

THE POETRY OF  
R. F. RATSHITANGA

(A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF  
THE POETRY OF PROTEST)

BY

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation submitted by me for the degree of MA in the University of the North, has not been submitted previously to any other university, and that this is my own work both in conception and execution.

Milubi

## DEDICATION

*This work is dedicated  
to my parents*

**MAANDA AND MAKWARELA**

*Whose love to me  
From age to age  
Oh, unsurpassed it was  
In loveliness.*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 THE AIM OF THIS STUDY

The predominant aim of this study is to probe into R.F. Ratshitanga's protest poetry. He throws his weight onto the ills that tend to nullify the spiritual existence of Venda people. Again, the investigator wishes to reveal how the poet has been able to employ some literary devices that he is head and shoulders above any Venda poet.

#### 1.2 THE APPROACH

The investigator finds it convenient to follow textual analysis approach as this is the only approach that best shows strengths and weaknesses in the literary text. Apart from this approach it is at times necessary that the biographical details of poems should be given. There are poems in which the poet's experiential background plays a role, for instance, **NGEI PHUMALANGA NDA IMA NDA SEDZA**. (At Phumalanga I stood and took a look) where the poet had once worked. His experience evoked protest against the prevalent situation.

#### 1.3 FURTHER PROGRAMME

Besides the introduction which entails, What is poetry? and Who are poets, further programme is as follows :

Chapter II deals with imagery in Ratshitanga's poetry. His usage of imagery helps people to visualise the situation. This juxtaposes human suffering.

In Chapter III he treats of symbolism which clarifies inhuman practises perpetrated by wrong personalities and institutions.

Chapter IV handles his artistry and technique in his poetry.

He uses literary devices with much success in exposing the ills of the society.

Chapter V is dominated by protest in his poetry. Protest pervades this chapter. He reacts against the injustices of the time and calls for the establishment of a new order of existence.

Chapter VI concentrates on social responsibilities in his poetry. He makes a clarion - call to every individual to shoulder the social responsibilities of annihilating the societal ills of the time.

Chapter VII is followed by conclusion which crowns Ratshitanga's philosophy of life.

#### 1.4 LIFE HISTORY OF RASHAKALIMPHANI FRANK RATSHITANGA

Rashakalimphani Frank Ratshitanga was born in August 1933, when the winds were hissing hither and thither, depriving the thickets of their raiment of green. He was born in the year of the great famine. In his area, it was regarded as a year of the Mbula famine, for people lived on mbula fruits. His mother went to the Tshikovha field (A field by the river) early one morning. While there, she felt unwell and left for the homestead. On her arrival, R.F. Ratshitanga was born. According to his mother, he arrived with the sun, meaning that nature ushered him into this world at sunrise. This was the debut of Ratshitanga's life history. A blank page was opened, to be filled with its own events, its weals and woes.

Ratshitanga was born of Mukondeleli Nyamasindi Matidze and Lazaros Makwarela Ratshitanga. It is worth mentioning that while his mother's heart was rejoicing over the beatitude the family had received, his father had been transferred from the Sibasa Police station where he was working, to that of Mafhishi (Bandolierkop) some few months before. He later joined his father at Mafhishi.



One day an incident took place and this went down to the core of Ratshitanga's heart. There was a certain Ngobeni, who was working for a certain white employer. The employer scolded Ngobeni, whose body was shining with perspiration dripping from him everywhere. This was followed by a terrible skirmish. Within minutes, Ngobeni's sweaty face was obscured by blood that flooded from a gash on his forehead. Young as Ratshitanga was, he could not wait to see more of that brutality. He took to his heels. This was the first encounter with racial conflict, of which he grew to know well.

His father came back from Mafhishi and went to Ngulumbi. He later moved from Ngulumbi and settled at Vondwe (known as Matatshe today) At Vondwe, his father established a butchery. Vondwe is a place that dominated Ratshitanga's youthful life. He roamed over most parts of the hills, played with locusts in the palm of his hands and imitated the Vhutiitii birds, whose melodies brought tranquility to his soul.

He started his primary education at Vondwe school in 1945. This was a school under the Presbyterian mission whose headquarters were Donald Frazer hospital. He also attended William Eady School which was supported by the Salvation Army. At this school, he developed the love for flowers; they seemed to sing vividly to his ears.

Reverentially, he enjoyed the twittering of birds. He became in imagination, a grazing cow, whose grazing was done in haste.

In 1954, he went to the Mphaphuli African School. The principal was at that time M.E.R. Mathivha (presently Prof M.E.R. Mathivha) He remained there until 1956, when he sat for a standard nine examination. It was at Mphaphuli High School that his poetic love and tendencies were awakened. Instead of reciting poems from books, he recited poems of his own creation.

In 1957, he was employed by the South African Railways after having transiently worked at Levubu Post Office and Frank's Motors at Louis Trichardt. He worked at Standerton Railways for five days only, having come into conflict with a white foreman. From Standerton, he went to Sasolburg, where he remained for five months or so.

He also went to Bloemfontein where he stayed for some weeks. It was difficult to find employment because of job reservation. So, he went back to Johannesburg, where he headed for the pass office in Albert Street. Luckily or unluckily, he was offered a railway job again. All the hard and ill-paying jobs were offered to Blacks, such as he. He was moved from one point to another, until he became a ticket-examiner. This lasted until 1961, when another disagreement with another white inspector occurred. They were involved in a bitter and bloody fight. Ratshitanga was arrested and taken to Modderbee jail. This was the end of his job.

During his time in prison, he took a firm decision to fend for himself by selling soft goods. This he did until the summer of 1971. It should be stated that he gained access to the American Information Library then situated in Shakespeare House, where he read American literature. His poetry was widely stimulated there. He began to create seriously and thoughtfully. His reading at the American library was interrupted by his zeal for adventure; he visited different parts of South Africa and Botswana.

In 1972 he came back to Venda, the place of his birth. Having no academic qualification, he was a natural heir to taunts, derision and humiliation. He secured work at Phumalanga saw-mill, where he wrote the poem **NGEI PHUMALANGA NDA IMA NDA SEDZA** (At Phumalanga I stood and took a look) When the job at Phumalanga came to a close (due to conflicts with the manager) the Department of Bantu Education employed him as an unqualified teacher, that is, as a private teacher, to use the correct term. This employment came to an end after three months.

From 1973 to 1977, he engaged himself in craft-work of various kinds, making sisal carpets, clay bowls and drums to earn his living. He went to Johannesburg where he had a market for his handiwork.

Then, in 1978 came his detention for his political involvement. After his release, he worked as a gardener.

In 1981, he was once again detained, after the bombing of the Sibasa Police Station. He was released in May 1982. He was later employed at Venda University as a mere gardener, He is still working there, as a gardener, at this moment.

## 1.5 WHAT IS POETRY?

All the genres of literature treat of man as a creature endowed with feelings and emotions within a circumstantial whole wherein he must perforce, find means and ways of expressing his deep-seated needs. One such form of expression is poetry.

Some writers like Marie Heese and Robin Lawton take poetry to be the most ancient form of literature known to man. They maintain that from early times this form of expression was a universal phenomenon, although its beginnings were quite different from poetry as we know it today.<sup>1)</sup> They further assert :

The earliest poetry was closely related to religious rituals and feasts. It was often a fusion of song and dance and was based on powerful incantatory sound patterns. It was the expression of man's most fundamental feelings and desires; his urge to communicate with his gods; his joy and gratitude at the bounty of nature; and his desire to exercise some sort of power, through ritual and magical chant, over natural processes.<sup>2)</sup>

Different literary critics tend to view poetry differently. T.S. Elliot regards it as language at its maximum potency, the best words in the best order.<sup>3)</sup> S.Gordon and G.E de Villiers view it as a philosophy, often a substitute for religion, in which man expresses his ideals, hopes and strivings,<sup>4)</sup> while Mathew Arnold defines it as :

1) Marie Heese and Robin Lawton, The Owl Critic, An Introduction to literary criticism (Johannesburg : Nasau, 1979), P.12.

2) Ibid; P.12.

3) F.W.Bateson, English Poetry, A critical Introduction (Great Britain : Longmans, 1950), P.15.

4) S.Gordon and G.E.De Villiers, Poetry now and then. (Johannesburg : Macmillan South Africa, 1968) P. xv.

The most beautiful, impressive and widely effective mode of saying things<sup>5)</sup>

With Wordsworths it is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; taking its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity<sup>6)</sup> D Lewis says that it is a special way of using words in order to create a special effect upon the reader and to light up the world for him.<sup>7)</sup>

Poetry is the language of the heart which is regarded as the seat of emotions. A successful poet arouses emotions in his readers.

It speaks directly to our feelings and our imagination<sup>8)</sup>

Poetry may, in a way, be regarded as, the most ancient form of literature known to man. It is found in all types of societies, literate as well as illiterate.

From the different explanations of what poetry is, the writer of this treatise feels bound to explain what poets are.

## 1.6 WHO ARE POETS?

Marshall contends that poets are those who are able to stand still, to capture the passing actions and ideas of the traffic of life and to shape them, turning impermanence into permanence.<sup>8)</sup>

Poets frequently reflect on reality and what is probable in life. They are quite observant and sensitive to the world of phenomena; they see what an ordinary man doesn't see. John Keats maintains that poetry must come as naturally as leaves to a tree, and that a poet goes through life with an awareness of what is happening.<sup>9)</sup>

5) H.Coomber, Literature and Criticism, (London : Chatto and Windus, 1953) P.77.

6) Heese and Robin Lawton, op cit, P.21

7) C.Day Lewis, Poetry for you, (Great Britain : Basil Blackwell, 1944) P. 1

8) Percy Marshall, Masters of English poetry, (London : Dennis Dobson, 1966) P 80

9) Ibid; P.34.

Poets are ever alert to what is happening around them. Their sensitivity could be aroused by love, beautiful objects, thrilling moments, social inequality, injustice, political deprivation, exploitation and many other factors. And they are sometimes revolutionary. Poets are our own visionaries. At another time, the poets experience intensity of feeling and they try their utmost to express it aptly. P B Shelley says that poets are the trumpets that sing to battle; they are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand Wordsworths regards a poet as a man who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul than is supposed to be common among mankind.<sup>11)</sup>

With Louis Macneice a poet may write about anything provided that the thing matters to him, for then it will bring with the intellectual or moral significance which it has for him in life.<sup>12)</sup>

S T Coleridge sees a poet in terms of philosophy. He regards a poet as a philosopher :

No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher.<sup>13)</sup>

While Shelley views a poet as a prophet and a revolutionary, leading the vanguard in man's thrust towards enlightenment and emancipation.<sup>14)</sup>

A poet is an artist working with words, fashioning out of the rude and stubborn mass of personal experience, to create a timeless monument.

10) S.C. Glassey, The Ground work of Criticism, (London : Oxford University Press, 1947) P.9.

11) Ibid.

12) Ibid.

13) Ibid, P.10.

14) Ibid, P.11.

## 1.7 POETIC DEVICES

Poetic devices or what C D Lewis calls "Instruments of poetry" form the basis of poetry. These include, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and assonance. R L Brett regards rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance and consonants as figures of sound.<sup>15)</sup> On the other hand he sees metaphors, similes, euphemism, et cetera as figures of speech. All these are poetic devices characteristic of poetry. The positive function of the various formal devices of poetry - metre, alliteration, metaphor, repetition et cetera is to ensure that the poem achieves a unity of impression.

### **Rhythm**

Poetry makes use of a musical pattern which evokes some kind of emotions in the reader. This pattern reveals itself through rhythm and it is related to metre, that is, the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry.

Rhythm is an effectual movement or "flow" that is brought about by the poet's use of emphasis and tempo.<sup>16)</sup>

Rhythm is there to indicate physical movement; create a certain atmosphere and to express feelings.

To the skilled poet, the regular metrical beat is a foundation, a norm from which to depart and return. It is an element in a larger movement, his rhythm.<sup>17)</sup>

Rhythm is affected by certain aspects. These are the poet's combinations of different metrical patterns, pauses, length of words, ease or difficulty of pronunciation. Marie Heese poses a question on rhythm : What is the best kind of rhythm for a poem? In answer

15) R.L.Brett, An Introduction to English Studies. Second Edition (London : Edward Arnold, 1976) P.42.

16) Heese and Robin Lawton, op cit, P.14.

17) Brett, op cit, P.13.

to this question she says that a common misconception exists that a good poem must necessarily be a smooth and musical one. She maintains that such a belief is as erroneous as giving a pre-requisite of rhyme to a good poem. She contends that the "best" rhythm for a poem is the one that expresses the poet's feelings and thoughts.<sup>18)</sup> Rhythm should not be seen in relation to feelings only but should be taken together with the meaning behind words. That is, it should not be made for the ear only, but for the intellect as well.

The use of rhythm reinforces emotions, the content, and carries home to the reader the writer's attitude, feelings and thoughts. Venda poetry is characterised by the effectual sense of movement called rhythm.

### **Rhyme**

Rhyme is closely related to rhythm for it punctuates the rhythmic structure of the poem with words that echo one another. Rhyme is pleasurable and pleases the ear. It satisfies our natural love of repetition.

Like rhythm, rhyme is most satisfying when it is not only decorative but meaningful. The mere presence of rhyme does not mean that we are in the presence of poetry.<sup>19)</sup>

This is of course the case with children's verse which appeals mainly to the ear. Rhyme comes at the end of the verse as reflected in Wordsworth's

"The world is too much with us."

The world is too much with us; late and soon  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers  
Little we see in nature that is ours  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon

18) Heese and Robin Lawton, op cit, P.18

19) Ibid, P.30

This sea that bares her bosom to the moon  
 The winds that will be howling at all hours  
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers  
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune<sup>20)</sup>

The rhyme scheme of this poem is abbaabbc. On the other hand we may have initial-rhyme which involves a repetition of initial sounds in two or more words. This is usually known as alliteration.

The white form flew  
 The furrow followed free<sup>21)</sup>

We also have internal rhyme : This is where two or more words rhyme within a line of poetry.

All is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil<sup>22)</sup>

Rhyme is also the pillar of the sonnet. The sonnet may be an English (Shakespearean) or Italian (Petrarchan). The Italian sonnet consists of the Octave (where the first 8 lines have the following rhyme scheme abba abba) and the sestet (where the rhyme scheme is cd cd cd or a variant)

In the English sonnet, the rhyme scheme may be divided into three quatrains and one concluding heroic couple, abab cdcd efef gg; but other poets do bring some variation. In Venda, rhyme is neither a precondition nor a pre-requisite for good poetry. Where it appears, it comes spontaneously. This is the case with Venda nursery rhymes which are designed to appeal to the ear.

We are led from line to line by the pleasantness of the metrical jog and the regular occurrence of rhymes, some of which are often quite ridiculous.<sup>23)</sup>

20) Gordon and G.E.De Villiers, op cit, P.91.

21) Heese and Robin Lawton, op cit, P.30.

22) Ibid.

23) Heese and Robin Lawton, op cit, P.35.

### Parallelism

Parallelism is viewed by Schapera as a correspondence, in sense or construction, of successive clauses or passages where, in each pair of lines, the first halves are identical in wording and the second are basically the same in meaning. He gives the following Tswana example.

letlhôla bommaêno gobeólwa  
letlhôla bommaêno golala balla<sup>24)</sup>

In Venda parallelism comes in this way

Dzhosia khonani yanga  
Dzhosia n̄e ndo t̄uwa  
Dzhosia a tshi t̄uwa  
Dzhosia ni vhuye nae.<sup>25)</sup>

### Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound at every interval, and the example of it from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Alfred Lord Tennyson" is as follows :

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew  
 The furrow followed free<sup>26)</sup>

### The Refrain

Refrain is a line or several lines repeated at regular intervals throughout the poem. The refrain largely depends on rhythm. It expresses the intensity of feelings of the moment.

24) I.Schapera, Praise-poems of Tswana Chiefs, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1965) P. 19.

25) D.M.Ngwana, Vhakale vha hone, (APB, 1958) P. 31.

26) C.P.Brooks and R.P.Earren, Understanding Poetry, (New York : Henry Holt and company, 1938) P. 49.

The refrain satisfies our natural love of repetition, gives continuity and enhances the lyrical quality of any poem, be it gay or serious<sup>27)</sup> .

Imagery, which uses figures of speech, and symbolism are significant poetic devices a poet cannot do without. From the literary devices that have been reflected above, the writer wishes to reveal how they are applicable to R F Ratshitanga's protest poetry in particular.

27) Heese and Robin Lawton, op cit, P.44.

## CHAPTER II

### 2. IMAGERY IN RATSHITANGA'S POETRY

It is impossible to separate the imagery from the poetry without grave loss. A successful poet makes use of words that carry pictures so as to evoke a sense of feeling in the readers. He uses "mental pictures" so that his audience may experience imaginatively that which has come to them through his words. They are able to grasp the complexity of the total situation. Imagery is a significant poetic device for intensifying, clarifying, enriching and giving the readers an insight into what is being described. C.B. Cox and A.W. Dyson regard imagery as anything descriptive and evocative in poetry which helps the readers to visualise a sense of situation.<sup>28)</sup> On the other hand Day Lewis maintains that an image is a picture made out of words;<sup>29)</sup> while M.H. Abrahams says of imagery :

"Imagery" is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature, whether by literal description, by allusion, or in the analogues used in its similes and metaphors.<sup>30)</sup>

Marie Heese views an image as a reference to or a description of something concrete by means of which the writer wishes to tell you about something.<sup>31)</sup> The image enables the poet to describe his object or situation with precision, vividness and force. This will be felt by the readers as something belonging on one way or another to the fabric of their lives. Imagery takes in its wake figures of speech and related literary devices. A figure of speech is the use of a word, phrase or an expression in other than its plain or literal meaning in order to produce a special effect.

28) C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, The Practical Criticism of poetry (London : Edward Arnold, 1965) p. 18.

29) C. Day Lewis, Poetic Image (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1948) p. 17.

30) M.H. Abrahams, A Glossary of Literary terms Third Edition (USA : Holt Rinehard and Winston, 1957) p. 70.

31) Marie Heese, op cit, p. 25

Abrahams regards it as a deviation from what we apprehend as the standard significance or sequence of words, in order to achieve a special meaning or effect<sup>32)</sup> The frequently used figures of speech are the following : simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, melopoeia, antithesis, oxymoron, irony, hyperbole, euphemism et cetera.

Ratshitanga makes use of imagery so as to reach and touch the hearts of his readers and this is clearly revealed in his poem 'Musi ro no neta' (When we have become tired)

Mihwalo ye ra hwala fhasi ra kudza  
Phanda ha vhahwesi maanda o pfuvha, ra kudza  
Na nala dzo no neta nga u losha  
Thoho dzashu rothe ri tshi vho dzungudza<sup>33)</sup>

(In front of the burden-givers when strength can no longer,  
We throw  
When our fingers homage can no longer pay  
All of us our heads in refusal we shake."

The burden has been laid upon people and it causes discontentment and bitterness. They throw it back to the owners so that they may experience a peace of mind.

In line 1 of the stanza the word 'mihwalo' in our everyday language suggests anything that may be carried either on the back or on the head. It happens that a person carries something of his own accord or through force. Should he carry the burden of his own free will, all the better; For he will be able to take it off as he wishes. But the contrary is the case with a person who might not take off what he has carried without the consent of somebody. He turns out to be the slave of what he has carried.

32) H.M. Abrahams, op cit, p. 60.

33) R.F. Ratshitanga, Tsengela Tsiwana (Pretoria : Van Schaik, 1973) p. 12.

In the context of this stanza, the word 'mihwalo' is suggestive of oppression. The line 'Mihwalo ye ra hwala fhasi ra kudza' carries with it a tone of bitterness.

People have been made to carry a burden which they are forced not to put down. The second line of the same stanza; 'Phanda ha vhahwesi maanda o pfuvha ra kudza' is suggestive of the people's preparedness for any eventuality.

In ordinary language, 'Vhahwesi' are people who help those who carry whatever they wish to. In other words, they give help and become spectators of those who struggle with whatever they have carried. But figuratively 'Vhahwesi' suggests oppressors. It is these oppressors against whom the oppressed react. Reaction is depicted clearly, by the line 'Nala dzo no neta nga u losha' which clarifies the state of slavery. The emotions evoked by this line are those indicating impatience and anger. It suggests that people may no longer endure any suffering.

Sa mbongola maḡini na thevhe ya lala  
 Musanda vhakoma vha lidza phalaphala  
 Ra vha furaḡela maḡo ḡadulu o lilala  
 Ro no neta ḡayo dzashu musanda dzo fhalala<sup>34)</sup>

(Like a loaded donkey in water lies  
 In the chief's kraal headmen blow their horns  
 We turned away from them  
 We have become tired, our feet to the chief's kraal can no longer walk.)

People have been made to endure like donkeys. Eventually, they revolt against those in authority.

In the first line, use is made of a simile 'sa dongi' which tends

34) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 12.



Ratshitanga uses the refrain 'Ro no neta' for the sake of emphasis. It may be used again as a euphemism. Instead of saying : "Ri lwa na vhpuli hothe" (We reject all forms of slavery and subjugation) he uses 'Ro no neta' (We have become tired). This is followed by an antithesis 'Zwiila ri do ilisulula' which makes one realise the intensity of frustration in the oppressed. The second line in the stanza, brings in the idea of success. The word 'khakhulula' embodies the establishment of a new order of existence. The last line, Vhana vhashu Venda zwiliwa la avhela' is there to convey a sense of contentment.

In the poem 'Mulanda', Ratshitanga has successfully used imagery to reveal the state of slavery.

Mmbwa ine mutshila ya phuphutha  
 Mukoma a rwa ha vha u shonedza  
 Dakalo a vunda, lufuno a thutha  
 Biko layo lothe ya di sumbedza

Mulanda wa a sa fheli maanda  
 Ane mabara a vhuisa musanda  
 Malamba o fhedza a wana ndala.<sup>36)</sup>

(A dog that wags its tail  
 Invites the beating from its master  
 He destroys both its joy and love  
 Yet it continues to work  
 faithfully for its master

It works without being discouraged  
 Only to be rewarded with an empty stomach.)

A servant works for the chief whose reward becomes a mere torment. This evokes ill-feeling and bitterness in him.

36) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit p. 14.

The word 'Mmbwa' (a dog) in the context of the poem, indicates the state of subordination and oppression. In this poem, a person is equated with a dog which is punished for no reason. Again, the word 'Mukoma' stands for someone who wields authority and is the source of security, peace and stability. But in the context of this poem, it suggests a tyrant who ill-treats others. Despite the treatment, the oppressed continues to show his love.

In the second stanza, the oppressed works for his oppressor without losing patience. He does it for the benefit of his oppressor. But what does he receive in turn as a reward? Hunger is the reward. The word 'ndala' in the last line is indicative of exploitation of man by man. This reflects a bitter overtone.

The image of despair and bitterness is shown by the poem 'Phosho ya vhana'

Phosho ya vhana lupfumo vhukuma  
 Ya ritha mbilu i imba muludzi  
 Dza pembela dakalo dzo fuma  
 Dzo kona u dikatudza mitodzi

Phosho ya vhana ndi dzilafho la fuvhalo  
 La dzimbilu dze dza pfulwa nga vhutshilo  
 A mbolela dzi no kundwa tshivhalo  
 Dzine dzo swotela dza vhuisa zwililo  
 Ra fara khana ra pfa dzi tshi divhitha  
 Dzi tshi nga ganunu dzo rithwa<sup>37)</sup>

Noise by children, a real wealth  
 It touches the hearts of men  
 And evokes joy  
 Bringing tears to an end

Noise by children, an ointment indeed

37) R.F.Ratshitanga, op cit p. 19

## CHAPTER III

## 3. SYMBOLISM IN RATSHITANGA'S POETRY

A symbol is a significant poetic device a good poet cannot do without. To write without it is like building without a foundation. The omission of this device becomes an exercise in futility. A symbol enriches, rather than impoverishes, the poet's work. Darbyshire regards a symbol as a special kind of sign which conveys information directly and indirectly. To him this sign stands for something other than itself, for example, the mark of a fish, was a symbol for the early Christians.<sup>38)</sup> On the other hand Marie Heese regards a symbol as a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by association in fact or thought<sup>39)</sup> On symbolism Yeats says :

Day after day I have sat in my chair turning a symbol over in my mind, exploring its details, defining and again defining its elements, testing my convictions and those of others by its unity, attempting to substitute particulars for an abstraction like that of algebra<sup>40)</sup>

The poet sees, feels and draws his symbols from the totality of his experiential world. '

Ratshitanga makes use of symbolism so as to draw the attention of readers to his personal experiences. He again uses it to evoke some feelings and to test the convictions held by readers. Symbolism is realised in his poem, 'Tshifhato tsha matombo' (A stone building)

38) Darbyshire, A Description of English, (London : Edward Arnold, 1967), p. 14

39) Marie Heese, op cit, p. 65

40) Donoghue, The Integrity of Yeats, (London : Longmans & Green, 1955), p. 36

Tshifhato tsha matombo nga tshi fhatiwe  
 Nga vhana vha muno arali vho thanya  
 Khatsho vha dzule vho takala  
 Ndivho yavho yothe vho khurutanya

Tshifhato tsha matombo kha yashu midi  
 Kha tshi ime ri wane vkhukhudo  
 Ri tinye mikumbela ya madi  
 Na vhana vhashu vha wane vhududo

Tshifhato tsha matombo nga tshi ime  
 Madumbu a kundwe u pwasha  
 Mbondo dzatsho, nge dza khwatha sa tsimbi  
 Ine na mpengo a linga a sokou litsha.<sup>41)</sup>

Ri songo fhatu tsha lufhuse  
 Tshine tsha wiswa nga muya  
 Ri kone u dzula-vho haya huvhuya.

(A stone building should be erected  
 By these children if they are clever enough  
 Within it, they should reside in happiness  
 Their knowledge having been recollected

A stone building in our yards  
 Should emerge for our protection  
 So that we can hide away from the downpours  
 And so that our children can find warmth

A stone building should emerge  
 Tempest may blow upon it and falter  
 Its walls should be as strong as iron  
 Which even a madman would succumb

41) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 14

We should never erect of dust  
 Which is easily blown away by wind  
 But a stone building  
 Then shall we settle in peace)

People should establish a good inter-personal relationship. In this lies peace and stability.

The first stanza suggests that a stone building be erected. This building, unlike one built of bricks, is expected to be strong and lasting. Unlike in the first stanza, the second one indicates that it is able to repulse an attack of any kind. Thus, becoming a good source of refuge since it is as hard and impregnable as an ironwall.

In the context of the poem, people have to be actively involved in enhancing their interaction and relationship. They need to establish bridges of communication across man-made walls and resolve problems confronting them. In this lies the fount of joy to mankind. The crucial points of this poem are found in the second stanza. The word 'Mikumbela' is indicative of calamity that might befall mankind if there is breakdown in communication. People should try their utmost to avoid this breakdown as it might lead to loss of life. This tends to reflect Ratshifanga's deepest feelings. He realises again that a direction taken by one generation might be regarded with some repugnance by another. In this case, a sense of the transience of human life is reflected. A fervent appeal is made through 'Tshifhato tsha matombo' (A stone building) that we redefine our stand and give a face-lift to our lives. This turn in our lives should be such that it brings with it peace and harmony.

One would expect a dichotomy to be drawn between the young and the old. Unfortunately, Ratshifanga does not do that. He suggests that the duty of erecting a stone building be duty of all. If this is accomplished there will reign peace and happiness.

'Madumbu' in the third stanza is a mode of symbolic expression

which suggests hideous weaponry. It incorporates the feeling of fear and despair. These can be dispelled through self-assessment.

In the last stanza, confrontation is discouraged by all means. 'Lufhuse' (dust) indicates grievances which cause discontentment in people while 'muya' (wind) suggests reaction to such states of mind. Ratshitanga appeals to people to try their best not to allow such to happen. They should, as a matter of fact, redefine their stand so that they might find peace and warmth in their existence.

Ratshitanga's symbolism is realised again in the poem 'Thudzani tshinwelo tsha vhutulu' (Kick away the gourd of poison)

Ni songo tsha ya nduni khulu  
 Hune vhatali vha fhiwa vhutulu  
 Vha mela mutumbane u no nga tshiulu  
 Phanda ra enda ra fhela nga gulu  
 Vhagobi vho di tsira nga tshiulu  
 Ro no fhela tsha khukhumuwa-vho nga gulu<sup>42)</sup>

(You dare not go to palaces  
 Where the wise are poisoned  
 And turn into soil  
 Leaderless as we are, we march  
 And mowed down by bullets  
 While the shooters have taken cover  
 And when they have annihilated us  
 They too crumble down like an ant-hill.)

People should never allow themselves to be entrapped in wrong influences propounded by wrong characters and institutions. These might turn suicidal.

Literally, the word 'Vhutulu' refers to a poisonous substance.

42) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 8

People who keep this potion are likely to be shunned and relationship with them is bound to be severed. But figuratively, this word is an embodiment of certain personalities that do untold harm to people, be it directly or indirectly. They have a way of luring and entrapping people to their diabolic objectives. Even the enlightened are co-opted and entrapped. They end up being instruments in the hands of these diabolic persons. Theirs is to dance to the tune of their masters. Ratshitanga moves people to be aware of these inhuman practices. He makes a clarion call to mankind to repulse these influences as they might expose them to self-destruction.

He indicates again that the destroyers will not continue destroying others as they will also meet their fate.

Ratshitanga suggests that the solution lies in destroying 'Tshinwelo tsha vhutulu' (A poison gourd) The perpetrators of evil objectives should be eliminated. Again, people should never respond to the wrong influences perpetrated by these devils especially the enlightened; for they are the ones misused to mislead others.

He indicates that they should dissociate themselves from these people. He implies that no man has any right to deny others a chance of enjoying life to the full.

In 'Venda li lila mutuka' (Venda cries for a leader) Ratshitanga reiterates his symbolic aspect.

Venda li lila mutuka  
 Ane kha khulunoni yalo a thukha  
 Vhutali hayo sa Salomo a luka  
 Nga phuphu ya tsimbi la kona u toka

Muthannga wa u fulufhedzea  
 A sa tendi na kulavhi kwo xela  
 Lupfumo a hana u lakatedzea  
 Venda kha uyo li khou vhidzelela

Venda li mu wanafhi-ha uyo mutuka  
 Vhothe vha tshi nga vho nwa muswuru  
 Vha tshi nga mahwarahwara sa dziphukha  
 Vha tshi vho ofhisa sa zwiguru<sup>43)</sup>

(Vendaland cries for a leader  
 Who shall accept the kingly chair  
 And reign wisely like Solomon  
 Anchoring his reign on an iron platform.

A faithful leader  
 Who attaches significance to everything  
 And hardly scatters the wealth  
 Vendaland cries for such a leader

Where shall Vendaland find such a leader  
 When all have turned drunk  
 And have turned wild like animals  
 They are fearful like monsters.)

People long for a leader in Vendaland for the ones at present have turned into monsters. They are no longer acceptable to people.

'Mutuka' is a word for a young man who is still energetic. He is expected to perform much of the communal functions with success. Again, the word implies a leader who might lead the country in the right direction. The word 'Vendaland' should not be seen in its everyday context but in a much broader sense. The country is in dire need of a leader. Ratshitanga presumes that the present leader is so weak that he can hardly lead the country to a rosier future. It needs someone, like Solomon, who would rule with much wisdom. The simile 'sa Solomo' carried overtones of wisdom and peace. The last stanza reflects the country's state of decadence.

43) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 5

It carries with it a feeling of revolt that springs from the rejection of the present leadership. There is a good reason why people should reject the present leader. People do not look at their leader with pride. Leadership has gone drunk and it is tinged with bestiality. Animals are not expected to have human feelings, neither should one expect it from the present leadership. The simile 'sa zwiguru' makes more evident the inhumane attitude of the present-day leadership. Leaders have become fierce..

Sendela zwau iwe we wa ana  
 Na zwi konqaho u livhana,  
 Khuluxoni iyi u mbo wana  
 Hu lilwa iwe n'wana-n'wana<sup>44)</sup>

(Come nearer, you who have taken an oath  
 Ready to face the difficulties  
 That you may take leadership  
 We all long for a real leader like you)

This stanza shows the type of leadership needed. People need someone who will lead them through thick and thin, and not one who cherishes self-centredness and self-aggrandizement. The repetition of 'n'wana-n'wana' in the last line emphasises and carries with it an image of real leadership. It is the kind of leadership that will never allow itself to be used as a rubber stamp. It will shun being cogs in the wheel of oppressive machinery.

44) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 5.

## CHAPTER IV

### 4. ARTISTRY AND TECHNIQUE IN HIS POETRY

A poet, like any other artist, must be able to control and utilise his material. A poet's material in this instance is language.

The creative artist, we have said, imposes order upon the chaos of his material by a process of elimination and organisation. In this way he creates what we have called artistic form<sup>45)</sup>

Once the poet succeeds in creating order out of chaos and creates an artistic form, then, he is a successful artist. For him to be an artist he does not misapply poetic devices like rhyme. He should let them come spontaneously. He must not enforce rhyme in his poetry for the sake of rhyming as the poetry he writes might appear unnatural.

Ratshītāṅga's workmanship lies in his ability to use language successfully in his poetry.

He makes use of metaphors, similes, personifications, and symbols. These literary devices intensify some feelings in his poems. This makes him a poet of note.

The art of the author cannot be divorced from his techniques. Artistry and technique form a unity. Poets may be regarded as being concerned with expression of deep-seated feelings. This is the expression of irresistible feelings. Although they share this common element, yet they differ in the way in which they express themselves. Technique calls forth divergencies in the approach to various poems.

In technique we look for the poet's skill in the choice of words,

45) Marie Heese, op cit, p. 11

in the way in which he coins words and the whole art of assemblage and fitting.<sup>46)</sup>

A poet may be said to sing as a bird does, from the urge within; and so poets may vary in techniques as a night-ingale may from a wren. Each has a genius for song, each has a fund of individual experience to relate; but their technique in relation is vastly different.<sup>47)</sup>

Ratshitanga's poetry reflects the unity of his artistry and technique and it is the force of the fusion that turns him into a successful poet.

Sa tshimange tshi bvungwi munangoni  
mukoma o ima  
Nga tshimebi muvhili watsho a sa gumi u tshaela  
Khae tsha da tshi si tsha tima-tima  
Tsho no neta maanda tsha guga a si tsha salela

Fulufhelo la maanda tshiswuhana  
A sa neti nga u namela dzithavha  
Ane na zwi no konda o livhana  
A kuya zwa vhuja zwa sudzuluwa<sup>48)</sup>

(Like a cat whose way has been obstructed by headman  
Who whips its body unceasingly  
To him it comes without hesitation  
When it has become tired, it draws out all its strength

With a manly hope  
He faces all the difficulties  
Until he reaches a successful conclusion)

Despite meekness, the oppressed experience the intensity of ill-

46) W.H. Stephens, Elements of English Verse (London : Macmillan and Co, 1933) p. 73

47) Ibid

48) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 13

treatment.

The oppression is so intolerable that people revolt against it.

Perseverance is in any human endeavour towards freedom.

'Sa tshimange' (like a cat) is a simile that likens people to a cat, which is known for its meekness. Unfortunately, it gets whipped now and then. Meek as its is, it resorts to fighting when it is unnecessarily provoked.

The downtrodden, like a cat, gets ill-treated now and then. The word 'tshimebi' stands for oppression. 'Tsho no neta' suggests that the oppression is so intolerable that people in turn revolt against the inhuman treatment.

Venda la namusi khomba mvundealuvhabvu  
 U vhone vho teaho thuso wa liladza thoho  
 u dzima dzilafho wa luvhabvu  
 Wo itwa ngau wa dzimwa vhungoho

Venda la namusi wo dzimiwa luvhomba  
 Sa we nombe a shaya a fhiwa mutore  
 A kapa a kola sa o laho munamba  
 Sa tsiwana ine a vhukololo ya amba

Venda la namusi mapfuma ngivho  
 Ya u itela zwickoko ya baraga milenzhe  
 Wa mona-mona wa kundwa vhulivho  
 Ya shanduka vhutulu ha hau vhutali<sup>49)</sup>

(Vendaland the invalid  
 You hardly help those in need  
 You never attend to the injured  
 This is due to your lack of truth

49) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 18

Today, Vendaleland has been denied goodness.  
 Like one without cattle  
 He never knows the taste of milk  
 He lives like an orphan

Today, Vendaleland is enriched with knowledge  
 Which has enslaved it  
 Vendaleland moves within enslavement  
 The knowledge that has been rendered has  
 turned poisonous)

Vendaleland has aspired for wrong ideals. It lacks both truth and wisdom. Its ideals have become self-destructive. Vendaleland finds itself in chains today.

In the first stanza Vendaleland is equated with an invalid. It experiences exploitation of its people yet it decides to remain inactive. Those who suffer are ignored. 'Khomba' is an embodiment of traditional life but the metaphor 'mvunde<sup>a</sup> luvhabvu' implies the annihilation of the Venda traditional life. On the other hand 'khuvhabvu' refers to the oppressed whose condition is never improved..

In the second stanza the word 'luvhomba' is suggestive of the good people in Vendaleland, 'Zwikoko ya baraga milen<sup>z</sup>he' in the third stanza is a metaphor that reveals the nature of slavery. The yoke of slavery results in an unceasing groan on the part of the people.

'Whutulu' in our everyday usage implies poison, but figuratively, it suggest unpleasant ill-treatment. His objective is to inflict harm on, and to destroy Vendaleland, hence Ratshitanga's protest.

He uses metaphors, similes, et cetera to scorn ideals Venda people are aspiring to. He again satirises all that is being done.

Great poets have a very individual techniques which is apparent to most of us; we say such a line sounds like Shakespeare, Milton or Keats.<sup>50)</sup>

In Venda, we are able to say that this line sounds like Ratshitanga's because of his diction. Compared to other Venda poets, he can be regarded as a poet of note because of technique to communicate his vision of life hidden to the less imaginative.

50) W. H. Stephens, op cit, p. 74

## CHAPTER V

### 5. PROTESTS IN RATSHITANGA'S POETRY

Every writer lives in a particular society and takes his word-pictures and ideas from it. He writes what he sees, feels, de- tests in his immediate environment. If he does not project him- self into what his fellowmen feel, he would be failing in his task to make them aware of what is taking place around them. Once the writer does not take cognizance of this, his work will suffer; hence protest in most of the writings.

Cosmos Pieterse cites an example of writers whose works are charac- teristically protest literature. These are Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer and many others. He goes on to say :

I should like to start with someone like Alan Paton, who repre- sents one extreme of protest literature in South Africa ... In between, you will find today people like Nadine Gordimer and in terms of drama, Athol Fugard.<sup>51)</sup>

In poetry, protest is realised in the poems written by Oswald Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla, Mazizi Kunene, Vilakazi, Ingoapele Madingoane and many others.

If one takes a look at a poem by Oswald Mtshali, one realises the protest in it.

Slowly he moves  
to and fro, to and fro  
then faster and faster  
he swishes up and down

51) Cosmos Pieterse and Donald Munro, Protest and Conflict in Africa Literature, (London ; Heinemann, 1969) p. 100

His blue shirt  
billows in the breeze  
like a tattered kite

The world whirls by  
east becomes west  
north turns to south  
the four cardinal points  
meet in his head

Mother

Where did I come from  
When will I wear long trousers  
Why was my father jailed<sup>52)</sup>

- In Vilakazi's poetry one is able to detect anger and protest.

In one poem he says :

Yet now my brother who is white  
Forsakes me, loathes me and exploits me  
Because of this, Oh Lord  
Where shall I hide?

The moon is high, the sky is jewelled;  
The moon is You, the Milky-way aglow  
With stars - those tears of Yours and mine  
O You, who wondered homeless through the world,  
Shine and dispel the darkness of the earth!  
Then, even we, O Lord  
May yet rejoice.<sup>53)</sup>

52) Wole Soyinka, Poems of Black Africa (London : Heinemann,  
1975) p. 156

53) Cosmos Pieterse and Donald Munro, op cit, p. 19

In Ngugi's opinion a writer is someone without choice, who needs to reflect on aspects of intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society.

What he can choose is one or other side of the battlefield ... What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics?<sup>54)</sup>

He goes on to say that a writer is concerned with what Chinua Achebe regards as the 'burning issues of the day' and these take place within the economic, political, class and race context<sup>55)</sup>

Ratshitanga like any protest poet, regards the feelings and experiences of people as of prime importance in protest poetry. Hence the bitter tone in his poetry. He reflects the economic, the political, the cultural struggles of his society.

'Ngei Phumalanga nda ima nda sedza' (At Phumalanga I stood and took a look) is one of them.

'Phumalanga' is the name of a saw mill in the 'Mutshundudi' river valley in Tshivhasa. This area is at present almost surrounded by a tea plantation. The poet once worked there and the conditions under which the Venda people worked touched him so much that he ended up writing the following poem :

Ngei Phumalanga kha la Matondoni  
Hune ha tamba nga manzhele a Mutshundudi  
Nda ima nda sedza Venda li khomboni

54) Ngugi wa Thigo, Writers in Politics, (London : Heinemann, 1981) p. 6

55) Ibid, p. 6

Maanda alo o no fhedza mutengo wavhudi  
 Vhanna nga duvha vha tshi shumela tshitano  
 Vhasadzi nngogo vha kudzwa la nga ndi tano

Ngei Phumalanga fhasi ha thavha ya Thathe  
 He lunako na ya Vondo dza tanganyisa  
 Venda lashu dza fhata nga muthathe  
 Nda ima nda sedza mutshini Venda u tshi  
 vho vhaisa  
 Mavoda alo u tshi khou shengekanya  
 Mikosi yavho lushada lwavho lwa milekanywa

Ngei Phumalanga he khalavha kale, mukano wa vha mulambo  
 He Vho-Ramaremissa khwatha vha lidza, ha ya vhalanda  
 Vho-Lavhengwa nombelo vha fara nga kuimbo  
 Nda ima nda sedza nda vhona matanda  
 Maganelo a khosi a si tsha vhonala  
 O milwa nga thulwi dza mapango<sup>56)</sup>

(There at Phumalanga in Matondoni  
 Which bathes itself in the crystal-clear water of Mutshundudi  
 I stood and saw Vendaland in trouble

Its strength having lost its value  
 Men working for 50c a day  
 25c were thrown to women -  
 as if it were a dream-

There at Phumalanga under Thathe mountain  
 Where beauty together with Vondo they merged  
 Our dear Vendaland they built in oneness  
 I stood and looked while the machine was inflicting  
 harm on Venda people.  
 The princes were being crushed  
 Their yelling, their noises swallowed by the machine

56) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 6

There at Phumalanga, where the boundry used to be Khalavha  
 Where chief Ramaremisa would blow a horn,  
 and counsellors would go to him.  
 Who-Lavhengwa nombelo would then forward with a song  
 I stood and looked and saw a heap of logs  
 Now, the barns of the chief can no longer be seen  
 Having been swallowed by the heap of logs.)

The presence of a saw mill at Phumalanga has disrupted the socio-political order. It has aroused feelings of bitterness and anger in people.

Phumalanga is a beautiful place whose beauty is embodied in the green vegetation. The place owes its greenness to the 'Mutshundudi' river which flows throughout the year.

In this contrast, this beauty has been spoilt by the presence of the saw mill. This has affected the socio-political order as well. Exploitation has become the order of the day. Men and women are paid 50c and 25c respectively. This is unbelievable. It actually rocks one out of sympathy with the owners of the saw mill. This kind of exploitation succeeds only in kindling bitterness and anger in people.

In the second stanza, Ratshitanga shows the destructive nature of the saw mill. 'Mavoḍa' refers to respectable princes, Unfortunately, the saw mill has destroyed the morale of both the oppressed and the princes alike. It respects no social stratification that prevails at Phumalanga since it is something alien. This has a crushing effect on Venda people. The saw mill suggests inhuman treatment of people by those who are out to exploit others. They are devoid of sympathy. People cry in pains but to no avail. If suppression takes such a worse form, people are bound to revolt.

The presence of a saw mill has affected the existing political order. This is evident in the third stanza. Who-Ramaremisa is

the name of the tribal chief whose call was answered immediately. Now his call is ineffectual. He wielded unquestioned authority among his people. Before the installation of the saw mill all his subjects respected him. But the installation of the saw mill in his land has usurped his authority, People no longer respond to the blow of the horn but to the call of the saw mill.

Phumalanga ngei kha la Venda vhukuma  
 Hune vhasadzi vha vhoxwa sa dzimbongola  
 Mikhwa yavho ya vhuthu nga mberego ya guma  
 Nda ima nda sedza lwá u tungufhala  
 Mbilu yanga ya dzula yo ongomala  
 Nge venda la u vuda la fhalala.

Ngei Phumalanga tshivhindini tsha la Tshivhasa  
 Hune vhashumi sa mmbwa vha pandelwa  
 Vharèngi sa vhahumbeli vha itwa, ndo lavhelesa  
 Nda vhona zwothe ndi sa tou anetshelwa  
 Nda fara khana mbilu ya tambula

Ngei Phumalanga kha lino la hashu  
 Hune avho vha no buledza manwalo vha tambula  
 Mabofu nga u pupudzika a vha magwashu  
 U kundwa hao tshedza mbilu dza dzula dzo fhumula  
 A takala a tshi shonedza vhavhoni  
 Nda vhona zwothe nda sumetshedza kha Mukoni<sup>57)</sup>

(Phumalanga in the heart of Vendaland  
 Where our women as donkeys are spanned  
 And through work, the manners of their being ceased  
 I stood and looked sorrowfully  
 My heart then leapt out of place.  
 For, Vendaland has been shattered.

Phumalanga in the heart of Tshivhasa  
 Where workers are expelled like dogs

Where buyers are made like beggars .  
 And I saw all these, without being told  
 I touched my chest; my heart was in great pain.

There at Phumalanga in this very country of ours  
 Where those who have completed their studies,  
 suffer the most  
 The blind becoming culprits because of blindness  
 Their lack of light making their hearts feel out of place.  
 Rejoicing in scorning the enlightened  
 And this did I see, and passed them on to the Almighty.

The poem exposes the position and the working conditions of women at the saw mill. The simile 'sa dzimbongola' implies that women are like donkeys. They are not only treated like donkeys but their traditional norms and values have been violated. Violation of norms and values have come through the foreign work situation at the saw mill. Ratshitanga laments this waning of norms and values in society,

The relationship between an employer and an employee is at its ebb. Some workers are treated inhumanly while others are expelled from work. This kind of relationship has permeated the lives of customers who have been turned into mere beggars. Thus, everybody is kept in a state of servitude at Phumalanga. This evokes some repugnance in Ratshitanga.

In the last stanza, he indicates that even the 'educated' suffer. The 'educated' should serve as the liberators of the oppressed, yet they find themselves in shackles. As a result, the 'uneducated' scorn those who fail to liberate themselves. A persistent concern of Ratshitanga in this poem is an assertion of freedom of man in contradiction to servitude and oppression.

Protest against oppression is realised in the poem 'Thudzani tshinwelo tsha vhutulu' and 'Musi ro no neta'. In 'Thudzani tshinwelo tsha vhutulu' Ratshitanga rejects those persons who are used

as tools for oppressing others. He maintains that money is used in most cases as an enticement. He urges people to defy oppression. On the other hand, 'Musi ro no neta' is a warning against oppression. The oppressed have become tired of exploitation, lack of respect for human dignity, ill-treatment, et cetera. When the oppressed become tired of oppression, nobody would stop them from annihilating the injustices of the time 'Venda zwiliwa la avhela' vividly expresses the sense of satisfaction, peace and stability. Thus, a man, no matter who he is, has the right to enjoy the fruits of his freedom in happiness and peace.

Ndo da fhamo shangoni wa nnyita phuli  
 Nda gagadela zwothe sa dzuyutsuyu  
 Nda lavhelesa mihwalo ya mphira khuli  
 Nda unga sa guvhukuvhu  
 Nda khuba marama sa nngu muvoni  
 Nda kona-ha u vhona mboni  
 Ndo da wa nnyita mbidi ya mihwalo  
 Nda wela fhasi nga fuvhalo  
 Ndi tshi itela lwau lukuna  
 Vhuleme ha goba mbilu yanga sa phuna.  
 Iwe wa ri ndi tsilu la vhukuma  
 Mulomo wau zwigodo wa bvuma  
 Nda vha muhali wa u kondelela  
 Nga vhuthu hanga ha u khathutshela<sup>58)</sup>

(I have been made a prisoner in this world  
 I have carried the burden without complaint  
 I turned dumb, like a slaughtered sheep  
 And suffered the consequences  
 I have been turned into a donkey  
 That falls down in pain  
 All this for the master's sake  
 The burden has struck my heart  
 I have become a paragon of tolerance

And I have been taken for a fool  
 All this out of my sense of humanity.)

Man is born free, yet his freedom is curtailed by his contingent situation. The word 'phuli' suggests the down-trodden who have no freedom of choice. They are faced with no alternative. Theirs is to do or die. Ratshitanga maintains that man is born free and has the right to enjoy his freedom. Unfortunately, he is turned into a slave. This is a violation of the existential axiom. The word 'mihwalo' in the third line implies oppression. People are made to endure this oppression. 'Sa guvhukuvhu' (like a waterfall) as a simile reveals the intensity of oppression. A waterfall is characterised by noise. A slave is expected to make a noise, similar to that of a waterfall. This is due to the unfortunate situation in which he finds himself. Ratshitanga suggests that the oppressed should be calm in their reaction against their situation

'sa ngu ' (like a sheep) implies meekness and tolerance. A sheep is known again, for its ability to take in the pangs of pain during slaughter. Ratshitanga sees a sheep as an embodiment of the oppressed. The down-trodden should respond against their oppressors with kindness.

The symbol 'Mbidī' (a donkey) in the seventh line, connotes an animal that is ill-treated now and then. It is made to carry anything against its wishes. It is actually at the mercy of its master. In the context of this poem, the word 'mbidi' suggests the oppressed who encounter oppression at every turn of their lives. The donkey works for this master until it falls down from pain and fatigue. It experiences these pains and fatigue out of its willingness to do good for its master. This is also the case with the oppressed who stand and fall by their oppressors. Despite ill-treatment, the down-trodden continue to do good to their oppressors. Unfortunately, the oppressors hardly take any cognizance of this. They only take delight in the fulfillment of their ideals.

'Whuleme ha goba mbilu yanga' as a metaphor, implies heart-pains. These are derived from working for the oppressors. The heaviness of oppression brings in these heart-pains. Meekness and tolerance are characteristic of the oppressed. They even go to the extent of showing their love for their oppressors. This is unheard of.

Ratshitanga is touched by the indifference of the oppressors to the oppressed. Those in authority hardly recognize the sacrifice made by the down-trodden. It is this sense of indifference of those in authority that brings in heart-pains to those who are not in authority. A realisation of this sense of indifference is revealed by the line, 'Iwe wa ri ndi tsilu la vhukuma' It also makes those in authority take note of the fact that the oppressed have come to the realisation that they are being made fools of.

Again, thanks rendered by the oppressors do not come from the depth of their hearts. They are swollen with pretence. The oppressed have come to realise this pretence and a feeling of bitterness is evoked in them. The word 'muhali' (a valiant) stands for someone who has distinguished himself in battle. Such personalities are given a token for their bravery. But in the context of this poem, 'a valiant' is somebody who has distinguished himself in tolerance. It is the kind of a person whose tolerance is immeasurable. The oppressed are regarded as valiants of tolerance in this poem. They are able to absorb any kind of ill-treatment that comes their way. A sense of humanity is revealed by the last line. It implies that ill-treatment has come to the oppressed due to their sense of humanity and tolerance towards their oppressors. Ratshitanga seems to blame this sense of humanity. He maintains that the down-trodden have tried to show love, tolerance and a sense of humanity towards their oppressors at their own peril. He regards this sense of humanity in the oppressed as a copper wire that has conducted a current of misery, heart-pains and self-destruction.

Mbilu yanga yo pfulwa nga misevhe  
 I tshi kha di vha thethe sa lurere  
 I sa athu u tea u hwala thevhe  
 Ye ya guguvhadza hayo vhutete  
 Ya tavha mukosi wa u phalalwa  
 Ha kundwa muaravhi a no thadula  
 Fhasi ya dzula i songo rulwa  
 Vhusiku vhutungu ha vhuisa mvula  
 Mahuvhula ane a dadza maisha  
 Ya rwa migado vhutungu ha rindila  
 Fuvhalo lo revha kudakalo kwa vhuiswa  
 Sa lushie fhasi ya titiya  
 Khofhe dzo thafha ya dovha ya gomela  
 Mbolela dzila dza dovha dza monela.<sup>59)</sup>

(My heart has been struck by arrows  
 At its budding stage  
 When it is not yet fit for burden  
 It has cried for help  
 Nobody has come to its rescue  
 It has sunk down with the heaviness of the burden  
 When night falls, it experiences the downpours of pains,  
 Which fill the lakes  
 It swims in pains  
 Like a child it lies down  
 Pains dawn again when sleep has given way  
 They fall again in downpours.)

The metaphor, 'Mbilu yanga yo pfulwa nga misevhe' suggests a sense of despair and bitterness in the down-trodden. It implies the crushing effect of the oppressive situation. 'Sa lurere' in the second line connotes the state of helplessness. Being in the state of helplessness means being at the mercy of the oppressors. Oppression knows no boundaries. Both children and adults are hit hard. Children are made to carry the oppressive burden at their earliest stage. They cry for help, unfortunately the oppressors are not eager to give them an ear. Young as they are, bitterness pervades their lives.

'Vhusiku v<sup>h</sup>utungu ha v<sup>h</sup>isa mvula' suggests the intensity of ill-treatment. The pains they endure come in full floods. They ultimately find themselves swimming in pains and bitterness.

Ratshitanga protests against this state of affairs. He stands against the oppression of both the young and the old.

The down-trodden are made to lie like infants. Normally, an infant will sleep out of a need. Sleep is in this case both spontaneous and enjoyable. On the other hand, sleep in the oppressed becomes an outlet of their day to day bitterness and frustration. Unfortunately, this outlet serves no purpose since oppression haunts them even in their sleep. Oppression, bitterness and frustration torment the down-trodden while asleep and awake. The metaphor, 'Mbolela dzila dza dovha dza mopela' implies recurrence of bitterness and frustration every now and then. Ratshitanga rejects and protests against the situations, institutions and personalities that debase the state of man into an object. Man is turned into a tool in the hands of his master. This succeeds only in kindling frustration and bitterness in the oppressed.

Ratshitanga maintains that every individual has a right to live without man-made restrictions. No man has the mandate to take another man's freedom and replace it with servitude and oppression.

Protest in Ratshitanga's poetry is again realised in the poem, 'Kudele kwa Vhaeni'.

Gomane dza v<sup>h</sup>uhali mahaya dza takuwa  
 Muno mashango a matongoni dza livha  
 Magungwa ma<sup>q</sup>ini a tshi tou seluwa  
 A tshi swika nga v<sup>h</sup>utali a mbo v<sup>h</sup>uvha

Vhalangambi dzithwala misanda vha isa  
 Dziphanga na zwivhoni zwa vha v<sup>h</sup>uvhaivhai  
 Mabvahanwani havho a si vhe a no ofhisa  
 Zwivhoni, nombe dzo tovhela ya nga ndi thai

Lurere lwa mbo ranga phanda Tshimedzi  
 Vhaeni vhashu vha mbo ri katudza ndimo  
 Mishasha, matongoni ya tokwa ra vha vhaxedzi  
 Mbeu dzo awela nga u kundwa vhuyo

Thavhani ya Tshanowa madyambila a a fhalala  
 Zihali zwa u ranga pandoni zwo poswa  
 Mulilo wa xaxara zwothe zwo fhelela  
 U tshi thothela, tuwani ra losha nga bonndo<sup>60)</sup>

(Fierce groups left their homes afar.  
 All their eyes were cast on this land,  
 While their ship kept sailing.  
 They kept a low profile when they arrived.

Their leaders took presents to the chiefs  
 knives, mirrors and all glittering objects.  
 Their words were friendly and harmless.  
 Our cattle then disappeared in disbelief.

When summer come,  
 Our ploughing was made to come to an end  
 Their buildings were erected and we had much to lose.  
 Our seeds were of no use anymore.

At Tshanowa mountains, Black mambas are no longer to be seen.  
 Weapons were thrown  
 And fire devastated everything.  
 After which we sought for peace.

The first stanza deals with the arrival of the foreigners. Ratshitanga makes use of euphemism 'vhaeni' (visitors) rather than foreigners, which may sound unkind.

They came from afar. Their arrival was distinguished by much diplomacy. The objective of the journey was not disclosed. It was kept a secret.

60) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 19

Paying homage is a sign of acknowledging authority. This they did, and they were received warm-heartedly. Their homage was in the form of knives, mirrors and other glittering objects. Their words were friendly and raised no alarm.

The third stanza reveals the change of both the attitude and objective. The metaphor, 'Vhaeni vhashu vha mbo ri kaṭudza ndimo' suggests the seizure of the land. This was followed by the erection of buildings. 'Mbeu dzo awela nga u kundwa 'vhuyo' implies subjugation.

The arrival of foreigners has not done harm to man alone but to wild species as well. Black mambas are also made to leave Tshanowa mountain. 'Mulilo' (fire) is a symbol that suggests the culmination of subjugation.

The word 'mulilo' implies bitter fighting. Despite the bitter fighting the owners of the land get defeated. A peace treaty becomes the order of the day.

Ratshitanga protests against foreigners who have come in disguise, only to show their true colours later. He reacts against the harm which has been inflicted on the owners of the land. The arrival of foreigners meant destruction of peaceful existence. Ratshitanga is bitter against this state of affairs.

Protest against detention is realised in the following poem.

Ndi kale no ndzhenisa kothoni  
 Nda kondelela zwanga nangwe ndi songo tshinya  
 Mbilu yanga ya tetemela sa i re phephoni  
 Nda guguvhala nda kundwa u tinya  
 Hu tshi vhuvhuta muya wa vhuriha u no vhavha  
 U no ṭulutshela wa tshilidzi a no vangula  
 Thuso yoṭhe nda wana ndo ṭangulwa  
 Nda vhidzelela nda ṭangana khalakhala  
 Inwi na fhumula na sa ḡe u phalala

Nge nda tshinya nga u ni kovhela vhuthu  
 Na sa zwi divhe, mbilu yaṅu ya dzula yo ita buto<sup>61)</sup>

(It is long that I have been put in jail  
 I have endured it although I committed no offence  
 My heart shivers as if in cold  
 When the cold wind blows,  
 Which like a thorn, prickles the core of one's life  
 I long for the merciful who can take it off.  
 I cry for help until my throat runs dry  
 And you keep quiet and never come to my help  
 My mistake lies in having shown you my sense of humanity.

In our everyday language, the word 'khothoni' suggests the place where offenders are taken to. The place is characterised by lack of freedom and niceties. In the context of this poem 'khothoni' suggests oppression. It curtails one's freedom of choice and breeds bitterness in the oppressed.

Ratshitanga sees detention in terms of the sense of humanity in the down-trodden. He regards this sense of humanity as a causation of unnecessary detention. 'Nda konḡelela zwanga nangwe ndi songo tshinya' implies detention without offence. This evokes a sense of anger in Ratshitanga.

The word 'Mbilu' (a heart) ordinarily refers to a very delicate organ of the body. It is responsible for the pumping of the blood. Should it stop pumping, life ceases. It is, therefore, the source of life. But in the context of this poem, it suggests sensitivity to inhuman treatment.

'Muya wa vhuriha' (cold wind of winter) is known for its destruction, of crops. It is also known for its after-effects on animals. Should it blow severely, most animals die. 'Muya wa vhuriha' as a symbol, suggests death. Ratshitanga sees the inhuman treatment in jail in terms of death. The ill-treatment is so harsh

61) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 30

that death is imminent.

'Mupfa' (a thorn) connotes the harshness and pains of life in the down-trodden. When a thorn has pricked deep down the flesh, help is sought immediately. This is due to the fact that the pricked one finds himself in a helpless situation. No one can come to the help of another unless there is an element of love in him. 'Nda vhidzelela nda tangana khalakhala' shows the nature of helplessness. A person cries for help until his throat fails him. This suggests that the oppressed are always seeking for help. Help is not forthcoming since the element of love is lacking in the oppressors. This evokes a sense of anger in the down-trodden. Again, Ratshitanga sees the cause of anger and bitterness in the oppressed as the sense of humanity shown by the down-trodden. To him, those in authority are having a misinterpretation of a sense of humanity for a sign of weakness and foolishness. This evokes in Ratshitanga, anger and bitterness. All this forms the peak and the culmination of Ratshitanga's protest in his poetry.

## CHAPTER VI

### 6. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN HIS POETRY

A poet is always concerned about his society and its activities. But then what is society? Samauel Koenig regards a society as a group of people held together by common traditions, customs, ways of life or a common culture, which exists among the members constituting it an awareness of belonging to it.<sup>62)</sup>

Responsibilities on the other hand may be regarded as duties. Ratshitanga tries to show in his poetry that everybody has a social duty to carry out for the betterment and the good of the communal set-up. Bateson asserts that the subject matter of poetry is not "things" but conflicting moods and attitudes of human nature in its social relations.

Even important "things" like an economic or political system, cannot be the subject-matter of poetry except as the objects of human emotions and reflections. The inner meaning of a poem is the syntheses of conflicting attitudes.<sup>63)</sup>

He maintains that poetry, which he equates with speech, is there to elicit social response and to establish social tranquility, while Oswald Mtshali sees poetry as a way of reflecting about the society. He states :

... black poetry, like every art form, describes the life of the black people in this type of society. It portrays the lives of the people who find themselves helpless victims

62) Samuel Koenig, Sociology, and Introduction to the Science of Society, (New York : Barnes and Noble, 1957) p. 21

63) F W Bateson, English Poetry, A critical Introduction (Great Britain, 1950) p. 59

in vicious circumstances not of their own making.<sup>64)</sup>

Poetry, among other things, has a duty to expose the ills of the society. On the other hand Moore does not find any satisfaction in the mere exposure of the vicious circumstances surrounding the society, but feels that there should be a reaction to any social ill. He sees the need for the South African poet to react to his social situation.<sup>65)</sup>

In the light of what Moore says, Ratshitanga reacts to his social situation. He even takes on the pains of making others become aware of their need to react to it. His reaction befits Moore's opinion that an artist is a man who lives in a particular society and takes his images and ideas from that society. His socio-political situation, his personality as well as his concern for the suffering of others. He apparently intends to make people become responsibly committed to ironing out of the social ills surrounding their lot.

Ngugi sees poetry as being inalienable from society. To him, politics, poetry and society form an entity.

It follows then that because of its social character, literature as a creative activity and also as an end is influenced by historical forces and pressures, it cannot elect to stand above or to transcend economics, politics, class or race. Again, because of its social involvement, literature is partisan and more so in a class society.<sup>66)</sup>

Ratshitanga's poetry, taken against the views of the aforesaid, is a reflection on the politics and its effects on his society.

64) Christopher Heywood, Perspectives on African Literature,  
(London : Heinemann, 1971) p. 125

65) Ibid

66) Ngugi wa Thiong'o, op cit, p. 6

He deeply ponders on his society and remonstrates against its ills. He does not only reject oppression but evokes the bitter feeling about social responsibilities in his audience.

A sense of social responsibility is reflected in most of his poems. One of which is, 'Ngei Phumalanga nda ima nda sedza'

Ngei Phumalanga kha lino la hashu  
 Hune avho vha no buledza mañwalo vha tambula  
 Mabofu nga u pupudzika a vha magwashu  
 U kundwa hao tshedza mbilu dza dzula dzo fhumula  
 A takala a tshi shonedza vhavhoni  
 Nda vhona zwothe nda sumetshedza kha Mukoni. 67)

(There at Phumalanga in this very country of ours  
 Where those who have completed their studies suffer the most  
 The blind becoming culprits because of blindness  
 Their lack of light making their hearts always to feel out  
 of place.  
 Rejoicing at scorning the enlightened  
 All these did I see, and passed them to the Almighty.)

All people, the 'educated' and the 'uneducated', despite their social standing, experience ill-treatment at Phumalanga.

Exploitation and suffering at Phumalanga saw-mill knows no bounds. Both the 'educated' and the 'uneducated' suffer alike. Although the ordinary people do suffer, yet they find solace in laughing at the 'educated' who fails to liberate themselves.

The word 'Vhavhoni' implies the 'educated' who by virtue of being educated should spearhead the protest against oppression. They are the ones who should not only improve conditions at Phumalanga but society as a whole. Their failure to do so is seen as negligence on their part. Ratshitanga levels a scathing criticism

against this kind of behaviour.

The sense of social responsibility is reiterated again in the poem entitled MARANGAPHANDA

Ndo ima shangoni nda sedza  
 Nda vhona mivhuso i tshi shanduka  
 Kudzulele kwashu na kwone kwa shanduka  
 Midi sa khumba ya hwetekana  
 Khulunoni ya vha tshimuna  
 Vanda la fhumula sa tshitumbu  
 Ra dziḁa mikosi ri sa ḁavhi  
 Sa ri shavhaho zwiguru zwi no ofhisa.

Ndo tendeleka na shango  
 Vhunga u wanga muhwalo  
 Une nda vha phuli ya u gagaḁela  
 Nda vhona tsiwana dzo habeledzwa  
 Dzi si na nungo dza u ponyoka  
 Mikosi dza ḁavha i no ofhisa  
 Mbilu yanga thethe zwa ritha  
 Nda ḁamba nga a elelaho shamani<sup>68)</sup>

(I stood up and took a look  
 And saw governments changing  
 Our ways of living also changed  
 And dwellings like a snail contracting  
 A chief becoming dumb  
 A royal setting quietened like a corpse  
 As if frightened by vicious monsters.

I looked around the country  
 Since it has become my duty  
 And I saw the orphans being spanned

68) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 1

Lacking strength to free themselves  
 They were frightful  
 My soft heart was touched  
 And I washed with the tears rolling  
 down my cheeks)

Oppression reigns all over the country. Traditional settlement has been eroded. The chief is silent about the general oppression felt by his people.

People cry in helplessness and bitterness. Ultimately, one's sympathy is directed at the oppressed.

The simile 'sa khumba ya hwetekana' in the first stanza suggests forced removal. Not only are they forced to move away from the areas they love, but their ways of life are also affected. 'Khuluponi' suggests a chief who is an embodiment of a stable rule. But what does a chief do in the face of forced removal? He turns dumb. That is, he fails to protect his people. People begin to lose confidence in him. There are reasons why people fails to have confidence in him. The first reason might be the fact that their chief has decided not to raise a voice of protest against those who remove others to unknown places. Secondly, those who remove others might have given him some form of reward to hoodwink him. Ratshitanga's voice rises against such actions. To him, these are actions of utter negligence of social responsibilities.

In the first stanza an emphasis falls on forced removal while the second one lays stress on denial of freedom of choice.

The down-trodden find themselves in a helpless situation. As slaves their salvation lies in dancing to the tune of their oppressors.

Tsiwana implies people in bondage. 'Dzi si na nungo dza u pon-yoka' implies that people long for freedom and this can only come through a liberator. Ratshitanga makes a bold call to individuals to come to the rescue of the oppressed.

A chief, by virtue of his social standing, might become a liberator. He would actually become a solution to the problem. Unfortunately he has become part and parcel of the problem, a bolt in the oppressive machinery. On realising this, the oppressed, helpless as they are, give unheeded cry. This touches Ratshitanga so much that he calls for reaction against injustices prevailing in his society.

Again, Ratshitanga draws our attention to social responsibility in his poem TSENGELA-TSIWANA (an orphan-defender)

Tsengela tsiwana fuka vuhali  
 Vhune nga vhuṭali ha dugedzwa  
 Vhu kone u fhisa vhugali

Tsengela tsiwana ima na khotsi kha yau ndila  
 U kone u ramba oṭhe maanda  
 Mafumo o livhiswaho ṅwana u kone u pila  
 Dakalo na mulalo zwi kone u anda

Tsengela tsiwana fara gatho nga tshau tshanda  
 Sa Davida we lawe a ḍi vha muposi  
 E ṅwana ngeno kha lushaka e phanda  
 Zwiḷa nga khotsi o no pfi ndi khosi. 69)

(An orphan-defender put on bravery  
 Which though wisdom, is kindled the more  
 That it burns all the tricks

Orphan-defender stand together with God in your path  
 So that you may have strength  
 To protect the child, menaced by spears  
 Then happiness and peace shall reign

Orphan-defender hold the sling with your hand  
 Like David who threw a stone from his  
 Being a child, he turned into a leader  
 To be crowned into a real king.

The oppressed need to be innervated so as to liberate themselves.

Their bravery should go hand in hand with wisdom. Without the liberating hand of God, the oppressed would not be free. They should stand up like the biblical David who came out victorious.

In our everyday usage, Tsiwana is a child without parents. But in the context of this poem, Tsiwana represents people who are suffering. They need somebody who will relieve them from feeling socially and financially disadvantaged. Such a person should be like the biblical David who young as he was, defeated his enemy and came out victorious. Ratshitanga calls for such a person to come to the fore and to lead his people from Egypt under Farao to Canaan. That is, leading his people from slavery to freedom. It is then that injustice would be repulsed and Ratshitanga regards this as a fulfilment of social duty on the part of the leader.

In the second stanza the person indicates that without the liberating Hand of God, nothing good would come from man himself. God is regarded as the source of courage. 'Mafumo' suggests inhuman treatment while 'rwana' implies the oppressed. In this case, someone is needed to provide help to the oppressed so that injustices might be dispensed with. According to Ratshitanga, it is through the carrying out of the social obligations that happiness and peace will ensue. 'Gatho' suggests victory while 'dakalo na mulalo' implies contentment and happiness.

Another aspect of social responsibility is realised in the poem entitled MUTINGATI (Unity)

Sa vhusunzi vhu tshi nzenzemisa thoro  
 Ine ya vhu fhira nga u hula  
 Mulindini ya fhelela ha vho nga vhu<sup>u</sup>tololo  
 Nga mutingati ndou ri nga kona u takula

Venda le la fhetwa nga vhumbulu  
 U shaya lufuno ha nga sa mbundudzi  
 Dzine dza li phulekanya sa gulu  
 Mutingati nga li ite li wane wa u toka midzi

Mutingati we England ya ita  
 Fura na Amerika ya tovhela  
 Zwivhuya nga zwanda vha kona u puta  
 Venda lashu mashudu u nga li avhela<sup>70)</sup>

(Like ants carrying a seed  
 Which surpasses them in bigness  
 Into the hole it goes as if by a miracle  
 Through unity an elephant can be carried by us.

Vendaland has been built out of secret manoeuvres  
 Its lack of love is like mbundudzi worms  
 That bore into it like a bullet  
 Unity should be created that it may find someone  
 Who will anchor its roots  
 Unity shown by England  
 France and America  
 enabled them to attain their objective  
 Vendaland can do like wise

Freedom of people comes through the concerted effort of the people.

70) R F Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 4

People should imitate the unity of countries like England, France and America during the wars

It is through unity of effort that people's objective would be realised.

A simile 'sa vhusunzi' (like ants) brings in an idea of unity in any social task. However difficult the task might be, people need unity, perseverance and patience. On the other hand, the word 'Vhumbulu' implies secret manoeuvre. Ratshitanga feels that Vendaland has been built out of this secret activity hence feelings of bitterness in people. Again, he maintains that it needs someone to save it from the destruction perpetrated by the oppressors. This will then be followed by happiness in the ruled. Authentic liberation is according to Ratshitanga, the responsibility of the individuals themselves. The word 'Mutingati' is suggestive of this. But this is possible if there is unity of purpose.

Through it, peace and harmony will be established. A sense of social responsibility in Ratshitanga's poetry is again revealed in the poem :

Ndi nnyiane a do ri fha Mvelaphanda?  
(Who shall give us progress?)

Ndi nnyi ane a do ri fha mvelaphanda  
Ya vhukuma i si ya u tamba  
Ine rothe ro wana, nayo phanda dza kanda  
Ine ya sa vhe hone nga u amba  
Nga vhungoho ya landula,  
Ra kombetshedza maipfi, zwanda ya tanula

Ndi nnyi ane a do ri fha mvelaphanda vhukuma  
I si yone nga u wana muholo  
Vhuleme kha Venda ha kundwa u huma  
La tshenuluwa nga u shaya zwidolo  
Thumbu dza vhothe nga ndala dza luma  
Ya muthihi ya totedzwa ya kundwa na vhushelo<sup>71)</sup>

\* (Who shall give us progress  
 A real one and not a child's play  
 Which will put us on a better footing?  
 Not progress in utterance,  
 Which can hardly withstand truth

Who shall give us real progress?  
 Not the one that comes through salary  
 Which cannot help Vendaland in anyway  
 And the stomach of the majority go empty  
 While that of one person fills to overflowing.)

The word 'mvelaphanda' (progress) brings in the idea of success and tranquility. Vendaland, like any other country, needs progress so as to attain success and tranquility. This is possible if there is an efficient leadership. Ratshitanga calls for a real leader to come to the fore. He does not call for a person who will engage himself in triflings. He needs someone who will involve himself in more activity rather than more utterances and less activity. Such a person should bring progress that will withstand criticism.

Ratshitanga does not want a money enticed leader. The metaphor, 'La tshenuluwa nga u kundwa zwidolo' reflects the urgency of the situation. Corruption reigns. The majority of the people go empty handed while few people amass everything for themselves. Ratshitanga calls for an end to this state of affairs.

Ndi nnyi-ha tshithavhelo kha nothe  
 Ane a tenda u ya muvoni  
 Malofha awe a nwiwa nga rothe  
 Dzina lawe la sa ye tshaloni  
 Mbiluni dzashu ra dzula ro gwala  
 Mbeu kha Venda la dzula nga u zwala

Ndi nnyi wa mato e a pfuma tshedza  
 Na tthalukanyo i so ngo tibwaho nga khuli  
 Ine zwi sa athu u da ya fhedza  
 Ya vhala na mañwalo e a khuba vhupuli  
 Ane a do hwalela ulu lushaka  
 Mvelaphanda i si na mashika<sup>72)</sup>

(Who shall lay down his life  
 And his blood, being the salvation for all,  
 His name becoming monumental  
 In the depth of our hearts  
 His name turning into seeds  
 In the whole of Vendaland

Who has piercing eyes  
 Whose thinking is not obscured by mist  
 Which can discern oppressive letters  
 Who is he  
 Who shall provide this nation  
 With progress devoid of impurity.)

Again, Ratshitanga makes a clarion call to anyone who is ready to lay down his life in the name of freedom. The word 'malofha' (Blood) in our everyday understanding, is a red fluid that carries the food substances throughout the body. It may be regarded as a generator of life. Without it, life would come to a standstill. But in the context of this stanza, 'malofha' suggests life in fullness. From the biblical point of view, it may be viewed as a salvation to the sinful mass. In this poem it may be regarded as a salvation of the oppressed mass. Ratshitanga maintains that anyone who lays down his life and sheds his blood for the down-trodden's sake, his name shall turn monumental in the hearts of the people. His name will remain in the annals of history indelibly.

Again, Ratshitanga calls for somebody enlightened to come and take the lead. He must be a person who can think independently.

72) R.F. Ratshitanga, op cit, p. 22

He should not allow bribery to dictate his thinking. He should possess the ability to discern oppressive manoeuvres. The upliftment of the nation should be on his shoulders. The confidence of the nation, peace and stability must rest on the rocky foundation which he shall have laid. This progress that is void of impurity. To crown the aspect of social responsibility, Ratshitanga maintains that whenever unity of purpose permeates the duties of collectivity, social obligations will be accomplished in harmony.

**CONCLUSION**

R.F. Ratshitanga, like some South African poets, has a desire of belonging to a living universe of purpose and value. His poetry, taken against the different views on what poetry is in Chapter I, may be regarded as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, taking their origin from emotions that have been recollected in tranquility. It is a special way of using words in order to evoke feelings in the audience. As a poet, he is able to stand still in order to capture the passing actions and ideas of the traffic of life as well as reflecting on reality and what is probable in life.

Literary devices form the basis of Ratshitanga's poetry. He uses literary devices such as metaphors, similes, personification, symbolism et cetera in order to evoke feelings in his readers.

Symbolism is realised in the poem 'Bere ya u pamelwa' (A back-ridden horse) which suggests that people have become like donkeys whose treatment is harsh and intolerable.

In Chapter II, Ratshitanga uses imagery in order to shake his audience into an awareness. Imagery clarifies and intensifies what is being described by the poet. He uses imagery to clarify the social-set of the people. Imagery is realised in poems like 'Musi ro no neta' (When we have become tired) which suggests discontentment and bitterness because of oppression.

'Ro no neta a hu na a no do ri thivhela  
Ro no neta ri do amba zwothe ra khakhulula'

When people have become tired, they will do everything possible to free themselves. They will also destroy the old order and establish a new order of existence.

Ratshitanga uses symbolism in order to project his bitterness and anger against the prevailing socio-political situation.

'Tshifhato tsha matombo' is a symbol of peace and stability. It suggests that people

should resolve their problems in harmony. The poem 'Thudzani tshinwelo tsha vhutulu', 'tshinwelo tsha vhutulu' is a symbol for bitterness against the old order of existence. Ratshitanga uses symbolism to react against inhumane attitudes of the present day leadership.

His artistry and techniques in Chapter IV is embodied in his usage of metaphors, similes, personifications symbols et cetera. The usage of these literary devices reveals his workmanship. They also reflect his deep-seated feelings, making him a remarkable poet among Venda poets.

Chapter V is dominated by protest in his poetry. 'Ngei Phumalanga nda ima nda sedza' is one of the protest poems. (At Phumalanga I stood and took a look). In this poem Ratshitanga reacts against the working conditions of his people at Phumalanga. He reacts against exploitation of man by man.

Vhanna nga quvha vha tshi shumela tshitanu.  
Vhasadzi nngogo vha kudzwa la nga ndi tano

At Phumalanga men work for fifty cents while women are paid twenty five cents. This kind of exploitation evokes a feeling of bitterness in Ratshitanga. He protests against all those who are out to exploit others.

Ratshitanga's sense of social responsibilities is realised in Chapter VI. He lives in a particular society, a society with its burning issues and he sees the need to react to this social situation.

It is the kind of a society that makes the lives of his people bitter day by day. Ratshitanga does not alienate himself from his people. He is inextricable enmeshed in vicious circumstances. He reacts to his social situation and he even takes on the pains of making others aware of their need to react to it. In the poem 'Mutingati' (Unity) he emphasizes the need for unity in any societal endeavour towards freedom. He maintains that every-

body has an existential right to live life in happiness and peace.

Ratshitanga's poetry reflects on politics and its effects on his society. He does not only reflect on his society but he protests against the ills of that particular society for which he is writing.

His poetry tends to project his deep-seated feelings. The element of revolt flows from his strong rejection of the prevailing socio-political order.

Ratshitanga's major concern about the suffering of his own people makes him emerge as a capable poet fully committed to the social set-up in which he finds himself.

To crown it all, Ratshitanga is disenchanted with life, that brings in its wake, inequality, cruelty, exploitation et cetera. All these, make him a protest poet who has a remarkable literary talent among the Venda poets.

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**SUMMARY**

In chapter one, definitions are given on what poetry and poets are, whereas in chapter two, an emphasis is put on imagery in Ratshitanga's poetry. His imagery clarifies the object of his description. It helps readers to re-live the inhumane situations in which they find themselves.

Chapter three deals with symbolism which enriches and intensifies his poetry. It perforces his inner feelings. This is meant to evoke latent emotions in the readers.

Symbolism is followed by his artistry and technique in chapter four. These are used to project his protest against the ills of his society.

In chapter five, Ratshitanga's protest in his poetry awakens people to self-awareness. It shakes them from their sleeping stupor.

The last chapter evokes a feeling of social responsibility in everybody. Ratshitanga shows that every man has a right to throw away the shackles that bind him and cause bitterness in his life. He maintains that the attainment of freedom is not only an individual task, but a concerted effort that must pervade any societal set-up.