even before missionaries came. They are ignorant of the fact that even before 1619 there were areas in West Africa where "university life was fairly common and scholars were held in reverence. There were in these ancestry rulers who expanded their kingdom into empires, great and magnificent armies whose physical dimensions dwarfed entire nations into submission, scholars whose vision of life showed foresight and wisdom" (Clarke 1968:632).

The second force was the government's repressive laws. The South African Government passed the Suppression of Communism Act of 1955 to enable the Minister of Justice to ban South Africans, living in or outside the country (Visser 1976:54). On 1 April 1966 Mr. B.J. Vorster, the then Minister of Justice, gazetted a list of 46 people living abroad who then had become banned (1976:54). Such banned people, the

majority of whom were writers, could not be quoted, neither could their writings be perused.

Because of the approach that the government had to literature and all the information distributing agencies, very few voices could be registered who were "troubling" people. The result was that because of such a stance, Tshivenda literature is devoid of "holistic life reflections", which means that the writers have left certain issues unaddressed, including any topics that could embarrass the government of the day.

The motives of many writers for writing could not be entirely separated from financial consideration. The Venda Language Board governed almost the whole literature project. But even in such hard and difficult periods there were voices that relentlessly continued to sound a protest note, like Ratshitanga, Farisani, Netshivhuyu, Milubi and others.

The third factor could be the most dangerous: lack of skills. Very few people had the skills that would help them formulate their thoughts into articles or books. Lack of skills was equally preceded by lack of interest, which was a result of lack of motivation. When the whole circle is considered, it finally means that Vhavenda writers would have no reason, nor the know-how, to write down their response to the missionary period.

But the battle should not be considered completely lost for even in this other "innocent literature" (ie, that agreed with government policy), one could still come out with a critique of the Missionary Christianity. Although our Black literature should be viewed against this background, it remains rich in many ways.

The fourth factor was unsympathetic publishers. Even before the bannings, publishers rejected manuscripts on the legal advice that they would probably be banned if published. This equally affected writing in the African vernacular (Visser 1976:55).

I shall narrate a sketchy history that will in no doubt show that even the Vhavenda had highly rich oral tradition which could not be ignored or be put aside as "savage history".



Again, what is interesting is that new voices have already started echoing the message of confidence in black literature. According to Milubi (1988:6), these voices include critics Jabavu, Vilakazi, Lestrade, Jordan, Groenewald, Kunene, Guma, Swanepoel, Ntuli, Marivate and Satyo.

Venda literature traces its roots to Western missionaries. According to Mathivha (1972:8), Venda language developed from some "form of Shona, Shambala, Nyanja, Sena, Swahili, Bemba and Ndau". When the first missionaries arrived in Venda in 1872 the language had already crystallised.

The first Berlin missionaries were Beuster and Klatt, who arrived at Maungani and with the help of some converts made the first attempts at translating the Bible into Venda (Mathiva 1972:12).

The Pedi connection: The manner of writing revealed that the missionaries were influenced by Pedi-speaking people. This was because the Lutheran Church "had Pedi as its official language in its early history" (Mathivha 1985). Because of this, missionaries were taught Pedi before coming to Venda" (Mathivha 1985). Beuster himself seems to have known Pedi because the early evangelists who helped him were Pedi-speaking people. As early mentioned, such a connection influenced his taking *Modimo* for God over against the natural *Nwali*.

The Karanga connection: As a language Tshivenda had strong Karanga influence. Karanga words like *denga* for Heaven, and *Nwali* for God show this connection. The first religious booklet that appeared in 1902 shows this connection strongly (Mathiva 1972:16):

*Ndi no tenda ko Modimo Bambo  
oe simba rose,  
Mosiki oa Denga na Pase.*

(I believe in the heavenly God  
the creator of all earth  
the creator of heaven and earth)

The Karanga connection could also have been influenced by Vhavenda who during the Mphaphu war with the Boers were scattered to Zimbabwe. On coming back, these people realised that they had picked up many Shona words.

Theodor and Paul Schwellnus, who were German by descent but Venda by birth, made a valuable contribution to Venda orthography, which was compiled by C. Meinhof. The symbols used are the ones used today with slight changes and few adaptations. Other German writers who produced Venda literature include C.F. Beuster who wrote a hymnbook, T.L. Shwellnus who wrote *Ndede ya Luambo Lwa Tshivenda* in 1918 (1972:23) and P.E. Schwellnus, who translated the New Testament and finally the whole Bible (1972:34). The Tshivenda used in this Bible exerted a tremendous and positive influence on the development of Tshivenda literature (1972:37).

The translation of the Bible into Tshivenda was, in itself, a great achievement of Western missionaries. It is debatable whether it is always effective to make the Christian faith depend more on book education than also on oral education. On the other hand, the evolution of Black literature paved the way for the introduction of Bantu education.

About this, C.S. Nwandula (1987:74) says:

Since African culture was regarded as inferior, and that of European as superior, the strong emphasis on the introduction of the vernacular, and the lighter stress on English teaching, signified education for culture domination and subservience by imposing outmoded tribal customs and culture on Africans who were to find their place in a white-dominated society.

Although the translation of the Bible into the vernacular by the missionaries was a

remarkable breakthrough in vernacular literature, the attitude of missionaries towards black culture remained negative. Milubi (1988:7) cites Roscoe in his *A study in West Africa literature* to clearly reveal this attitude:

An attitude inherited from colonial days and early missionary evangelising, they assert that the African has no choice because he has no cultural traditions of his own, no religious, economic or political background worthy of serious attention, and certainly no history of glory in the creative arts.

In many ways Christianisation was Westernisation even though the product of such Westernisation could not be allowed to have the same status as accorded to Western people themselves. The result of this was that Vhavenda people, including Vhavenda writers, developed a negative attitude to their own literature in favour of that of the West. This attitude lasted until the late fifties and sixties (Mulubi 1988:8). According to Finnegan, as quoted by Milubi (1988:8), from this period a new perception of African studies became apparent. African literature was no longer judged through Western eyes. African work of art was to be assessed and be accepted according to its own worth.

#### **1.4 THE COUNTRY BEYOND THE TWO MOUNTAINS**

Then suddenly there was heard a terrible rumbling from the mountain of the spirits in which the royal city of Matongoni had been built. The voice spoke "My Beloved Son, Come hither that I may confer with you!"

So Tshilume returned to where the people were assembled who were to be governed by him. He descends from the mountain shining like fire, though he burned not. And his eyes also flamed like fire. The people trembled and were afraid to see him wearing this terrible appearance. Seeing the people fearing him thus he put out the flames that were burning about him, only then could the people approach near to him (Van Warmelo 1940:15-16).

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain and very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God (Exodus 19:16-17).

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant and they were afraid to come near him (Exodus 34:29-30).

The four preceding extracts, two from *Ngomalungundu* by M. Mudau as edited by Van Warmelo, and two from the Book of Exodus, recorded by Moses, call for an understandable concern. An easy explanation could be that the *Ngomulungundu* one is a copy of the Old Testament. But this explanation falls apart when one reads the preface to *Ngomulungundu* by N.J. van Warmelo (1940:8).

The European reader cannot fail to be struck by some remarkable parallelism between the Venda tradition recorded by Mudau and certain aspects of the history of Israel as described in the Old Testament. The author is a Christian and a teacher, and on reading his manuscript for the first time I therefore took it for granted that he noticed the points of resemblance between the story of the Vhasenzi and the history of the Jews. Imagine my surprise then, when I found that he had not noticed them but found it difficult to see what I was driving at, until I had been at some pains to explain what I meant. I am satisfied that there is no Bible or missionary influence in the recorder as such.

It is not the purpose of these remarks, or of the study, to enter into debate on this issue. Suffice it to highlight that what struck Van Warmelo in 1940 is what struck me in 1996 when I first read these manuscripts. My being struck by this parallelism served a different purpose. I realised that for the Vhavenda to be assisted to understand the claims of the gospel, there must be a pass that would serve as a bridge between Mount Matongoni and Mount Sinai. I saw a pass between the two mountains, Mount

Matongoni where *Nwali* stayed with his miraculous drum and his obedient son, Tshilume, who took the leadership immediately after the burning of the city, and Mount Sinai where God spoke to Moses and gave him the ten commandments. Both men, whether one fictitious, the other not, came from these mountains with a certain glory on them. I have not thought it expedient to continue with the parallelism. My struggle was an experience of how one could pass through these two mountains and reflect on life beyond the mountains.

*Echoes in the country beyond the two mountains* is an attempt on my part to look at how Missionary Christianity represented by Mount Sinai has influenced the lives of the Venda-speaking people represented by Mount Matongoni, which mountain represents their cultural world-view. This influence will be sifted in the literature written by Vhavenda artists themselves.

## 1.5 CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE

This is an attempt to summarise the influence that missionary Christianity had on Vhavenda, as represented by Vhavenda writers. Seven Vhavenda writers have been selected with this aim in mind. Literature as such reflects human experience as interpreted by writers. This study is truly about life, religion, education, families, wars, teachers, farmers, headmen and chiefs, students and other social conflicts.

This study will examine the literature of a people, the Vhavenda, with its profound truth, its desire for space in the sun and its ever-present enemies who gang up to smash its efficiency and effectiveness. It is a study of the people who choose to respond to life albeit at times with fear, to take their powerlessness as a cue, to create a new structure of power within them, confronting their own humanness and that of their neighbours, people who choose the womb from which life, hope and decency might issue.

*Echoes beyond two mountains* is an attempt to hear these “echoes” in Tshivenda literature. The authors are so close to the Vhavenda soul that to reject their works is to reject their experience. Jackson Byden (1968:623) correctly says:

Amongst the most notable effect of fiction is its capacity for producing within its limits of the illusion it creates a world, which even in the sense of the geographer and the historian can seem very true.

To have known these writers and read their works is to have relived lives of countless people who have lived or who still live. I shall equally try to observe how their living was influenced by Missionary Christianity. It is an interesting study although surrounded with difficulties.

Chapter 2 will focus on the political history of the Vhavenda. A brief history, tracing them from Abyssinia to south of the Limpopo River, will be sketched. Their meeting with the Western missionaries and the Boers will be noted.

Chapter 3 looks at the Vhavenda world-view as a way of offering some clues on why Western missionary activities succeeded in certain areas and failed in others. This chapter explores the Vhavenda religion, their understanding of demonology and medicine.

Chapter 4 examines the Western missionary contact in history, examining missionary pioneers in Venda and how they influenced Venda world-view and Tshivenda literature.

Chapter 5 examines the Western missionary echoes in Venda literature and looks at the works of different writers. All the works have been selected on the basis of relevance to our theme. Three novels by two eminent Tshivenda writers will be discussed. The novels are *Zwa Mulovha Zwi a Fhela* (Bad times do come to an end) and *Elelwani* by T.N. Maumela and *Mmanga Mawelewele* by E.S. Madima.

Chapter 6 deals with two short stories, *Hu Bvuma na Fhasi* ("It even shakes the earth" by T.Sengani and *Tsumbandila* ("Signpost") by T.T. Mudau.

In chapter 7 the poetic works of Rashitanga, Sigwavhulimu and Netshivhuyu are contextually analysed. Ratshitanga and Netshivhuyu distinguish themselves as agitating poets whereas Sigwavhulimu follows a line of his own.

Chapter 8 discusses findings and makes recommendations to Missiology and to Vhavenda writers who are strongly encouraged to touch the Vhavenda cultural nerve which will result in many Vhavenda being motivated to write and read such literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE VHAVENDA'S POLITICAL HISTORY

#### 2.1 ABYSSINIAN ROOTS

According to Nemudzivhadi (1994a:2), the Vhavenda were firmly rooted in Ethiopia where during the first century of the Christian era Mambiri became king and instituted the monarchy. His son and successor Tovera (Thovhela), journeyed down to Kenya in 800 A.D., that is 266 years before William the Conqueror crossed the North Sea to England where the foundation for the English monarchy was laid. Mudau equally supports the idea that Vhavenda come from the North (Van Warmelo 1940:10). According to Mutenda (in Makhado 1980:8), the Vhavenda and Vhalemba migrated to the present Venda from Zimbabwe. This idea is further endorsed by Stayt (1960:9) in *The Bavenda*, an anthropological study of the Vhavenda, when he states "there can be little doubt that linguistically and culturally the Bavenda have a place in the congeries of people that form the wedge which starts North of the Zambezi and passes through Mashonaland, tapering away amongst the Bapedi south of Vendaland". He states further that all current oral traditions show that the important migrations came from North of the Limpopo River. Mutenda, as quoted by Makhado (1980:8), states dogmatically that Vhavenda originated from Vhukalanga (Mashonaland) at a place called Ha-Mambo.

When one considers the fact that a number of the Lemba ethnic group are still found in Zimbabwe around Belingwe mountain, and that there are some Vhavenda chiefs in Zimbabwe who have Vhavenda subjects under them, one cannot dispute the fact that the Vhavenda originated in the North (Makhado 1980:10).

Makhado (1980:10) quotes Marole in his supportive view of the fact that Vhavenda come from the North although with Marole the real northern area is the Congo and not



Ethiopia. Mudau (1980:3) strongly supports the point of the origin of the Vhavenda as being in the North "from the region of the great lakes, dense forest and large rivers".

Apart from these historical writers, linguistic similarities strongly support the idea that Vhavenda emigrated from the North (Makhado 1980:11). Tshivenda shows substantial similarities with languages spoken in central Africa, like Shona, Chichewa, Chinsenga, Luganda, Swahili, Tshiluba and Bemba (1980:12-13).

A striking feature is that there are close similarities between the Tshivenda vocabulary and the languages spoken in areas where the Vhavenda are believed to have gone past or lived before they proceeded to the South (1980:11).

Although there is no consensus on the exact place of their settlement before moving towards the South, Nemudzivhadi's account seems to be more reliable than the others. The Lembas, who are part of the Vhavenda, have Semitic characteristics which presuppose a strong contact between them and the Jewish people. Such a contact could only have happened in the North Eastern African countries, like Ethiopia and Egypt.

## **2.2 MOVEMENTS TOWARDS THE SOUTH**

According to Conerly (1946:26), the "Venda of today are the descendants of those whose migration into the Transvaal commenced some eight hundred years ago, many of whom witnessed the emergence of empire-like states which exercised their sphere of influence from the Kalahari Desert to the Indian Ocean".

Thovhele's sons, Murenga and Sororenzou, left Kenya for Thanganyika (Nemudzivhadi 1994a:2). By 1000 A.D. the clan crossed the Zambezi into Zimbabwe under the leadership of Mushaavhathu (Nemudzivhadi 1994a:2).

In 1450, thirty-eight years before Bartheolomeo Diaz reached the Cape, the royal residence was moved to Matombo (Matops or Mubvumela) (Nemudzivhadi 1994a:2).

As the Mbire went on subjugating the Mbedzi or the Dzivha people, they (the Mbire) named them the Rozwi destroyers. From Mubvumela they went to Khami, Vhuxwa and Dananombe which became their residences in 1500 A.D. (Nemudzivhadi 1994a:2). Among their kings who reigned here was Ntindime who died in 1688 (Nemudzivhadi 1994a:2). His son refused to be installed as king and was consequently referred to as Dambanyika (Nemudzivhadi 1994a:2).

Ntindime's death marked the disintegration of the Mbire-Rozwi Empire as Dambanyika moved to Lwandali South of the Limpopo (Nemudzivhadi 1994a:2). This is supported by Conerly (1994b:2), who states that "Venda legends and recent archaeological findings tell us that in the late 1600's or early 1700's the Vhasenzi, under the leadership of their king, Velelambeu (Dambanyika) crossed the Limpopo River and settled in the village of Tshiendeulu".

The land into which Dambanyika moved was inhabited by Vhangona, Vhambedzi, Vhanyai, Vhanzhelele, Vhatavhatsindi and Vhalea. This was Venda (Canerly 1994b:2). They discovered a tributary which they named Nzhelele. They moved across the hot and arid wilderness of the Limpopo valley following the Nzhelele River and discovered an ideal place for a home in the Soutpansberg mountains. This they called Dzata, "the largest Shona-Venda settlement South of the Limpopo" (Daneel 1995:19). It was constructed in a style similar to that of the Great Zimbabwe, and some say that the stones used to construct the royal area were transported from Zimbabwe (Canerly 1994b:27).

### **2.3 EXPANSION AND DEMISE OF THE VENDA EMPIRE**

With the coming of Vhasenzi in the late 1600s, various Venda clans and groups living in Soutpansberg became politically united under the central authority of Vhasenzi and their ruler Vele Dambanyika (Canerly 1994b:27). They became part of a state similar in structure to that of the Great Zimbabwe and Khami Empires of Zimbabwe (Canerly 1994b:27). Under Thohoyandou, who was enthroned after the death of his nephew, the political boundaries went further south to Pietersburg with the Olifants River in the

south east and the Sand River in the west and Thohoyandou ruled in Dzata between 1761 and 1790 (Canerly 1994b:28). He extended and improved Dzata. According to Stayt (1960:15), "the golden age of the Bavenda was probably during the reign of Thohoyandou, but at his death jealousy and family feuds disintegrated the tribe through intensive warfare, which continued intermittently until the country was brought under European domination". Nemudzivhadi extends the influence of Thohoyandou even to the mighty Zambezi in the north (Nemudzivhadi 1985:19). Thohoyandou was not Velelambeu's son but a nephew and favourite of Velelambeu. Stayt, however, does not support this view.

Who was this Thohoyandou? Dambanyika's son and successor, Masindi, ruled for a short time after the death of his father. Tshisevhe, his younger brother, followed him but ruled for a short period because he also met a sudden death. His son, Ragavheli, could not assume the chair because he was too young. He was put under the guardianship of his uncle Phophi, who became regent until the young prince could assume leadership. The young prince was murdered before ascending to the throne (Canerly 1994b:28), and the people began to whisper that Phophi was responsible for the death of all rulers since Dambanyika.

According to Conerly (1994b:29), it was during this time that Phophi's name was changed to Thohoyandou. Fearing for his life, Thohoyandou fled in the middle of the night with his people and the sacred drum. They were never seen again.

The kingdom was divided into three ruling houses: Mpofu Ramabulana, Ragavheli and Mphaphuli.

It is not clear who assumed the throne after the mysterious departure of Thohoyandou. Shortly after the birth of his son, Munzhedzi, in 1790, Thohoyandou's nephew, Mpofu, assumed leadership of the group which moved to Tshurululuni under the Songozwi mountain (Canerly 1994b:29). Thohoyandou's other nephews, Raluswielo (Tshivhase) and Ravhura, the younger brother of Ragavheli, established themselves at Depeni (Dopeni) and Makonde, respectively (Canerly 1994b:29). Mphaphuli settled at

Tshitomboni. Until that time the Vhavenda had only met other African nations, but this was to change when they met a new people (Europeans), with a different world-view, a different culture and economy, and an attitude of mind that belittled any way of life different from its own.

## **2.4 EARLY CULTURAL COLLISION**

It was during the reign of Mpofu that the sons of a hunter and Trekker, Coenraad du Buys of the Cape Province, were the first non-Africans to settle in Soutpansberg. They appeared before Mpofu in 1820 (Canerly 1994b:30). Mpofu was kind enough to give them land to live on. "They were given many girls from the chief's kraal" (Canerly 1994b:30). As to how the girls were "divided" amongst these sons, nothing is recorded. Their father, Coenraad, travelled to parts unknown. Some believed he moved to Mozambique where he settled and remarried (Canerly 1994b:30). His sons settled at Tshikhovhokhovha at a place that king Mpofu allotted to them.

Mpofu died in 1829 and was buried at Tshirululuni above Louis Trichardt. His sons were Ramabulana, Ramavhoya and Madzhie (Canerly 1994b:30). When Ramabulana succeeded to the throne peacefully in 1830, his own mother was in favour of Ramavhoya. Ramavhoya found himself at loggerheads with his own brother, Ramabulana, because of his mother (Canerly 1994b:31).

Eventually civil strife broke out and they fought against one another with spears and arrows and axes, until the elder brother was beaten and driven out by his younger brother. Ramabulana went away and stayed with the Tlokwas at Rida. It was while here, that he was nicknamed "Ramabulana", the rain bringers. It was during a drought and the Tlokwas asked him, "Where is the rain?" to which he replied, "The rain will come." Within the next few days heavy rain came. So he was nicknamed the Rain Bringer. Prior to this time he was known as Munzhedzi Rasithuu Velelambeu (Canerly 1994b:31).

Soutpansberg itself was the scene of international trade. It was the meeting place of ancient trade routes; the Inhambane routes from the south-east to Beja and from Lorenzo Marques. It is interesting to note that "although life in this frontier society was far removed from European settlement, the trading of metals and hunting of wildlife for the portage of ivory and animal skins to the Indian Ocean or the Cape Colony and on to international markets, constituted a portion of the wealth accumulated by the Thovhele of the Venda before the arrival of the first settlers" (Canerly 1994b:32). Because of this, Chief Mmamugudubi, a Tlokwa chief, led a team of hunters into the Soutpansberg area in 1835. These were days of great suspicion and uncertainty. Ramavhoya slew the chief. The scattered members of the hunting team fled to Ramabulana and urged him to fight for the throne in order to revenge for what Ramavhoya did to their chief (Canerly 1994b:32).

During the same period Trichardt, Van Rensburg and Potgieter appeared looking for a way to the great ocean in the east. They were in the company of Bushmen whom they hunted and caught and made slaves (Dicke 1941:82). "That some of these wild Bush people, taken along against their will, ran away, is not surprising, that some stayed on, is" (Dicke 1941:83). Those who followed the Voortrekkers over the Vaal River found themselves amongst strange tribes of natives and in lion country and deserting became both difficult and dangerous. They had few means of securing food or defending themselves against wild animals or the natives. The Voortrekker leaders took their weapons away from them. So even the deserters had to keep following their enslavers or remain near their camps to pick up crumbs of meat and entrails left behind by hunters. Some got eaten by lions. The slaves were equally ill-treated by both Louis Trichardt and Pretorius (Dike 1941:83).

It was this group of people who finally were asked by Ramabulana for help against his younger brother, Ramavhoya. Consequently Ramavhoya was strangled by Ramabulana having gone out to meet the Voortrekkers, not knowing that they had planned his execution (Canerly 1994b:33). As compensation, Ramabulana decided to grant a portion of his land to Louis Trichardt and Van Rensburg, "knowing nothing of the differences between White and African concepts of land ownership and tenure"

(Canerly 1994b:33). This was to cause untold misery, which led to the outbreak of war between the Boers and the Vhavenda.

The trading centre was formally renamed Schoemansdal in 1848. For some twenty years Soutpansberg - Schoemansdal dominated trade in ivory, the one great export item of the Transvaal prior to the discovery of gold (Canerly 1994b:34). The Boers came with their own laws, their guns and horses, their strange religion, their women and children. Ramabulana saw that his own land was being taken away from him, when he considered "the annual division of homesteads - (worked by) hundreds of Africans ... in a system of tribute labour" (Canerly 1994b:35). His title "thovhele" was taken away and he was dubbed a "chief". Möller Malan summarises this as follows: "Indeed, the Soutpansberg Colony itself was experienced by Africans as a raiding state, exercising hegemony over them through annual tribute levies and meeting obduracy with destructive forays, funded out of the attendant plunder ... which engaged itself in the plunder of nature herself as of man" (cited in Conerly 1994b:35).

These problems were compounded by the coming of Joao Albasini in 1849 with Boers from Lydenburg, accompanied by four hundred warriors, mainly Shangaans (Canerly 1994b:36). The Shangaans came to the Transvaal as a result of the wars of succession "between the sons of Soshangane, Msila and Mawewe and gathered themselves around Joao Albasini who promoted himself to be their chief (Harries 1989:84). "Knobnose location" was delineated in recognition of services rendered to the state by Albasini's government auxiliaries (Harries 1989:92).

News from the southern areas of the Soutpansberg was disturbing, for the Buys brothers were raiding kraals and taking booty (Canerly 1994b:37). During this time Ramabulana's eldest son, Davhana, was arrested and accused of cattle theft by the Boers. Ramabulana managed to escape at night and finally removed himself and several of his Ndumi to Nengwekhulu, where they hid themselves. When he finally died in 1850, the throne was taken by Davhana, who did not reign for long because of Makhado, the younger brother who forced him out blaming him for murdering his father, Ramabulana (Canerly 1994b:47).

With the help of Chief Mphaphuli, Davhana was taken by Albasini to Luonde. This resulted in a battle between Albasini and Makhado. From this time Makhado had a negative attitude towards Albasini and the Boers. The Boers, on the other hand, had managed to entrench themselves in Schoemansdal and were hoping to take control of the whole area formerly under the jurisdiction of Vhavenda leaders.

Through this sketchy history, it has become clear that the area that the missionaries came to evangelise was an area of great confusion and conflict. This confusion should not just be taken as a result of the invasion of the Soutpansberg (Venda) by the Boers, but equally as a result of cultural shock emanating from the coming into the same area of the Vhavenda, Boers, Vatsonga, Bapedi and British and German missionaries. Examining the Vhavenda world-view will help us understand the type of the collision that we are talking about.

### CHAPTER 3

#### ELEMENTS OF THE TRADITIONAL RELIGION OF THE VHAVENDA

Kraft (1979:33) defines a world-view as "the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which members of the culture assent". According to Kraft (1979:54-57), the functions of people's world-views embrace the following among other things:

- (a) They explain how and why things should be as they are.
- (b) They serve an evaluational function. Values and goals of society are ethnocentrically evaluated as best and sanctioned by the world-view of their culture or subculture.
- (c) They provide psychological reinforcement of a specific group.
- (d) They serve an integrating function.
- (e) They govern the adaptational level of the group.

The works of Van Rooy (1971), Stayt (1960), Wessman (1902) and Ndou (1993) rank among the best attempts to write about the Vhavenda world-view. With the exception of Ndou's work, the other three lack the cultural depth that such studies command. Although Stayt's book, "The Bavenda" fails to depict the correct world-view of the Vhavenda in certain aspects of their lives, it commands respect because of the way it was written. Stayt was blind and based his book on a study he conducted by asking questions and recording the answers. Anyone familiar with the Vhavenda culture will know that the problem with this approach is that Vhavenda do not seem to answer questions directly. To him for instance, (1960:230), NWARI (Nwali) is "the Mashona god who reveals himself at Mubvumela".



African world-view is a logically integrated whole. It is important to realise that because of this, researchers who are foreigners to this culture, are more prone to arrive at an erroneous conclusion like Taylor, quoted by Van Rooy (1971:3), who noted "no distinction can be made between sacred and secular, between natural and supernatural, for nature, man and the unseen, are unseparably involved in one another in a total community". The truth is that there is a distinction between human beings and gods, between the sacred and the secular. During times of worship there are people who are not allowed to perform certain rituals because such rituals are considered holy. As Kraft (1979) pointed out, people's world-view serves to give them an explanation of how and why things got to be as they are. The most important issue here will be such people's views on the supreme being (God or gods). That is where we will start.

### **3.1 IDEAS ABOUT GOD**

Van Rooy (1971:5) is of the opinion that little more is thought and said about God among non-Christian Vhavenda than that He is the highest in the hierarchy of forces. He goes on to say that God is considered so high above human beings that He is unapproachable except by special persons and in special circumstances. In a culture that respects its leaders and elderly, it cannot be ruled out that this could not be so. But that is not to say that Vhavenda religion is solely the sphere of the ancestors or spirits and not of God the Creator, as Van Rooy states (1971:5). Such a view is strongly contested by Ndou (1993:31), who is of the opinion that the Vhavenda have a strong concept of God, "for them thunder and striking of lightning is connected with God". To him, the idea and concept of God is fundamental amongst the Vhavenda.

Most of the Vhavenda are somewhat reserved and secretive about their religious beliefs, more especially to outsiders and those who show little respect for them as Africans. This is, I believe, one reason why a number of foreign researchers have not succeeded to interpret most fundamental issues in African world-views.

This study will examine Vhavenda concepts of God and how these concepts influence their world-view. Old views about God are worth recalling. Though vanished from

serious discussion, they still retain a kind of underground existence.

The Vhavenda have a strong central belief in a supreme Creator. This Creator is known by different names, the most important being Raluvhimba, Nwali, and Khuzwane. According to Stayt (1960:230), Raluvhimba is the mysterious, monotheistic deity of the Vhavenda, who is connected with the beginning of the world, and is supposed to live somewhere in the heavens and is connected with all astronomical and physical phenomena. Stayt (1960:230) points out that many wonderful things are taken to be Raluvhimba's activities: " ... a shooting star is Raluvhimba's travelling, His voice is heard in the thunder, comets, lightning, meteors, earthquakes, prolonged drought, floods, pests and epidemics - in fact, all the natural phenomena which affect the people as a whole".

In thunderstorms he appears as a great fire near the chief's dwelling place, whence he booms his desires to the chief in a voice of thunder. What is interesting is that he can be talked to, especially by the chief, as the leader of the people who addresses him as *Makhulu* (grandmother) (Stayt 1960:230). As He passes on, there will be clapping of thunder. According to Stayt, (1960:231), "occasionally he is angry with the chief and takes his revenge on the people by sending them a drought or a flood or possibly by opening an enormous cage in the heavens, and letting loose a swarm of locusts on the land".

According to Stayt (1960), the word *luvhimba* means eagle, the bird that soars aloft. The Vhavenda have a very real idea of this power, travelling through the sky, using the stars and wind and rain as his instruments. Van Rooy, (1971:6) however, believes the word means "father of the lanner", who travels faster than the African Lanner. (A lanner is a large falcon.)

There are different spots where Raluvhimba occasionally manifested Himself. One is at Luvhimbi (north of Sibasa) which has been a religious stronghold of Vhatavhatsindi under Chief Muthivhi who was subdued by Ravhura, one of Thohoyandou's sons. There is such a close relationship between the chief, representing the people, and

Raluvhimba. Raluvhimba calls the chief *Muduhulu* (grandchild). In Tshivenda religion it is the chief's duty to perform the rites in connection with rain.

According to Stayt (1960:231), Raluvhimba also revealed himself in the Matoba Hills in Zimbabwe. As a result of this every year a special messenger used to be sent to Raluvhimba with a black ox and a piece of black cloth to secure his blessings for rain. This tradition has since faded away.

### **3.2 A STRONG BELIEF IN NWALI (NWARI)**

The origin of the Nwari-cult has been the subject of research. Recently the historian Beach (1980:22f, 249f), made a strong argument in favour of its Venda origin. Daneel (1995:217) maintains that the Nwari cult was introduced by Mbire-cult officials who had immigrated from the Tanzanian lake regions. However, it is not the focus of this research to enter into this debate. Our aim is to make an important observation, namely that the mere fact that the Nwari-cult is shared by more than one tribe, clearly shows that the cult itself should not be regarded as tribal but national. Vhavenda, like the Ndembu of Zambia, the Shona and Ndebele of Zimbabwe, the Shoko and the Rozvi regard Nwari as their God and developed the Nwari-cult around their cultures as they deemed fit and necessary.

Vhavenda have implicit faith in the powers of Nwali, especially that he can make rain. The belief was stimulated by the large priesthood connected with the cult. Ndou (1993:30-31) cites Mbiti, who says, "God is no stranger to the African peoples", to show that the Vhavenda have always believed in a supreme creator and for them "thunder and striking of lightning is connected with God". What is striking is that Nwali is said to be another name for Raluvhimba ((Van Rooy 1971:5). Because of considerable cultural affinity between the Mashona and Vhavenda, they share the same name for God. Ndou (1993:33) quotes Ranger and Rennie as supporting the idea that the name Nwali dates back to an early age. This is the same name that is pronounced *Nwari* in Shona. Such a notion is supported by Daneel (1993:34), who conducted an extensive research on Shona religious life.

The inception of *Mudzimu* and its usage in the first Venda Bible did a disservice to the earlier name of *Nwali*. *Mudzimu* is now a commonly accepted name. It is interesting to note, however, that traditional African Initiated Churches prefer to use *Nwali* in their prayers. According to Ndou (1993:34), the pioneer missionaries in Zimbabwe employed the name *Mudzimu* for God, which was unacceptable to the Mashona until they resorted to *Nwari* as a reference to the supreme being. Vhavenda and Mashona share much in their cultures.

Van Rooy (1971:6) is incorrect when he states that the name “*Nwali*” used in various legends is by origin a deified Chief. Stayt (1960:233) correctly contradicts this and states that “the Chishona name, *Mwari*, means begetter or bearer, in our terminology, the Creator”. This God is not the deified spirit of some remote ancestor. The Vhavenda have a view of God as the Creator. In their prayers to Him they would say:

*Inwi Vho-Makhulu washu ...*

*Na iwe Goko musika vhathu*

(You our ancestors ...

Even you, the Creator of Mankind.)

Having said that, it is equally true that other legends will bring God down to the level of people's understanding. This should not be seen as an indication that the idea of a supreme creator was never present amongst the Vhavenda. The attributes associated with the name of *Nwali* are those of an immanent and transcendent Being. He is seen as being concerned and involved in the social welfare of his people. Even in the beginning, he was never seen as a distant god, away from the people. So Van Rooy's statement (1971:6) that “the god of the Bantu, and of the present-day Venda, is but a remote part of the cosmos, very far away”, is far from correct.

The legends of both Mudau and Marole (1940) are misleading. They write about *Nwali*'s human weakness. To Mudau, *Nwali* is seen as an ancestor who dies and disappears. Marole supports this idea by depicting *Nwali* as a polygamist with a dozen women called his wives. According to Ndou (1993:41), this influence was planted by

Stayt. However, it is not clear as to how he influenced or planted it.

Vhavenda's understanding of Nwali is that of a Creator. Ndou (1993:41) points out that Junod does not accept this. To Junod, Raluvhimba was the Maker and Nwali the Founder of everything. Junod made a point not to use the word "creator" because, according to him, the Africans do not understand creation "as the idea of creation 'ex nihilo' is not conveyed by the native term, nor does it clearly exist in the Bantu mind. Natives do not bother much about creation".

Nwali is praised by Vhavenda as *Musika vhathu* (Creator of mankind.) Junod seems to have lacked sound information, otherwise he would not have written what he did (above).

God was equally a rain bringer. Since Vhavenda were agricultural people, water was very important to them. Their whole life depended on rain. Nwali was considered the bringer of rain, so he was not a God far away. He was therefore taken to be the one responsible for changing the seasons.

Nwali was associated with specific visitations that he made from time to time. The main sites of his visitations were at Makonde, Donwa and Tshivhula. The main Nwali-cult in Venda was at Makonde. The cult was established by the Dzivha and the Mbedzi clans who migrated to Venda with this priesthood.

### 3.3 THE SPIRIT WORLD

In Venda certain places are reputed to be inhabited by spirits who are able to influence the lives of the people (Stayt 1960:236). Every chief has a place in which the spirits of his ancestors are reputed to abide. Such places were mainly burial places for the chiefs. Other spirits are reputed to stay and abide in rivers and lakes. Lake Fundunzi is connected with the ancestor spirits of Netshiavha who is the guardian of the lake. The lake is associated with a great many weird beliefs which we shall not explain. The spirits associated with rivers include *Phiphidi* (falls) and *Guvhukuvhu* (falls). There are

many other localities associated with particular spirits, including resting places (*zwiawelo*) which are scattered throughout the country.

### **3.3.1 Dissociated Spirits**

A number of rivers and mountains are believed to be inhabited by spirits which could be termed dissociated spirits in the sense that they are not connected with a particular image (Stayt 1960:238). *Zwidudwane* (mountain spirits) fall into this category. These are the most feared spirits among Vhavenda.

### **3.3.2 Transmigration of Spirits**

Some of the Vhavenda believe in the transmigration of the spirits. This is an isolated belief which holds that some people, especially chiefs, return to earth after death in the form of animals. Some chiefs are said to return as lions after death, other as leopards (Stayt 1960:239). Wessmann (1908:82) describes an incident that illustrates the strength of this belief among the Vhavenda. One morning he was awakened by a war cry. On leaving his house, he found many armed blacks on the point of killing five lions which had just raided a neighbour's cattle kraal, and had taken refuge in the bush nearby. There was no one ready to enter the bush and shoot the lions. So the issue became a lengthy affair until messengers from the chief arrived, forbidding them to shoot the lions, and threatening punishment in case of disobedience. The argument of the king was that "the lions are not real lions, but dead ancestors who have taken the shape of lions in order to visit their children". Consequently, the lions were undisturbed, and after feasting on more cows, disappeared after two weeks' stay.

### **3.3.3 Midzimu: Ancestor cult**

The Vhavenda have developed a system of communicating with Nwali through their dead ancestors. To them, death is a transition between life on this earth and life in the spirit world where the ancestors continue to live, exerting a strong influence on living

relatives. Such ancestor spirits can revenge for themselves through bringing misfortune (Stayt 1960:240). A person can either be affected by the spirits of his father's lineage or his mother's lineage. The plural form of Mudzimu (spirit) is *Vhadzimu*. R.R. Ratshitanga wrote an anthology of poetry entitled *Vhadzimu vho tshenuwa* (The gods are frightened). Some poems from this book will be treated. Normally the spirit is represented by a sacred animal or object, like a cow, a goat or a sacred stone.

### 3.3.4 Individual Spirits

When a man dies, he is represented by a spear which is bought by his son from his first wife. Every woman, after her death, may have a small iron ring made of an old hoe. The iron rings are called *malembe* (hoes). There are different types of these like *tululu* and *lunamo* (Stayt 1960:247). This clearly shows that the family history was preserved through *malembe* and spears.

All the different objects used in worship are called *zwitungulo*. It is believed that the spirits inhabit such *zwitungulo*. With Vhavenda, every sickness, death, misfortune or danger is taken as having a spiritual cause. The traditional medicine doctor through his *thangu* (articles, especially bones used for divining), plays a very prominent role. He is the one who gets involved when misfortunes strike an area or a family. Other misfortunes are believed to be prevented through the prayers of *Makhadzi* (the big sister who serves as a priest in the family), during the ritual ceremony called *u phasa* (pouring water into one's mouth and spitting it out). The ancestor spirits are invoked and propitiated before sowing and reaping (Stayt 1960:252). The person who is important here is *tshifhe* (the priest). The reaping ceremony is called *thevhula*. Stayt (1960:258) sums up the importance of thevhula as follows:

To a Muvenda the thevhula ceremonies are the most important events of the year. A man attends that of his own lineage and that of his mother's; in the latter case, if he has married his malume's daughter, he is accompanied by his wife. He may also join in the festivities at the chiefs village and by invitation, at the home of his various wives. In this way he is brought into contact with a

considerable number of people, and has an opportunity of meeting a great many friends and relatives ... It is at these functions that the social, economic and religious aspects of Tshivenda life are blended into a harmonious whole.

### 3.4 PILLARS OF VHAVENDA WORLD-VIEW IN PRACTICE

There are several themes in the Vhavenda world-view. Only the most basic will receive our attention at this stage: communal living, a strong spiritualistic world-view, *vhuluvha* (deeply felt respect), *vhuloi* (sorcery), Chief-subjects covenant and the manner of facing life and death. These features of Vhavenda world-view come from the central belief that the Vhavenda have in Nwali and *Vhadzimu* (dead ancestors). Each of the five features will be treated in order to show their importance in the function of Vhavenda world-view.

#### 3.4.1 Communal living

In Vhavenda society, as in traditional African society in general, the focus of importance is upon the group rather than on the individual. This group means first the family, including the ancestor spirits (Van Rooy 1971:9). A number of proverbs can be found to reemphasize this concept:

*Muthu ndi muthu nga munwe* (A person is a person through another person)

*Muthu u bebelwa munwe* (A person is born for another)

*A u tsukisi ndila u wothe* (You cannot tread open the footpath on your own)

*Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu* (One finger cannot take samp from the pot)

*Matanzu maswa a tikwa nga malala* (New branches are held intact by the old ones)

African people look at their personal value as an integrated part of the whole. The struggle is to get one's proper place in the kingship group and in the tribe and act accordingly. This cultural feature is carried through many institutions like *davha* (communal working), family kinship, burial services and circumcision school. It is true that because of such stress on interpersonal relations, characteristics that are



appreciated tend to be “friendliness, complaisance, adaptability, pliability, willingness to compromise, modesty, respect for seniors, openhandedness, the willingness to share what one has with others, everything that contributes to smooth interpersonal relations, and to avoid friction between persons” (Van Rooy 1971:10). The whole concept balances the African community in such a way that communities do not have capitalistic disparities where the few rich dominate the many poor.

### **3.4.2 A strong spiritualistic world-view**

The spirit world influences the everyday life of the Vhavenda. All spheres of life are pervaded by it, including family life, relationship with other people, divining, medicine, sowing and harvesting, working and taking leisure, birth and death. Van Rooy (1971:12) is incorrect when he states that “the spirits completely dominate the life of the Vendas”. He does not know that there are many Vhavenda who are not influenced negatively by their spiritual world-view. Van Rooy doesn't seem to understand a non-Western world-view through having been brought up in a Western world-view. It is not that the spirits dominate the Vhavenda world-view but that they allow room for spiritual explanation of things which at times borders on animism - “the belief that material objects possess a soul or Spirit” (Wimber 1986:5). Many Western researchers have given a wrong impression of the African religion as animism. The truth is that every culture has presuppositions, some conscious and many unconscious.

When faced with a crisis, the Vhavenda, as Van Rooy (1971:12) rightly points out, turn to the ancestor spirits. But it should be noted that the ancestors are not taken as gods but as mediators with God. Even today some Christians will turn to their ancestors, when realising that the “missionary god” appears equally paralysed in issues and events that face them. By “missionary god” is meant the false missionary concept of God whereby God is misrepresented, as in the case of people suffering from demonic oppression who are told that they are just superstitious, which leaves them thinking that the “missionary god” cannot help in cases of demonisation.

The world-view includes *Vhadzimu* (the living dead) and *zwitungulo* (amulets

representing the spirits of the people). The *Vhadzimu* remain the protectors of families and tribes, and no harm can befall either unless they are neglectful (Van Rooy 1971:12). They are even used to ward off witches.

This world-view revolves around magic, witchcraft, spirits, gods, and God. It permeates every aspect of life, like illness, drought, lightening, sterility, death, misfortune, unusual success or bad luck.

Like any other world-view, it has its own problems. A hard worker can easily be taken to be a person with "Zombis" who work for him. On the other hand a sluggard can always explain his case understandably because whatever happens to him does so because he is bewitched. This can easily induce communities to have very little incentive to work hard. Every misfortune is given a spiritual cause beyond the victim's control. This can finally instil and encourage a spirit of accepting whatever happens as God's will.

### **3.4.3 Respect for elderly people**

The Vhavenda world-view encourages a deep respect for elderly people, who are referred to as those who brought us into the world. One's parents are one's *Vhadzimu* (gods) because they gave one life. Respect for the elderly has led to a not very open way of talking with the elderly and finally has turned to include all forms of conversations with the elderly and with strangers. This has led to giving "wrong answers" to people who ask questions, especially if they are foreigners.

### **3.4.4 Vhuloi (sorcery)**

*Vhuloi* forms a very important consideration in the world-view of Vhavenda people. The following example quoted by Davidson (1969:121) helps to explain it.

Fifteen Africans - twelve men and three women - have been jailed after being found guilty at Fort Victoria of having eaten the body of an African baby after

opening up his grave ... In statements said to have been made to the police the accused said: "We are witches and this is the food of witches."

This statement by Davidson introduces us to *Vhuloi* (sorcery), a superstition which to many Westerners is prescientific. It was thought that science would eradicate *vhuloi* completely. The resurgence of Satanism in Europe and elsewhere in highly developed countries simply proves that *vhuloi* seems to be part and parcel of human living.

Another example is an incident that happened in Europe in the eighties and is taken from a police report of the account given by a seven-year old child who had been abused (Brown 1987:212):

I remember going with my father to a man's apartment. He wanted to buy a woman. I thought my father was good because he did not sell me ... When she (the mother) came into the room, they made her take her clothes off and lie on the table. She started screaming when they tied her up. She screamed a lot ... My mother held my arms and made me cut her wrist with a razor blade. They killed her ... They would toast the Devil with blood. Usually they would take the heart out and offer it to the Devil to be blessed. They would always push a piece of the heart in my mouth.

To me, it is obvious that Africa does not need to make any apology to Europe for beliefs in magic, sorcery and anything connected with the supernatural. In Africa witchcraft fears have increase over the past decades.

According to Davidson (1969:128), witchcraft is believed to be the "natural exercise of evil" by persons who are possessed by a malevolent but innate power which can be used to hurt other people. On the other hand, Davidson (1969:128) defines sorcery as the "unnatural exercise of evil by anyone who may wish to draw upon the power of evil". You practice sorcery as an ordinary person and not a witch. This is achieved by applying to a specialist in the casting of spells or else by casting spells yourself.

According to Van Rooy (1971:24), sorcery is believed to be the cause of misfortune, accidents, sickness, death, barrenness, failure at school and impotence. *Muloi* (a witch in Tshivenda though others may use the term “sorcerer” for *muloi*), becomes the most feared and hated creature of all.

The diviners are held in high esteem since they are the ones who divine those who are and those who are not *muloi*. With the coming of the Zionist churches, some “prophets” equally point out *vhaloi*, especially after praying for a demonized person and the *thuri* (spirits) have been expelled from the person. There are different versions of *vhuloi*, like cursing people, using magical drugs from *nanga* (a specialist of sorcery), night witchcraft using owls and *thuri* (striped mongoose), and being used by evil as *tshivhimbili* (a male witch who roams around at night destroying people’s lives). A belief like this, whether proven or not, leaves its adherents in a state of fear, which, in fact, aptly describes a number of Vhavenda. This fear drives them to seek for protection. Consequently, it is very difficult to find an atheist amongst Vhavenda. For personal, family or business survival, a Muvenda must lean on something or someone supernatural. Much of the literature examined in this study reflects this kind of battle in the lives of Vhavenda. *Nanga* and *Mungome* (a traditional doctor and a diviner) are specialists who are looked at as having the authority to help people in their fight with forces that negate and harass them. They are therefore the chief enemies of the witches.

### **3.4.5 The covenant between the chief and the people**

The practice of respect reaches its peak in the relationship between *khosi* (chief or king) and his subjects in the Tshivenda culture. The *khosi* represents the ancestors. He is the pivotal point of the life force of the tribe. Religious veneration is paid to important chiefs. There is a covenant relationship between a chief and his subjects.

The chief is expected to act as an intercessor for his tribe. When his power, prestige and wealth increase, the people are blessed by it and vice versa. The chief acts as a priest to his tribe. An interesting conversation between King Makhado and Michael

Buys shows the pivotal role played by Vhavenda kings of old. Michael Buys was trying to introduce a white missionary to Makhado (Ndou 1993:15),

*"Wat wil hy hê"? het hy (Makhado), aan Michael gevra.*

(*"What does he want?" Makhado asked Michael Buys.*)

*"Hy wil vir jou bid", was Buys se antwoord.*

(*"He wants to pray for you", was the answer.*)

*"Vir my bid? Weet hy dan nie dat ek self as godheid intree vir my volk by Nwari (God) nie?*

(*"Does he want to pray for me? Doesn't he know that I am the one who intercedes for my people before Nwali?"*)

The *khosi* is so respected that a special language is used to describe his activities. He is addressed in an impersonal way (Van Rooy 1971:28). *"Kha hu zwiwe"* instead of *"kha vha ambe"* ("let there be message" instead of "let your grace speak"). Because of this covenant, the chief should attend faithfully to his official duties and not give priority to his private affairs. He should deal promptly with the cases of the people and should always consult counsellors and seek advice from men of recognized standing.

Van Rooy (1971:28) points out that on the other hand, the people reciprocate by bringing beer and providing labour for the chiefs' fields for in Tshivenda, *Khosi ndi vhalanda* or *Khosi ndi khosi nga vhalanda* (A chief is his/her subjects or a chief is a chief through his subjects). The chief prays in the *thevhula* ceremonies to get favours from the gods to bless the royal family.

#### **3.4.6 Life and death**

Vhavenda have a strong belief in life. Life is so treasured that every available means will be tried to maintain the life of a person. To them, death is unnatural and evil even to an old, sickly person. So, when someone dies, they usually search for a spiritual cause for that death. This is done by soliciting the services of a *mungome* (diviner) who, through his sacred bones, is expected to inform them the cause of such a

misfortune.

When a person finally dies, they tend to agree that *madi a tevhuwa o tevhuwa ha kumbelwi* (When the water gets spilled you cannot gather it again) (Ndou 1993:54). The Vhavenda do not believe in the complete extinction of a person's spirit but in the continuity of life after death. When a person dies the Vhavenda say:

*A hu tshe na muthu.*

(The person is no longer there.)

The body is no longer regarded as a person. According to Ndou (1993:57), that is why the corpse is referred to as *tshitumbu* derived from *thumba*, which is a miniature house.

To Vhavenda, death is not a total annihilation of a person but is regarded as a bridge through which one crosses to the world beyond. After burial, the dead are not totally forgotten, the living keep contact with their living dead. Ndou (1993:104) cites Mbiti, who endorses this understanding as an African way of understanding death. "The basic notion of the next world is found in all African societies, as far as one knows. It is the hereafter beyond physical death. This is pictured exclusively in materialistic terms which make that world more or less carbon copy of the present."

## CHAPTER 4

### EARLY MISSIONARY WORK IN VENDA

#### 4.1 DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH MISSION

The first mission to pay attention to Vhavenda was the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) under missionary MacKidd, who founded the first mission station for the Blacks of Soutpansberg in 1863. This was called Goedgedacht (Nemudzivhadi 1980:6). The work was extended to cover the Buys community and some white folk. On 20 October 1863 MacKidd opened a school, which happened to be the first school in Venda. It was unfortunate that at the end of the year he died and was succeeded by Stephanus Hofmeyr in 1864, who later removed the mission station to Kranspoort. Hofmeyr was on friendly terms with Madzhie, the *khotsi munene* (uncle) of both King Ramavhoya and King Ramabulana. The unfortunate part of this whole mission was that it was not contextualised. Although it had come to Vhavenda, the missionaries used Northern Sotho as the language of communication since they did not know Tshivenda.

It has not yet been established whether Mutshaeni had already started with his church service in a cave at Tshiheeni when missionary MacKidd founded the Goedgedacht Mission station. Mutshaeni is reported as having been converted to the Christian faith while being in the southern colonies, where, according to Mathivha (1985:43), he was baptized by the Reverend James Allison of the Wesleyan mission.

The Kranspoort work was severely affected by the wars between the Boers and King Makhado. The DRC did tremendous work in 1956 when one of their missionaries, Dr Nico Smith, founded Tshilidzini Mission, which has grown into a big hospital and an effective church next to the hospital.

## 4.2 THE BERLIN MISSIONARY SOCIETY

German nationalism was equally behind the drive for colonisation and the idea of mission in Germany had a strong “volk” concept. German colonialism, expressed by the slogan “only German missionaries for German colonies”, came later than the British or the Spanish. It became a reality in 1885 and exploded on to the scene within a short time (Bosch 1991:308), and then disappeared suddenly. In the colonial period twelve German societies were formed for the purpose of working in German colonies. One of these was formed in East Africa by Carl Peters, who wanted mission to understand itself as a German enterprise that should serve both church and fatherland. As Bosch (1991:309) points out, it should become “mission in a national German sense” and help to educate the Colony’s “negro material” in an efficient workforce (1991:309).

On 29 February 1824, Johannes Janicke and nine other men in Germany came together with the aim of forming a new society that would help in mission work. Janicke started a theological school to train evangelists to go out and spread the gospel. At this school eighty evangelists were trained, some of whom were sent to South Africa (Mathivha 1985:35).

Janicke’s successor, August Neander and his colleagues continued the work. The Berlin Missionary Society was set up with the chief aim of helping missionaries by giving them gifts and praying for them. When the mission inspectors noticed the society’s progress, they started thinking of sending missionaries to the “heathens”. Consequently on January 1829, a seminary was opened which trained a number of missionaries who were later sent to South Africa, East Africa and China (Mathivha 1985:35).

The first five people who qualified were sent to the Cape where they were welcomed by Dr Philip, the then Superintendent of the London Missionary Society (Mathivha 1985:36). They worked amongst the Batswana. Their mission work spread to Natal and the Eastern Cape.



Work in the Transvaal started during the second half of the nineteenth century when according to Du Plessis (1911:344), "in 1860 instructions were issued by the committee in Berlin to open up a new field ... among the Swazis". This task fell to Revs. A Meresky and H Grutzner who had lately arrived in South Africa (Mathivha 1985:37). This was a second attempt at missionising the Swazis since the first attempt led by James Allison of the Wesleyan Mission ended in a tragic incident where his first converts were massacred by the chief, who suspected them of treason. After this massacre no other course open to missionary Allison but to withdraw to Natal. Thirteen years had now elapsed and Meresky and Grutzner were in high spirits, believing that their attempts would be met with success. Unfortunately, even this attempt ended in failure. The chief doubting the sincerity of their motivation and intentions. Realising that they could not continue with their work amongst the Swazis, they decided to settle among a group of the Transvaal Basotho. These were the Sothos under Chief Maleo (Mathivha 1985:37). Here where the first Transvaal Mission Stations was set up in 1860 and given the name Gerlach's Hoop, in honour of general Van Gerlach, one of the Society's directors. Great misfortune befell them while there. They were tremendously helped by the sympathies of the Boer authorities. In 1861 they were joined by two missionaries, Rev Endeman and Rev Nachtigal. Meresky, accompanied by these two missionaries, moved northwards and established another mission station among the Bapedi under chief Sekwati (1985:38). Shortly after their arrival, Chief Sekwati died and was succeeded by his son, Sekhukhune. Sekhukhune was allegedly well disposed at first towards the missionaries who had established a mission at Ga-Ratau to be followed by other mission stations at Phatametsane and Kgalatlou, but soon changed his attitude. According to Du Plessis (1911:347), the reason for this attitude was "heathen influence". Maluleke (1995:13) appears to strongly disagree. To him (1995:14), it was the biased attitude that the missionaries took, in this case siding with Mampuru who was a rival of Chief Sekhukhune, which forced the chief to reasonably doubt the integrity of their mission and motives. On top of this, according to Delius (1983:109), there was a belief "prevalent amongst Berlin missionaries that Christian advance depended on the destruction of chiefly power".

Mathivha (1985:39) states that Sekhukhune finally expelled the missionaries from his

country. In 1864, Meresky, together with two of his converts, fled, evacuating the three stations that they had opened among the Bapedi. When they were expelled in 1864, Meresky searched for a place to settle until he bought a plot where he started the mission station of Botshabelo. Here he stayed with his converts as their missionary and chief. The mission station was further morally strengthened when people from Gerlach's Hoop came to settle at Botshabelo when their mission station was closed.

The mission station entered a period of unprecedented prosperity. A good number of people attended divine service to the encouragement of the missionaries. The church building was enlarged and a school building erected, followed by a shop, a mill and a printing and book-binding department. During Meresky's time Botshabelo was the most successful and most prominent of the Berlin missions in the Transvaal.

Mathivha (1985:40) states further that during this period many other mission stations were established, including Matlala, Makapanspoort (1865), Lydenburg (1866), Modimolle, Malokong (1867), Blaauwberg (1868), Potchefstroom, Tshivhase (1872), Tshakhuma (1874) and Heidelberg (1875). During this period the Berlin Missionary Society established itself firmly in the country. Let us now consider how this society established its work amongst the Vhavenda.

#### **4.3 THE ADVENT OF MISSIONARY WORK IN VENDA**

Du Plessis (1911:349) points out that before 1872 the missionaries occupying the most northerly stations in the Transvaal, Blaauwberg and Mphome, used to undertake evangelistic tours from time to time into the regions bordering on the Limpopo.

The histories of church and school in Venda are so interwoven that it is difficult to separate them since all this work had been introduced by missionaries.

According to Mathivha (1985:41), education in Venda started as a direct result of the Great Trek as well as the discoveries of gold and diamonds in the Southern Transvaal. The gold rush exposed the Vhavenda, who flocked to these centres, to missionary

teaching and preaching. Some of them then simply knelt before the pulpit to be baptized and others took the chance of attending the "night school" for the purpose of learning the three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic).

Those who were fortunate enough to receive both baptism and an elementary knowledge of the Rs exercised considerable influence on their return, particularly on the various chiefs. According to Du Plessis (1984:54) and Mathivha (1985:42), through such influence chief Ligeigise Tshivhase, as early as 1870, started to seek missionaries to preach and teach amongst his people. Other Venda chiefs followed this procedure, which led eventually to the establishment of five major mission stations which later proliferated into numerous smaller stations.

#### **4.4 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BEUSTER MISSION (1872)**

According to Mathivha (1985:42), "Carl Beuster has without doubt contributed more than any other missionary to the upliftment of the Venda people educationally and spiritually". Carl Beuster was born on 7 July 1844 in Liebenwalde in Prussia. After training as a missionary, he was sent to the Transvaal Republic on 14 June 1870, where he first worked at Modille and Ga-Matlala in the Pietersburg district before coming to Venda. Then he was instructed to establish a mission station in Venda.

MER Mathivha (1972:11) maintains that Beuster was accompanied by Klatt whereas RN Mathivha (1985:42) says he was with Rev Stech who was given the same instruction to start a mission station. Be this as it may, the two names might be referring to the same person. On Friday, 8 November 1872 they arrived in Venda and were given a place to establish a mission station. Reverends Grutzner and Beyer went back to Matlala, leaving Beuster with Stech to commence their task among the Vhavenda.

The two missionaries found a people with a language which had a store of traditional images which had not been committed to writing. They experienced great difficulty in getting converts. The work would have gone extremely slowly had it not been for Johannes Mutshaeni, who came to their rescue. He had already become a Christian

of the Wesleyan mission while he was in Natal. With his help, Beuster was able to collect a few words for his vocabulary book, and to draw up a liturgy. Beuster took great pains in collecting words and arranging them in some order to make sentences. To do so, he employed the letters and symbols of German, his mother tongue.

Round about 1872 Beuster, with the help of some converts, started to translate the Bible into Tshivenda. He started with some chapters in Genesis. These are the earliest manuscripts in the history of the Tshivenda literature (Mathivha 1972:12).

#### **4.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF EARLY MISSIONARIES TO TSHIVENDA LITERATURE**

The missionaries played a pivotal role in the development of Tshivenda literature. Besides his work on translating the Bible, Beuster compiled the first Tshivenda reader. Assisted by Mutshaeni and some converts, he also rendered extracts from the Bible, various Psalms and children's songs. The children's songs, still used today, are included in the *Nyimbo dza vhatendi na vhana* (Songs of Christians and children), published by the Berlin Mission Society (Mathivha 1985:43).

During these formative years, David Denge came and settled at the mission station. He was followed by Paulus Luvhengo from Modimolle who also settled at the mission station. A school for children was begun with Beuster's step-daughter. A child of Johannes and a child of Paul Luvhengo were the first enrolled pupils (1985:44). Although people were baptized during the early years, the outbreak of a smallpox epidemic and the subsequent death of David Denge and Johannes Mutshaeni forced many to withdraw (Mathivha 1985:44).

When the work at Maungani was firmly established, several outstations were established at places like Tshififi in 1881, Mbilwi in 1886, Thengwe in 1887 and also at Mandala in 1894. The church building was subsequently enlarged and a new school built.

According to Mathivha (1972:13), the first part of the Bible to be translated and

published by Beuster, was the Gospel according to St John. Its title was *Evangelii nga Yohane na dziepistola dza Yohannes na dzipsalme na dzimoe dzo khetheaho nga tsewenda*. (The Gospel and epistles according to John and some selected Psalms in Tshivenda.) This is the first book in Tshivenda. The orthography was either influenced by Pedi or the Lepsius orthography. The Pedi influence was a result of the missionaries' first having been taught Pedi before coming to Venda. Beuster's early interpreters were Pedi-speaking people.

Beuster also wrote a booklet for children called *Spelboek ea Tsewenda* in 1899 (Mathivha 1972:14). This became the first book printed as a schoolbook for Vhavenda. It is the first school reader ever written in Tshivenda for use in schools.

The task of committing Tshivenda to writing was continued by the two Schwellnus brothers, Theodor and Paul and their sister, Mrs Giesekke (1980:1). At this time their father, Rev E Schwellnus, had already founded the second mission station for the Berlin Missionary Society at Tshakhuma in 1874 (Mathivha 1985:47; Mathivha 1972:15).

Rev E Schwellnus was followed by his two sons, Theodor and Paul, as missionaries. These two were born in Venda and grew up with the language as a means of communication in their daily lives (Mathivha 1972:15). They helped in the phonetic and phonological analysis of Tshivenda, which made C. Meinhof's task of compiling Tshivenda speech sound simple as he explained it in an article he called "Das Tsivenda", published in 1901 (Mathivha 1972:16). In this article, Tshivenda orthography was changed to what it is more or less today.

The beginning of 1902 saw the birth of *Katehisma Duku ea Dr Martin Luther*, (The little Chatechism of Dr Martin Luther) which was published and used in the training of the new converts and also as a book to be read by Christians (Mathivha 1972:16).

In 1904 the Schwellnus brothers, Theodor and Paul, published a book entitled *Die Verba Des Tsivenda*, which was a list of collected Tshivenda verbs. This book made

the learning of Tshivenda simple (Mathivha 1972:20). According to Mathivha (1972:20), the book was a valuable contribution to Tshivenda literature because it enabled the missionaries to build up a Tshivenda vocabulary. The book also made it possible for the early missionaries to translate extracts from the Bible.

In 1911 another important development took place in the history of Tshivenda literature. A book entitled, *Mikanzwo Ya Vhuswa ha Vhutshilo Ya Maduvha a Murena Othe a Nwaha* was published in Berlin (Mathivha 1972:20). According to Mathivha (1972:23) the book standardised the written form of Tshivenda as far as religious literature was concerned.

In 1913 another publication of Beuster's, *Nyimbo Dzo Khetheaho Dza Vhatendi na Dza Vana Va Tsiwenda*, appeared (Mathivha 1972:23). It was followed in 1918 by *Ndede Ya Luambo Lwa Tshivenda*, written by Theodor Schwellnus. The book furthered the cause of the new orthography. In the same year an important book was published entitled *Mafhungo a Buguni ya Mudzimu*, which was a translation "probably by E D Giesecke" (Mathivha 1972:23). It contains extracts from the Bible, both the Old and the New Testament. The stories are so arranged that they are fit to be read by both young and old. According to Mathivha (1972:25), the book could have been included as a school reader. Its passages are in the form of short stories written in simple prose which can be read without difficulty. "Some of the passages are so good that they may be committed to memory. Some of them are in the form of short essays which helped the Venda readers to develop their abilities as far as writing an essay is concerned (Mathivha 1972:25).

In 1919 Theodor and Paul Schwellnus published *Wörterverzeichnis der Venda - Sprache*, in which German nouns and words are given with their Tshivenda equivalents (Mathivha 1972:25).

In 1923 another translation appeared entitled *Evangelii na Mishumo Ya Vhaapostola* (1972:26), followed later by a translation of the New Testament. Immediately after this in 1924 the Modern Lutheran Venda hymn book entitled *Nyimbo Dza Vhatendi* by Paul

Schwellnus was published. The hymn book is rich in pure Tshivenda with a poetic flavour of its own. For instance, hymn 152:

*Vhuhwavho hau ndi vhuhulu,  
Ndi dzivha li sa gumiho.  
Ho ela hu tshi bva tadulu;  
Ndi nnyi a sa vhu vhoniho?  
Nne ndi vhuvhona thungo dzothe,  
Ndi do di renda, thi fhidzi.  
Mishumo yau hothe-yothe  
Ndi tshilidzi na tshilidzi*

(Your goodness is great,  
It is an unfathomable lake  
It flowed from heaven;  
Who doesn't see it?

I see it all around,  
I will praise without ending,  
Everything about your deeds,  
Which are grace upon grace.)

This hymnal has served to spread missionary Christianity perhaps more effectively and more lastingly than any other work of art so far written or composed. Some of the hymns were very polemical and anti-African traditions. An example here is hymn 38 verse 2 (1976:31):

*Shango la Venda, Midzimu ya kale ndi swiswi.  
Ro phuphudzika ri tshi nga dzinngu dzi sa liswi.  
Hee Vhavenda!  
Ri pf: Vha-fela nnda  
Ngeno Mutshidzi e hone?*

(Land of Venda, your ancient gods are darkness.  
 We grope like sheep without a shepherd  
 Hee Vhavenda!  
 We are called: those-dying-outside  
 When a Saviour is there.)

The hymn book improved the singing of the whole of Venda, especially Venda Lutheran Services.

In 1927 Endemann (Mathivha 1972:30) published *Midzimu Ya Malombo*. In this book it becomes very clear that Vhavenda use the word *mudzimu* for a spirit or an ancestor. An extract from this booklet could assist us here:

*Musi vha tshi thoma u tshina, ndi uri ha lwala muthu.  
 Vha mu alafha, vha vhona, a sa fholi, vha ya thanguni.  
 Mudzia thangu a vha vhudza uri : U na mudzimu wa malambo.*

(When they start a ritualistic dance it is because someone is sick.  
 If they treat him and find him incurable they go to a diviner, the diviner will tell them, he has a mudzimu of malambo).

In 1930 Paul Schwellnus published his *Mudededzi 1* (Mathivha 1972:34). In the same year another hymn book by F.H. Burk *Phalaphala Ya Mafhungo Madifha* was published (Burk 1930:1). It is a collection of Venda hymns from other translations in Zulu and English hymn books. Its first hymn has greatly influenced the Pentecostal churches.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1.     <i>Yesu ndi dzina lavhudi</i><br/>              <i>La Murwa-Mudzimu</i><br/>              <i>Li a difha dzindevheni</i><br/>              <i>Dza vha mu tendaho tendaho</i></p> | <p>3.     <i>Dzina heli li na maanda</i><br/>              <i>A kanukisaho</i><br/>              <i>Na vhane vha vhaaisala</i><br/>              <i>Vha nga fhodzwa ngalo</i></p> |
| <p>(Jesus, the name that is good</p>  | <p>(This name has Power,</p>  |



of the Son of God  
It is sweet to the ears  
life of those who believe.)

Power that is surprising,  
Even those who are sick  
Can be healed by it.)

2. *Ndi dzina li takadzaho*  
*Vhana vha Mudzimu*  
*Li a vha vhofoholola-vho*  
*Vhutshinyini havho*

4. *Vho xelaho vhe swiswini*  
*vha si na vhutshilo*  
*Vha tshi pfa dzina la Yesu*  
*Vha do fhodzwa ngalo*

(It is a name that is pleasant  
The children of God.  
It also sets them free  
From their iniquity.)

(Those who are lost in darkness  
Those without life  
When they hear the name of  
Jesus,  
They will be saved by it.)

This hymnal has influenced the vocabulary of both the Pentecostal and the Charismatic Christians in Venda. They use such terms as "*vhana vha Mudzimu*" (children of God) meaning Christians, "*u tshidzwa*" (to be saved) rather than to believe. They normally pray for the sick in the name of Jesus, for in this hymn Jesus is both a Saviour and a Healer.

In 1937 the greatest publication in the history of Venda literature, the Bible, appeared, viz. *Bivhili* by P Schwellnus (Mathivha 1972:34). Here Schwellnus gave his best form of the Tshivenda idiom and revealed himself as a gifted translator. The Tshivenda used in this Bible has exerted an enormous influence on the development of Tshivenda literature and became the book of every Muvenda Christian family. According to Mathivha (1972:37), the translation awakened in the Vhavenda a love for discussing religious topics and Christianity as a form of philosophy. The philosophy of the people was challenged from the philosophy of the Bible. Up to that time, Vhavenda had only known of Nwali and Mount Matongoni and the burning city. But now they started to hear of Mudzimu and Mount Sinai and the ten commandments. The two mountains stood in opposition to each other. On Mount Matongoni, Tshilume, the voice of Nwali speaks to

the people. On Mount Sinai, it is Moses who speaks. For an average Muvenda to hear clearly the message of another mountain, Golgotha, there must be a pass between the two mountains. The missionaries did not appreciate the Vhavenda world-view with the result that they never tried to construct a pass between the two. This left the listeners of the missionary Gospel with the heavy task of placing the new message within their world-view. The social aspect of Hebrew life affected the social aspect of Vhavenda life. The polygamous marriages found in the Old Testament reinforced polygamy in the Vhavenda community and prohibited foods equally reinforced Vhalembas' (a clan amongst the Vhavenda) traditions of avoiding such foods. The Bible further reinforced Vhavenda belief in future existence. Vhavenda regard the dead as living and active in another world.

The translation of the Bible into Tshivenda crowned the written form of Tshivenda. The Bible indicates the highest stage of the development of the Tshivenda language. Moreover, the Bible stabilized Vhavenda philosophy and therefore their form of expression.

Mathivha (1972:43) summarises the importance of making Tshivenda a written language as follows:

The Missionaries of the Berlin Missionary Society sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Venda soul and the Venda language. They have built an everlasting monument which will guide the Vendas from generation to generation. The language monument will always outlast the material monument, because in the language lies those deep spiritual values of a nation which no human can subdue no matter how sternly applied.

That the translation of the Bible into the vernacular served as a vehicle for the inferior Bantu Education, should not detract us from its positive aspects in the development of Tshivenda.

## CHAPTER 5

### ECHOES OF SCRIPTURES IN TSHIVENDA LITERATURE

#### 5.1 *ZWA MULOVHA ZWI A FHELA* - MAUMELA (1963)

(Things of yesterday do come to an end)

T.N. Maumela was born in 1924 in the Sibasa district of the then Northern Transvaal (Makhado 1980:22). In 1945 he qualified as a teacher at Lemana Training Institution and in 1962 he obtained his BA degree. During this time he was the principal of Tshivhase Secondary School. In 1970 he was appointed Cultural Organiser for Vhavenda.

Maumela is considered one of the foremost authors in Tshivenda. In 1966 he won first prize in a Tshivenda competition sponsored by the former Department of Bantu Education and in 1967 "Die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns" (The South African Academy for Science and Art), awarded him the Samuel Edward Mohayi Literary Prize for Bantu Prose. The same year he also won the first prize in the Tshivenda Short Story Competition launched by Radio Bantu. In 1971 he won the first prize in a Tshivenda short story competition to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Republic of South Africa, launched by the former Department of Bantu Education. Besides a wide range of novels, he has also written extensively on Tshivenda drama, collections of short stories and a series of language manuals for use in secondary schools.

#### 5.2 THE PLOT IN A NUTSHELL

Maumela opens the first chapter with an elaborate description of Latani, Malilele's wife. Malilele works in the southern urban area and only comes home during holidays. The government policy of the migrant labour system is therefore introduced as a matter of

fact. Malilele's village is at Matshidze. It is during the olden days in Venda when springs were found in great numbers. There is a path that leads to one of the springs from Malilele's village.

Latani has a school-going child known as Vhangani. One Monday Latani takes a calabash to go and draw water at the spring. While there, she is attacked by a sudden illness. She becomes feverish and lies down. A lady comes by and offers help. She is Mukumela, a visitor to the area. She helps Latani and carries her calabash home. This is the beginning of their friendship.

Mukumela's husband, Shandukani, is at this time insane. Latani advances a love affair to Mukumela who has become her friend on behalf of her husband. Mukumela accepts the proposal and immediately Malilele is told of the proceedings and he happily accepts Mukumela as his second wife. *Dzekiso* (money paid to the bride's parents, but as she was already married, given to her former husband), is paid in respect of Mukumela and this is refunded to her former in-laws.

Mukumela is married and joins her husband in the city. Her son, Ntakusen remains with his aunt Nyadzanga. When Mukumela comes back from her husband, she gives birth to a son, called Thanyani.

The two women live together amicably until Ntakuseni, Mukumela's son, is hurt by hailstones during a severe hailstorm. Mukumela finds herself failing to accept the natural cause of the sickness. She becomes highly superstitious. The target of her superstition is her *muhadzinga*, Latani. (A *muhadzinga* is a woman married together with another to the same husband). A rift develops between the two. Latani is finally accused of witchcraft. Malilele takes sides. He believes the story of his second wife. In the end he becomes furious and expels Latani as he cannot stay with a witch. Latani and her son, Vhangani, go and stay at Maangani. Vhangani finds it extremely difficult to continue with his education because of distance and as a result goes and stays with Khakhu at Sendela. Khakhu's wife, Mudzunga, proves to be a difficult person to live with. Finally, Vhangani finds it very difficult to stay with this family and leaves schooling.

In the meantime, Malilele goes away together with his second wife and children to Hagalavhanda, in search of pastures for his stock. He contracts tuberculosis after which Mukumela deserts him and returns to her former husband, who has now regained sanity. During this time his son, Vhangani is now an ambulance driver at Gulukunwe Hospital. He is given instructions to go and fetch a patient at Hagalavhanda. Vhangani is shocked to find that the patient is his own father. His mother doesn't want to see him. Malilele eventually dies in hospital.

### 5.3 LOOKING AT THE CHARACTERS

#### 5.3.1 Shandukani - the Gadarene maniac

In this novel, Maumela seeks to console, comfort and even teach the central principle that bad times do come to an end. He succeeds in doing this through a portrayal of different characters which revolve around one central main character, Malilele. Other junior characters include characters like Shandukani, Mukumela's husband. Shandukani is introduced by Latani in the following manner (1996:34):

*Vha vhona munna muvhira wa tshika muvhili wothe, a dovha a ambara zwiambaro zwa madzhakantana, zwine muthu a nga ri zwi bva tshitumbani tsha nguluvhe, o ima tshidavhini tshi re hafhala kule na ndila ino ine vha khou tshimbila khayoy, duvha li sa fhisiz zwone thovhela, muthada l tshi khou sokou semana l yothe, l tshi re ... "Zwino Hangwani ri do ri o tshinya ngani, hafhu o vha nea Khethani. Hela! Ndi ri musadzi ndo tou mala nga madana mavhili a Rannda."*

(She saw a young man full of dirt covering his whole body. On top of this he was putting on tattered clothes as if coming from a pig sty. He was standing in the sun, which was excruciatingly hot. He was cursing alone saying, "What fault will we give to Hangwani since he gave them Khethani! Look here, I have paid R200 for my wife." )

Such a character reminds one of the Gadarene maniac in the New Testament. From this description it is very clear that Mukumela could not stay with such a person. He is beside himself, completely out of touch with reality. Shandukani was equally very violent. The day he came to Latani, after hearing that his wife had eloped with Malilele, he threatened Latani saying (1963:35):

*Ndi khou toda u nwa malofha a musadzi wanga Mukumela.. Mudzumbululeni ni mu dise fhano. Ohoo! Na sa mu disa nguvha ndi a ni fhedza nothe nga ngwengo."*

(I want to drink my wife Mukumela's blood. Bring her out to me. If you don't bring her to me, I am going to finish you all with my weapon.)

Latani, together with the children, ran away and found a hiding place. Shandukani took siege of the whole home of Latani. He could be seen going in and out and making fire. Latani could not even get help from the Mukoma (a chief's henchman responsible for administering justice in a local area under his jurisdiction), who was deeply perturbed by the way Malilele had invaded someone's family because of problems he couldn't solve. In Tshivenda culture, *Vhapengo* (mad people) remain people who are accommodated in the community. The next day they were seen going to the police who also could not offer help because they were of the opinion that the issue was not very serious. In the meantime, Shandukani had become very destructive. He slaughtered a goat. Malilele had to come to get him out of his home. Mukumela is depicted as having finally got a responsible husband. Her times of turmoil have come to a standstill. For Shandukani things look gloomy and uneventful. Or were they? Don't evil days also come to an end? In the end Shandukani gets well and gets his wife back. So the Gadarene maniac also gets healed and becomes sober again.

### **5.3.2 Mukumela - the opportunist lady**

Mukumela is depicted as an opportunist woman. She got married to a husband who finally became insane. Such a rosy future was interrupted by a series of painful events

which led her to leave her husband. The author gives us a glimpse of her suffering under Shandukani (1963:20):

*Shandukani ndi u mbo di ri iwe Mukumela thetshela u zwi pfe nga dzifeisi, na nga mipundu na nga thoho, a mbo di ri hwiri fhasi muthu wa vhathu ...*

(Shandukani started to give a series of blows to Mukumela, which were followed by kicks and banging her head until she fell down. )

When Mukumela left her marriage, it was meant for good. Her meeting with Latani brought untold changes in her life. As already outlined, when they met at the spring, a new lease of life was presented to her. Her hopelessness ended when she became Malilele's second wife. Latani is not jealous at all in having Mukumela as Malilele's second wife. These were some of the "Christian virtues" found in traditional non-Christian cultures on which Missionary Christianity should have been built. From now on, Mukumela started to enjoy family life and totally forgot her former miseries.

### **5.3.3 Malilele: Belief in witchcraft is catastrophic**

Malilele is introduced to us when his star is shining (1963:15):

*Munna wa lidzhidzhiriba ane a tou vha tshone tshinada nga vhusili.*

(A strong hefty man who is the embodiment of toughness itself).

If one compares this description with the one the author makes before his death, one realises the impact of the theme "Yesterday's events also come to an end" (1963:84):

*Khuuvha muthu o onda o fhelela,  
O no tou ita na u swifhalelwa,  
U fema ha hone hu u tou dakaila,  
Mato o no tou gobela.*

(The poor fellow is lean to the marrow; He has become black. When he breathes, he does so with great difficulty. Latani equally believed that Malilele was bewitched. )

Malilele got himself into a cultural marital problem by taking a second wife. Although his first wife had no problem with this second marriage, the marriage itself proved to be disastrous. When the two women experienced problems, Malilele sided with the second wife. His love for his first wife was ebbing away fast. Even Vhangani was affected by the problems of his father and his mother.

Malilele believed his wife had bewitched Mukumela's child (1963:71). Mukumela also believes her husband has been bewitched and says:

*Ngauro a si vhone, kha vha kundwe vha tshi tou vha vhou tou tou tatshilelwa.*

(Since it is not you doing this. You are probably under the influence of an evil spirit.)

Further on she talks like a Christian person (1963:71):

*Fhedzi vha divhe-ha zwauro Mudzimu a si nwana.*

*Linwe duvha zwila u a rwa muthu nga thamu."*

(You should equally know that God is not a child. One day He might punish you.)

Latani's words betray her understanding of reality in a non-Western way. She seems to believe in witchcraft and also in the power of God. To her, one does not have to choose one or the other as the Western missionaries have taught. To her, both realities call for her attention and understanding with a sense of commitment to both.

Through this incident, Maumela shows us the other side of Malilele. He is hard and lacks human feelings. His days are equally numbered for what is left is that his second wife will desert him to be picked up by Vhangani, the child he now rejects. He will be in a sickly position that leads to his untimely death. "*Ha! Zwa mulovha zwi a fhela!*" (Yes, our yesterdays come to an end.)



His death evokes some questions to the reader. Is this death not a result of his belief in traditional medicine rather than in Western medicine? Is the author not here passing judgement on traditional medicine that it cannot heal? This appears to be so. Malilele dies quickly believing that he is bewitched. He is tied up in his belief in the traditional non-Western medicine.

Since African religion doesn't separate healing from worship, Malilele's negative attitude towards Western medicine is also his attitude towards Western religion. Malilele's calculated attitude towards Western medicine is representative of Black people's attitude towards both missionary hospitals and missionary churches. They would tend to doubt the effectiveness of Western medicine, especially because it is separated from their faith. For a person with a holistic view of life, it is very difficult to separate healing from religion. If there is an area where Missionary Christianity failed Blacks, it is here.

#### **5.3.4 Latani becomes a victim of her cultural beliefs and practice**

As Malilele's first wife, Latani is responsible for getting a second wife for her husband. Her character is depicted as flawless except that Maumela makes her a victim of her own culture. She stays with her husband in a jovial mood until a second wife comes to turn the tables around. This signals the end of her long honeymoon. Former good days come to a sudden halt. Her husband, who until now had been a source of joy, is turned into her great tormentor. Her great days in her family have come to an end. Never will she enjoy the love and laughter of a person called a husband: "*Zwa mulovha zwo fhela.*" (Her yesterday has also come to an end.)

#### **5.3.5 Vhangani, the strong**

With Vhangani, Malilele's son, the adage, "tough times never last but tough people do", becomes a reality. His life begins in a family of great stability and progress. At school he is seen to be co-operative and industrious. At home he has respect and a sense of

responsibility. All these are interfered with when his father finally separated himself from his mother and him. The past gets further from him. He lands in a world of great want and of being unwanted himself. His future becomes dim and doubtful. He lives as an ambulance driver. His tough times end here.

## 5.4 ANY WESTERN MISSIONARY FLAVOUR?

Although not written as a religious book, Maumela's book is a master parable on its own. It unravels the deep-seated cultural webs that make it simple or difficult for the Vhavenda to understand Western Christianity because of such a major difference in the world-view of both the missionaries and the Vhavenda. The following observations should be noted.

### 5.4.1 Traditional Vhavenda culture

Maumela passes a verdict on old Vhavenda cultural ways of living. Latani suffers because of her commitment to the traditional understanding of a prosperous family. As Malilele's first wife, she takes it as her duty to find a second wife for her husband. Rather than bring in more joy as was her desire, this brought complicated conflicts which ended only when she was chased away.

Maumela describes the way they were living before she was chased away in a dramatic manner (1963:58):

*Zwino kutshilele kwa afha mudini ha vha hu uri a ku tsha divhalea. Kwa mbo di vha kwonokula kwa musu vhahadzinga vho no dzula mudini hu si na u andana vhukati havho, ho no vuwa nndwa yamato nga vhusili.*

(From that time life in this family became unpleasant. It became the type of situation where *vhahadzinga* (women who share the husband) are staying together without any understanding amongst them, with raging fires of the cold war of the eyes.)

It is clear that Latani suffers because of her traditional upbringing. She wants to be a good Muvenda wife. She ends up badly hurt.

In this way, Maumela shows us the undesirability of continuing a practice like this which results in such human misery. He is here echoing the same missionary tune of monogamy as the biblical model of Christian marriage.

#### 5.4.2 Traditional medicine

Maumela seems to be preaching against traditional medicine in favour of missionary ones. Ntakuseni gets sick because of being severely injured by hailstones. Both Latani and Mukumela could realise this. Unfortunately, the traditional healer's diagnosis does not bring this to bear.

Ntakuseni is said to have *tshithavhi* (pains) and shivering spells. They are advised not to send him to a hospital (1963:53) because

*Makhuwa a vha koni u tshi elela.*

(Whites cannot cure *tshithavhi*).

So a traditional healer was brought. Mukumela was further told to swallow (take) some more medicine at the "healer's" home. When she comes back, she is seen to be completely changed. She no longer wants to talk to Latani. Latani finds out that she is implicated in Ntakuseni's sickness. Mukumela's elder sister suggests that the child be taken to a hospital, but Mukumela refuses because her husband, Malilele, does not like white doctors. He is a person of firm belief in traditional medicine. He easily believes that his former wife is responsible for Ntakuseni's sickness. Maumela doesn't tell us how Ntakuseni got healed. However, he does succeed in making us doubt the effectiveness of traditional medication.

### 5.4.3 Witchcraft

The book treats witchcraft as a fact of life. When Malilele alleges that his first wife was bewitching Ntakuseni, his married daughter replies (1963:69):

*Aiwa zwi si dine, kha ri thome u bva na ha vha mme anga ri ye thanguni,  
uri rine-vho ri tou zwi pfa-vho nga dzashu ndevhe.*

(All right, let this not trouble us, let us first go to a diviner with my mother so that we can hear it with our own ears.)

Malilele does not consent to this. He finally evicts them from his home because, according to him, Latani was bewitching Ntakuseni. When he himself finally gets sick, he spends two years suffering and consulting one traditional healer after another until (1963:84):

*thundu yothe na thakha zwi tshi fhela*

(All he possessed was exhausted.)

Whereas the traditional healers fail to diagnose the sickness, Vhangani, who himself is not a doctor, can diagnose it as TB. In this way Maumela succeeds in making us doubt the ability of traditional healers to cure. On the other hand, he makes us develop a strong positive attitude toward missionary medicine. A belief in missionary doctors will imply taking witchcraft as a figment of a derailed mind.

### 5.4.4 'Twilight faith?'

Here the author documents a state of 'twilight faith'. Maumela does not bother himself with neatly dividing what is Christian and non-Christian. Latani, who for all intentions and purposes is introduced to us as a Muvenda wife, who strongly believes

in traditional medicine to tame one's husband, also appears to believe in the missionary concept of God. Her last words (1963:71) to her husband are very revealing of this:

*A vho ngo loiwa nga nne vhone who tou liswa gaputshete. Ndi ri a si vhone, vhone ndi a vha divha ... Fhedzi vha divhe-ha zwauri Mudzimu a si nwana. Linwe duvha zwila u a rwa muthu nga thamu.*

(You have not been bewitched by me but you have been made to eat *gaputshete*, (swallow and be quiet). I say it is not you for I know you ... But you should know that God is not a child. One day He might punish you.)

Although an ardent believer in traditional religion and medicine, Malilele nevertheless also has faith in the Western missionary God. When he was in hospital he said (1963:86) to his son, "My son, I am meditating about where I must go and stay if God helps me and I get out of this place."

#### **5.4.5 The strong become weak and the humble are exalted**

The parable contained in this novel is very revealing especially viewed from a socio-political point of view. Malilele, as shown above, is strong and unbending. He is well-to-do and influential. On the other hand, his first wife and child are weak and poor. But this does not carry on forever, for a time comes when the strong Malilele becomes weak and vulnerable. The weak Vhangani and his mother, Latani, become strong and influential. Is Maumela giving us a parable on how strong and oppressive social institutions will finally be rendered weak and powerless? Is he comforting the weak and the powerless with the knowledge that God does punish the mighty and the strong? Is he reminding the strong and oppressive that their days are numbered? An answer to all these questions cannot be guaranteed with clear honesty and objectivity. Suffice it to say that Maumela succeeds in teaching us to believe that we all have a future even though our present state might not be rosy. Those whose present position is strong and domineering should not take it for granted that it will remain so. That was the lot of the Blacks in the sixties when this novel was written. Maumela seems to bring a word of

comfort that *zwa mulovha zwi a fhela* (days of yesterday will come to an end).

## 5.5 ELELWANI ("REMEMBER") (MAUMELA 1954)

### 5.5.1 Plot in a nutshell

Old Ratshihule, a chief of Makovheni, is interested in taking another wife. The marriage is pre-arranged by the parents of Elelwani, without her consent. To Elelwani's parents this is a royal privilege they should never miss. There is no doubt that parents whose daughters had the privilege of getting married to chiefs or headmen were the happiest because they were eventually able to earn the respect of other members of the community, if not the entire land. The custom is given as a matter of fact with no hint that it could be resisted since other African tribes practise it (1954:6).

Maumela then introduces Vele who poses as an embodiment of the modern belief among the African people that the youth should be left to blunder alone in their love affairs. Elelwani doesn't love Ratshihule for she has fallen in love with Vele. When asked by her father, she flatly says:

*Nna huufha ndo di vha vhudza na kale zwaure thi funi havho Vho-Ratshihule  
vhane vha khou nkombetshedza khavho*

(I told you long ago that I don't love this Ratshihule you want me to marry.)

Her father, on the other hand, cannot accept this.

*Inwi arali ni nwana wanga ni do ya. Ndi hone ndo amba zwenezwo.*

(If you are my child, you will go! I have spoken.)

When Vele meets Elelwani, they try to plan to stay together but fail to come to any agreement. Elelwani refuses to elope with Vele because she fears her father. Finally,

Ratshihule sends people who finally prevail even though Elelwani tries to delay at first. Elelwani finds herself married to Ratshihule. Ratshihule, realising that his dreams have matured, loves Elelwani more than all his other wives. Elelwani is equally faithful. The Chief gives her the responsibility of handling the keys and also looking after the finances of the house.

While things were like this, the tide turned against Elelwani. One morning Ratshihule was greeted with terrible omens just next to his house. There was a dead owl and an earthenware jug full of blood that had already coagulated together with some black substance strewn round it (1954:31). This caused such a terrible fear that Ratshihule sent for *Maine* Netshitopeni, a traditional healer, who advised that a *mungome*, a sorcerer with the power of divination, should be called. The team of three who are sent to get the *mungome*, are struck by malaria and finally die.

When the Chief wanted to send another delegation, there was nobody ready to risk his life. Finally one of the Chief's counsellors advised the Chief to settle for a Zionist diviner and prophet, who was equally good but not far away. The Zionist preacher referred to, who in the meantime became a Zionist pastor, finally comes. It was Vele whom Elelwani did not recognise because of his robes. When the time of "prophecy" came, Elelwani was pointed out as a witch. The Chief got rid of her. She landed in Vele's hands. They finally got married.

### **5.5.2 Important issues that have a bearing on Missionary Christianity**

#### **5.5.2.1 *Tshivenda culture before the coming of Western civilisation***

Traditionally Tshivenda culture was bound together by important institutions. In this novel, Maumela (1954) shows us that the Tshivenda culture was intact before the coming of missionary Christianity. Maumela paints a picture of the African traditional life with its joys, conflicts and sorrows. Marriage was an important institution, which was administered by elderly people. The fact that both Elelwani and Vele can no longer see this in a positive manner clearly shows that a paradigm shift was taking place. Maumela

does succeed well to show us other important institutions like *dzunde* (communal working to assist the chief), *davha* (communal working to help others), *vhunanga* (doctors) and *vhuhosi* (diviners). All institutions held the African communities together. In Elelwani, both Elelwani's parents (1954:11) and Chief Ratshihule represent the old Venda culture, which they are keen to maintain. Vele, the spoiler, represents the new wave that sees things differently.

#### 5.5.2.2 *Christianity as a myth*

Maumela has succeeded in portraying missionary Christianity as a destructive and unreal religion. The morning that Ratshihule observes some blood that has coagulated inside an earthenware vessel, he is frightened. At the same time the incident highlights specifically the most important religious ceremonies and beliefs of these people. Maumela is subtle in introducing the new religion, which suddenly comes into conflict with the traditional religion and a way of life of the people. The new religion comes with Vele, the spoiler.

The spoiler is a pastor known far and near because of his divination and praying for the sick (1954:45). He is recommended to Chief Ratshihule by Vhakoma Nemavhulani. Ratshihule equally gets interested in him not so much as a man following a new religion but because through whatever power Vele has, he will be helped. So even Ratshihule does not regard it as wrong to use something you don't believe in as long as you can get what you want.

This is a problem that Western missionaries could not easily discern. The preacher is portrayed as a real Zionist. He seems to have a fair knowledge of scriptures. Maumela comments (1954:49) on his intelligence, saying, *Ene Mufunzi wa hone a si u thanya*. (The pastor appears intelligent).

His preaching (1954:55) reveals that he knows some basic doctrines on judgement, repentance and hell:



*Vhafunwa vha Mudzimu, divhani zwa uri vhutshilo ha nama vhu a fhela musi ri tshi fa. Fhedzi-ha vhunga Yesu Khristo o kunda lufu, na rine zwino arali ra tevhela ene, ra funa Ene, ra di nekedza kha Ene, ra fulufhela Ene na u tevhedza ndaela dzawe dzothe, na rine ri do kunda-vho.*

(Know that our fleshly life ends when we die. As Jesus defeated death, if we follow Him, and are dedicated to Him, we also shall overcome death. If we love Him, and are dedicated to Him, we also shall overcome.)

Likewise he speaks about repentance and baptism. These are themes that are very relevant in missionary Christianity. It is highly unthinkable that the spoiler does not believe that, whatever he says about these. The spoiler seems to have gathered both the vocabulary, its logic and even his prayer mannerism only to get what he needed. When Elelwani is pointed out as a witch, she goes back home. On meeting Vele, she learns that he was the one who was behind her coming back. At this stage Elelwani asks a question (1954:59):

*Zwa vhuzioni ni kha di ita na?*

(Are you still following the Zionist movement?)

*Hai, ndo zwi litsha. Ndi kha di zwi itelani ndo no wana zwe nda vha ndi tshi khou lila zwone.*

(No, I have abandoned it. Why should I do it when I have already got what I need?)

The answer is shocking to say the least. Maumela sees the value of Christianity as only in what people wish to get. To Vele, the whole religion (ie, Christianity) is a play enacted on the stage. The Christian God is not accorded any status above the traditional gods that Ratshihule and his subjects worship and revere. The response to Vele's preaching is not known. Maumela does not seem to think that this is important since to him, Missionary Christianity is a fantasy.

### 5.5.2.3 *A plea for a contextual faith*

Matshinyise, the spoiler, is portrayed coming to the Chief's headquarters with a group of his disciples or members (1954:49). He is wearing his priestly garment - white with three crosses, two at the back and one big one in front. He is not different in this attire from the Ulu's priest, who is described by Achebe, quoted by Kalu in his article, *The Priest/Artist tradition in Achebe's Arrow of God* (1994:59). His movements during his service are those of a sangoma. He teaches the congregation to participate in his saying "Amen" (1954:50).

It looks like Maumela is pleading for a contextual faith amongst the Vhavenda if Vhavenda have to take the Christian faith seriously. He is pleading for a religion that takes account of a people's way of life, a religion that recognises beauty in other people's culture. Such a religion is decorated and smeared with the people's culture.

The reason why both Nemavhulani and Chief Ratshihule find Matshinyise's service interesting and appealing, is that it is clothed in their culture and aims at addressing their fears. For that reason, they see it as a relevant religion. Matshinyise's god does not threaten them unnecessarily. They can even join his disciples in saying "Amen" as he preaches. This is the way Maumela conveys the importance of a contextual faith. It is not very clear whether Maumela thinks witchcraft should be addressed by the Church or not. Here Maumela makes one point that witchcraft, although feared and considered evil, is but a figment of human thinking. What frightens the Chief is what Matshinyise did in order to get the woman he loved. To the Chief, this is a very fearful omen but to Matshinyise it is just a thought-out plan to get what he needs. It stands to reason whether witchcraft is as simple as Maumela portrays it here. But, on the other hand, it is equally very impressive of Maumela to have made Matshinyise's faith seem to be fighting against "the evil of the community".

### 5.5.2.4 *The position of the two religions*

The author puts the two religions on the same level. Chief Ratshihule seems to

personify Venda in all its buoyance before it was pulled apart by Western missionary religion. Tragedy strikes in the form of the arrival of Matshinyise, the spoiler, who comes garmented in Western religious attire. His coming strikes hard at the very roots of Africa in general and Venda in particular - the close-knit social fabric of the clan - and pulls it apart. The coming of Matshinyise is to solve a riddle which is baffling the Chief. Matshinyise can only resort to lying in order to get what he wants. On the other hand, the first traditional healer whom Chief Ratshihule consults gives a "divination" that is far from the truth. He lies and frightens them. He tells them that part of the blood that Ratshihule saw has been taken from a member of his family. According to him, the owl was a sacrifice of a curse (1954:37).

Through these, Maumela conveys a message of no confidence either in the traditional religion or in the new religion pioneered by Vele. The picture does not seem to change even if the three emissaries succeed in securing the services of another traditional healer at Phafula.

## **5.6 MMANGA MAWELEWELE (MADIMA 1961)**

### **5.6.1 E.S. Madima**

E.S. Madima was born on 5 August 1922 at Vhufuli, Ha-Tshivhase, in the Northern Province. He started school at Goldville in 1931, passing St 6 in 1939, after which he taught as a privately employed teacher for two years. From 1941 he was trained as a teacher at the former Lemana Training Institute where he completed the course in 1943. He first taught at Muhuyu School from where he was transferred to Tshivhase Secondary School where he taught until 1965, after which he became one of the Assistant Secretaries for the Vhembe School Board. Here he terminated his services in 1970 when he was transferred to the Department of Venda Education and Culture. He taught at Mphaphuli High School from 1976 until 1979 when he joined the Venda Language Service.

His contribution to Venda literature comprises novels, dramas, poetry and short stories. According to Makhado (1980:110), "It is not strange that Mr Madima has always got a prize for his works on Venda Literature, going to the extent of obtaining position one in the literacy competition organised by Unisa for his drama, "Hu na Savhadina" (There is Savhadina).

Not only is Madima a prolific writer, he is also a choir trainer and conductor.

### **5.6.2 *Mmanga Mawelewele*: Contents in brief**

*Mmanga Mawelewele* is not an easy novel to follow. The author gives manifold episodes and different characters that seem to fight for the first position. The book would have been better if written in the form of separate short stories (Makhado 1980:27). Nevertheless, the book has valuable information relevant to this study.

The author begins his novel in a challenging way. He tries to locate the birth of two of his main characters but fails because they were born before the coming of the White people (1961:1). The only thing he can do is to mention some national occurrences that took place when they were born, "*wonoula nwaha we ha wa naledzi masiari-tshivhangalala*" (the same year that stars fell down during the daytime). Such incidents helped Africans to locate the dates of their birth before the missionary era. Children born during the same year of catastrophic incidents, like drought and famine, would have no problem knowing their times of birth, but others would.

One other phenomenon which the author mentions is the faith of the people during such times. He mentions an earth tremor that took place which many considered as signifying the passing Raluvhimba. The Vhavenda would say, "*Makhulu u khou fhira*". (Grandmother is passing). People would blow all kinds of musical instruments and beat drums at the Chief's headquarters. Old women and old men would dance touching each other with their blankets and overcoats. It was during this time that the author and Mawelewele, the main character, were born.

It was during the same period that the Whites arrived in the area of the author (1961:1). When a missionary, known as Rev Johnson, came to Furaulale, he began to build a mission station, which was a village of "*Vharudi*" (a name given to Christian people). Reverend Johnson came with Semoni Mavusa, who had gone away to the South for a long time without coming back. Such people were called "*makholwa*" (ie, people who went to urban areas not to come back for a long time. Usually they would come back with no possessions, and as a result were held in awe).

When Johnson arrived at Furaulale, people's dwelling places were not in good order (1961:4), "*nndu dza vhathu dzi tou divhonadza uri vhathu vho sokou tangananatanganana*" (people's houses could easily reflect that people were disorganised). The author also shows us that those who followed the missionary styles of building had better houses. He gives a vivid description of the beauty of the missionary house. This style is contrasted with that of the Tsongas, who followed "*tshirudi*" and were no longer building like other Tsongas. The author introduces us to a school built by the missionary. It was well built with a well-made road with trees planted along the road which added to the beauty of the whole surrounding.

During these times the missionary had to try and attract pupils to come to "his school"! Even when the bell was rung, it was the children of "*vharudi*" who should go to "their school". Some other children liked the idea of going to school: "*Nne ndi tou tama e nne a yaho tshikoloni*" (I wish it were I who was going to school). But they could not, so they would have to join other boys who were not from *Vharudi* parents. These would spend their days as herd boys, enjoying free swimming and cattle games. Elderly people would be found at "*davhani*" (communal work for the sake of helping other members of the community, ie drinking, making basekts and mats and also hunting).

Mawelewele's real name is Boyi because he was born in a mission village. His father was Samu. It happened that one day he visited his cousin where they were doing the "*tshikona* dance", which was foreign to him since his faith had declared such things heathen practice. He tried to dance, making many mistakes and even confusing the one who was beating the accompanying drum. They called him Mawelewele ... an intruder.

Mawelewele becomes heavily delinquent. Because he was born in the missiona village, he despises those born in other places. He ill-treats other pupils. He has no manners. He is not even obedient to his parents, (1961:15), *“na khotsi awe vha tsi mu vhidza a sa koni uri, “ndaa!” a tshi aravha”* (Even when his father would call for him he would not say “ndaa” in response).

Mawelewele, although born and bred in a mission village, doesn't have any enduring liking for schooling (1961:16).

*Zwa tshikolo vha sa zwi londi, fhedzi ri tshi u vha fhira vha vhilaela. U diita nnyi e nwana wa Muhedeni.*

(They didn't care about schooling. When we got better marks, then they would grumble saying, “What does he think he is, a child of a heathen.”)

Mawelewele is not only a spoilt child, he is also an excellent athlete and enjoys boxing. One day he knocks a boy down and finds himself running away to urban areas. He lands on a farm where it becomes very hard for him. He comes back only after a long period. On coming back, he is nearly murdered. Unfortunately, nobody believes him when he narrates the incident. During the Second World War, he was picked up as a soldier although he did not go any further than Springs. “At times the narration becomes rather too mystic, so much so that the reader finds it extremely difficult to differentiate the plot from the milieu and characterisation” (Makhado 1980:126). At the end Mawelewele gets converted and goes to train to be a pastor. Coming back, he is to be sent to a new Christian village at Fhatuwa. All these events take place in the midst of other characters like Reverend Johnson, the missionary, Ailwei his cousin, and Masalazwitshitota, the murdered traditional healer. Looking at the different characters and what they contribute to the unfolding of this novel, will help us understand the different Christian concepts found in this novel.

### 5.6.3 Issues with a bearing on Missionary Christianity

#### 5.6.3.1 *Vhafunzi Vho-Maamba zwivhuya: The success and failures of the missionary enterprise*

The book is about Reverend Johnson (*Maambazwivhuya*), a missionary who came to Furaulale with Mavusa. The author introduces him to us in glowing terms (:9):

*Vhafunzi Vho-Maambazwivhuya vho vha vhe muthu ane a takalela mushumo wawe. Shango lothe heli vho vha vho no li tahadza vha tshi enda vha tshi funza vhathu mafhungo a u shanduka. Na henengei murahu ha dzithavha vho di sika minwe mililo. Zwikolo zwe vha thoma ndi zwinzhi na Hulemeni o takalela mishumo yavho i takadzaho. Fhano ha hashu naho u thomani vhathu vho sanda iyi pfunzo ntswa, Vhafunzi a vho ngo fhidza u ri dalela luvhili kana luraru nga nwedzi.*

(Reverend Johnson was a person who loved his work. He had traversed the whole country going about preaching the gospel of repentance. Even beyond the mountains he started other fires. He started many schools in such a way that the government was impressed by his work. At our place, although initially people didn't like what he was doing, the Reverend kept visiting us. They also have fruits in their mission station which they give to people. All these did not go deep enough to influence parents to send their children to school. )

The missionary used to hold his services at the headquarters of the chief. He was always in the company of Evangelist Mavusa, who was equally hardworking. He also travelled with a team of other *Vharudi*. Normally after preaching they would pray. Reverend Johnson even used sweets to attract children to come to school. This is because it was felt that (:11)

*Pfunzo i ya pengisa, na hone ane a ya u do la tshone tshikolo.*

(Education makes one mad, whoever attends school will have to look to it for his

provision.)

The situation was like this until people experienced a great drought. For three months it was very hot with no drop of rain. Whatever was planted in the fields, got burnt up. A traditional healer was called. His divination led to the expulsion of the white missionary in the land. He was told to hold his service within his premise with his *vharudi*.

In the meantime the missionary does not sit and look at the weather. He makes use of a water canal he has dug. That year he experienced a great harvest. He turned into a Joseph to help the starving masses. After the drought the Chief issued a command that all his subjects should support the missionary school by sending their children to it. Madima (1961:11) clearly shows that the missionary came to help the people, not necessarily on the issues of religion but in developing them. Madima is very strong to make this point clear. After the drought, the missionary began to teach them how to plough.

*Ngei zwikovhani khakhathi yo tangana, nwana u mamela lurumbu. Vharudi vho da u ri funzedza kubwele kwavhudi kwa mugero na ngei seli ho takuwa munwe une wa do guma fhala zwikwarani zwa Vhangona wa vhuelela mulamboni. Muudele wa dzhena masimuni wa vhibvela, a pakata mavhele ... Ano maduvha a ri tsha amba tshithu. Tshikhuwa tsho no vha tshashu, miroho hu tavhiwa ya tshakhatshakha, ha limiwa na dzigorou. Miroho ila ye ya vha yone ya tshinange, mifungwi, nngu na muxu zwi vho tavhiwa-vho mitangani.*

(At *zwikovhani* things are taking place. *Vharudi* has come to teach us how best to make water canals. On the other side of the river another canal has since been started which will end at the Vhangona hills and goes back to the river. The manure gets into the earth and enriches it and brings forth good crops. Now we are tongue-tied. Western civilisation is ours. We plant green vegetables of different types. We even plant wheat. Vegetables like *tshinange*, *mufangwi*, *nngu* and *muxe* are now planted in our gardens.)



The missionary stole the hearts of the people by his hard-working habits. People started to follow his new teachings and new ways of living.

Even a strong spiritual leader like Vho-Maambazwivhuya failed to correct Mawelewele during his early days although he worked for him. Mawelewele was a thief. The author does not blame the missionary for Mawelewele's bad character. The Reverend forgave Mawelewele when he was found to be a thief and confessed it. But unfortunately Mawelewele allowed bad company to influence him telling him that he didn't know how to steal from a white man. Madima (1961:52) describes the Reverend as a real (true) spiritual leader - if he was a hypocritical pastor he would have chased Mawelewele away long ago.

#### 5.6.3.2 *The powerful nature of the Missionary Christianity*

Madima minces no words in depicting the effects of the missionary's prayers. When Mawelewele had to leave and stay with him no longer, the Reverend prayed sorrowfully that "God should work on his own in this child whom he wanted to be like others". This prayer was indeed answered as Mawelewele ultimately became a Christian who was sent to be trained as a pastor.

The second incident which the author cites to show us his favourable disposition towards the spirituality of the missionary, is the healing of an insane man, whom he likens to the biblical man of Gadara. The insane man, Masalazwitshitota, pounced upon people, holding a sharp axe in his hand when there was a music competition. Mawelewele jumped to the situation in order to help the people. This nearly cost him his life. The pastor came when the two men were on the ground wrestling, with the teeth of the insane man deeply embedded in Mawelewele's neck. A teacher came to try and help. Mawelewele was semi-conscious when this ordeal finally ended.

Then Madima (1961:65) introduces us to the missionary, who comes upon a very uncertain situation and immediately commands the people to get away saying:

*Sendelani kule! Fhumulani nothe! ... Dzinani la Yesu Khristo, Sathane nga shavhe zwino. Mudzimu shuma nga wotho mune wanga ... lwe wo fanelwaho nga thendo, nga hu sa fheliho. Amen.*

(Get away! Be quiet all of you. In the name of Jesus Christ, let the Devil run away! Oh Father, work alone my God. You are worthy to be praised, now and forever. Amen.)

After saying this, the insane man ran away and jumped into the river. On coming out he was completely sane. The prayers of the missionary had prevailed.

Through this incident Madima shows us a missionary pastor who becomes an answer to the spiritual problems of the people. Realising that many Western missionaries did not practise demon exorcism, the reader is challenged to seek for reasons why Madima's missionary prays for the sick and commands demons. Is Madima through this book correcting the missionary ways of dealing with issues of demonisation? Whatever the answer, what does become clear is that Madima's missionary pastor is a man for all seasons. When people are hungry he gives them food, when they are confused he cleans their minds.

#### 5.6.3.3 *Mawelewele: The Prodigal Son comes home*

The central setting of Madima's book is the mission village, with Mawelewele as the main character. For all practical purposes, Mawelewele is depicted as a bad boy who stays in the mission village together with his father. Neither is committed to the Christian religion. Mawelewele's delinquent behaviour in no way makes him ashamed that he is misrepresenting the mission. He still uses pejorative terms like 'heathen' to refer to those who were not staying in the missionary village (1961:16). Mawelewele is violent, aggressive and highly selfish. He does not listen to any person, not even his father. He gets deep into drinking and 'party living' with no promise that he will ever be reformed. Like the prodigal son in the Bible, he comes to his senses during a fight with a mad man. According to Mathivha (1972:249) his character illustrates something deep in the human race, namely the bad characteristics of a person do not condemn him

forever but with growth and maturing, a person can change for the better. His character shows the travail of a soul from a non-christian lifestyle to christian commitment.

#### 5.6.3.4 *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Ailwei the despised becomes the light-bearer*

Madima's portrayal of Ailwei easily betrays his subtle motive in writing the novel. He seems to be locked in a battle against the missionary thinking that for the children to be good they needed to stay in the missionary village. Ailwei does not stay with the so-called *Vharudi* (Christians).

Neither are his parents *vharudi*, but in all other areas he matches so well with *vharudi* children, even going to an extent of excelling over them. He is a persevering child, he attends school until he qualifies as a teacher at the school which he had attended with Mawelewele. He is fond of jokes. One day he closed Mawelewele in the hut and shouted to people that there was a person stealing inside the hut. When his grandmother came, she commented (1961:24):

*Ndi Mawelewele wa ngei Vharudini!*

*... u tou vhuya a tswa vhuswa?*

(It is Mawelewele from *Vharudini* (Christian)

... how come he steals porridge?)

Apart from this episode, Ailwei is a good person with good moral standards. The author uses him to ridicule the 'heathens' and christians alike. There are no negative comments from others about him.

Realising that he was not from the mission village, one realises the impact that the author wished this character to have, making readers aware that something good can come even from Nazareth (John 1:46). The author pleads for an understanding and acceptance of black culture.

Witchcraft - the cultural pellagra of Africans or the backbone of the African world-view, is also addressed. In *Mmanga Mawelewele* Madima treats all new cultural practices with great respect. He (1961:26-29) devotes no less than four pages to the preparation for Christmas celebrations. Children from "heathen" villages do not understand Father Christmas. Two of them jumped through a window out of fear of Father Christmas. To them, the devil had come to church. Likewise a christian wedding party is given an equally prominent place in the book. Seven pages are devoted to describing it (1961:53-59). Witchcraft, on the other hand, is treated with a sense of scorn and no attempt is made to explain its weight amongst the people. Strangely enough, Mawelewele's mother, on hearing that people were talking about Mawelewele a lot, said coldly:

*Vhathu vha songo ndokela nwananga!*

(People should bewitch my son!)

This is said in the hearing of Ailwei, who is shocked to hear a *murudi* person talking of witchcraft. His own teacher, a *murudi* has taught them that witches do not exist (1961:36).

Witchcraft also features strongly. When Madima (1961:39-40) introduces ritual murder, Mawelewele is depicted coming home from working in the urban areas. It is late in the evening as he passes through a dense forest. His hair rises. He hears people throwing divine bones. Rather than turn back, he tries to proceed with the journey with the people running after him. He outruns them. As he runs, he meets a traditional healer, Masalazwitshitotana. This name means "after effects". This is exactly what happened after he was murdered. Mushavhanamadi, one of the murderers, who kept on calling Masalazwitshitotana, became mad. Mawelewele warns him and continues running. The ritual murderers murder the traditional healer (Masalazwitshitotana). Madima satirically shows that even in a case like this, family members will go to a diviner and still "catch" a witch responsible. The inclusion of this story is ironic in the sense that ritual murders rely heavily on the diviner's bones. Actually there would be no ritual murders if there were no diviners (witchdoctors). It is paradoxical when a diviner dies because of what other diviners like him tell people.

## CHAPTER 6

### SELECTED TSHIVENDA SHORT STORIES

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Mathivha (1972:166) divides Venda prose into novels and short stories. The history of short stories in Venda can be traced back to text books written for standard grade pupils. The stories are short with a single plot and few characters. "The short story is a brief narrative in prose" (1972:284). This means that the short story has some common characteristics with the novel. It has a plot, which develops, characters, a milieu and language. The novel may have a main plot and a sub-plot while the short story, on the other hand, has only one main idea, which is developed briefly.

Mathivha (1972:284) believes that the short story should start with a brief introduction which focuses the reader's attention on the main part of the story. The short story is expected to have no chapters whereas the novel has. According to Boulton, quoted by Mathivha (1972:285), short stories can be divided into five types: narrative, argumentative, dramatic, informative and contemplative.

We shall now consider selected short stories by Sengani (1994) and Mudau (1996). Two stories will be considered from Sengani's "Hu bvuma na fhasi" (1994) and two from Mudau's "Tsumbandila" (1996). These four stories have been selected as being relevant to this study.

##### 6.1.1 Hu bvuma na fhasi (It even shakes the earth) (1994)

###### 6.1.1.1 Vha la nga pulane (They eat by plan)

In this story, Sengani introduces us to a Christian family with many questionable

characteristics. The father, Muraga, is introduced as having a good speaking relationship with his daughter, Lisani (:28). Their chief opponent is Muraga's own wife, Emelina, who is also Lisani's mother. The father and daughter are fond of chicken and the chickens belong to Emelina. Each time they want to eat chicken, they plan to tell lies for Emelina to give them the needed relish.

Serious issues are raised by this short story which warrant our attention:

First the Christian family seems to have no cultural norms of respect. The husband, Muraga, is treated by his wife as if he is her first son. When Lusani wants to know the relish of the day, Emelina, in scolding her says (:29),

*Wo no dzenwa nga muya wa khotsi au ndi khou vhona*  
(The spirit of your father has entered you.)

An interesting thing is that she finally allows them to slaughter the chicken. While Muraga is eating, feasting on the meat, Emelina takes away his plate before he has finished eating. His daughter interrupts, reprimanding the mother to allow her father to continue eating (:29). Emelina further embarrasses them by reminding them that they haven't even prayed before partaking of the food. To this, Muraga says that the cook should have prayed. Emelina doesn't seem to respect her husband. This, in turn, influences her child not to respect her father.

Secondly, Emelina seems to be more respectful to her pastor. Muraga lies to her, telling her that the pastor will be coming on the coming Sunday after church. Immediately Emelina starts to prepare for *Vhakhethwa* (the holy ones). That Sunday they were late to come to church. After the service, when they were shaking hands, the pastor remark innocently

*Ri do vhonekhotsi a Lisani ...*  
*e na mme a Lisani (:30)*

(Lisani's father, we shall meet again ... how? Lisani's mother.)

When they arrive home, they wait for the pastor to arrive. After a long time Emelina,

realising that they are not coming, picks up the telephone to find out why. She doesn't find them at home but is informed that they have gone to Pietersburg. Muraga doesn't even apologize when he is given the pastor's food. Muraga and the family feast on the prepared chicken, very much at his wife's misunderstanding and disappointment.

This short story makes a mockery of the Christian religion (Christianity). Such a devout lady like Emelina doesn't even feel ashamed to illtreat her husband. On the other hand, her husband, a respectful member of the church, is not ashamed to tell lies. Sengani seems to be warning Christians that their behaviour is highly wanting. If Christianity is to be influential, it must be seen to offer better moral standards to the ones previously upheld by the community.

#### **6.1.2 Vhomme mubebi (the mother, the one who parents)**

Through this short story Sengani introduces us to Vhomme who lives next to Lugani. (*Vhomme* is a respectful title for a pastor's wife. She is regarded as the mother of the congregation. In this story, unfortunately, Vhomme doesn't live up to her title.) Lugani is being proposed by Tenda, who has a negative attitude towards Vhomme. His reasons are clear and sound convincing:

*Ndi uri havhala vha toda u tou vha mulangi  
wa vhutshilo ha munwe muthu, arali a sa zwi  
tendi ndi muvhi, nne hafhu a vha sokou amba  
na nne lini (:51)*

(It is because she wants to control somebody's life, if a person disagrees, then he is bad, she doesn't always talk to me.)

Vhomme, on the other hand, doesn't mince her words in describing Tenda. She believes he is proud and that he may not even be a child of God. She also says that he doesn't come to her for advice. To her, if Lugani falls in love with him, then such a family will not withstand the storms of life (:52). Vhomme says this because she wants

Lugani to marry Itsani, who is her favourite. The day Itsani comes, she tells him that she would like him to consider marrying Lugani. When hearing that Lugani seems to be in love with Tenda (:52), she criticises Tenda in Itsani's hearing. Later on, after Itsani has gone, she calls Lugani, telling her that she has been thinking about her in her prayers. She unashamedly condemns Tenda as an irresponsible person who cannot manage a family. Lugani is completely hurt by such remarks. That night she doesn't sleep very peacefully.

Just before a church conference, Vhomme is seen calling Lugani, saying:

*Nwananga ndi nae dzithabeloni haano maduvha  
a thi lali nga mabono a ndelaho. Mudzimu u  
khou fhindula. Mbamulovha ndo ita na u didzima  
nda ofha u da u mu vhudza.*

(I am with you in my prayers my child. These days I do not sleep because of the visions that come. God is answering. Yesterday I even had to fast, but I was afraid to come and tell you.)

She continues telling her of a vision she has had. In the vision she saw a young man dressed in a blue suit with Lugani singing a beautiful song. After the song they held hands and went away together. As she is narrating the vision, she bursts into tears and tells her that even her husband was awakened by the dream (:54). The dream begins to work on Lugani who could easily realise that, in order to have a prosperous family, she should lean on the advice of Vhomme.

Vhomme's involvement in Lugani's life influenced her to be against Tenda. She planned a musical item that should be sung by Lugani, Itsani and the other two. They sang so well that people were highly blessed. Some were even crying (:54-55).

Because of the love that Tenda had for Lugani, he recorded all that Vhomme said against him. This was finally given to the Church Board. The Pastor was equally



disturbed by his wife's mannerisms. Finally Tenda marries Lugani against Vhomme's will.

Through this short story the author seems to be fighting against hypocrisy and unnecessary involvement in other people's affairs even when it is done by church leaders. His depiction of Vhomme makes us dislike the abuse of office of which Vhomme is clearly guilty. Vhomme listens to private conversations of young people in the church. She likes to direct the marital affairs of young people. She dislikes some and likes others.

### **6.1.3 General comments**

Sengani gives a very negative picture of missionary Christianity. In the two stories we have read, there are a few important observations that one can make.

First, there is a lot of hypocrisy in what people call Christianity. In the first story Emelina, who is portrayed as a devout Christian, fails miserably to lead an exemplary life at her home. She illtreats her husband and child. Clear Biblical teachings on family hinge around submission, love and respect. Emelina seems to have none of these.

Secondly, Missionary Christianity is depicted as having no cultural strongholds to lean on. Vhomme takes the important position of being Lugani and Itsani's parents. The way she attempts to act like a parent is very frustrating in that she imposes her wishes and dreams on others and not the will and desires of the parents of the two children. Sengani seems to be disturbed by a Christianity that has usurped the role of parents and completely replaced them. This is, unfortunately, what Missionary Christianity has come to do. It has uprooted people from their roots without giving them a better foundation on which to build their life.

Thirdly, Sengani advocates a critical understanding of Christianity. Lugani was nearly misled by the hypocritical "religiosity" of Vhomme, which included visions and false prayers. Tenda is portrayed as an example of an objective Christian. He doesn't just

believe everything that is said without investigating. Another character who seems to fit this category is the Pastor himself. He doesn't allow his wife's dreams and visions to mislead him. He is able to console Itsani.

*Inwi ni so ngo dinalea murathu wanga, Mudzimu  
u do ni fha wanu nga tshifhinga tshawe (:58).*

(You shouldn't be worried my brother, God will give you your wife in His due season.)

## 6.2 TSUMBANDILA (MUDAU 1996)

Thilivhali Thomas Mudau was born on 12 December 1966 in Messina in the Northern Province. In 1983 he passed his Matriculation examination with distinction. He taught Science and Mathematics at Ligege Secondary School in Duthuni. In 1985 he enrolled at Medunsa for a medical degree. He completed his MB:Ch B degree in the required time. From there he worked at Garankuwa, Soweto and Messina as a medical practitioner. He has written extensively. His works include *Appearance Maswathe*, *Khando*, *Gala*, *Khulukusho ya Tshengelo*, *Emma*, *Dzindila*, *Murunzini was Thavha*, *Pendela shango*, *Khathulo yanga*, *Vhurendi Hashu*, *Dzolokwe*, *Mutingati*, *Matodzi*, *Wanu u swika Lufuni*, *Mbuno dza vhutshilo*, *Khakhu*, *Testamente yo latiwaho ya mitsheto ya Dzata* and *Tsumbandila*.

In *Tsumbandila* we shall take three short stories with two having almost the same theme - racism, and the last one depicting the life of a pastor. In all three stories Christianity is treated as a settled religion which is no longer a threatening encroachment but part of the religious and cultural landscape (Hale 1966:160).

The first two stories will immediately receive our attention. They are entitled *Rooikoos na dokotela* (Rooikoos and the doctor) and *Ndi zwa vhutama* (It has to do with friendship.)

### 6.2.1 Rooikoos na dokotela (White racism blinds their minds.)

The short story is written in a conversational manner in such a way that the reader is able to note the usage of words by the different characters with their attitudes thrown in between.

The short story opens with a conversation between Rooikoos, a white farmer, who has brought his injured wife to a hospital with a multiracial staff. Rooikoos is in a questioning dialogue with a Black sister, Sofasonke. He wants to know whether his wife will make it or not, to which Sofasonke assures him that if the doctor comes early, there is a chance for her to live. In inquiring about the doctor who was on call, Rooikoos learns that it was a 'Madikizela'. He looks up and down and immediately interjects:

*Dokotela yanga ndi Cronje, kha ndi vhidzelwe zwanga Cronje (1996:1).*

(Cronje is my doctor. Call that one.)

To his request, Rooikoos is told that Cronje is on leave. He insists that he must be phoned. Perhaps he has left a replacement. Sofasonke makes him aware that they are gambling with a person's life because if a doctor doesn't come the lady will die. She goes out and comes back with the matron, Van Dyk (:1), who speaks harshly to bring sense into Rooikoos:

*Iwe munna, hu na dokotela muthihi a re kholoni, ndi dokotela Madikizela. Arali u sa funi musadzi wau a tshi laxwa nga onoyo dokotela ndi zwau, hwala musadzi wau u tuwe (:1).*

(You man! There is only one doctor on call, Doctor Madikizela. If you don't want your wife to be treated by him, that is your problem. You may carry your wife away with you.)

After this, the Matron leaves the room and Sister Sofasonke puts a drip on the white lady. Rooikoos realises that his wife's life is ebbing away. He says to her, "Minkie, do not die, the doctor is coming just now" (:2). The inserted drip gives her some strength because immediately after this, she says to her husband:

*Rooikoos, u a mpfuna?*

(Rooikoos, do you love me?)

*Natuurlik, ndi a u funa.*

(Of course I love you.)

*So, kry my enige dokter. (:2)*

(Then get me any doctor.)

After Minkie has said this, Rooikoos acts as if he has not heard her. Time is passing fast. The matron comes in to say Doctor Nel is not around. He has gone to his farm. The good news is that he has left a doctor to look after his patients. This accords with Rooikoos' desires. He asks Sister Sofasonke to help him carry his wife to the car. Sister Sofasonke clearly makes him aware that a long delay will work against Minkie's health. She also advises him to go to the police and report why Minkie took a gun and shot herself accidentally. She adds a very painful sentence. She tells him that the reason why he does not want a doctor's assistance is that he wants her dead. Rooikoos becomes angry and says,

*Ri na madokotela ashu rine vhatshena. Musadzi wanga ndi nga si tende a tshi farwa nga zwanda zwa, zwanda zwa ...*

(We whites have our own doctors. I cannot allow my wife to be touched by ... hands ... by ... hands.)

He does not finish his sentence. Maybe he wants to say, "a Kaffir's hands" or "a baboon's hands". Sofasonke, hearing this torrent of racial slurs, asks Rooikoos why he has allowed her to touch his wife. To this, Rooikoos tells Sofasonke to leave her, adding that the person is his wife.

*Sy is nie 'n speelding nie. Dokter Nel sal haar sien, nie Madikizela nie.*

(She is not a play thing. She is to be seen by Doctor Nel and not Madikizela) (:2).

He doesn't even want to say Doctor Madikizela.

So Rooikoos takes his wife to his car. As he arrives at Doctor Nel's house, Mrs Nel tells him that, although the doctor isn't around, he has left another doctor to help his patients. Minkie is then put on the bed to be checked by the doctor. Rooikoos enters the room and closes the door. Finally the doctor comes. When Rooikoos looks at the person, he can see that it is a doctor by the clothes but then he asks:

*Ndi iwe dokotela wa hone?*

(Are you the doctor?)

*Ee, ndi nne. U ngafhi mulwadze wa hone? Ndi dokotela a tshi thindula Rooikoos.*

(Yes, it is me. Where is the patient?, the doctor answers Rooikoos.)

All Rooikoos could do was look at his wife and then look down.

In this short story Mudau introduces us to a contemporary post-missionary scene. The Gospel as preached by the missionaries, gave the idea of one God, and not gods, as being behind the whole of creation. This would equally mean that the whole of creation should speak of one God, the Father of Jesus Christ, who equally has become our Father through Jesus Christ. The Fatherhood of God should lead to the brotherhood of humankind irrespective of colour, class and language. Rooikoos doesn't register any understanding in his life of taking people of other colours as people. He doesn't want his wife to be touched by hands of a different colour. He nearly lost his wife because of this prejudice. In this short story Mudau clearly makes us aware that racial prejudice has a way of blinding us. It is a time bomb which, if allowed to explode, can destroy people in South Africa. It further clouds the whole understanding of missionary motive in coming to preach to people of other races if those races could not be seen as equal with other races. In that way, missionary Christianity doesn't become good news to the Blacks but bad news since it reminds them that God created them different from others to be inferior.

What encourages one in this short story is that the white matron doesn't seem to share Rooikoos' prejudice. She tells him that Doctor Madikizela is the doctor on call and that if he doesn't want him to attend to his wife, then he can decide to leave with his wife. The insertion of this matron here has a very strong message. Mudau wants the readers to realise that not all whites are racists. The opposite is equally true. Not all Blacks are not racist. To that we shall now turn.

### 6.2.2 Ndi Zwa Vhutama

This short story is about a man called Malongwe - an uncompromising racist. Any discussion that fuels racial misunderstanding will be encouraged by him. Mudau introduces him as a hardliner who gets involved in a terrible accident. He doesn't die but is experiencing excruciating pain. He cannot raise his neck. A wave of pains start from his head downwards. His mouth is full of sand. As he tries to spit saliva, coagulated blood comes out. It is late at night. At least he is able to hear. As he is lying there, he hears people coming. They are talking about his car, which at this time looks like a cart. They ask each other whether anybody has survived. Another one says there is a person pointing at him but he is interrupted by another one who says:

*Litshani muthu hoyo a di fele, hunwe khamusi na u fa o no di fa ... kha ri tuwe (:27).*

(Leave that person to die, maybe he is already dead ... let us go.)

Malogwe could hear these words spoken in his language. He tries to scream, but he cannot. He wants to lift up his hand but fails because it is trapped by the door. The early morning cold feeds on him unsparingly. He begins to collect some thoughts about the accident. Then he realises that he is in deep pain with no one to help. His own people have passed him by.

As he is lying there, he hears voices coming. It is a White man with a Black man. The White man tells the Black man that there is a person alive and that he is Black. They

begin to help get him out. They cut his hands out with a saw. As they do this, Malongwe is in deep pain and bleeds profusely until he becomes unconscious. When he regains consciousness he realises that he is in hospital. A nurse comes to ask him whether he knows how he came to the hospital or not. To this he says:

*Houla mukhuwa o todou mmbulaha nga goloi heila ...*

*Vhathu havhala ndi vhavhi a si vhathu ... ndi Vha*

*sandela mbilu dzavho dza dzinowa. Madyavhathu ala'.*

*Tshe ra pwanyeledzwa a si zwino ...*

*Makhuwa vhothe vha a fana, a si vhathu, nowa dzila (:29) .*

(That White man nearly killed me through that car ... Those people are evil - they are not human ... I hate their hypocrisy. Maneaters! It is long we have been oppressed ... All whites are alike, they are not human, they are snakes.)

His answer reveals his deep-seated racial hatred towards Whites. After saying this, he sleeps again, only to be awakened by a pat on his body. When he opens his eyes he cannot believe what he is seeing. Next to him stands a White man in khaki shorts and shirt. His face is burnt by the sun. Malogwe thinks he is being shown hell. He begins to scream saying:

*Hei, a thi u tadi a thi tadi! Ndo tshinyani nne. Ntutshale muvhi ndiwe! Tuwa Sathane ndiwe (:29).*

(Hey, I don't want you, I don't want you. What have I done? Leave me, you evil person. Get away from me, Satan!)

As he says these words, the poor White man leaves him. Malogwe sleeps again but he appears very agitated, calling Whites witches who have followed him even to hospital. Then he shouts at the top of his voice. The nurse hears the cry and comes to find out what is happening. Malogwe explains that he doesn't understand why the "oppressors" are allowed at the hospital to torment patients. Because of this, he tells the nurse that he is leaving the hospital. The nurse wants to know what oppressors he is referring to. Realising that he is referring to the White farmer in khaki, the nurse then

explains what happened:

*Ho ula mukhuwa ndi ene o uneaho thusothanzi a vhuya a u hwalela ngeno vhuongeloni nga modoro wawe. Garatha yawe khei, uri ri u nee yone u mu foinele musi wo no bva sibadela (:29).*

(That White man gave you first aid and brought you to the hospital in his own car. Here is his business card. He would like you to phone him when you are discharged from the hospital.)

After saying this, she takes out the card and gives it to Malogwe who is seen tired and not knowing what to say.

Mudau ends his second short story in the way that Jesus ends his, leaving the readers to make their own verdicts. Racism has been a leprous practice that has made Christianity a laughing stock amongst the nations of the world. It is especially so because those responsible for bringing Christianity into Africa had been the most guilty of it. They became its architects.

### **6.2.3 Vhafunzi Vha Todani?**

Before a general commentary can be made, we shall look at the last short story that is relevant to our theme: *Vhafunzi vha khou to dani?* (Pastor, what do you want?)

In this short story, Mudau seems to grapple with pastoral problems in the post-missionary period. The heading of this short story is as amusing as it is strange. It can either mean: "Pastor, what is your job in the community?" or: "Pastor, why do you do it here?" Both those questions relate to the job description of a pastor and its effectiveness. The question is asked by Khwathelani, a young man who has been drifting into a former Christless life.



Mudau depicts Khwathelani as a Christian married man who during his wife's study leave, experiences extramarital sexual desires that finally catch up with him. He falls in love with Mercy, who does not want to end the relationship. His wife's return gives Khwathelani a real problem: where to meet with his new lover. They finally decide to meet in the bush. It is when they are together that the Pastor, who has come into the bush to pray, accidentally meets them. The Pastor has been advising the young man on how to carry on with his Christian life with very little positive results. As the young man sees the pastor, he asks this question:

*Vhafunzi vha khou todani? (:53)*

(Pastor, what do you want?)

Through this short story Mudau describes the problems of a settled church. He describes the role of a pastor in such a church. The story has one main character that it introduces. His life offers us different challenges.

The first challenge is that of understanding what a real Christian is. Khwathelani is described in very clear terms that leave us with no problem as to what he was experiencing in his christian life.

*O vha a tshi funa nga maanda uri a vhe Muzalwana  
o fhelelaho, hone zwo vha zwi tshi khou bala. U  
nga ri musi a tshi lovhedzwa o vha a songo vhidzwa  
Na thembuluwo na u bebwa kavhili khamusi nazwino  
khae a zwo ngo bvelela.*

*Zwe a vha a tshi ita a sa athu tangedza Murena o vha a tshi  
kha di zwi tama (50).*

(He so wished to be a complete born-again person but it was difficult. It was as if he was baptized without been called. Maybe he never repented and was never born again. He still desired what he used to do before he became a christian. )

Mudau depicts the life of a charismatic-pentecostal believer. Khwathelani desires to be a complete born-again Christian but finds the desires of the old lifestyle coming back. Here Mudau confuses issues. To have a desire for the old lifestyle need not disqualify one as a Christian. But with Mudau such desires make him question his repentance and the born-again experience. Perhaps the author brings the picture of Khwathelani to challenge us on the real meaning of a Christian.

Khwathelani's Pastor accepts the challenge of Khwathelani's spiritual weakness. The pastor is depicted as a spiritual leader who easily notices the changes taking place in Khwathelani's life. He strongly encourages him to attend prayer-services. He preaches to help people like Khwathelani. When an altar-call is made, Khwathelani does not go in front even when he realizes that he has been touched by the Word of God. The Pastor does not stop here. He telephones him to invite him to come for prayers with no success. He makes an appointment with Khwathelani who fails to tell the truth when asked his reasons for not coming to the prayer-meeting. The Pastor is not easily misled. He prophetically tells him what is bothering him:

*A zwi dini, hone ndi khou vhona ni tshi nga ni shaya nungo kha u shumela Mudzimu. Vhonani hafha, ndi a zwi divha zwaure muya wanu u a funa, hone no vhoxwa ngauri ni muthu wa nama (:51).*

(I can see that you lack power to work for God! Look here, I know that your spirit likes to work for God but you are bound because of being a human being.)

This clearly makes Khwathelani to realise that the Pastor knows deeper things than what he has so far disclosed.

The challenge is of purity in the Christian life. Mudau depicts Khwathelani as a struggling Christian who finally decides to go back. He goes back because of his evil desires. He ends up lying and cheating, trying to seem what in practice he is not. He is lured by Mercy, a wayward girl who is depicted as having no godly conscience. She doesn't care about Khwathelani's family. She insists that she must be taken as his wife

also.

Then comes the challenge of sin. Mudau depicts the power of sin to those who otherwise would like to lead a decent Christian life. Khwathelani tells Mercy that the Pastor is troubling him rather than that his own conscience is troubling him. Mercy doesn't seem to have anything to do with the Pastor. She just replies, *eea* (:53). (Is that so?). Earlier on Khwathelani has found his Bible opened as he was coming from meeting Mercy. He closed it and didn't prefer reading it. Sin becomes so powerful that Khwathelani ends up wounding the heart of his own wife and that of his Pastor.

#### **6.2.4 Comments**

When one examines Mudau's depiction of Christian mission and Christian pastors and their work in Venda against the background of his intellectual development and political achievements in South Africa, one can readily discern patterns of encouraging preaching, reconciliation and truthfulness amongst different races.

The first two short stories that deal with racism are put in such a way that no one race should accept full responsibility for the sin of racism. There seems to be no sinner and sinned-against in Mudau's treatment of racism. Rooikoos, that Afrikaner farmer who didn't want a Black doctor to touch his wife, is as bad as Malongwe, whose hatred of Whites was an open secret. The two stories do not go deep enough to show us that apartheid has been a religion of most of the White South Africans. The Christian religion has formed part and parcel of White political power (Van Niekerk 1980:136). It has made the Black people powerless, it has victimised them and its practitioners, according to Peet Mtshali (Van Niekerk 1980:137), must be made aware of their moral responsibility towards its victims.

Mudau stresses whole-hearted acceptance of each other during this post-missionary or post-apartheid era. The Black Malogwes must be encouraged to redefine their enemy and the White Rooikooses must be shown that colour has no place in the new South Africa. The good Samaritan parable has been ably re-enacted. In the Rooikoos

story, Doctor Madikizela is the good Samaritan who is willing to help a White patient with no preconditions. On the other hand, in Malogwe's story, the White burnt-face farmer becomes the good Samaritan who helps an arch-White hater. The message is clear and simple: Let the Church be a good Samaritan.

The last short story which we looked into shows us the challenges that the new faith, that has been brought to Africa by missionaries, faces. According to Mudau, Christianity in its other expressions, is presented as a moral faith.

Here Khwathelani struggles with his personal desires until he completely fails to satisfy the demands of the scriptures.

He doesn't want to completely leave the Church although his moral failure is even noticed by his pastor. Through this short story Mudau portrays the mission of the Church as that of a clean-up operation.

## CHAPTER 7

### AGITATING TSHIVENDA POETRY

In the mid-1970s Medupe, Malopoets, Phanda-ma-Afrika, Khauledza Bayajula and other artists in Venda formed a group called Guyo. Nthambeleni Phalanndwa, Gundo Lidovho, Irene Mutsila and other poets also joined the group. Their poetry was published in *Staffrider* in both English and Tshivenda. The general theme of their poetry was the plight of the Black people under the oppressive regime of the Nationalist Government. The group, unfortunately, did not survive long for the then Venda government soon suppressed them (Milubi 1980:207).

Besides this type of poetry, other poetry were written by a number of other poets, including Matshili, Ngwana and Madima. The agitating poetry was aimed at making other fellow-sufferers aware of the brutality of the system under which they were living. It was equally focussed on the government authorities responsible for such a system. Finally it was aimed at informing the world at large of what was happening in South Africa as a whole and also in Venda as a so-called self-governing state which finally graduated into an independent state.

A shake-up took place. Some of the Guyo members went from school to school, reciting their poetry. The recitations produced a certain sense of awareness in pupils and students. Besides the Guyo group, individual poets wrote extensively on the plight of the Black people under the Nationalist Government. Through such writing one is able to glean missionary concepts that are reflected in such poetry. We shall restrict our research only to three poets relevant to our theme. The three poets selected are Ratshitanga, Netshivhuyu and Sigwavhulimu and we shall consider two poems of each poet.

## 7.1 RATSHITANGA'S AGITATING POETRY

Tendamudzimu Ratshitanga was born at Mulenzhe in 1940, which is in the Northern Province. He stays at Tshidimbini in the Ha-Tshivhasa area. His works written include *Vhungoho na Vivho* (Truthfulness and jealousy) (1972), *Ndi nne nnyi?* (Who am I?) (1973), and *Tell him, mother* (1976).

### 7.1.1 "God speaks through me"

This is the poem that he entitled *Tshituhu ndi vhuvhi*, in his book, *Vhungoho na Vivho* (1972:15).

*Vhungoho ndi tombo la tsia vhafu  
ndi lwone luare lu tsheaho magumbe a muthu  
naho vha ambi vhaho phedzo vha tshi vha vhafu  
Vhungoho vhu vhukhethwa, a vhu loshi vhuvhi ha vhathu.*

*Murena wanga u amba e kha nne  
O tungufhalela zwine vhathu vha ita  
Ni itelani ngeno ni vho rengululwaho nga ene?  
Tshaka dza vhuvemu na vhufhura.*

*Iwe muvhusi wa tshituhu u itelani  
Na iwe munna mudi wa luambo na tshibonda  
Nna zwothe izwi zwi u vhuedzani  
Litsha vhathu vha khotsi, nge ene mune a vha londa.*

*Kha vhothe phanda hawe ndi vhathihi  
A hu na mupfumi kana muhulu  
Vhuhulu ndi nama dzanu, ngeno mimuya I mithihi  
Mavemu na matsilu vho-inwi Vhahulu.*

*Shango lo sikelwa vhathu vhothe  
zwothe zwi femaho ndi zwa mbofholowo  
I we muthannga u tamelani u la u wotha  
I we wa ngelekanyo ntswu sa dongololo.*

*Shango asilanu, ndila khotsi  
Ni di shatelani matope ngeno no sikwa no kuna?  
Yawee, matsilu aya a tambulelaho vuhosi  
Hone kha vhozwi a do yaho tadulu a huna.*

(Truth is like an abiding rock  
 It is a razor that cuts through human personality  
 Though those who speak it, finally die  
 Truth is holy - it doesn't pay homage to sinfulness.

My God speaks through me  
 He is touched by what people do  
 Why do you do evil when redeemed by him?  
 You nations of murderers and deceivers.

You cruel ruler, why do you do it  
 You, family head full of abusive language and beating  
 What do all these benefit you in return?  
 Leave the people of the father, he will care for them.

Before him, you are all one  
 There is neither rich nor great one before him  
 greatness is found in your physical nature yet your spirit is one  
 Thieves, fools and the great one are all equal.

The earth is created for all  
 All that have breath must enjoy freedom  
 You the intelligent one, why do you eat alone?  
 Your reasoning is as black as a centipede

The earth belongs to the father - it is not yours  
 why do you soil yourself with mud  
 when you were created clean  
 Oh! fools who continue to suffer for chieftainship  
 None of you will see heaven.)

Through this poem Ratshitanga touches important themes that are relevant to our research. We shall investigate the most important ones:

**(a) God is seen as a creator of all**

In our discussion of the Tshivenda world-view we made mention of the fact that Vhavenda have a belief in Nwali as a creator. Here Ratshitanga reinforces that belief although it is garmented in Christian language. The Creator is seen as a "Caring Creator, *Ene mune u a vha londa* (1972:15). (He cares for them).

Ratshitanga argues that God created the world for all and not just for a section of humanity. His deepest desire is to see all of his creation free. When one meditates on this point, it becomes clear that Ratshitanga has succeeded in contextualising the missionary message to talk to people about issues that face them. Ratshitanga goes on to stress the ownership of God and the stewardship of people, "the earth belongs to him" (:15) just like people belong to him.

**(b) God is not just a distant Creator but a Redeemer and a Father**

Ratshitanga reveals God as a father. This is an obvious shift away from regarding *Nwali* as *Makhulu* (grandfather). He sees God as a father who is hurt by what people do. He sees God as a father who has redeemed us (1972:15). This concept of the fatherhood of God leads us to the brotherhood of man. Ratshitanga sees us as equal before God the father. He equally regards the earth as having been created for all of God's humanity. Because of the brotherhood of man the "clever" ones should not deceive the unintelligent ones. Equally important is that the ruler must not rule with cruelty. This is a direct challenge of the rulers especially during the seventies. Ratshitanga does not take oppression in a one-sided manner, he equally sees it as happening even in families. He calls upon heads of family to refrain from violence.

*Na iwe munnamudi wa luambo na tshibonda  
Una zwothe izwi zwi u vheudzani (1972:15).*

(You family head, full of abusive language and beatings  
What do all these benefit you in return?)

He acknowledges that family violence happens in two serious ways: physical abuse and language abuse. To Ratshitanga, all these must cease because God is one.

**(c) Truth is eternal, "*vhungoho ndi tombo la tsiavhafu*"**

Truth is regarded as a razor that cuts through the labyrinth of the human personality.



The author endorses that those who commit themselves to speak the truth finally die but truth itself doesn't die. He regards truth as holy (1972:15).

Truth does not pay homage to human sinfulness. Many Christian leaders got arrested for speaking the truth in Venda. This was an encouraging statement for them.

**(d) "God speaks in me"**

Here the poet assumes the position of a prophet. He has succeeded in seeing a pass through Mount Matongoni and Mount Sinai and be able to hear God's voice beyond these two mountains. He hears the message of God directed to the people. God directs his message to the oppressive rulers and oppressive fathers. He wants them to acknowledge that before Him, humankind is equal. The poet/prophet wants them to know that God regards them as stewards of his manifold blessing.

This poem reflects themes in the socio-political life of the Vhavenda. It depicts violence and its horror. This type of violence is completely rejected by God who created all humankind. It also reflects that humanity has soiled itself even though God created humankind in righteousness. He acknowledges the vanity of vanities of those who struggle for kingship because even if they succeed in ruling here below, the heavenly kingdom will be far from them. He calls people to address themselves to truth. Truth is God himself. All these are strong biblical images that Ratshitanga uses to show us the concern of the God of Creation for his creatures.

**7.1.2 Nwali Thetshesesa (Nwali, Listen!)**

In this second book of Ratshitanga's, there are sixty-six poems. Although several poems in the book are relevant, only one, *Nwali thetshesesa*, will be analysed (1987:44)

*Nwali thetshesesa  
Rine vha lilaho,  
Mitodzi I si tsha bva,  
Vha no nga vhorine.*

*Ro tangwa nga maswina  
Vha tamba nga rine  
Mikosi ya mathupho,  
Vha sea yeneyo.*

*Masmimu vho govhela,  
Na mvula l sa ni,  
Madanga o fhalala,  
Ro sala ri si na.*

*Vhadzimu vho tshenuwa,  
Zwifho a ri tshee na,  
Ho sala u tovhela,  
Kha vho ri thubaho.*

*Vhutshilo vho shandula,  
Lufuno lwo no fa.  
Ri teka-teka rothe,  
mbilu dzi ofhaho.*

*Ipfa khumbelo dzashu,  
Ri fhe zwo tuwaho.  
Ri vhuyele hafhu,  
Murahu havhudi.*

(Nwali, listen  
to us who cry  
even though tears no  
longer come out  
Listen to those like us.

We are surrounded by enemies  
who ill-treat us.  
They laugh at our cry  
The cry of misery.

Our fields have been taken away  
There is no rain  
Our herds of cattle have been scattered  
We are left with nothing.

The ancestors are surprised  
Our sacred places are gone.  
We are left following  
Those who captured us.

They changed life.  
 Love has died.  
 We are all astray  
 With hearts full of fear.

Listen to our requests,  
 Give us what is gone from us,  
 Let us return again.  
 To the good beginning.)

This is a poem of prayer. It is addressed to Nwali, the God of Matongoni. As already stated, Nwali is the Tshivenda name for God. The Bible translators preferred to use "Mudzimu" for God, which formerly meant an ancestral spirit.

The prayer makes different request. Different issues are also raised.

In the first stanza, Nwali is implored to listen to "us" who are crying and also to those who are like us. The cry has been so prolonged that tears no longer come out. What is of fundamental contextual value is that Nwali is depicted as a God who does listen to the voices of those who are suffering. He is a God who is touched by the things that touch people. He is portrayed equally as a God who shows no partiality, who can listen to others like us who have the same problems that we have. This clearly depicts Nwali, not as a god of the Vhavenda but as God of all humankind.

In the second stanza, Ratshitanga shows the readers the predicament in which the oppressed find themselves. God is called upon to help the oppressed who are encompassed by their enemies who brutally ill-treat them. When they cry because of their agonies, their oppressors laugh at them. God is called on to assist.

In the third stanza, the poet implores God to remember their enemies who have taken their fields. An agricultural community like the Vhavenda community depends largely on what they get from the fields for their living. Coupled to this, Ratshitanga reminds God that the flocks have equally vanished. This line is pregnant with meaning. A great number of Black farmers lost their stock through lack of grazing because their land was

taken away from them. They also lost their stock because of government control over it. Through all this and on top of it all, it is not raining, “*Na mvula l sa ni*” (It is also not raining). Nwali was believed to be a rain-maker. So Ratshitanga takes that ancient understanding of Nwali as a rain-maker, and combines it with a Christian understanding of asking whatever a believer desires (John 14).

The fourth stanza introduces us to Ratshitanga’s understanding of the spiritual reality. The pyramid of spiritual authority in Ratshitanga’s understanding has God (*Nwali*) at the top and gods (*Vhadzimu*) at the bottom. The two realities are not in conflict with each other. The ancestors (*Vhadzimu*) have been living on earth worshipping Nwali. When they die, they go to be with Nwali. In the whole exercise of worship they are not excluded. Ratshitanga is disturbed that the traditional ways of worship have been removed (1987:44):

*Ho sala u tevhela*  
*Kha vho ri thubaho*

(We are left following  
Those who captured us).

Here Ratshitanga seems to bemoan the loss Vhavenda have suffered by allowing themselves to be captured by others. This is a clear declaration of a vote of no confidence in the new missionary Christianity. The use of the word “captured” shows that the new religion has been forced upon the people. Vhavenda are now just “following” their captors. This gives the impression that there is little understanding in the new religious exercise.

In the fifth stanza he bemoans the traditional life that has been changed. For him, (1987:44): *Lufuno lwo no fa*. (Love has died.)

This is very revealing of the way that Ratshitanga takes Missionary Christianity to be. Whereas the missionaries will take it that their religion has brought love to people,

Ratshitanga will contest that view. To him, the new religion has put love to rest. It has destroyed the fabric of African communal way of life. The one great African family is dismantled. Fear now rules in the community which in the beginning did not know it.

In the last stanza, he makes a societal request. He pleads with Nwali to hear them (1987:44). He does not ask for new things but for the restoration of the old ways which have been removed. This is a clear indication that Ratshitanga seems to be convinced that the old ways were better than the new ones. What this means is not clearly shown. It is when one reads other poems like *Venda thetshelisa* (1987:43) (Venda listen) that one gets the idea that Ratshitanga sees modern life as heavily oppressing by immoral burdens like drunkenness, illegitimate children and divorce. Then he says (1987:43), "*Tshikhuwa tsho ri swingisa.*" (Western civilisation has blinded our eyes.) He therefore blames modern social problems on Western civilisation. Rather than enlightening people, it has succeeded in blinding them. He pleads with Nwali to bring back the old happy days. But this does not seem to mean that the missionary religion should be totally discarded because in the same book he writes about *Mudzimu* (God) (1987:5) in glowing positive terms:

*Vho ri ndi ene Mudzi*

*Wa vhathu na zwivhumbwa zwothe.*

(They say he is the root of people and the whole creation.)

He goes on to say he is not far to locate by those who search for him. The old days to which Ratshitanga refers are days of great traditional significance where there was respect for the elderly (1987:43), both living and dead. He seems to be referring to the days of communal living where Vhavenda had only one family.

## 7.2 AGITATING POETRY OF NETSHIVHUYU

The late M.J. Netshivhuyu was born in the Northern Province at Mavunde on 10 August

1945. He passed his matriculation examination in 1970. He obtained his JSTC teacher's diploma in 1974 at Tshisimani. While there he started writing articles for *Wamba* magazine. In 1975 he started teaching at Mphaphuli Secondary school. On 5 November 1977 he was involved in an accident which left him bedridden until his death in 1983.

It was during these dark days when he was bedridden that he had a dream in which he saw himself having written a book called *Ndi pfa nnyi?* (Who do I listen to?). He finally wrote the book but entitled it *Nyangalambuya*. The publication of this book served as great motivation indeed. Friends joined in to encourage him to write. This did not fall on deaf ears for between 1980 and 1983 he wrote about twelve books with the help of his wife, Ndanganeni Phyllis Netshivhuyu, who did the valuable work of writing down what Netshivhuyu dictated.

Although Netshivhuyu has several relevant poems, only two are taken for the purpose of this study, *Gundo la Daniel*, and *Ndele* (1984:1) ("Daniel's victory" and "A clean personality").

### 7.2.1 Gundo La Daniele (Daniel's victory)

In this poem, Netshivhuyu takes the Christian faith to task. He looks at the victory of Daniel as a strong incentive to encourage Christians to live up to that standard (1984:28, 29):

*Hezwi zwi a ri shusha  
Ri a tshuwa rine!  
U vhona ndau tshivhanda  
Madungambwa o farwa nga  
hadzila  
Phanda ha iwe mutuka!  
Wa lukanda lu tilaho.*

*A si manditi ndi ngoho!  
Wo kunda vho sedza  
Vhahulu vha tetemela  
U vhona mutshila u  
phuphuthshela!  
Lukanda lwau lu tshi  
tatisa  
Wa tonga u tshi  
Tongelesa.*

*U na gundo nangoho,  
Zwo vhone tshedzani,  
Musi iwe wo takala,  
Ndau l tshi setshelela*

*Zwi do konwa nga nnyi-vho  
Wa lino lo dalaho vilili,  
U fhandula mbilu ya ndau  
Ya phuphuthela l*

*Yo hangwa u thura marambo  
Nga u pfa u feda tshidzimu!*

*bwerepwere?  
Ri kherulele khanzu yau  
Ri vhudzulele muya ndau  
Dzi tetemele*

(These frighten us.  
We get frightened  
To see a wild animal  
With its back teeth set on  
edge  
Before you young man  
With a strong countenance.

This is truth, it is not magic.  
The victory came  
with them watching  
The great trembled  
With their tail asking for  
peace.  
Your countenance could not be approached,  
You continue making a show.

Indeed, you have victory.  
This was clearly seen.  
You were happy.  
The lion smiled at you,  
Forgetting to chew the bones  
Because of smelling a godly  
smell.

Who will achieve these standards  
In our country filled with  
(violence) confusion?  
To divide the lion's heart  
So that it begins to plead for  
peace in fear  
Give us part of your garment  
Give us the Spirit and the  
lions will tremble!)

The author is completely shocked when he thinks about Daniel's victory. He feels frightened when he sees a strong, brave wild animal like a lion shivering, with its back teeth set on edge, before Daniel, the young man.

This is ascribed to the fact that Daniel has a saintly smell which induces the fierce lion to totally forget about bone chewing and behave itself in a friendly manner. It is as if Daniel's peace of mind has become contagious. Daniel is able to influence the lion's behaviour.

The author sees the Daniel story not as fictitious but as real. The victory was achieved in the presence of onlookers (1984 :29): *Wo kunda vho sedza*. (Your victory came with them watching.)

This brings the author to the goal of his poem: agitating fellow Christian people to follow Daniel's example. He challenges fellow Christian people (1984 :29):

*Zwi do konwa nga nnyi-vho  
wa lino lo dalaho vhlili?  
U fhandula mbilu ya ndau.*

(Who will achieve this standard  
In our country full of confusion?  
To split the lion's heart.)

This is a negative encouragement. He realises that the country is filled with *vilili* (confusion) because of the "lion". The author is talking about political confusion. He realises that the heart of the enemy, "the lion", is tough and hard but he advocates for its splitting. Then, according to Netshivhuyu, the lion will plead for peace in complete frustration.

Netshivhuyu concludes his poem by showing the readers that such bravery calls for action. He therefore appeals to Daniel for a piece of his garment. This is a biblical image of putting on Christ (Rom 13:14). He also pleads for Daniel's spirit, realising that the lions will run away because of the new spirit in Christians. The author is thereby calling on all Christians to be brave by putting on the garment of bravery and by allowing Daniel's spirit to rule in their hearts.

### **7.2.2 Ndele (1987:1) (One who is clearly clean)**

In this poem Netshivhuyu writes about *Ndele*, which is an allegorical way of depicting the virtues of a Christian. As said by Senghor (Jones 1975:80), "African surrealism is not in mystical and metaphysical", *Ndele* is an abstract poem that endeavours to show us how Christian virtues will attract people as opposed to verbal proclamation (1987:1):

*U sedzwa nga nnyi  
A kundwa u talela?  
Thabelo ya vhuvha hau.  
Wa tshimbila nga u nanya  
Tshifhatuwo li duvha u penya  
Wo ambara hone vhudele*



*Ndi nnyi wa ningo mbuya  
 Ane musi a tshi fhira a kundwa u milela!  
 U pfa dzuvha la tshilimo,  
 Lo bonyolowa na munukhelelo!  
 Tsha vha tshiala tshau ndele.*

*A sedzwa nga nnyi?  
 A yo masila au,  
 Wa mato a si mavhoni,  
 A kundwa u donolela?  
 U vhona u musuku  
 U shayaho madondo*

*Wo newa vhutsila ndele  
 Ha muhumbulo u si fovhovho,  
 U nengwaho yone tshika.  
 U dzudza wo takala,  
 Ndu yau ya Murena*

(Who sees you  
 And fail to gaze at you,  
 The prayer of your being  
 Walking in a skilful manner  
 with a shining face  
 You have clothed yourself with cleanliness

Who owns a better nose  
 Which will resist your appealing smell that waters the mouth?  
 For you are the flower of summer to be smelled.  
 Which opens up with a fragrance  
 Which is a cockade of the noble one.

Who even looks  
 At your garments?  
 He whose eyes do not see  
 will he not gaze  
 For he sees them as gold  
 which has no blemish.

You have been given the art of being clean,  
 Your mind is not without substance,  
 It is distasteful to dirt.  
 It remains happy.  
 The sleeping mat is put away  
 For you are the house of the Lord.)

The poem opens with words of appreciations directed to *Ndele*, who appears to be passing by. His passing-by prompts the praise song. The first impression about this person is that no one looks at him without taking a second look. The author immediately tells us why people would like to look at the person again. The face is shining, the person has put on clear and clean garments. This allegoric depiction of this character in this manner speaks of purity, love, endurance, patience and truthfulness. Our first impression is that the person is full of life and that he is composed. How a person walks also reveals how he feels inside.

Having established these standards of this person, Netshivhuyu introduces us to the cry of his heart. He asks whether there are people with noses that can smell such beauty of character. The character is likened to a summer flower that takes its time to open with a fragrance that cannot be resisted.

The personality not only need to be seen or smelled but must be gazed at for it has put on the garments of gold. In Tshivenda gold speaks of royalty and expensiveness. To put on garments of gold will mean to have enduring virtues.

The last paragraph finally takes out all the spiritual wealth deposited in this personality. Whatever the person had, has been given (1987:1):

*No newa vhutsila ndele.*

(You have been given the art of being clean.)

His mind is said to be a mind not without substance. The mind is trained to dislike dirt. This finally results in a personality that is happy and not always sick (1987:1):

*Wo sendedza thovho kule.*

(The sleeping mat has been put away.)

The sleeping mat has been put away because of the healthy mind which the person possesses. His body is said to be the house of the Lord (1987:1). It is this very last sentence that finally gives us a clue as to whom the poet is addressing. He is

addressing a Christian person. At the same time he is evangelising. He is calling people to be convicted by the character of Christians. This does not leave Christianity without problems for the other side of the same coin is that the Christian faith will not go very far if it is not backed by a shining character. It is not only faith that speaks of a new creation.

### **7.3 SIGWAVHULIMU**

Wilson Mulingwe Ratshalingwa Sigwavhulimu was born at Tshitotsheni in Ngovhela on 10 August 1937 in the Northern district.

He started schooling in 1947 at Mphaphuli memorial school where he passed his standard VI in 1954. In 1958 he passed his Matriculation examination.

From 1963 he was employed at different work situations which finally led him to work as an instructor at the Railway College in Germiston from 1964 up to January 1972. In 1972 he joined the Venda Government Service, where he served at different departments and clearly distinguished himself as a hard worker which led to his appointment as deputy director general in the department of commerce in 1985. In 1987 he became a director general in the same department of commerce. He is a holder of a Bachelor of Arts degree with Sociology and Political Science as major subjects.

Sigwavhulimu has made a valuable contribution in Tshivenda literature especially in the area of poetry. His publications include *Tsiko Tshiphiri* (1971) and *Mirunzi Ya Vhuvha* (1975).

#### **7.3.1 Vhutambo ha khirisimusi (1975:18)**

In this poem, *Sigwavhulimu* shares his faith and religious feelings about the Christmas celebration. The poem is written in a philosophical way (1975:18):

*Mudzimu dzumbulula tshiphiri tshau,  
Dzumbulula mulayo wau.  
Dzumbulula, nga mbebo, lufu, tshidzo ya vhathu.  
Dzumbulula vhathu iwe Mudzimu tshilidzi tshau.*

(God reveal your mystery,  
Reveal your law.  
Reveal the salvation of mankind through the birth.  
Reveal your grace to all people.)

In this very first paragraph, Sigwavhulimu prays to God for the revelation of the mystery of his grace which is God's law, *dzumbulula mulayo wau*. (Reveal your law.) This grace is missionary in character. It aims at saving people. Sigwavhulimu sees the birth of Jesus as a missionary plan of God the Father.

The second paragraph puts Christmas on the map of the Christian faith:

*Begwai, begwai, iwe Murena Yesu.  
Begwai nga duvha la khirisimusi,  
Khirisimusi duvha la u begwa hu si u begwa.  
Begwai u sa gumi, begwai iwe bvungwi la  
tshifhinga.*

(Be born! Be born! Lord Jesus  
Be born on the Christmas day.  
Christmas the birth day which is not the birthday  
Be born endlessly, be born you consummator of time.)

In this paragraph Christmas is depicted as a day on which Jesus is born. It is a birthday that is not a birthday in reality (1975:18). Perhaps this means historically, it is not Jesus' birthday although the day is nevertheless taken as such for lack of the real date. It can also mean that Christmas is celebrated as a birthday though in the spiritual sense it is not just an ordinary birthday. Be that as it may, Sigwavhulimu reveals the importance of Christmas in this sense that Jesus must be born endlessly.

It is in the third verse that this endless birth is clearly depicted (1975:18):

*I bebwa kha dzifhio dzimbilu?  
 Khirisimusi i si na vhutambo?  
 Ndi ngana mbilu dzo bebwaho?  
 Nngana mbilu dzo dzikaho?*

(In which hearts is it celebrated?  
 The Christmas without celebration?  
 How many hearts are born again?  
 How many hearts are at peace?)

Sigwavhulimu succeeds in showing us the spiritual understanding of Christmas by putting a series of questions. Through these questions he makes it clear that to him the right Christmas is the one not only with outward celebrations, but one that takes place in the heart. He makes it clear that the hearts that experience this "Christmas", finally experience calmness. So Christmas brings a worldwide calmness to those who allow the Jesus of Christmas to be born in their hearts.

In the fourth verse Sigwavhulimu describes the type of hearts in which Jesus would like to be born (1975:18):

*Dza lamba u nyaelwa nga vhutambo-nama  
 Dzi tshi tswimilela vhutungu  
 Ha malofha o dwedwenyeaho tshifhambanoni:  
 Malofha thengululo ya vhathu.*

(Hearts that deny themselves fleshly celebrations.  
 Hearts that groan in pains.  
 The pains of the blood that gushed out on the cross.  
 The blood that redeems mankind.)

There are hearts that deny themselves fleshly appetites. Sigwavhulimu is hereby discouraging carnal celebrations that leave the meaning of Christmas completely distorted. He believes that although Christians must celebrate Jesus' birth, the mind of the cross must remain lingering in us as we prepare for Christmas. As if this "mourning attitude" will equally disfigure Christmas celebrations, Sigwavhulimu brings in another powerful thought in the fifth verse (1975:18):

*Naho ra lila ra tamba nga mitodzi  
 Fhedzi ra shaya malofha a mbebo ya Khirisimusi,  
 Zwisiwana zwa matodzi-vhuthu zwi do xwatuwa  
 Ra nyengelela dinzwini la zwililo.*

(Even if we cry and wash ourselves with tears,  
 If we lack the blood of the birth of Christmas  
 The fountains of human tears will dry up.  
 We shall be consumed in the abyss of lamentation.)

Sigwavhulimu stresses the importance of realising that mourning without hope in Christ is fatal.

So, to Sigwavhulimu, the answer is not just in leading a joyless life without celebration, the answer lies in having "the blood of the birth of Christmas".

In the last verse Sigwavhulimu combines the two pictures, the crying one and the celebrating one (1975:18):

*Nga vhutambo ha Khirisimusi  
 Vhuthu kha vhu liladze dzimbilu.  
 Vhu angaredze tshilidzi  
 Tsha mutumbu wo navhaho tshifhambanoni.*

(Through Christmas celebration  
 Let human kindness lift up its heart,  
 Let the grace be grasped,  
 The grace of the body on the Cross.)

He calls upon human kindness to lift up its heart and grasp the grace of God during the time of celebrations. The grace itself will lift people's hearts. It is the grace of the body on the Cross. So, this verse beckons people to come to Christ so that even at Christmas they will see him already on the Cross. The Christmas faith is woven in suffering that even when we celebrate his birth, we cannot fail to remember the Cross. Is Sigwavhulimu here taking Christ captive culturally since successive cultural waves have each offered us their new version of Jesus and his gospel? Our protest should be tempered by the consideration that running the risk of cultural captivity is inherent in

the church's mission. The Jesus of the Bible is portrayed as a man who brings joy to the world through suffering on the Cross. So those who suffer redemptively are following in Jesus' steps.

### 7.3.2 Tsiko-tshiphiri: *Mudzimu*

"Mudzimu" (1971:53) is a poem that is found in Tsiko-tshiphiri, another anthology of Sigwavhulimu. It is one of his shortest and certainly one of his best poems. In this poem Sigwavhulimu takes the missionary contributed name of God "Mudzimu" and etymologically gives an in-depth analysis of it (1971:53):

*Iwe mudzi  
Mudzi-mudzi  
Mudzimu.  
Mudzi-muthu  
Mudzi wa muthu.*

*U thoma muthu,  
U fhedza muthu,  
U mudzi wa u thoma,  
U mudzi wa u fhedza:  
Mudzimu.*

(You are the root,  
the real root,  
Muzimu (God)  
The person's root  
The Root of a Person.

You begin a person  
You finish a person  
You are the top Root  
You are the last Root  
Mudzimu.)

Through this poem, Sigwavhulimu reveals certain basic Western missionary concepts about God which have become part and parcel of the Vhavenda understanding of God.

Sigwavhulimu directs God as a root: *Iwe Mudzi* (1971:53). It must be remembered that a root serves to attach a plant to the earth and convey the nourishment from the soil to

it. When Sigwavhulimu portrays God as a root, he is depicting him as the basis and foundation - as a means of growth. The poet further adds that God is not the same in function. Sigwavhulimu wants us to have the right picture of the type of root that God is. He is the real one; the one without which the plant cannot survive.

The idea of God being a root is further developed by giving us a picture of a human being as a plant with God as the root. So God becomes the root of a person.

The second thought that this poem portrays for us is that of a creator. Elsewhere in this document we have shown our rejection of the notion that the Vhavenda have no idea of God as creator as propounded by Van Rooy (1971:6). We have shown that even from the beginning Nwali has been taken as a creator. It is this picture that Sigwavhulimu continues to paint for us. He sees God as both a creator and a finisher of humanity. Another strong idea that Sigwavhulimu puts forward is the ever presence of God in human living. He is not just in the beginning or at the end of human life. Without God, human beings will not be able to live. Here one remembers Jesus' parable of the vine and its branches in John, chapter 15. In this way God is not far from any of us. This also puts forward the missionary concept of God. If humanity cannot live without God, then humanity must be made conscious of Him. All people must be anchored in Him. Life itself receives meaning from Him. Without Him, there is no foundation of peace in our world since He is the basis of human life. There is no duality here. God is a God of all life.



## CHAPTER 8

### ECHOES BEYOND TWO MOUNTAINS

#### 8.1 Revisiting the basic thesis

The German missionaries who worked in Venda in the late nineteenth century contributed greatly to the development of Christian mission in Venda. They laid a foundation which is not easy to eradicate. One cannot fail to realise that their project was crowned with both failures and successes. In my understanding, where they failed they did not fail because of bad motives even though this did contribute; I believe they failed because of failing to see the importance of creating a “pass” between the cultural mountain of the Vhavenda people (Matongoni) and that of the Christian world. It was difficult for a people of a different world-view to hear echoes of the gospel which did not take cognisance of their world-view. The different writers we have studied, realised the importance of understanding people’s world-view before introducing new things.

What happened to the Blacks or Afro-Americans in the United States of America is what happened to the Blacks in South Africa. Blacks were thought to be morally and intellectually inferior beings. The writers themselves are caught between this understanding. Tshivenda writers often used the same stereotypes as White writers when portraying Blacks. This was the task of conditioning which resulted in the oppressed seeing themselves the way their masters saw them. When Christianity was introduced in Venda, it aimed at rooting out “heathenism” in the dark Soutpansberg. The projection of Africans and the evaluation of African culture was done by missionaries. Tshivenda writers provide a valuable contribution to African evaluation. Important issues of contextualisation have been raised by the different writes whom we looked at in this brief survey. To that we shall now turn.

## **8.2 UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTUAL ISSUES INVOLVED**

### **8.2.1 Issues of contextualisation**

The coming of the German missionaries to Venda has been taken as the beginning of Venda history. Likewise the missionaries took it as if they entered into a meaningless void to which they gave meaning. The attitude of the German missionaries towards African traditional religions was totally negative.

The missionary enterprise formed certain decisive attitudes towards African religion (Anderson and Stransky 1981:55). According to Kalilombe (1981:55), missionary work was seen as the church's bounden duty to bring the true faith to pagans, or to save souls that were in darkness. The challenge attracted vigorous and enterprising people, ready for action and for suffering, even to death. Although the enemy was known as Satan, it was felt that Satan had disguised himself and was active in his network of false religions. He and his associates had to be encountered, unmasked in their perfidy and then engaged in a mortal battle. The missionaries' encounter with the traditional African customs and religious practices was thus not a peaceful one. The German missionaries may have had sympathy and genuine love for individual "natives", for after all, they were the ones on behalf of whom the war was being waged. But towards their religious system and practices, there could be no compromise.

The Scriptural passages which were read for guidance in their encounter with the traditional religions were normally those with overtones of opposition against the "gentiles" as enemies of God's people and practitioners of idolatry and abominations. The verses selected, were the ones with expressions of hostility towards the pagans.

Reality was simplified into an "either/or" pattern. African traditional religions became opposition religions. There was thought to be nothing positive in these religions. There could be no positive assessment of these religions by the missionaries. Pagan religions were referred to as superstition (Bosch 1984:9).

When we realise that God has been ever present among his own people, just as he has been in all people's cultures and religious tendencies, we will be forced to be positive towards other people's histories and religions. This will not mean that everything in those religions is good or to be retained. Scripture should remain our guide on what should be retained and what thrown away. If this approach had been followed, Africans would not have been taken as heathens who knew no God. Their religious world-view would have been respected. This speaks of contextuality which has been seen as "the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within a specific context, nothing less than a necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the word" (Saayman 1995:191).

There are many contexts and many theologies (Saayman 1995:192) which are often experienced differently by different people. The German missionaries working in Venda did not try to analyse the Venda context so as to arrive at an understanding of their culture and religion.

The Tshivenda writers whom we have studied, seem to indicate that the African religious past has a contribution to make to other religions, including Christianity. The holistic approach is closer to the Scriptural way of living than the Western way. But the negative bias that missionaries had towards other religions forced them to regard Africans as heathens.

### **8.2.2 Witchcraft**

The Tshivenda writers we have studied, clearly show us the problems associated with witchcraft. Nothing seems to have changed in so far as witchcraft beliefs are concerned. Many people have lost their lives because of this. Some have been burnt alive; others have been stoned to death and yet others have been rescued by government officials. Witchcraft was thought to be a pre-scientific belief which would die a natural death as time developed (Davidson 1969:122). But time has given us a different conclusion. Nothing seems to change about witchcraft. The German missionaries, who pioneered the spreading of the gospel in Venda, clearly took this

belief lightly. It was thought to be part of the superstitions of the Vhavenda. Others, like Wessman, went to the extent of visiting a sorcerer who “divined” him correctly (1908:93). Consequently Wessman concluded that there was some force connected with witchcraft.

In *Elelwani*, Maumela (1954) treats witchcraft lightly. This is because the missionary approach to this issue was to regard it as superstition. As a result of this, Christianity failed to make an effective contribution to the solution of this African dilemma.

### **8.2.3 Racism and missiological afterthought**

Missionary Christianity succeeded in dividing the South African community into Blacks and Whites, rich and poor. It is paradoxical that Christianity is seen to have been the force behind racism and the disintegration of human relations.

In Mudau’s two stories, racism is shown as a time bomb that could explode in a very destructive way if not handled well. Whites are regarded as having contributed to Africa’s development, spreading literacy, medical knowledge and technical skills (Leonard 1996:11). This is not always very praiseworthy as apartheid and other colonial societies in Africa, vested power, wealth, skills and comfort within minority communities. This resulted in an Africa that is racially obsessed. The church needs to take the challenge of racism very seriously. Since the aim of mission is to be the transformation of both individuals and their society so as to reflect the sovereign rule of God, context analysis becomes essential (Nel 1988:146). Mission, politics and economics are interrelated. The fact that “conservative” churches tend to grow in affluent societies and “progressive” churches in poor societies is further proof of the interrelatedness of economics, politics and religion. By conservative churches we mean churches that tend to agree with the oppressive status quo. Such churches flourish on escapism. Progressive churches, on the other hand, are churches that tend to side with the poor and the marginalised. They flourish on activism. Any liberation that is seen not to be spreading “White advantages” will not be building a better life for all (Leonard 1996:11).

### 8.2.4 Poverty

The South African political confrontation is the confrontation between the indigenous communities of the Southern continent and the White settlers on the issue of landownership. The conquest of land by the Whites resulted in many social problems which finally reduced Black people to abject poverty. Cheap labour was introduced. Through this, the Blacks were kept at the lowest level for the entire country (Bruwer 1988b:61).

The quest for land became the most pressing issue in the history of South Africa. A bigger percentage of the land was given to White farmers who followed practices which had their origin in the era of slavery. Exacerbated by laws with a racial component, this reality made farm labourers one of the least protected groups of workers in the South African Society.

In *Mmanga Mawelewele* (1962), Madima clearly shows us the path that missionary Christianity followed to better the living standard of their mission villages. Scientific agricultural methods were pursued which resulted in good harvests. The missionaries taught the people to develop hard working habits. The church should take this issue from here and develop an effective development theology which must give practical and honest answers to the questions that buffet the lot of the suffering masses of South Africa. Father Vigil, an influential church leader, quoted by Martin (1994:33), is convinced that our visions and plans for the South should find their theological basis in our option for the poor. When one realises that the wretched of this earth make up over 90% of humanity (Slovo 1995:193), this option makes sense. Education must equally be transformed not only to be a sorting device for better jobs but also a form of investment, something which helps to raise the capacity of the society to produce more wealth (Wilson and Ramphele 1989:340).

### **8.3 Towards a conclusion**

We have examined the literature of a people - the Vhavenda-speaking people with their profound truth, their desire to be heard and listened to and the ever-present challenges that whisper hints for a solution.

I recognise the limit of this study since it is based on few literary works and touches only a scattered sampling of literature. Thus I have not attempted to interpret our data in terms of generalities. However, I feel this attempt gives one a challenge of Tshivenda literature as a trustworthy tool for further research into this most important subject.

I consider this project as one segment of a whole response to God's revelation and acknowledge its value as a bridge builder to young missiologists to provide them with a body of knowledge that will motivate them to read Tshivenda literature and also to write it. As a way of encouraging this, churches should hold symposiums to influence young writers who will equally write on issues of Christian faith.

I maintain that literary work in Africa must not only reflect and represent the authentic experience of Africans but must be a prophetic voice that speaks to this situation.

Tshivenda literature will keep on developing as long as it can speak about the art of living and loving in its own context. Such reflections must artistically describe African history and lifestyles in such a way that it affirms the Black people themselves. Missiology will be able to draw important information from such literature.

My aspiration was to delve deeper into the subject of Tshivenda literature as a graveyard where living shadows of missionary Christian experience display their presence. It was equally my goal to “hear” echoes of Christian concepts as reflected in the literature. Through it, it has been clearer that the following issues need the Church’s attention:

- (1) Ecumenical work needs to be developed.
- (2) Development projects need to be continued.
- (3) A Christian approach to the practice of witchcraft and a belief in witchcraft is long overdue.
- (4) A Christian literature written in Tshivenda will help many Christians who cannot read English literature.

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