



I. A translation of the inscription on his tombstone reads

Here lies Samuel Krune Mqhayi . He was born on 1st December 1875 and died on 29th July 1945./A praise singer of the nation /of national acclaim/ a writer of books/ A counsellor of the whole Xhosa kingdom/ A leader and a true Christian/ Let him rest in peace/ let his spirit remain for ever leading us. ①

This stone was laid by his nation and family under the auspices of the Memorial to the revered Ntsikana.

2. Mqhayi is the first, or among the first, in the field of Xhosa Literature. To generations of black pupils and students, Xhosa poetry is synonymous with S.E.K. Mqhayi I (Sindi Sayedwa) make bold to say there is not one child who has gone through primary school education without having encountered at least one of his works.
3. Symbolic in more than one respect of his time, his works reflect his nationalistic sentiments, his religious inclinations, his status as a black British subject. However to me Mqhayi was a visionary. His loyalty to his sovereign, expressed beautifully in the 'Prince of Britain', is subtly underlined with scorching irony.

"Hayi, the Mighty Britain
 Here she comes with Bible and bottle,
 Here she comes , a missionary escorted by a soldier,
 with gunpowder and guns,
 with canons and breachloader
 Forgive me , O Father, but which of these must we accept?

 Eater of our country's inheritance
 Long live the King!

4. Mqhayi reflects the spirit of his age and if the reflection we see appears complex, that is a result of the complex nature of the time in which he lived. He has written prolifically, prose and poetry , but it is in poetry that he excels and for which he is tremendously admired. Accepted and acknowledged Poet Laureate (Imbongi yeSizwe) Mqhayi excelled in that form of poetry known as Praise poems/izibongo

Mqhayi's nationalist sentiments are very well portrayed in the praise poem 'Ukutshona kukaMendi' written after the Mendi, carrying black troops to France during World War I was sunk. At one and the same time , he pays tribute to the black men who died for their fatherland and consoles (in true African style) the nation for the loss it has suffered.

The real greatness of Mqhayi is to be found in his wholeness of view as an artist of stature he praised, spoke and wrote of his Africaness with pride and eloquence. He claimed the heritage of all SA as his own and in doing so articulated prophetically the vision of a new oneness.

by Sindi Sayedwa.

5. S.E. K Mqhayi was a socially committed writer who desired to push SA history in a certain direction. His significance lies in the fact that he bridges the 19th and 20th Century Xhosa Literature, that he was an oral bard in a literary age and that he was a Literatus carrying an oral tradition. Beyond that he was a creative artist as well as a performer reciting his own poems.

When Mqhayi wrote his first 2 poems for Izwi Labantu in 1897, he was immediately acclaimed as Imbongi yalawaGompo neyeSizwe Jikelele. In these two poems the two main themes of Mqhayi's life's work are delineated viz:

- a) In Izwe LakwaNdlambe (the domain of the Ndlambe people) he declared his unshakeable loyalty and fidelity to the polity and traditions of his

Mqhayi 2

- b) In UNtsikane' he portrayed his quest to transcend local and ethnic consideration by heroising the first notable Xhosa convert to Christianity.
6. His first novel, an adaptation of the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah entitled USamson(1905) offered a critique of SA society in the years following the Anglo-Boer War. He conceived of the natives as the impotent "sleeping giant" who in the words of Shakespeare's Mercutio, willed and wished a 'plague on both your houses'. The image was sustained by the Titan's act which brought to ruin the edifice constructed by the collusion of Liberal white men and reactionary racists at the expense of the indigenous peoples of SA. Mqhayi was always aware that the intrusion of Europeans into the patterns of behaviour and politics of Africans was not always gentle and altruistic.

Mqhayi's last book of poems 'Inzuzo' (1942) suggests that he was both an oral and literate poet who was socially aware and was well steeped in the techniques and content of the oral culture of his people while experimenting with English Romantic forms.

A poem written on the occasion of the recruitment of the 'Black Brigade' a black SA contingent in the First World War. in translation reads

'We are indeed grateful and impressed that
His Britannic Majesty
Should think of asking us to come and work as stevedores
At a time when he is under pressure
Who were we?
To even think of lending a hand
To the King of Britain
On whose empire the sun never sets.
His dominions extend over land and sea.
As things now stand
He is ready to colonize the heavens

Listen now fellows!
Your people now belong to the Commonwealth of Nations
You should celebrate and dance
And act like this and that!

Mqhayi was the first writer to bare the soul of the Xhosa people. He was remarkable for the versatile nature of his works. He tried his hand at novels, poems, history, biography and translation.

Cynics have often expressed the opinion that in the Mendi poems, Mqhayi was pandering to British imperialistic sentiments, but all he did was to bring out the prevailing attitudes towards Britain of the black people, many of whom were bedazzled by the power of its empire. It mattered not to them that their forefathers had laid down their lives to prevent the spread of that very empire; they were carried away by the image of Queen Victoria. Mqhayi therefore was only giving expression to their admiration when he cried out.

"Who are we to come to the help of the King of Britain
A Colossus on whose domains the sun never sets,
He who rules the earth and the waves,
Who even has designs on the skies."

7. Another striking characteristic of Mqhayi's was his use of metaphor and subtle innuendo as a means of expressing protest. When he noticed the slightest signs of injustice to his people he set out their resentment in verse.

The poem UMBambushe is an excellent example of this. Read literally the poem deals with a dog that was pampered by its owner, King Mlawu. He even threatened to put to death any of his subjects who would dare to punish Mbambushe for biting him. But one day the king himself was attacked by the dog and great was the commotion that followed. This time the dog was destroyed. The fact of the matter was that Mqhayi was aiming a broadside at the

7 cont..British authority for giving in 1910 to the demands of the Northern colonies for the total exclusion of the Black people from the major citizenship right of their country. In terms of the poem Mlawu is the British authority, Mbambashe wise the Northern colonies and Mlawu's subjects were the black population of the country. At the same time Mqhayi makes an innocent prediction that one day the master who pampers the dog will have occasion to regret his actions!

Mqhayi's only surviving son Herbert said of his father:-

I think my father was an inspired man. He drew his inspiration from his faith in Christ, his admiration for the customs and traditions of his people, his hope for the betterment of the lot of his people and his love for humanity. These were the driving forces behind many of his most spontaneous utterances.

In Jolobe's Mqhayi still lives in the hearts of readers
'Ugama lifukanyw' ezintliziyneni zemifundâ' He - whose- name- is- enshrined in the hearts of educated ones.

Biographical notes from Dr Shepherd's book 'Bantu Literature and Life'-
(Lovedale Press)

1. Samuel who Xhosa speaking men loved to call 'Imbongi yesiZwe Jikelele', was born in the Tyumie valley at Gqumahashe on 1st December 1875. He came under the influence of such ministers as Rev. E. Makiwane and notable men like Tengo Jabavu. ①
2. He was a boy of independent mind, lonely, observant, hardworking- he was also playful and mischievous. When he was 9 his father moved to Centane district. In the 6 years Samuel spent in the Centane district he learned much respecting Xhosa life and customs as well as the refinements of the Xhosa language. He was later put to school at Lovedale and started a teacher's training course. *Wrote 2 poems for Izwi Labantu in 1897.* ②
3. He accepted a post as a teacher in East London. While there he became secretary of the congregation of Rev W B Rubusana and of the Vigilance Association which gave him an introduction to social questions and matters of race relations as they affected black and white. ③
4. He began to contribute to the Xhosa paper Izwi Labantu. He settled as a teacher among the Ndlambe tribe and later moved to Maclean-town. *Wrote 2 poems for the paper - his gift was immediately recognised - 2 significant poems, one breathing love to his land & people, one a profession of faith using Ntsikana.* ④
5. For a time he assisted in the editing of Imvo ZabantuNtsundu. This was followed by a period as a teacher at Lovedale. He left Lovedale because he objected to the way South African History was taught at South African Schools. He became a member of the Board entrusted with the revision of the Xhosa Bible. *as hero. Nearly 30 yrs later he pub'd his biog of Ntsikana.* ⑤
6. In later life Mqhayi settled at Tilana's Hill on the main road between King William's Town and East London. This he named 'Ntab'ozuko' (Mount of Glory). From this centre he travelled widely among his people, of whom, both illiterate and educated, he had deep knowledge. He attended innumerable gatherings and was always welcome especially in the role of Imbongi. At Ntab'ozuko he died on 29th July 1945 and was buried there two days later. ⑥

note. In 1927 Mqhayi published an additional 7 stanzas of Nkosi Sikelel'Afrika in Umteteli waBantu issue of June II. ⑦

reference South African Outlook, December 1975 published at Lovedale ⑧