CHAPTER FOUR

THE ALAZON: HERO IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE’S
RED OLEANDERS (1925) AND WOLE SOYINKA’S
KONGI’S HARVEST (1967)
This chapter analyzes the alazonic stance of hero in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Red Oleanders* (1925) and Wole Soyinka’s *Kongi’s Harvest* (1967). Whereas the former explored the contours of the fractured Indian psyche, identified its various complex components and searched for a resolution and solution in a rebellious figure and the later too vehemently questioned the blood-thirsty tendencies of African rulers through a heroic figure, “the positive hero” whom Abram Tertz describes as the “cornerstone” of socialist realism whose innumerable virtues are capped by “the clarity and directness with which he sees the purpose and strives towards it” (*On Socialist Realism*, 157-173).

Both Tagore and Soyinka represent the intellectual movement of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century where writers had been grappling with outrage and disenchantment of the societies undergoing the pangs of colonialism. This chapter attempts to establish both the writers as champions of heroic struggle which is the quintessence of human life as depicted in their respective plays *Red Oleanders* (1925) and *Kongi’s Harvest* (1967).

Etymologically hero as *alazon* is an “imposter”. Northrop Frye defines *alazon* as the “miles gloriouis and the learned crank or obsessed philosopher” (*Anatomy*, 39), whereas according to Aristotle, “the *alazon* is prone to ostentation” (Bergson, 413). Likewise Shakespeare calls *alazon* the ‘bombastic and self-glorifying’ character. *Alazon* was developed further in Renaissance comedy, the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*, by introducing stock characters such as the “Braggart soldier” or the “windy old doctor” (Blair, 337-341).

The archetypal representation of the *alazon* is II Capitano, a miles gloriouis in *Commedia dell’Arte*. The role of the *alazon* is usually characterized by overstatement, which often places the character in high relief. The high relief situation enables other characters to revaluate the *alazon*’s exaggeration. Here, *alazoneia* seems to bear elements of classical ingénue irony, too. In ingénue irony, the author puts forward a simpleton, who presents himself or herself in an over-enthusiastic, ignorant or earnest way (Muecke, 58). This behaviour, however, is often contrary to how a person should actually behave. For instance the *alazon* can present an unemotional event overtly emotional, and vice versa- an emotional event is told by being strictly unemotional.
Hence, the *alazon* is, in contrast to the sober *eiron*, a boastful “decoy-duck” (Muecke, 58).

My focus in this chapter rests on the *alazonic* stance of hero as has been theorised by Ihab Hassan in the *The Pattern of Fictional Experience* where he defines *alazon* as an “imposter”, “compulsive rebel” who is involved in a never-ending tirade against stagnating and repressive forces of society. Both heroes analysed in this chapter fall in the ambit of what Hassan aptly opines:

Rebel or victim, the hero is at odds with his environment. He is at odds with himself. His energy is the energy of opposition and his aggressions are either directed against himself (the victim) or against the world (the rebel). In either case, he remains an alien to society, a misfit.

(*The Pattern of Fictional Experience*, 329)

The hero, in African and Indian context can be seen as a narrative device which presents society in a permanent state of conflict with itself. The hero epitomised as the master of conflicts striving to understand the competing forces and manipulating them to create stability has been debated and deliberated in literary and critical studies. Where on the one hand we have heroes who are products of peace or of stability there are other who emerge out of chaos and conflict. Commenting on the hero’s iconic power, Dean A. Miller opines:

Though, the hero may die for the society; his iconic power rests in the hot core of the human imagination, coupled with his own very special style.

(*The Epic Hero*, 24)
In this chapter, the first play under consideration is Rabindranath Tagore’s *Red Oleanders* (1925; from original Bengali play, *Raktakarabi*) and the second one is Wole Soyinka’s *Kongi’s Harvest* (1967). Both the literary icons, Tagore and Soyinka, though geographically and generations apart, allow their heroes break open the bindings of their confinements to emerge quite strongly in the socio-political scenario. It is this universal approach that makes their plays relevant even for the modern readers.

Tagore, an advocate for justice and freedom, through his writings always reflects the poverty in rural India and social evils prevalent in the Indian society. His plays depict social, political and economic problems: the pitiable conditions of prisoners, slavery, delay in the administration of justice, the gap between the ‘haves and have not’s’. His works expose the complex and variegated web of Indian life at various levels- at the level of the peasant whose incessant, backbreaking labour does not provide him even the means of bare subsistence, as well as at the level of the opulent capitalists and rajas, and struggling middle class people. The portrayal of these different sections displays both realism and socialism.

Thus, Tagore presents a panorama of the life of the poorest in the colonial India at a time when the British rule was showing some of its wickedest features. Tagore was upset by the social status of common man. He empathized with the poor people for their never-ending poverty, their ceaseless hard labour, and their hearts full of sacrifice in such harsh social conditions. On the other hand, Soyinka, a fearless writer has always been at the forefront, leading struggles on behalf of the downtrodden and the quest for justice and freedom. Soyinka, a Yoruba, was sent to prison for speaking out against the massacre of Igbos and attempting to broker peace during the Nigerian/Biafra War in 1967. Akporobaro makes a pertinent observation on the responsive nature of African Literature when he says:

> The Nigerian literature belongs to this tradition, particularly those that were written in the realist mode. The fictional situations explored in them are often the writer’s response to the often-harsh socio-political realities of contemporary society.

*(Forms and Style in the Nigerian Novel, 38)*
Red Oleanders (1925) was written during the period of socio-political upheavals in colonial India and is the byproduct of modern materialistic system. The devastation caused by the evils of science during the First World War injured writers’ feelings and this gave an impetus to Tagore’s writing. To counter the crises of civilization, to revive and liberate man from his ever increasing greed, Tagore came down to meet men from every stratum of society. Tagore’s Red Oleanders has in it the total picture of the crises and civilization of the India in twenties in terms of the place of action of this play which is Yakshatown. Commenting on Tagore’s strong reaction against the mechanical civilization, An Indian critic, Gaurav Pradhan asserts:

Tagore’s strong reaction against the mechanical civilization of the modern period is very well reflected in the ‘Red Oleanders’. The artistic abilities and the finer feelings of the people are however lost in the morass of mechanical civilization. Men are employed over men to check their delayed work. The man as a machine, as a part of the great organization and as a unit of the social whole is strongly deplored by Tagore in this drama.

(Literary Concepts, 53)

Kongi’s Harvest (1967) was written in newly independent Nigeria which was in a state of flux. The political arena of Nigeria was stormy and volatile in the sixties. It was a period in Nigerian history when elections were being rigged and all the opponents of the government could be taxed out of existence. The army of Thugs literally reigned as the country witnessed its first military coup in 1966. The federal government of Tafewa Balewa was toppled and a counter coup brought Yakubu Gowon to power. Within five years after independence Soyinka could clearly foresee the future of the nation by his empirical observation.

Sixties was the period of social and political unrest in Western Nigeria. When the political turmoil accelerated in Nigeria with renewed intensity in 1965 Soyinka
produced Kongi’s Harvest. Leslie Paul in A Study of Heroic Individualism comments, “For Nietzsche struggle is the essence of the heroic. The heroic is the agonal spirit incarnate. He finds in struggle both his means and his end”(12). Red Oleanders and Kongi’s Harvest depict the all pervasive images of corruption and the death of justice, thereby, conveying writers’ vision as has been pointed out by Eldred Jones:

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)

Red Oleanders is a scathing attack on the capitalistic society of pre-independence. Ranjan is a representative of society where the relationship between the king i:e upper class and the workers i:e lower class is that of the exploiter and the exploited. The exploitation of the workers was not limited only up to fewer wages but also to the extent of using them as slaves. Undergoing the pangs of injustice, Ranjan succeeds in giving a voice to the voiceless workers by his dint of sacrifice.

The headmaster’s character-sketch of Ranjan brings out his rebellious traits, “He said he was not used to be being made to work. The headmaster of Vijragarh came with the police, but the fellow doesn’t know what fear is. Threaten him, he bursts out laughing. Asked why he laughs, he says solemnity is the mask of stupidity and he has come to take it off” (Red Oleanders, 35). What is pertinent is that Ranjan gives voice to his voiceless co-workers which the headmaster aptly defines “nothing seems to fasten on to him. His boisterousness is infectious. The diggers are getting frisky” (36). Ranjan therefore is an embodiment of protest and sacrifice for the rights of exploited workers in a gigantic system of the powerful king and the pig-headed defenders of the exploited system. The core issue has been aptly brought out by Kripalani’s observation:

While the earlier play Muktadhara dealt with the diabolical use of technological knowledge (symbolised by the machine) for colonial
exploitation, this one raises the more fundamental issue of the free spirit of life set against the more terrible machine of a highly organised and mechanical society which turns men into robots, reducing names to numbers.

(Tagore: A Life, 181)

Ranjan is an alazonic hero and Nandini, his beloved is an alazonic heroine of the play. Tagorean hero, Ranjan is fighting against the dehumanising forces of modern urban civilization. Critics aptly comment that Ranjan stands for the spirit of youth and Nandini stands for life force. By projecting a hero who firmly believes that there exist a dire need for an antithesis of the kind who represents supreme; Tagore expresses his faith in the power of rebellion. Ranjan emerges as the “compulsive rebel”- the alazon when he violently questions “gigantic system”- the oppressive power structures but by doing so he is taken and finally killed. Ranjan is what Camus declares:

The rebel.....his first step, refuses to allow anybody to touch what he is. He is fighting for the integrity of one part of his being. He does not try, primarily, to conquer, but simple to impose.

(The Rebel, 18)

Ranjan as an inhabitant of “Yakshapuri”, which is the image of an exploitive industrial civilization devoid of the truth of life, spirit of joy and basic human values stands for the will to “impose”. The dramatic personae are grouped to represent a tripartite formation of the oppressed, the suppressed and the emancipators. The head of the power regime, the king of Yakshapuri, the man in him concealed, acts from inside “an intricate network”. He is aided by a number of functionaries in running the elaborate administrative machinery. Entangled in its meshes and coerced to mine gold are numerous vulnerable and powerless victims, tunnel diggers all. The “gigantic system” resting on appalling tyranny is defied by Nandini, a beautiful woman having magnetic personality, and her beloved. Into this sordid milieu arrives Nandini with her elemental
élan to create a general commotion among the inmates by playing upon their heartstrings.

The janitors of the township keep Nandini and Ranjan apart fearing that their union will splinter the very fabric of the set-up which is at great pains to preserve. Attracted but bewildered by Nandini, the king acts like a giant, who with his “acquisitive passion” has mastered the secret of extorting strength from nature and man but not the natural rhythm of life. His dormant desire for joy of life is aroused by her as he starts feeling the intensity of her love for Ranjan. Despite his “Titanic Power” the king realises his inner poverty, for his existence is bereft of all “love and life and beauty”.

Ranjan, who “does not know what fear is” poses a problem to the establishment and the soul-killing discipline, which he openly flouts. Sardar, the top official, in order to get rid of Ranjan infuriates him with the outrageous slander that Nandini has been a slave girl by the king, and thus sets him on to dare the king. The last encounter of Ranjan with the King at last comes out of death. On Nandini’s insistence, the king at last comes out of his network and reveals himself to her. Shocked by the sight of Ranjan lying dead inside the room, Nandini tells the king that the time for “the last fight” between them has come and declares that Ranjan, though dead, will be victorious through her and he always became the exemplary paradigm of heroism in Yaksha Town. The king, the man in him now awakened, is distraught with remorse for killing Ranjan, the spirit of life and youth. Finding that his own system and his own assistants have betrayed him, he joins Nandini in her final fight to demolish the inhuman structure of Yakshapuri. The long exploited workers now seething with fury, and growing rebellious, break open the prison gate and follow Nandini “who has gone before them all” in her struggle to death with soulless defenders of the monstrous prison-house.

In “Red Oleanders: Authors Interpretation” published in Manchester Guardian, 28 August 1925) Tagore stated that “This play of mine seems obscure in meaning” and went on to interpret what the play was about:
But the personal man is not dead, only dominated by the organization. The world has become the world of Jack and Giant - the Giant who is not a gigantic man, but a multitude of men turned into a gigantic system...

Yakshapuri is a prison-house from where most of the inmates want to escape and Ranjan’s sacrifice sets them free. The hideous cruelty to which human beings are subjected in Yakshapuri is not only narrated but also visually corroborated. Nandini is horrified to see many familiar faces moving like live corpuses, with “their heads lowered forever”. Apathetic to human suffering, the professor, as a spokesman of the system that feeds on human life, proclaims:

That marvellousness is the credit side of the account, and this ghastliness is the debit. These small ones are consumed to ash that the great ones may leap up in flame. This is the principle underlying all rises to greatness.

*(Red Oleanders, 111-112)*

When Nandini condemns it as “a fiendish principle”, Professor with cold objectivity explains:

It is no use getting annoyed with a principle. Principles are neither good nor bad. That which happens does happen. To go against it, is to knock your head against the law of being.

*(Red Oleanders, 112)*

All that we hear now is that Nandini has “dyed her garland the colour of oleanders with her heart's blood" and "gone in advance of us all to the last freedom”; the King has just gone off to his death, hearing Nandini's call and, according to the
Professor, “has at last had tidings of the secret of life”. Ranjan has left behind “in death his conquering call–he will live again and cannot die”; the workmen have broken into the prison and released Bisu, and the net-work before the palace has been torn to shreds. Bisu comes out and calls on his comrades to come on to the fight and as we hear the shouts of Victory to Nandini!’ the curtain falls. A song dies away in the distance: ‘Hark it's autumn calling– Come, O come away!’ Ranjan’s sacrifice not only regenerates the king but boomerangs on the manoeuvres. It hastens the collapse of the inhuman regime resting on complete rejection of human values. Tagore makes a very candid comment on the philosophy of human nature when he says:

Human nature invites selfishness now and again. This, however, hinders the extension of human consciousness. On the basis of his selfish nature man sins and commits crime. So, sin is selfishness, a revolt against the real self of man and a rejection of the good.

(\textit{The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, 60})

Tagore’s deep love for all humanity made him to revolt against social injustice and political exploitation. This got reflected in his play \textit{The Red Oleanders}. In one of his famous poem ‘Atonement’, Tagore gives a clarion call to the upper class people to be ready for the reaction of the down-trodden, depressed and the exploited as he asserts:

Those whom you have insulted and those whom you have oppressed will certainly not pardon you. Those whose plight you have ignored, whose personality you have thwarted, whose human dignity you have usurped and whose honour you have denied will soon come in power ...when they regain their dignity and prestige, they would like to crush and hit back those who stood in the way of their progress and prosperity for centuries. ‘You will have to pay for the ignorance
that you have caused. You have to pay for the wide gap that you have created. This has to be made up by those who have been responsible for creating them’.

(Literary Concepts), 56

Tagore has always inspired the depressed and oppressed members of the society not only in India but also in the other colonial parts of the world who have been under the tyranny of social, political and economic exploitation and oppression through centuries. Tagore always stood by the downtrodden and championed their cause with the zeal of political emancipation and economic progress.

A Yoruba icon, Wole Soyinka is plugged into an elite conception of history in which a dominant figure creates change, even in very tragic circumstances. His Kongi’s Harvest is a microcosm of the political situation of Nigeria in sixties. Soyinka’s portrait of the kind of corrupt maniacal political leader, Kongi, with whom independent Africa has been cursed, is a dictator driven by such an absolute lust for power that he requires the sacrifice of all the moral figures in society. His tyranny devours the strong breed of idealists willing to sacrifice themselves in order to end political corruption and establish a better social order. The opposition leaders, Daodu and Segi, represent a political version of the strong breed; they are young idealists willing to sacrifice themselves to end Kongi’s evil.

In Kongi’s Harvest (1967) the sacrifice is made by the forces of rebellion that oppose Kongi who is brutalised by power. Though he already has power over the traditional king, Oba Danlola, Kongi wants a public demonstration of the transition to his power at the Harvest Festival. Since the traditional Oba is reluctant to justify this new corrupt leader by handing over the New Yam, Kongi tries to manipulate him by promising the release of political detainees. His ego is so monstrously swollen that he has the yearly calendar renamed for himself. For a photographer, he poses like Christ in the Last Supper, and then sets his Aweri lackeys to work on his next book as soon as they release his last one completely self-centred; Kongi wants the traditional Harvest
Festival to become a celebration of his absolute power. When he learns that one of the detainees has escaped, he explodes in a paroxysm of revenge:

I want him back, alive if possible. If not, ANY OTHER WAY! But I want him back... And hear this! The amnesty is OFF! The reprieve is OFF! The others hang tomorrow ... No Amnesty! No Reprieve! Hang every one of them! Hang them!

(CP-II, 100)

Daodu, one of the young leaders of the opposition, identifies the role of sacrifice in a political context: ‘...we...hereby repudiate all Prophets of Agony, unless it be recognised that pain may be endured only in the pursuit of ending pain and fighting terror’ (127). Just as Eman in The Strong Breed was willing to sacrifice himself to oppose evil, so Daodu and Segi are part of a new political strong breed, the jealous rebels who will risk everything to stop the tyranny of dictatorship. Both Daodu and Segi are what Albert Camus label as, “The rebels” who risk their life to renew and revive society through their rebellious deeds against repressive forces:

If the individual, in fact, accepts death and happens to die as a consequence of his act of rebellion, he demonstrates by doing so that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny. If he prefers the risk of death to the negation of the rights that he defends, it is because he considers these rights more important than himself. Therefore he is acting in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men.

(The Rebel, 15-16)
Both Daodu and Segi recognise that sacrifice is needed to halt Kongi’s insatiable appetite for power and the social pain it produces. Unfortunately, as political events in Nigeria and other parts of Africa reflect, political tyranny continues to feed on the sacrifice of progressive political forces. The Harvest Festival comes to a climax with a burst of gunfire which kills Segi’s father while he is trying to assassinate Kongi. The dictator’s triumph means the martyred sacrifice or flight of his enemies. But Soyinka is far too satirical to allow Kongi’s Harvest to be gathered painlessly. His victory speech turns into a parody of a political bacchanal in which the tyrant ‘exhorts, declaims, reviles, cajoles, damns, curses, vilifies, excommunicates and execrates’ (131) until he foams at the mouth. Segi’s appearance dancing with a copper salver, like Salome, and presenting Kongi with her father’s head on a platter depicts a visual representation of the tyrannical appetite as a form of cannibalism. Instead of being offered a New Yam, which symbolises life and prosperity, the tyrant is offered a severed head symbolic of his blood-sucking tendencies.

Here Soyinka has portrayed that politically the beauty of the society we find ourselves in have been covered up with some social realities like corruption, selfishness, man’s inhumanity to man by the supposed leaders and the bourgeoisie. Daodu has been discovered as revolutionary in nature because he gives the masses a true voice of their own. In respect of Kongi’s Harvest, Soyinka aims at sensitizing to the problems of present day Nigeria but also at convincing the reader that much of the problems faced by the downtrodden are imposed on them by the political class. The political leaders are presented as being wicked, merciless and exploitative. They engage in politics not to change the society but to have power for themselves and deal ruthlessly with anybody that might pose as a threat to their authority.

By projecting the hero, Daodu, Soyinka wants to convey that a society can only be reformed if everyone is aware of the happenings in that society and ready to make huge sacrifices to realize positive changes. Being a politically agile and vociferous critic of his times, Soyinka’s plays always depict a character that rises above the selfish rulers. 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. Daodu stands in
antithesis to both these rulers. Daodu’s speech makes it clear that there is an alternative to ‘Kongism’ as a way of life:

So let him, the Jesus of Isma, let him. Who has assumed the mantle of a Messiah, accept from my farming settlement this Gift of soil and remember that a human Life once buried cannot, like this yam, sprout a new. Let him take from the palm, only its wine and not crucify lives upon it.

(CP-II, 128)

Ostensibly, Daodu appears as the messiah and the saviour of people and abhors sadistic attitude of kings. When we place Daodu in the spectrum of rulers like Danlola and Kongi, we find this champion of Yams emerging head and shoulders above them. Oyin Ogunba comments quite optimistically that Daodu:

...stands for the inevitable synthesis of traditional order and the modern age, and so he is the man of the future. But his plumes are not yet fully formed.

(The Movement, 199)

Soyinkan hero, Daodu becomes the voice of the people who rejects an ascetic and sadistic way of life. He believes in enjoying life to its last dregs, for life without basic comforts and a joy is a beastly one. He is against Kongi as he has inflicted pain and suffering on the people. He believes in removing pain from life or at least reducing it. His intention is to enhance the quality of life through diligent cultivation of land. Kongi has committed a crime-he has starved people physically and spiritually, he has an organised spy system and has subverted the very foundations of the society. He almost becomes a maniac with murderous instincts. Kongi’s lust for power has become a devouring passion. Soyinka has made a very strong point that the play is about “Kongism”, not about Kongi. Kongism is a never-dying principle. It continues to plague mankind in a different, but more inhuman shape. Whenever a leader like Kongi usurps
the power of a traditional ruler, the result is chaos, anarchy and doom. “Hemlock”, the opening section hints at the cup of humiliation which Danlola is forced to gulp at the hands of Kongi and “Hangover”, the last section shows the unpalatable effects of totalitarianism.

Ogun, the Yoruba god, is Soyinka’s idol god in the theatre. The Ogun principle is partly acquired by some of the characters in the play. Kongi stands for the Ogun principle of destruction. All his energies are diverted towards becoming the spirit of the harvest. The people are not at all concerned with him, nor does he care for their welfare. All his energies are directed towards destruction and not to any creation. He boasts himself as “the spirit of harvest” but he does everything as a spirit 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” compares Daodu with Ogun and projects 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 behaviour 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)

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 Hero, 176-178). These actions apparently attest to the Ogun principle. Daodu, of course, possesses some features but he is not a complete incarnation of the principle. In the second part of the play, he 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. Though his actions tend to destroy the traditional order but by winning the yam competition at the same time, he not only rejuvenates traditionalism in the land but also he gives life to the land being a farmer.

Daodu has his own farmer’s community. It produces the prize-winning yam of the year. A noted critic, Mark Winestein calls the yam is “symbol of life and fertility” (World Literature, 128). Daodu becomes the symbol of new life. Segi recognizes him as life and calls him “The Spirit of Harvest” (CP-II, 98). She instigates to preach him life:

Segi: Preach life Daodu, 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...

(CP-II, 99)

Kongi, in contrast to Daodu, is the spirit of death, hostility and sterility. But he calls himself as the spirit of harvest. Kongi’s repeated self declaration: “I am the SPIRIT OF HARVEST...I am the spirit of HAAR-VEST!” (CP-II, 91) depicts his mania. The
Secretary further flatters him by nurturing his love for image building. He sounds superfluous when he suggests that everything must date from the occasion of Kongi’s harvest and the year should be known as the year of “Kongi’s Harvest” (K.H). Hereafter, dates will be like 200 A.H (After Harvest), but Kongi prefers K.H, as it appears less ambiguous to him. The Praise-monger Kongi’s Carpenters Brigade praises him:

Kongi is our mother
Kongi is our man
And Kongi is our Saviour
Redeemer, prince of power
For Isma and for Kongi
We’re proud to live or die!

(CP-II, 116)

As the leader of self-glorification, he starves his men to formulate new ideas and images of him. Only through words, he projects him as “Messiah of Pain” (CP-II, 99).

Segi and Daodu are the focal points of opposition to Kongi’s regime. Daodu possesses the qualities of a true leader unlike Oba and Kongi. Being a son of junior Oba and farmer by profession, he is associated with the African tradition and with the spirit of harvest. Kongi symbolizes denial of life because of his asexuality whereas Daodu is shown in a sexual role. Segi’s open invitation to Daodu on the eve of harvest and the young man’s acceptance makes their relationship symbolic of life, which is a challenge to Kongi’s regime:

Segi: Come through the gates tonight. Now I want you in me, my Spirit of Harvest.

Daodu: Don’t tempt me so hard. I am swollen like prize yam under earth, but all harvest must await its season.
Segi: There is no season for seeds bursting.

Daodu: My eyes of Kernels, I have much preparation to make....

Segi: I must rejoice, and you with me. I am opened tonight; I am soil from the final rains.

(CP-II, 98)

The harvest imagery reflected in the conversation between Segi and Daodu conveys a glimmer of hope in the play, which lies in both of them. When Daodu is clothed in ritualistic robes for the harvest and Segi, kneels ceremoniously before him uttering “My prince...my prince...” (CP-II, 98), the ritualistic myth is fully dramatized and holds the promise of procreation and new life at the right “Season”. A noted Indian critic, R. Sethuraman aptly remarks that both Segi and Daodu:

Form the two wheels on which moves a new political philosophy, combining the best of the spiritual traditionalism of Danlola with the pragmatism of the modern. The two wheels are complementary and dependent on each other to launch their attack which, hopes to reduce the structure of “Kongism” to a shambles.

(The Literary Half Yearly, 38)

Soyinka’s iconoclasm and resilience makes him an alazonic, “compulsive rebel” writer of Nigeria. It appears that the great dramatist’s fight with the Chiefs and emperors started at a very tender age. An interesting incident of Soyinka’s childhood, when he refused to bow to a chief as mentioned in his autobiographical work Ake illuminates this fact. The young Soyinka’s words to Odemo (a Chief), shows his rebellious stance:
If I don’t prostrate myself to god, why should I prostrate to you? You a just as man like my father aren’t you?

\[(\text{Ake: The Childhood Years, 125})\]

Soyinka, the skilful dramatist, in his play *Kongi’s Harvest* depicts the 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.

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). The apotheosis of Danlola in view of this saying places a heavy responsibility upon his shoulders. But his attitude to bask in the sunshine of his past glory by remaining absorbed in dancing and singing most of the time makes him a worthless guardian of people. His luxurious attitude shows his incapability of maintaining the spiritual authority which he has inherited as the king. The dramatist has always been sarcastic of such escapism and nostalgia on the part of rulers, who owe a great responsibility towards people. Oba Danlola is such 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.

There is no great difference between Kongi and Danlola. 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. Thus the play is depicted the conflict between tradition and modernity, Life and death, fertility and sterility.

Both the plays analysed in this chapter highlight Tagore’s and Soyinka’s condemnation of man’s inhumanity to man as existed in India and Nigeria operating through the relationship between an oppressor and the oppressed which is a universal
phenomenon. It is oppressor’s self-centred and insensitive approach that sucks the oppressed. This goes on for so long that oppressed is at last reduced to a permanent hallucinatory state of total exhaustion.

The socio-political fabric of Yakshapuri and Ismaland thrives on the division of the oppressor and the oppressed. In the play *Red Oleanders*, the oppressed class includes the miners, whose human identities have been effectively razed even as they have been reduced to mere numbers, like 47V (Phagulal) and Ng69 (Bishu):

We have become numbers, with numbers on our doors, our telephones, our cars, our factories, our restaurants, our votes, and our tickets at sports or theatre. Even as worshippers we are card indexed.

(“Red Oleanders: An Interpretation”, 1952)

Yet in a remarkable dramaturgical twist, Tagore assigns names to the oppressed miners, while the oppressors are mentioned only by their class designations. So, the miners comprise individuals like Bishu, Phagulal, Chandra, Kishor, Gokul, Gajju. Even the zombies—like creatures, who emerge as waste from the king’s inner chamber, are identified by Nandini by their respective names: Anup, Upamanyu, Shaklu and Kanku. But their social superiors are given no individual names to boast of. They are merely representatives of their classes: the King, the Governor, the Deputy Governor, the Preacher, the Professor, the Headman. If they have reduced the miners to mere numbers, the author reduces them to mere class-designations. This is Tagore’s way of getting back at the oppressors by denying them individual identities. In *Kongi’s Harvest*, the oppressor class is headed by Kongi and the King, the initiator of the system, which is pushed ahead by the network of the Reformed Aweri Fraternity, the Carpenters’ Brigade, the Party Secretary, the governors, the priests, the officers, and even the intellectuals. The oppressed includes the common people, prisoners and Oba Danlola.

Hero in both the plays analysed in this chapter – be it Ranjan in *Red Oleanders* (1925) or Daodu in *Kongi’s Harvest* (1967) is in a state of constant warfare,
questioning the outworn and stagnating authority so as to bring a new lease of life into the society. In both these plays, their heroes declare aloud their thoughts, speak out and protest. Both these heroes embody the principle of change, rebellion and revolt as has been pointed out by Dean A. Miller in his empirical study:

The hero, imagined as great man, is conceived as who lifts or forces himself into a dominant place in his society and epoch, and then compels that society and time into new, even unique historical patterns; in the process he will in all likelihood push aside older, outworn representatives of the principle of power and authority...to some degree he thus resembles that archaic theme of young hero in his resistance and opposition to old king.

*(The Epic Hero, 20)*

In both the plays under analyses, if Ranjan and Daodu are the “man of the future”, who have the potential of awakening the people, then it cannot be ignored that Nandini and Segi are the driving force behind them and have the potential of shaping the destiny of nation. A well known critic, Joseph Campbell’s assertion on heroine says:

She is the ‘other portion’ of the hero himself-for ‘each is both’: if his stature is that of world monarch she is the world, and if he is a warrior, she is fame. She is the image of his destiny which he is to release from the prison of enveloping circumstance.

*(The Hero, 316)*

In a nut shell, both the heroes analysed in this chapter are the embodiment of courage and a new vision because they succeed in giving a voice to the voiceless against injustice by their dint of courage and possess vision to gain freedom. Ihab Hassan in *The Pattern of Fictional Experience* observes, “Courage is the prime virtue because it is the
virtue of self- sufficiency. It confers dignity on meaninglessness. The hero, as it is said, encounters nothingness, and his courage is the courage of simply being...on trial is the very existence of man, not his heritage or future, his property or belief” (32). Their conflict with the oppressive regimes are not their singular fight for their own rights but represents the turmoil going on in the minds and hearts of thousands of exploited and soulless workers.

Tagore and Soyinka presented Ranjan and Daodu to the public as an inspiring example of Heroism through their alazonic stance. They both believe as what Camus says in his book The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt, “Better to die on one’s feet than to live on one’s knees” (15). They both possess the audacity to question the social evils perpetrating greed, corruption, superstitions and inhumanity and are determined to bring a new lease of life into society plagued by powerful rulers through the portrayal of their heroes. In such an attempt to rejuvenate the society their heroes had to suffer as they possess fortitude and valour to retaliate against the oppressive regime just as Christ had to suffer for the sins of humanity.
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