Chapter III

WOLE SOYINKA’S PLAYS: A DANCE OF THE FORESTS, THE STRONG BREED & MADMEN AND SPECIALISTS
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A Dance of the Forests:

_A Dance of the Forest_ written on the occasion of independence celebration of Nigeria in 1960. It is a response to the western dramatic tradition with fusion of Yoruba rites, rituals and dance. It is an impressive play due to its inspirational product of Yoruba and European traditions. It clearly addressed to particular community, at a particular in history a point at which change appeared to be possible.

The play set in a local Nigerian village. Soyinka deliberately selected the location of the play considering its historical background for the celebration of the gathering of the tribes, and portrays aspects of Yoruba cosmology- like the four realms of existence, the Egungun masquerade, and the coexistence of humans, gods, and demons-that are enveloped in the non linear time frame of the dream.

In _A Dance of the Forests_, Soyinka focusing on two significant aspects Cultural and Political context: Yoruba cosmology and Nigeria's post-independence political future.

It is a story of four Young expatriates who hide in the forest to escape from the Celebration of the gathering of the tribes. It is a political satire of Post-independence Nigerian leaders and the performance of ancestor worship, Egungun, is an equally influential feature from Yoruba theatre on Soyinka’s dramaturgy. As Balistreri define ritual practice as, “When a person dies, the
family must observe certain rituals called Egungun to assure that the dead man is accepted into the world of the ancestors. Once he is considered an ancestor, the dead man may be worshiped in the same manner as an Orisha”(7). Eventually, the Egungun masquerade became secular, and took the form of a performance usually taking place in an annual festival—that presents Yoruba myth and cosmology.

It consider as an ambitious and obscure play with the role of the dead, the deities, and the living. When the play begins three human beings are brought together under the deity, forest head. It also considers as a highly individualistic play explores new visions as multi dimensional and diversified as the human psyche itself.

The play presents, Yoruba Cosmology with the projection of non-linear timeline of the action. In that sense, starts and ends in the temporal time outside the forest, but the larger sum of events take place over one night in the forest, in the metaphysical time of the dream that moves freely between past, present, and future.

The division of scenes in the play, therefore, does not follow unity of time. Indeed, nothing in the stage directions suggests definite details about the setting of the action. When the play opens, the audience is informed only about the occasion of the gathering of the tribes, but neither specific places nor times are indicated. And when the play ends, all we are told is that “Now it is fully dawn.” Therefore, as A. Ahmed contends,

Despite the non-linear presentation of time in A Dance of the Forests, in the course of the play the audience does
become aware of the shift from the present, embodied by the activities of the living, to the past of the court of Mata Kharibu, and then back again to the present when, at the end of the play, the major protagonist, Demoke, is discovered stretched out on the ground. (104)

The play opens with Dead Man and Dead Woman who have just emerged from the ground, seeking human advocates to bear their cases in the forthcoming Gathering of the Tribes. Meanwhile, we are told that Demoke the carver, who is a follower of Ogun, has carved an *araba* tree – the tallest of forest giants and one dedicated to Eshuoro, Ogun’s rival.

In the Second part, past shows through a flashback enacted by Aroni’s Storytelling about the fate of the dead duo. In the re-enacted court of Emperor Mata Kharibu, Captain (Dead Man) and the suicide of his pregnant wife (Dead Woman), tragic events which take place at the behest of Madame Tortoise, wife to Mata Kharibu. Dead Man and Dead Woman come before Forest Head to request redress for these ancient crimes of the distant past. On this occasion, history and nature, histrionically anthropomorphized, come forward to critique the past, the present and posterity. Thus, drama re-enact the theme of the conflict between History and Nature. To this extent, therefore, According to Biodun Jeyifo,

“"It is within this treatment of forest-nature, this validation of nature’s integrity (earth, sea, wind, mountains, stone, trees and metals) against man’s historic assault that Soyinka provides the specificity of the otherwise generalized canvas of the play. It is the validation of the animist wisdom of the mythic and
ritual epistemologies of “tribal” West Africa against its historic experience: a precarious undertaking. The humans depredate the forest-nature but the forest takes its toll, makes exactions.” (2004: 135).

The surface plot of the play is complex one. The humans are gathered for a festive celebration, a “gathering of the tribes” and they ask the deities and spirits of the sacred groves of the forest to send to the occasion illustrious ancestors as symbolic presences of the greatness and glory of the race. But the forests spirits, principally, Forest Head, know better; they know of the past crimes and evils of individuals and groups in the community; they therefore plan to convert the euphoric supplication of the humans to its opposite: a cathartic, purgative confrontation by the gathered tribes with the truth of their past historical experience and reality. Thus, not illustrious ancestors but two restless dead are sent to the humans, accusers and gnawing spots in the buried collective conscience of the race – dead man and dead woman.

The humans in fury and evasion drive out these unwelcome guests; but the spirits of the forest are remorseless and they lure three of the most important personages among the humans, Demoke, Rola and Adenebi to an expiatory “dance” in the heart of the forest. These three representatives of the human community have recently repeated the cycle of moral corruption and murderous violence that they had each perpetrated in previous incarnations in a decadent and brutal kingdom of the past. In this ritual-judicial space in the heart of the forest, these humans are forced to confront both the restless dead and their other crimes and stupidities, which appear to them as objectified grotesqueries and phantoms. Day breaks in the forest and the three humans, chastened but still
unsure and groping, return to the other humans.

A Dance of the Forests elucidate the bestial nature and brutality, Selfishness, hypocrisy and the lust for power have been satirized through all the characters present as the ancient emperor Mata Kharibu, the dead warrior, Demoke, Adonebi and Rola –Soyinka conveys inclination of the human beings to betray one another.

Nature and function of art, political corruption, war, the destruction of natural environment are some of the themes are highlighted with use of multiplicity of symbols. As man is the central figure in the play, “Man is represented by living men and women like Rola, Demoke, Adenbi. Dead Man and Women represent Men as victimized by the tyrants and the all powerful. The Half-child is the ambiguous symbol of man’s uncertain future” (Balistri62).

A Dance of the Forest is an echo and half-echo of European writer, concern with possibility of a destructive cycle which preoccupied European dramatists from Euripides to Shakespeare. It emphasizes the need to restore the African cultural identity as a major element of Social development.

A Dance of the Forest is also a remarkable for the use of the devices like masks dance songs drums, rituals etc. Like rituals which are considered highly sacred, its associated costumes, masks and other paraphernalia are also regarded as sacred rituals, masks and other costumes signify many unspoken but evident suggestion and are therefore considered as a powerful tool for post colonial culture.

A Dance of the Forests expresses the awareness of the disillusioning experience of independence and the need to go back to one’s cultural roots. The
Yoruba cosmology has always been central to his works and has provided incentive for growth to his artistic development. Soyinka employed Egungun, a Yoruba masque tradition which believed that ancestors are worshiped through the ‘Egungun masked figures’. Yoruba people believed that their worship will guide them and bless them for a better future.

Again, Soyinka conscious about the tradition of Yoruba python of god Olodumare worshipped by Yoruba people through minor deities and oaths. As Eldred Durosimi Jones Observes, “Yoruba are surrounded by gods and spirits with whom the lives of mortals interact” (33). Again the Yoruba traditional idea of ‘Abiku’, the half child of the dead women represents Yoruba mythology. Thus, Soyinka focuses on several Yoruba traditions which are integral part of the Society.

Soyinka advocates spirituality of the nature in the background. Nature presented as to celebrate the meeting of the past and present. As Akomaye Oko’s says, “Soyinka relies on the retention of the human dimension by merging the natural and supernatural, the past and the present”. Thus, craftsmanship of the playwright skillfully utilizes the role of nature by using the words like ‘Forest’, mingling of ‘past and present’ upholds close association of Yoruba People with the nature.

In the play, Soyinka presents three major deities widely worshipped by people for their special powers: “Forest Head (Obatala), Ogun, and Eshu (Eshuorun)” (7). Obatala is the supreme creator of earth and mankind, considered as the god of purity and high moral standards in the Yoruba culture. Eshuorun, is the Yoruba trickster god. He has no regard for authority, and therefore, he
causes mischief among the gods and men. Ogun is the god of iron and war in the Yoruba pantheon, who is sacred to warriors, hunters, blacksmiths, drivers, railroad workers, and artists. As Balistreri says, “Ogun is a god full of contradictions, but he is most notably acknowledged for being the god of creativity and destruction at the same time” (7). All three gods are interested in shaping the destinies of the forest dwellers, which complicates the action since gods use their special powers to defeat each other, and to protect their humans as well. Thus, through these characters, Soyinka shows a conflict between the gods eventually affects the lives and destinies of humans. In addition to deities, Soyinka also included spirits that control the universe. Thus, spirits projected as an integral cosmological order in which all aspects of the universe correspond to a harmonious unity under the power of the supreme deity.

The human characters also belong to different realms of existence: the living, the dead and the unborn. In addition to the forest adventurers, who exist in the world of the living, Soyinka presents ancestors from ancient times reincarnated through ritual practice of ancestor worship. In addition, the final dance in the play is cantered on the battle to possess the unborn child of the dead woman shows the relationship between the past and the present, Soyinka makes use of several major symbols like bridges domes cercal and the rainbows.

The human characters in the play experience mobility between the world of the living and that of the ancestors when they take part in the ritual of ancestor worship that involves the resurrection of dead souls. In that particular scene, gods, humans possessed by real spirits, unborn children all co-exist and interact in a fluid concept of time and space that presents the concept of time as a
continuous flux in Yoruba cosmology.

*A Dance of the Forests* presents a complex interplay between gods, mortals, and the dead in which the ideal goal is the experience of self-discovery within the context of West African spiritualism. The living have invited two glorious forefathers to take part in a feast and celebration—the “Gathering of the Tribes”. The god Aroni, however, explains in the prologue that he received the permission of the Forest Head to select instead “two [obscure] spirits of the restless dead”: the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, a captain and his wife from the army of the ancient Emperor Mata Kharibu. These two were selected because in a previous life they had been violently abused by four of the living. The four mortals are Rola, an incorrigible whore nicknamed Madame Tortoise, who was then a queen; Demoke, now a carver and then a poet; Adenebi, now council Orator and then Court Historian; and Agboreko, Elder of Sealed Lips, a soothsayer in both existences. They have been selected because of past debauchery, which Aroni hopes can be expiated through revelation. Aroni further explains in the prologue that the Forest Head, disguised as a human, Obaneji, invites the four mortals into the forest to participate in a welcome dance for the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, who Aroni takes under his wing after the living ostracize them. The dance is interrupted by the wayward spirit Eshuoro.

Eshuoro seeks vengeance for the death of Oremole, a devotee of Oro and apprentice to the carver Demoke, who killed Oremole by pulling him off the top of the araba tree that they were carving together. Ogun, the patron god of carvers, defends Demoke. Ogun (the god of iron, war, and craftsmanship of the
Yoruba, Soyinka’s own society) and Oro (the Yoruba god of punishment and
death) represent antithetical forces that continuously interact until their
hypothetical synthesis, through which the mortals would attain self-
understanding.

*A Dance of the Forests* reveals Soyinka to be deeply rooted in the Yoruba
World, particularly in the world of Yoruba myth and philosophy examining their
relevance to contemporary Nigerian Society. Soyinka uses Yoruba myth of
Ogun to interpret and confront present reality to analyses deeply certain
problems which are particular to Nigeria. But these entire problems can be
applied to humanity in general too. The play also faces problems like injustice,
inhumanity, racism inside and outside Nigeria. Thus, the intention of the
playwrights is to show the tragic plight of man in the totality of his experience.
Such experience includes both physical and spiritual and also the past the present
and the future.

*A Dance of the Forests* is the most difficult and complex among all the
plays written by Wole Soyinka on account of its archetypal characters,
multiplicity of themes, complicated symbolism and multi-dimensional
technique. It is about Nigerian Society, more familiar with Yoruba cosmology,
its metaphysics, and its rituals. It concerns with comprehensive view of man
over a massive span of history. For Soyinka, history is a nearly cyclical
movement any progress being represented by a kink after an evolution and the
start of new cycle. It is an attempt to represent the complexities of human
personality and its consequences within this cyclical pattern of history. Thus,
play concludes with warning bell for the people of impending class and factional conflicts, economic crises and political chaos.

**THE STRONG BREED**

*The Strong Breed* is one of the most remarkable plays of Wole Soyinka written in 1964. It is a compact play known for its symbolism. *The Strong Breed* is a tragedy based on the tradition Egungun, a festival based on the belief that scapegoat of the village carries out the evils of the community.

*The Strong breed* is divided into two parts. It is a story of eman, a member of the ‘Strong Breed’ family born in delta region. The play is based on the purification rituals that observed in two villages, first in the Village of Jaguna and Second in the village of eman. The play opens in the evening before the celebration of the village’s annual purification ritual. For this rite, a stranger or idiot is selected to Service.

The play opens in front of the Eman’s house, in a village where he became a stranger. The conversation between Eman and Sunma leads the play ahead. Eman is reluctant to leave the village with Sunma. She forces him again and again to leave the village on the other hand Eman wish to join the festival at the night to welcome the ‘New Year’. The incidence when Eman watches Ifada playing outside the house. He thought that Ifada (an idiot boy) eager to take part in the festival without having masks. Sunma became harsh toward the Ifada. Eman unable to understood the Sunma’s stand. Eman explain, Ifada became more unlucky boy rather than other boys. Sunma continuous her hating towards Ifada without giving satisfactory reason to Eman makes him confuse. On the other side, Eman shows affinity due to his helplessness and aloneness. During, a
girl (seek) appears on the stage dragging along with an effigy (of human being) by a rope attached to one of its legs. The Conversation between Eman and the girl begins. Eman come to know about her sickness and ask about the effigy. She explains her mother’s belief on that effigy (Carrier) instead of medical aid to recover from the sickness. It stipulates superstitious belief in Yoruba Society. The girl asks clothes for her Carrier (effigy). Again, Sunma became harsh towards the girl as she did with Ifada. Scene ends with Sunma and Eman left the stage. Ifada and girl exchange words (speaking) with each other at the same time girl remark on Ifada’s ugliness at the same time Ifada became busy to beat effigy for the sake of girl’s illness.

Eman firms on his decision to stay in the village, in spite Sunman’s persistent pleas. Sunma explains the villagers are evil and their disinterest in eman. Further she informs, Jaguna (her father) became the priest at the festival, eman became the target victim who trapped in the house till the end of the festival. Sunma keep urging eman to leave the village but all her effort became futile.

Sunma and eman continuous their conversation; when Sunma declare her decision to leave the village with eman, at the same time eman willing to join ‘The New Year’ festival.

During this, some peoples comes by beating the drum towards the house to take Ifada as carrier. Ifada is afraid and no longer interested to use as a carrier. Eman took him to his house despite the fact that Sunma opposes. A group of men’s along with Jaguna and Orage comes near to the house and beat the door. Eman opens the door and rejected the presence of Ifada over in the house.
Jaguna warns eman and asks sunma to inform her friend (Eman) to co-operate. At the end Jaguna and Orgae threatened eman to burn the house which leads eman agree to hand over the Ifada, before he asks the Jaguna reason behind to put a helpless and unwilling boy as carrier. Eman put his view as outsider like Ifada, so it is unfair to put outsider as a carrier. Finally, Eman self-declared as carrier for the sake of ritual. He seeks refugee in the shrubs desperately looking for water as he is thirsty.

The Scene shifted to the past, when eman recalls meeting (flashback) with his father wherein Old man had delighted to tell him about hereditary function of carrier for their family.

In another flashback, eman unwilling to go back to the village after the death of his wife Omae, gives birth to the child. During Old man explain, it is difficult for the members of Strong breed family to escape from his duty. Eman still firm on his decision not to take part as carrier. Again flashback took Eman to the past when the men pursue Eman. The conversation started between Omae and Eman about the period of initiation. It is a period when the young boys on the threshold of manhood are left all by themselves. Eman convince her and explain the significance of the initiation. After breaking the vows during the period of initiation Eman decides to leaves the village and goes to the city for living. After twelve years he returns to the village and accepts the old ways of life.

At the end of the play, again the flashback shifted to the present, wherein Eman hanged as a part of the purification ritual. Ifada and Sunma became
helpless and unhappy due to the loss of friend in front of the rituals for the sake Society.

Soyinka uses flashbacks technique for a dramatic purpose. It point out his craftsmanship as a dramatists. He employs four flashbacks in due course of time to show the incidence in the past. In the first flashback, Old man tries to convince eman about the tradition of carrier in the family. The incidence of camp involvement of Omae with eman illustrates through the second flashback. Third flashback depicts the incidence of Omae after giving birth to the child. The final flashback used at the end of the play before the death of Eman.

Eman is a protagonist in the play. He is a mysterious member of the Strong Breed family, carries responsibility of evils of their Community through symbolic annual ritual. According to Yoruba belief, “individual is born with a certain destiny. He can, to some extent, ameliorate his condition he consult the babalawo the Iafa divination priest, for guidance as to the sacrifice he must perform to improve his state in life” (Soyinka), applicable to eman. At the beginning, Eman unwilling to become a carrier then motivated by the fact that he was born to be the Strong breed family. Thus, Eman took all the responsibility on his shoulders. Soyinka portrays eman as a helpful in nature proves in the incidence of Ifada, when eman helps him for getting the masks. Again, when the villagers came to take Iafda as ‘carrier’ eman saves him by putting his life in danger which execute role of “teacher” and “healer” for the peoples. As Eldred Jones identifies, Eman as the reflection of a “Christ figure” in his noted work

*Introduction to Nigerian Theatre* as he asserts:
“When the actual ordeal comes Eman’s body flinches, but in the end, having offered himself in Ifada’s place, he is sacrificed. Eman is represented in the play as a Christ-figure; the parallels are obvious:

He is willing to die for thankless people, at the end he flinches at the physical ordeal, and he dies lifted high on a tree.” (127)

Soyinka narrates role of Eman, become a ‘Hope’ for the Society who believes that evils will be diminished by performing the role of ‘carrier’. As Jones says, “Eman as a first tragic actor celebrated Soyinka. He attains self knowledge about his ‘existence’ and ‘purpose’ in life” (125). Eman’s presence in Jaguna’s village and ignorance about the village ritual illustrate as, “I am not blind Sunma” he says. “It is true I would not run away when you wanted me to, but that doesn’t mean I do not feel things. What does tonight really mean that it makes you so helpless?” (CPI:125). As Jones evaluates the role of Eman is, “A moral force which transcends Social boundaries. He is the broad humanity which the world needs and rejects at the same time, while individuals and individual societies relentlessly pursue their particular concerns. He cannot escape this role because he is of the strong breed” (The Writing of Wole Soyinka, 54) proves eman is a driving force for the Yoruba Society.

According to one of the Yoruba Proverb, “A dog that is destined to be lost never heeds the hunters warning Whistle” (Ogunba Movement106), it is aptly applicable to eman. So, Eman’s act of Self-sacrifice is essential for his
own personal development, home community benefit, and for the health and survival of his adopted Society.

Soyinka illustrates the position of the outsider in Society in the minds of the others. Stranger suffers with the curses of the villagers, it happens with eman. Due to this, Sunma force eman to leave the village, point out the position of eman in the Society,

SUNMA. "… why do you continue to stay where nobody wants you?

EMAN. That is not true.

SUNMA. It is. You are wasting your life on people who really want you out of their way.

EMAN. You don’t know what you are saying.

SUNMA. You think they love you? Do you think care at all for what you –or I—do for them?

EMAN. Them? These are your own people. Sometimes you talk as if you were a Stranger too.”(120)

It examines the position of eman as ‘outsider’ in the village of Jaguna. It helps to understand the place of outsider in Yoruba Society.

The Girl is the only isolated character reveal with little ambivalently. She described as “unsmiling”, “unsetting”, “unwell”, “impassive”, “a kind of inscrutability” and “surprising venom”(118-120). Soyinka tries to criticize people not ready to change according to the ways of the Society. She is influenced with the bad practices of Yoruba Society.
Soyinka depicts the two different sorts of women through the characters of Sunma and Omae, who ambivalently portrayed as both positive and negative mentality of the society. Both try to save Yoruba culture. These women’s are breaking the taboos of the societies. Omae provides Eman’s father with an anchor and symbol of hope, she disrespectfully interrupts Eman’s coming age ritual.

In the present play, Soyinka focuses on various tribal traditions in Yoruba Society. *The Strong Breed* based on the Yoruba Custom; purify the evils through the ritual sacrifice. A festival takes place on the occasion of ‘The New Year’ celebrates the destruction of the past evils rather than the welcome of the New Year illustrate the belief of Yoruba People as Sacrifice serves the prosperity. Soyinka concerns role of the ‘carrier’ is different from village to village. Some villagers choose outsider as carrier and some depend upon the chief of the family. In Yoruba society, it is believed that women become ill fated in Strong breed family. It notices, in eman’s family when women died after giving birth to the children. Such things happened with emans mother and wife Omae. As Old man utters, “Don’t you know it was the same with you? And Me? No women survive the bearing of the Strong ones.” (133)

Soyinka minutely observes and comments instead of medical facilities they depends upon the false tribal tradition. It shows the lack of knowledge of Yoruba people. Soyinka used a various natural imagery to illustrate the association of the Yoruba people with nature. Like, River as ‘purifier’ to connects the two traditions, two different Societies of the Yoruba. As Old man utters about family tradition as, “ours is a strong breed my son. It is only a strong
breed that can take this boat to the river year after year and wax stronger on it. I have taken down each year’s evils for over twenty years.”(96)

Ritual Sacrifice in the form of human being is considered as a Pride in the Yoruba Society. Soyinka explores his deep concern about Yoruba culture and denounces the absurdity of the traditional practices such as human ritual for the sake of the human Society.

_The Strong Breed_ is structured on the past event which bears on the present action. The play is based on the past, present and future world. Some of the minor character like Jaguna and Orage are a little more complex one. It is resemblance between both men is that, they are in favor of carrier practice to fulfill their Social responsibility. They push the ritual through their sense of duty towards community. Thus, they force eman to prepare for the role of Carrier.

The concept of destiny, determinism, human will, which are important aspect of Yoruba Cosmology. Soyinka explains the concept of destiny is a vital role performs in the lives of Yoruba people. _The Strong Breed_ became more Suggestive play with the complete fusion of object and Symbol. In the words of Durosimi Jones, “Soyinka is genius writer, has used a fairly common scapegoat ritual as the vehicle for a tremendous moral statement which once again transcendent setting of the play”(126). Thus, Soyinka integrates the ritualistic practices of his society to highlight self Sacrificing ritual through the hero eman have always been put to test for reviving the society.

In the Strong Breed, Soyinka attacks the disgust attitude of the Yoruba society towards customs, rituals and his vision of to create respective Society free from rituals and Ceremonies. At the same time focuses on the negative sign
for the newly independent Nigerian Society to move towards the better future. Thus, Soyinka highlighted Social problems of the Yoruba Society and tries to diminish the vices in the Society.

**KONGI’S HARVEST**

*Kongi’s Harvest* performed in 1965 on the stage, and after two years published in 1967, in newly independent Nigeria which was in a state of flux. It is a microcosm of the political situation of Nigeria during sixties. The play opens with heavy, somber and pessimistic mood. Action of the play takes place on the eve and the day of the national celebration of Isma. It is a about Society that is governed by a form of diarchy, the traditional rulers on one hand, a military dictator on the other.

The play is a satire on the rulers of a fictitious kingdom of Isma, somewhere in Africa, during the preparations for celebrations and aftermath of a New Yam Festival. The ruler of Isma, Kongi is a repressive, ambitious autocrat, who is assisted by a ubiquitous Organizing Secretary. He has put some of his most powerful opponents, including Oba Danlola, into detention and wants to usurp Danlola’s position. Specifically he wants to receive the New Yam from the Oba’s hands and present himself to the people as their protector and spiritual leader and acknowledge his supremacy. His rule is challenged by his ex-mistress Segi, Soyinka, thus, brings out the conflict between a traditional ruler and tribal chief and a megalomaniac dictator.

The play divided into four sections namely Hemlock, First Part, Second Part, and Hangover. The first section ‘Hemlock’ serves as a Prologue to the play.
It reveals that, Oba Danlola bear heavy responsibility on his shoulders for saving the state and its people from the tyrannical rule of Kongi suggesting poison and anarchy in Ismaland. Indeed much of thematic analysis of the play eventually summarized in the three images which open the satirical anthem at the beginning of the play,

“The pot that will eat fat its bottom must be scorched The squirrel that will long crack Nuts. Its footpad must be sore the sweetest wine has flowed down. The tapper’s shattered Shins.” (CPII: 61)

Kongi demonstrates his vision towards creating a better future for his people. He rather creates an illusion of personal as well as national well-being to the outside world and the gullible fools within.

The play opens with people opposed to kongi’s government. The adamant posture of kongi to take the New Yam from Oba. When Oba Danlola in prison with certain of his chiefs and followers. He decided to stay there until the honor of eating the first of the New Yam, traditionally belonging to the king, must now be transferred to Kongi the new political leader.

During the scene shifted, when the prison Superintendent is outsmarted by Danlola he is forced to abase himself to the king again and again while the royal drums break forth into a song of mourning and farewell. In Segi’s Club, Kongi’s vision of harmony is to replace the old superstitious festival by a state ceremony governed by the principle of enlightened ritualism, roughly translated to modernity in tradition.
Second part begins in Oba Danlola’s palace, when Oba Danlola has been released from the detention camp. According to Daoudu, Danlola was not to attend the procession of the festival. He derides Kongi’s spy system as narrow, and his as wider, because the former includes only men, but the latter includes women, the dead and the unborn.

In the second part, Kongi stops the dance of the Oba by bursting the traditional drum. It symbolically signifies the end of the Oba’s rule and destruction of traditionalism, but some hope lingers in his actions and everything is under the process of reformation.

Daoudu becomes the symbol of new life. Segi recognizes him as life and calls him —The Spirit of Harvest (98). She instigates to preach him life,

SEGI.  Preach life Daoudu, only life...

DAODU.  Imprecations then, curses on all inventors of agonies, on all Messiahs of pain and false burdens...

SEGI.  Only life is worth preaching my prince.

DAODU.  On all who fashion chains, on farmers of terror, on builders of walls, on all whose feet are heavy and yet stand upon the world...

SEGI.  Life...life...

DAODU.  On all who see, not with the eyes of the dead, but with eyes of Death...

SEGI  :  Life then. It needs a sermon on life...love.” (99)
As fate of the protagonist is left unclear, Kongi’s secretary going towards the border. It signifies cell is not well in Kongi’s camp. There seems to be a problem in daodu’s camp. The indications are that the strife will continue. The secretary bemoans his plight. No solution has been evolved in the end. In the last part called “Hangover” shows the unpleasant effects of the totalitarianism.

Kongi is a prominent character of the play. He is a head of the Society called Isma Land. He is a military head of the modern day. Kongi oppresses Oba Danlola and Sarumi. He asks Oba Danlola to surrender and accept his, new leadership the new Yam which symbolizes power. Danlola refusal leads him into the prison shows Kongi is a dictator in nature.

Oba Danlola has surrendered the monster yam, and Kongi accept it. Kongi's victory seems assured, but peace and salvation are still remote propositions. His marathon speech and Segi’s performance makes kongi speechless it symbolizes kongi’s success in producing destructive force of life and he is the new spirit of death rather than Spirit of Harvest.

Kongi tyrannical nature results force of people like the Secretary, Oba Danlola, Sarumi and others to go into exile to form treachery against him and his movement. As Soyinka examine Kongi and Kongism have no future, and no community can tolerate a tyrannical megalomaniac for long. Soyinka knows Kongi is dehumanized, and Isma will reject him one day. At the end, concerted action by the members of the community will result in his downfall.

Kongi’s lust for power has become a devouring passion. Soyinka utters the play is about: “Kongism, not about Kongi. Kongism is a never-dying principle”. Kongi is contrast to Daodu, who is the spirit of death, hostility and
sterility. But he calls himself as the spirit of harvest. It shows in Kongi’s repeated self declaration, “I am the SPIRIT OF HARVEST...I am the spirit of HAAR-VEST!”(91), depicts his mania. Kongi’s secretary heading for the border, indicating that all is not well in Kongi’s camp. When Danlola enters, he talks about spending the rest of his life in exile, and mentions that Sarumi has gone to abduct Daodu and to forcibly parcel him across the border.

Kongi thus clearly demonstrates his vision towards creating a better future for his people. He rather creates an illusion of personal as well as national well-being to the outside world and the gullible fools within. Through biting satire Soyinka registers his distaste for such ugly aspects of modern Societies in Africa. Kongi wants to project an image of having made a clean break from the past. He has the power but without spirituality meets his doom at the end. Soyinka tries to depict the role of political leaders in Africa through the character of kongi.

As a dictator, Kongi is authoritarian, corrupt, and tyrannical. His aim is to establish himself as the ‘god of the land’. He is only interested in eating the first yam to demonstrate his ascendancy to absolute power. The King is an embodiment of the society's spiritual personality. There are undertones of lament, as the infrastructure of tradition is slowly crumbling. Tradition may not be perfect, but it is humanistic, as it is in harmony with nature and derives its strength from it. As Oyin Ogunba makes a useful observation, “The king in Africa is still God's deputy on earth and so he combines both spiritual and political functions. Hence, this festival is not a private celebration but one that has meaning for the whole community and in which everyone is expected to
participate with interest.” (1972: 8)

The role of Oba Danlola is a traditional ruler arrested, tortured and imprisoned for not submitting to the military leadership of Kongi and denies him access to his power. He is a sad, living in poverty surrounded by a remnant of his faithful people. Soyinka identifies Oba Dandola with Ogbo Aweris leaders who formulate the law with Danlola.

Oba Danlola’s suffering acquires the dimensions of martyrdom, “The King’s umbrella/Gives no more shade”. An air of despondency marks the life in the royal camp, but the situation is not so hopeless, as it appears. The supernatural guardians of the community will not permit Kongi to have a clean walk-over” remarks M. Pushpa (91). Thus, Oba Danlola is a wily, dilatory and reactionary traditional chief who has been ruling his people with an absolute power which lies in the paraphernalia of customs and taboos.

Daodu is a smart, intrigue kind of character in the play. He is not only a prince but also a successful farmer. He convinces his uncle Danlola to allow Kongi to eat the first of the ‘New Yam’ it shows his smartness and qualities of a true leader unlike Oba and Kongi. Being a son of junior Oba and farmer by profession, he has associated himself with the African tradition and with the spirit of harvest. According to Jonathan Peters, “Daodu, the quiet revolutionary, impatient with the ritual and slow dignity of traditional authority and abhors the image-making and the unproductive terrorism of the present government. Although he adopts the productive tools of the modern world he fails to recognize that he must also respect the soil of tradition in order to produce a
normal harvest. Success in the future will depend on the just matching of tradition and modernism, not on the elimination of one by the other.” (206)

Soyinka represents daodu as a kind of force through which society can be saved. He has been shown to have the spiritual sanctions necessary to establish continuity with the now outdated regime of Oba Danlola and carry over its spiritual authority into the modern age. Another noted critic, Umokoro calls Daodu as an embodiment of Ogun principle, taking into consideration some of the actions of Daodu, like initiating the play, advocating for the individual’s fundamental human rights, by staging the coup, trying to save the tradition; and risking his life for people (The Ogun Hero176-178). Thus, it suggests daodu as a voice of the people, rejects an ascetic and sadistic way of life.

Kongi’s Harvest is a theatrical play, brilliantly structured to articulate a confrontation of old and new culture. Theatrical devices and techniques brighten the performance of the play. The meaning of the play unfolds through characters, conversations, songs, etc. Music, songs, costume style of gesture communicate the reader over and above the dialogue within the plot. Similarly, traditional drumming, singing and the songs act as chorus for the Reformed Aweri in Segi’s club the voice rhythm are natural, even in the lyrical passages; movement relaxed, poised and cool.

The entire play is rooted in African tradition, especially in the elaboration of concepts concerning the feast of the New Yam, in the extensive employment of proverbs and in the ritual of the king’s dance (-song). Oyin Ogunba in his essays comments on the structure of the play as, “The king in
Africa is still god’s deputy on earth and so he combines both spiritual and political functions” (8). It proves festival is not a private celebration but for the whole community and everyone is expected to participate with interest. Thus it is a life-giving ritual which has to be done in epic style to demonstrate the higher aspirations of the community.

Soyinka’s depicts a character of Selfish rulers. The harvest imagery reflected in the conversation between Segi and Daodu conveys a glimmer of hope in the play. Soyinka believes that the future of Africa lies in the hands of such people like Daodu who have the courage to protest and to resist tyranny and repression.

The sound of drums symbolize power have been snatched from the Oba by President Kongi. A dance of the king, with all its pomp and majesty, is a reminder of the departed graces of traditional authority to which the Oba’s hark back nostalgically. The abrupt ending of the dance brings a jolting return to reality. Soyinka flourishes it with rich elements like, traditional expressions, masquerades, rituals, dirge, praise singing, dance, mask, tradition, the Yoruba Yam festival and the New Year Festival.

Soyinka represents depravities of the traditional King, Oba Donlola on the one hand and the blood-thirsty tendencies of modern dictators like Kongi on the other hand. As Eldred Durosimi Jones comment about the play as, “It is a Symbolic dramatization of the opposed values of Kongi and his people death against life. Kongi obviously takes the meaning this symbolic curse on his regime. He sees the eventual futility of his terror staring back at him through the dead man’s eyes.” (87)
Soyinka raises various issues in the society. Soyinka reinforces his messages by using lots of imagery in the play. His rich imagery strikes as soon as the title of the play is encountered. The name ‘kongi’ suggests something that is very hard and the ‘harvest’ suggest someone reaping something.

The Feast of the New Yam is an indispensable ritual of celebration in traditional black Africa. It is the feast of the New Year and therefore celebrates the renewing cycle of nature. In Africa, Yam is grown as the prime crop, this king of crops, as it is called in Things Fall Apart, symbolizes the supremacy and power of the clan. As symbol of harvest, the yam embodies the fertility of the tribe and guarantees its continued procreation through harmonious interaction with the people. In addition, as an occasion of cleansing, the harvest festival symbolizes the purgation of the clan’s sins and the restoration of its commonwealth through the medium of its spiritual head. The Yam festival is a part of the traditional Yoruba Society, and has deep meaning, and philosophy embedded in it. Yams are harvested from about June each year in a Yoruba community, but the people can eat them only after the King has accepted the Yam at the festival. That’s the reason why Kongi eat the first yam. It is a symbolically cleansing ceremony after which the ordinary men eat without any fear of adverse results.

Kongi’s Harvest deals with the conflict between religion and politics that was an important part of the political scenario in Europe, some centuries back. Oba Dandola is the perfect representative on the side of traditional culture. As M. Pushpa comments, “Oba Danlola is preoccupied with the doom of traditional culture, which gradually dies. The death of traditional values may prove
disastrous for the new nation. Total abandoning of the traditional bulwark, does not augur well for a nation on the threshold of a sea-change.” (95)

In the present play, Soyinka again deal with Yoruba Cosmology which, dominate figure like, Ogun, the Yoruba god creates chang in the theatre. Kongi stands for the Ogun principle of destruction. These characteristics of Kongi relate him only to the destroying principle of Ogun. Bruce King (4) in his article, —Nigeria II: Soyinka and Ogun compare Daodu with Ogun and project him as a direct representation of Ogun principle:

Daodu performs a sacrifice and imitates Ogun‘s mythic journey through chaos towards creativity. Daodu is like the artist, a mouthpiece of the gods, who is redeemed by undergoing a potentially destructive experience. His behavior represents the will and risk-taking necessary if the karma of man‘s destiny is to be broken and the hope of a new age brought about. (Introduction to Nigerian Literature, 91)

In Nigeria, king is regarded to the status as god- as a Yoruba proverb quoted by Soyinka in Myth, Literature and the African World opines —Orisa l‘ Oba‘ (the king is a god) (15). His luxurious attitude shows his incapability of maintaining the spiritual authority which he has inherited as the king. Soyinka compares the characters of Kongi and Dandola. Both are similar in exploiting people, only the way is different. Kongi’s actions and his harvest symbolizes that he succeeds in producing the destructive force of life and his harvest is nothing but sterility and death. He is instead of being a protector and productive force, he
generates and spreads destruction, killing his opponents and showing no interest in fertility.

The present play depicts the conflict between tradition and modernity, Life and death, fertility and sterility. Kongi’s Harvest, inspired dictatorial traits present in the government of African system. Soyinka obsessed with the corruption that prevails in politics and society. As in the words of Puspha, “The political scene in contemporary Africa was a very complex and disturbing one and Kongi’s Harvest is a comment on it.” (95)

Soyinka is preoccupied with the political situation of Africa and his immediate Society with the pervasive images of corruption and the death of justice. It stated in the words of Jones as,

“This act of salvation is not a mass act; it comes about through the vision and dedication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision in spite of the opposition of the very Society they seek to save”. (The Writings of Wole Soyinka, 12)

*Kongi’s harvest* is a satirical exposure of the absurdity of human conditions in the world, stark reality when man is confronted with the basic choices and the basic situations of his existence. It is the most proverb-riddled play deals with African politics. It pins down perfectly the kind of cruel, paranoiac black dictatorship that is apparently new to the experience of Africa. It is a black comedy hardening on satire, through which Soyinka giving vent to his hatred of the entire system in Africa.
Work Cited:


