CHAPTER - 2
BEGINNINGS OF DISSENT

The masks!
O take off the mask! And behind?
What wind! What straw!

J.P.Clark.

The year 1960 saw the Nigerian Independence and Soyinka’s return to Nigeria. *A Dance of the Forests* was produced in this year to mark Nigeria’s independence from Britain. The play revealed Soyinka as an *enfant terrible*, a writer who delighted in shocking and bewildering his audience. He also emerged as an independent thinker with numerous theatrical skills. During 1962, Soyinka contributed regularly to Nigerian controversies through the press. He manipulated the media so as to ensure that space was available for him to express his views, so that he could make an impact on his countrymen.

A mood of euphoria prevailed in Nigeria at the time of independence from the British rule. Soyinka remembers that period as one of brief optimism followed swiftly by disillusionment. The emancipation from the clutches of slavery was followed by another ugly phase in Nigerian history, which was full of corruption, political intriguing, manipulations, dictatorship and coups. As Soyinka says:

*It was clear they (African leaders) were more concerned with the mechanisms for stepping into the shoes of the departing colonial masters, enjoying the same privileges, inserting themselves in that axial position toward the rest of the community. It was the most naked and brutal sign of alienation of the ruler from the ruled, from the very first crop. And I realized the enemy within was going to be far more problematic than the external, easily recognized enemy.*

*(Quoted in Jaggi, ‘Ousting Monsters’)*

At this time of violence, victimization, repression and censorship, when the press and the radio were, both, increasingly under pressure from the government, Soyinka had
turned to drama, and specifically to the satirical revue form to make known his feelings of dissent.

In the middle of 1964, with a strike in progress and the talk of revolution in the air, he advocated and worked for a people’s uprising. Political violence returned to the streets of western Nigeria during 1965 with renewed intensity, and in March, at a time when ministers were being murdered and party arsonists were active, Soyinka bravely produced a new revue, *Before the Blackout*, another onslaught on opportunist politicians, corrupt time servers and cynical manipulators. 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 foresees the future of the nation by his empirical observation. Against a background of national crisis, Soyinka produced his major play of the mid-sixties, *Kongi’s Harvest*.

Soyinka always believed in drawing the attention of his countrymen to the harsh realities of contemporary times. Even at a historic occasion like the independence, he produced a play *A Dance of the Forests* to puncture a nostalgic idealizing of the past. This play was written especially for the Nigerian Independence celebrations (October 1960) – a juncture when the countrymen were rejoicing in the richness of their tradition after passing through the dark phase of colonialism. For the great dramatist it was a time for introspection and retrospection because it was the end of an era and the beginning of another.

*A Dance of the Forests* dramatizes the tragic quality of African history and mythology in order to make a statement about the future, not only of Nigeria, but of post-colonial Africa, in general. Soyinka reports that when he was a student he met some of the leaders-in-waiting of post-colonial Nigeria and, listening to them, he realized that in a curious way the post-colonial was a repetition of certain historical abuses of power; and it is this iterative nature of power that is the subject of *A Dance of the Forests*.

Despite being surrounded by the mood of jubilation and exhilaration, Soyinka had the potential to analyse things quite realistically. In an interview with James Gibbs he once remarked about the dichotomy between illusion and reality at the time of independence:
A Dance of the Forests was not a play about the Nigerian situation; it was a general thing. The independence celebration in 1960 was just an appropriate occasion to present it. In giving reasons why it was appropriate he said later ‘after independence some of those new rulers were going to behave exactly like their forebears did, just exploit the people’. He was, he continued, interested in taking another look at that history, saying: ‘The euphoria should be tempered by the reality of the eternal history of oppression’. A major theme in the play concerns the possibility of making a break with the past, of a new beginning, but there is much, too much, else. (Gibbs, Wole Soyinka 63)

These words uttered by the writer heighten the degree of his acute penetrative and futuristic vision. In A Dance of the Forests Soyinka has exhibited his creative genius by evoking a violent and inglorious past in order to demonstrate its continuity into the present.

At the critical moment, when the Western civilization had introduced an element of tension into African societies, it was the remarkable features of Yoruba culture that Soyinka moulded into his dramatic forms to give a new direction to his protest. This culture was able to afford a stable institutional and spiritual base for the transformation of collective life and feeling for the individual. Soyinka amalgamates the Yoruba rituals pertaining to physical sacrifice for good and evil ends, and the traditional dramatic expressions like dance, song and mime. This blending draws the attention of his countrymen to topical issues and problems in the contemporary society.

In A Dance of the Forests, the main focus is on the erosion of the traditional values and the consequent loss of hope among the young generation. They are left with very few cultural and moral reference points with which to face the modern world. To highlight this dilemma, Soyinka adopts the tragedy form, for it offers him a language in which he is able to fuse together imperceptibly his interest in the metaphysical and the mythological with his political concerns. From this point, Soyinka effected a notable transition from a superficial satirical approach to social problems, towards a deeper concern with great moral and spiritual issues. A Dance of the Forests is the first work in which troubled awareness of the human scene, as exemplified by the African situation, is given expression at a serious meditative level. The celebration of
Nigerian independence, presented as a paradigm of African society marks the turning point of society, where moral progress is inscribed within a historical perspective. To awaken the disillusioned generation, Soyinka endeavoured to work out a new spiritual coherence out of the historical disconnection between the African heritage and the modern experience.

In his dramaturgy Soyinka adopts the pattern of web like rather than tree like internal relations of the parts of his script. This structural phenomenon depends more upon metaphoric than metonymic imagination. This form of dramatic communication acts as a system in which the audience learns through the recognition of similarities between apparently unrelated images with a view to emphasize the epistemic dimension of the object with which they are confronted. This view differs from the emphasis on tempo-casualty and the emotive aspect of drama characteristic of Aristotle’s organicity. It is closer to Brechtian theatre of alienation. This dramatic form, like Brecht’s, emphasizes the connection between subsequent images of a play in metaphoric as opposed to metonymic terms and serves a meta communicative purpose. The use of tempo-casually unrelated episodes is capable of drawing attention to the fictive process. Soyinka uses myths from the Yoruba mythology which the audience are familiar with, at the same time, incorporating rituals and dances. This effectively alienates the audience from the primary characters and is capable of enhancing their critical viewing of the world, which is typically Brechtian. (Sekoni 90-91)

The play, *A Dance of the Forests*, tells a story of how the inhabitants of a certain post-colonial African town decide to invite ancestral spirits from the Forest of the Dead to a celebratory gathering of the tribes, where they also hope to find out from the ancestors what the future holds for them.

To celebrate a festival, *The Gathering of the Tribes*, and before *A Dance* starts, certain preparations have been made. Demoke, a carver, has transformed a giant silk-cotton tree into a totem; Adenebi, the Council Orator, has arranged for representatives from among the illustrious dead to be invited; the scattered sons and daughters of the soil, the beautiful but hard hearted Rola amongst them, have been summoned home to join in the celebration. Events do not fall out as expected: while working on the totem,
Demoke has come to resent his apprentice, Oremole, who was able to climb higher than he could; in a fit of jealousy he sent the assistant tumbling to his death and then lopped off the top of the tree, thereby offending Eshuoro (a deity Soyinka created out of the fusion of Eshu, the God of Faith, and the cult of Oro). Now that the Totem is complete, the area around it has been cleared and Demoke no longer recognizes it.

Apart from the forest setting, Soyinka has incorporated other typical Elizabethan elements like the prologue, disguise, involvement of gods and spirits in human life, magical happenings and a ‘play-within-a-play’. All these elements reflect the consanguinity of the play with the Elizabethan drama. The Prologue is indispensable to an understanding of the plot as it illustrates the highly complex course of action to be followed in the play.

Soyinka provides a preamble to the play, a testimony from Aroni, the one-legged one, which indicates the pattern that is followed when the ‘dance’ starts. This statement introduces the groups involved in the drama: the dead, the living and the deities, both major and minor. The dead who arrive are remarkable, a man and a woman who have shown great courage and endured great suffering, but they are not glamorous, gorgeously dressed, tyrannical rulers of a vanished African kingdom for whom Adenebi had hoped. The Dead Man has been castrated for his principles and the Dead Woman is pregnant with the Half-Child, whom she has carried through many generations. In the course of the play we are encouraged to focus our attention on three of the living; Adenebi, Rola and Demoke, whose murder of Orimole has, it seems, closed the final link in a chain or, in other words, completed a circle. The dance can proceed. The three human beings are brought together, and under the guidance of a major deity Forest Head, conducted deep into the forest, the setting for many Yoruba adventure stories, for initiation rights and for the meetings of secret cults. After revealing exchanges and the intervention of various gods, particularly the vindictive and aggrieved Eshuoro and Ogun, who protects Demoke, three humans are taken back to the previous existences in the Court of Mata Kharibu. In a flash back, *The Welcome of the Dead*, we see them commit crimes similar to those they have been responsible for as ‘living characters’.
The forest image has much wider connotations in the traditional African society which is rooted in the belief of spirits and supernatural beings. A critic aptly remarks on the forest setting of the play:

In *A Dance of the Forests* the natural environment of the forest, away from the society, enables the characters to explore their inner selves and to come to self-knowledge. This typical romance pattern is particularly apt for the Nigerian dramatist because the forest is the ideal site in traditional religion for the enactment of transformations from one state of being to another, for meeting with spirits who aid people to come to self-realization. (Katrak 140-141)

The play opens in a society, which is full of hypocrisy, sinful existence and immorality, but towards the climax we find the purgation of the main characters after their stark realization of the crimes committed by them in the past as well as in the present.

Through the actions and motives of the three principal characters Demoke, Adenebi and Rola, Soyinka once again cautions against taking tradition at its face value and forbids to be swayed by the illusion of a glorious tradition, thereby, conveying that the vices in human nature have existed since generations. The movement of these characters deeper and deeper into the forest is a highly significant aspect of the play. Each character has an ostensible reason for coming into the forest:

**Rola:** This whole family business sickens men... The whole sentimentality cloys in my face. That is why I fled. The whole town reeks of it... The gathering of the tribes! Do you know how many old and forgotten relations came to celebrate...

**Demoke:** For one thing I did not know what it was all about. The council met and decided that they wanted it done. In secret. The tree was in a grove of Oro, so it was possible to keep it hidden. Later I learnt it was meant for the gathering of the tribes. When I finished it, the grove was cleared of all the other trees, the
bush was razed and a motor road built right up to it. It looked different. It was no longer my work. I fled from it...

Adenebi: I have a weak heart. Too much emotion upsets me. This is the era of greatness, unfortunately it is to those who cannot bear too much of it to whom the understanding is given...

(\textit{CP-I 9-11})

The apparent grounds furnished by the principal characters reveal the partial truth behind their motives for leaving the city. Rola emerges as a typical modern woman in her dislike for the traditional role of woman who is considered a binding force in the Nigerian society. Rola is sickened of family ties and is virtually appalled by the old relations. She flees from the town in order to avoid the old relations whom she might meet in the festival. Demoke, the artist holds the society responsible for his leaving the mood of festivity in the town. He shows his exasperation at the motor road which was built around the ‘totem’, a traditional structure carved by him for the celebration. Adenebi on the other hand projects himself too sensitive and emotional for an occasion like \textit{“the Gathering of the Tribes”}. Though the reasons provided by these characters convey the onslaught of modernism on the society, they do not reveal their true characters. Their real picture in fact is exposed after their gradual journey into the forest and an encounter with their previous lives in the pageant of the past followed by the prodding of the Forest Father.

\textit{A Dance of the Forests} continues with an extended rite which incorporates \textit{The Chorus of the Spirits, The Chorus of the Ants, The Masque of the Triplets} and \textit{The Dance of the Half-Child}. Demoke bravely intervenes in this last dance and catches hold of the Half-Child; when he attempts to restore it to its mother, the Dead Woman, Eshuoro blocks his way and appeals to Forest Head to intervene and the dance draws towards an end with the final judgment of the Forest Head. The final speech by Forest father shows the godly frustration and helplessness in view of the attitude of the creature, most dear to him:

The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden – to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and
bare the mirror of original nakedness – knowing full well, it is all futility ...to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumoured ineffectuality complete;... hoping ... in new beginnings ... (CP-I 71)

This remark of the Forest Father is highly illuminating and forms the crux of the play. It shows the pervasive weakness of man which is a matter of concern for the creator too. Forest Father, therefore, is the mouthpiece of Soyinka himself, who like the playwright ventures to elevate the guilt-ridden human beings to a life of self-realisation. As a critic opines:

...in *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka presents a somewhat Voltairean view of History as a record of human follies, of mankind imprisoned within an absurd cycle of blind passions. Forest Head who represents the Supreme deity in this play also acts as a kid of objective judge of human condition, and it is through him that the essential point of the play is put across. (Irele 61)

The great dramatist in *A Dance of the Forests* seems to make the Nigerians realise the dichotomy between the illusion of an illustrious past and the reality of an ignominious present at the time of “new beginnings”. At the same time the tone of the playwright is not altogether pessimistic. The last words of the Forest Father hold a glimmer of hope for the future, which probably lies in the hands of the artist only.

In the last scene that follows, Demoke is told that the Half-Child is a ‘doomed thing’ but, after a moment’s hesitation, he entrusts the child to his mother, the Dead Woman – who seems to want it despite the curse which it carries. Aroni leads the mother and the child away. Forest Head withdraws, and Eshuoro, with a loud yell of triumph, rushes off accompanied by his supporter. These somewhat bewildering events are followed by *The Dance of the Unwilling Sacrifice* in which Demoke is compelled by Eshuoro and his jester to bear a sacrificial basket to the top of the carved totem. As Demoke climbs, Eshuoro sets fire to the base of the totem; the carver falls; Ogun catches him, carries him to the front of the stage and reunites him with the villagers who have been searching the forest. The play draws to end with the reunion of the artist with the villagers.
The Half-Child holds a highly symbolic and significant position in the play and has been interpreted widely by critics. Eldred Jones views the Half-Child as a symbol of man’s future whereas Una Maclean regards it as representing the new Nation of Nigeria at Independence. But the Half-Child can be viewed as a symbol of both the past and present. He stands at the threshold of two ages – traditional Africa and the modern Africa, since it has witnessed the violent past when its innocent mother was killed and the present, which does not seem very promising. Half-Child epitomizes the enduring positive moral values of the past which percolate into the present in spite of many odds and constraints. The survival of the Half-Child in the womb of his mother makes it a complex symbol and conveys the survival of the past values. Therefore, the child and the mother together form a complex symbol. Through the centuries of pregnancy, the child is not dead even though its mother was dead. The Child’s words as it is released from the womb do not convey a happy future for itself:

I who yet await a mother  
Feel this dread,  
Feel this dread,  
I who flee from womb  
To branded womb, cry it now  
I’ll be born dead  
I’ll be born dead (CP-I 64)

It is evident that the play’s deepest inspiration is deliberately African. It is constructed on the pattern of a New Year Festival and also draws on traditions of African dance and on African rituals. Soyinka in an interview, asked that his play should be responded to ‘through the pores of the skin’; he argued that his only obligation to the audience was to provide ‘exciting theatre’, and asserted that he would be happy if he could ‘set a riddle’ which would keep the audiences thinking. (Kolade 78). In A Dance of the Forests, Soyinka took up the challenge to write a full length African tragedy for the stage and to address his countrymen at a time of ‘new beginnings’. The result was an ambitious combination of elements from classical, Elizabethan, symbolist and expressionist dramas with African rites and rituals, all within a framework of festival theatre, an ideal form of drama to voice his protest.
The protest in the play is conveyed through Demoke, who can be described as the protagonist. He is a complex man, creative and violent, an artist and a murderer; he is protected by Ogun, who combines contrasting qualities of the same order as the God of Iron. He said of Orimole’s death: ‘There is nothing ignoble in a fall from that height. The wind cleaned him as he fell’. These lines help the thinking, remembering, intellectualizing members of the audience to understand the meaning of Demoke’s achievement in climbing the totem, the effect of his fall and his purified state at the end of the ordeal. In the exchanges which conclude the play, the word ‘expiation’ is given particular prominence by repetition. Some of the living, it seems, have proved and purified themselves in ‘the dance’. Demoke has ‘done enough...felt enough for the memory (his) remaining (life)’, and Rola, when she enters, is significantly described as ‘chastened’. Reaching for a suitable image to describe their ordeal, Demoke affirms that ‘it was the same lightening that seared us through the head. There has been ‘chastening’ and ‘searing’, ordeal and purification; there has been a working out of guilt, there has been expiation. In A Dance of the Forests, Soyinka’s conception of the privileged position of the artist, of the creative and sensitive individual, within the human community is presented through the character of Demoke. As Gerald Moore comments, Demoke from Soyinka’s A Dance of the Forests is ‘the only occasion in Soyinka’s work when his Ogunian hero is distinctly portrayed as an artist’ (Twelve African Writers 219). The character of Demoke reflects a healthy fusion of tradition and modernism. His creative and artistic endeavour of carving a totem shows his affinity with the African tradition whereas the daring act on his part in the ‘Dance of the Half-Child’ where he asserts his will by deciding to return the Half-Child to its mother depicts his progressive and modern vision. Deeds, such as Demoke has performed do not alter history, but they strengthen the protagonist and can purify the community; they provide an example and go some way in creating conditions in which a new start can be made.

At the very end of the play, Agboreko reflects a preoccupation with divination and prophecy when he asks Demoke ‘Of the future, did you learn anything?’ Demoke does not reply, but, the Old Man says, ‘When the crops have been gathered …’ and Agboreko earns an uneasy laugh with his tag ‘Proverbs to bones and silence’. Soyinka prophesied that the prospects for Nigeria in the year of Independence were grim. He
seems to be arguing that the present is not different from the past, since there is no radical break between the two in terms of the nature of private as well as public social and political relations. He wants the people of Africa to realize this and awaken to the situation.

The playwright has employed the technique of flashback for a complex illustration of how the past is paradigmatic of the present endless reproducibility and universality of evil. In the pre-colonial African monarch, Mata Kharibu, we have an example of a leader without any scruples and whose sole concern, like that of the post-colonial leadership of Kongi and Kamini, is with self-aggrandizement and absolute power. Kharibu takes the wife of a neighbouring king, Madame Tortoise (Rola in post colonial times), for a lover; and when the husband does not react as he expects, he and Madame Tortoise, both of whom are extremely keen on a fight for the sheer love of violence, cast around for a pretext on which to invade the neighbouring kingdom. In the end, some flimsy excuse is found but to the King’s and Madame Tortoise’s surprise, the General refuses to fight what he regards as an unjust war. Madame Tortoise, having failed to persuade him to change his mind with the offer of her body, falsely accuses him of attempted rape and has him castrated and sold into slavery and his pregnant wife murdered. As it turns out, the General and his wife are the deformed spirits that have been sent to represent the ancestral spirits at the gathering of the tribes.

Rola is, therefore, a complex woman who is a personification of the paradoxical principles of creation and destruction in women. The playwright seems to have a special kind of fascination for such enchantresses as we find the women of this breed in many of his works. Simi of The Interpreters and Segi of Kongi’s Harvest also possess the potential to inspire or destroy men. The recurrence of such emancipated women implies the belief of the writer in the capacity of women for creation as well as for destruction. It is in fact a warning to the patriarchal and polygamous Nigerian society to reconsider their attitude towards women lest they should adopt the destructive principle and start gulping men.

It is not only the King and the Queen who mete out extreme violence in the pre-colonial kingdom depicted in the play: others are equally evil. There is the court poet (reincarnated as Demoke, the carver), who pushes his assistant to death because of his
jealousy over Madame Tortoise’s preferring the young assistant to him. The poet’s action is repeated in the post-colonial times, when Demoke also causes the death of his apprentice Oremole while cutting down the sacred Oro tree for carving what is described as ‘a symbol of the great reunion’ of the tribes. Oremole, the Historian in Mata Kharibu’s court is reincarnated as Adenebi in the present times. As a Historian, he defends the King’s idea of war and compares it with the War of Troy. He argues that war and violence are, in fact, the only legacy of human history:

War is the only consistency that past ages afford us. It is a legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. Soldiers have never questioned bloodshed. The cause is always the accident your Majesty, and war is Destiny… (CP-I 51)

These words of the Historian also imply the universal fact that war shapes human destiny. In the Nigerian context, these lines hint at Soyinka’s premonition about the Nigerian Civil War which came true with the outbreak of Civil War in 1967.

Overall, evil is presented as trans-historical, as we see it being reproduced in the present ‘post-colonial formation through the reincarnation of the past as both, subjectivity and event’. What Soyinka, therefore, wishes to convey is that with Independence, the end of colonial oppression may not necessarily lead to the eradication of oppression in general. This message may have seemed a little too pessimistic on the eve of a nation’s founding moment in 1960, but it was an accurate prediction of the Nigerian post-colonial experience as well as that of the majority of African countries. Indeed, as portrayed in A Dance of the Forests, evil seems to be a fundamentally entrenched aspect of human history: the court historian seeking to provide his master with the expected justification for waging war against Madame Tortoise’s husband, cynically argues that war and violence are in fact the only motor of human history, asking ‘Would Troy, if it were standing today, lay claim to preservation in the annals of history if a thousand valiant Greeks had not been slaughtered before its gates and a hundred thousand Trojans within her walls?’ (CP-I 51)

The juxtaposition of the two existences of the prime characters Demoke, Rola and Adenebi convey the depravities and vices of human beings, which have persisted
since generations. The tone of the dramatist is full of grimness throughout at the cannibalism of human beings. Soyinka's deliberate avoidance of any parallel for the emperor Mata Kharibu in the present conveys his vision. The vociferous critic and writer, Soyinka here seems prophetic, for he foresees Nigeria’s future under the military rules who proved to be as barbarous and tyrannical as the traditional African kings like Mata Kharibu. Katrak aptly remarks in this context: “Mata Kharibu will always remain the same throughout human history. For them there is no possibility of purgation as there is for the other two in their rebirth as Demoke and Rola” (Katrak 143).

There is also a more immediate reason for globalising the context of corrupt power in Mata Kharibu's Kingdom. The play is set in the period of the transatlantic slave trade and includes an episode on slave-trading in which the court physician and the slave dealer have a witty and refined chat about the business of selling humans. The slave trade is also seen to serve the needs of despotic rule well as exemplified by the fate of the general, it provides the most effective way of getting rid of the opposition. Whereas pre-colonial dictators sold opposition into slavery, the post-colonial ones create conditions which achieve similar population drainage.

In *A Dance of the Forests* Soyinka uses a cyclic notion of history which does not allow for the idea of any radical difference between the past and the present and that this concept of cyclicity constitutes a pessimistic rather than optimistic view of the future of post-colonial Africa. He examines the role of the past in the process of constructing a post-colonial future. Soyinka’s concern here is that we learn to take responsibility not only for the celebrated feats of the past or the various forms of indigenous technical development, but also for the history of the abuse of power. It is here that he performs what he considers to be the essential role of the African writer, that is acting as the conscience of his society rather than hypocritical praise-singer.

Pessimistic as the play is, there is a glimmer of hope as we are shown that, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting against tyranny, history also offers the example of Kharibu's general who is able to say no even on pain of death. He serves as an example of redemptive leadership in the course of which the whole society is renewed.
For this reason Soyinka relies for the structure on a cinematic alternation between past and present as well as between the world of the living and that of the dead. Structurally the frame of the Forest dwellers is predominantly a dramatization of Yoruba cosmology, delivered through traditional dance and mime; and it shows Soyinka exploring the theatrical value of the elements of traditional African culture. It also forms a surrealistic contrast to the realism of the historical world of Mata Kharibu as well as that of the post-colonial present. In terms of the particular plotting of time in the play, the Forest is also the teleological terminus of the past, as it contains most of the dead that would have formed part of the pre-colonial past inhabited by Mata Kharibu. Also within the context of traditional African ancestral worship, in which it is believed that the dead coexist with the living, the Forest dwellers are co-present with the post-colonial space and, indeed, inhabit it; and they have the capacity either to harm or enhance it.

The adaptation of traditional African cosmology and pre-colonial African history to the needs of a distinctly post colonial critique which we see in the play, testifies Soyinka’s determination to use the totality of his intellectual and cultural heritage, as a resource for fashioning a distinct post colonial political pedagogy.

The convoluted, rather than linear, movement or the repetitive rather than translational, development of *A Dance of the Forests*, as well as *Kongi’s Harvest*, communicate effectively through the use of metaphor. This communication is achieved through the emphasis of features of the principal or primary subjective category by using secondary or subsidiary images that imply statements about the primary vision of the writer. The final recognition of semantic equivalence between the diversity of images in a retrospective reading or experience of such a play provides cognitive discovery or recognition.

In *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka dreams of a truly de-colonized continent, where an autonomous African culture assimilated only those progressive elements of recent history that were consistent with its own authentic identity. For Soyinka any form of political repression is a suppression of the individual will, which is the force through which new ideas and new life proceed. The suppression of the individual will is, thus, the suppression of the very forces of life. This is the theme of the next important play
of Soyinka, *Kongi's Harvest*, produced in the mid sixties, against a background of national crisis.

Soyinka said that *Kongi’s Harvest* was inspired entirely by a sentence which he once heard an African leader pronounce, “I want him back alive, if possible”. *Kongi’s Harvest* also grew out of Soyinka’s concern with human rights and civil liberties, out of his conviction that the role of the political activist was an important and honourable one, out of his perception of political developments on the continent of Africa, and out of his anxiety to root his theatre in the idioms of African festival performances.

A political holocaust always brings about drastic changes in the lives of people caught in it. *Kongi’s Harvest* is a microcosm of the political situation of Nigeria in the 1960s. Soyinka’s revulsion for dictators and dictatorship is evident in this play. His central characters expose the African brand of democracy, which has been subverted to the needs of personal convenience.

The play is set in the imaginary African state of Isma during the preparations for celebration and aftermath of a New Yam festival. Festivals and rituals are deeply entrenched in the traditional Yoruba society, be it a ritual sacrifice, Yam festival or others. All these festivals have a deep meaning and philosophy embedded in them. 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. Yam is harvested from June each year in Yoruba community, but the people can eat them only after the king has accepted the Yam at the festival. King is regarded as god by Yoruba people and his acceptance and eating of the new Yam is symbolic of cleansing the community. It is only after the cleansing ceremony that the ordinary men eat it without any fear of adverse results.

The harvest symbolizes fruitfulness and prosperity but in the plays of Soyinka it does not have the conventional symbolism of happiness. Invariably the harvest is a futile and melancholic event instead of one that brings wealth and happiness. Such a despair echoes the anarchy in Nigerian society where tradition is being stifled by the modern forces. The somber harvest of Igwezu in *The Swamp Dwellers* exemplifies the plight of man in the hide-bound society which is inundated with superstitions. The harvest in
Kongi’s Harvest, on the other hand, is a dismal affair, since Kongi, the despotic ruler, tries to asphyxiate the cultural values by repressive practices.

As a symbol of harvest, the Yam embodies the fertility of the tribe through its harmonious interaction with nature. The New Yam festival lies at the heart and soul of the community as it imposes an onerous responsibility on its traditional ruler. An overthrow of the traditional authority by the modern dictatorship for the New Yam makes it a pivotal object. The Yam, therefore, becomes symbolic of the healthy tradition of Nigeria. A critic aptly opines that “The Yam becomes an object of quest, the Holy Grail which must be achieved” (Ogunba, ‘The Traditional Content’ 8).

The ruler of Isma, Kongi, is a repressive, ambitious autocrat, who is assisted by a ubiquitous Organising Secretary, advised by a fraternity of largely sycophantic Aweris and enthusiastically supported by a Brutal Carpenters’ Brigade. He has put some of his most powerful opponents, including Oba Danlola, into detention, but he has not, as the opening sequence, ‘Hemlock’, makes clear quelled the Oba’s ebullient and independent opposition. The Oba is an old and obstinate, fiery, traditional leader. Kongi’s rule is also challenged by his ex-mistress, the mysterious and beautiful Segi, by her female supporters and by Daodu, Danlola’s much-travelled nephew and heir who is the leader of a successful farming co-operative The dictator wants to usurp Danlola’s position; specifically he wants to receive the new yam from the Oba’s hands at the New Yam Festival and, by eating part of it, to present himself to people as their protector and spiritual leader. Danlola is understandably unwilling to abdicate his religious functions by cooperating in his image-making exercise, but Segi and Daodu are anxious that he should at least pretend to cooperate in order to draw Kongi to the public celebration of the New Yam Festival. There they plan to have him assassinated just as the New Yam is presented to him, just when he is about to commit an outrageous blasphemy.

In the course of the play, plans are discussed and move forward: Danlola is persuaded to accede to Kongi’s request and Kongi agrees to release some political prisoners. A detail of the assassination plot is changed slightly when Segi’s father escapes from detention and takes on the role of marksman. But, before he can kill Kongi, he is himself shot. In an ‘improvised’ denouement in Part Two, Segi dances accompanied by her women supporters, and presents Kongi with her father’s severed head. As
Kongi stares at it aghast, the lights go out. This is followed by ‘Hangover’ from which it seems that, despite the shock which the system has received, Kongi remains in control.

‘Hemlock’ the opening section of Kongi’s Harvest is a kind of prologue and has symbolic overtones. Hemlock is a poisonous plant and it indicates tragedy with its implication of poison and death of Socrates. The very first title of the play is, therefore, suggestive of life threatening and death producing forces. In this prologue, the traditional King Oba and his camp is introduced. The action starts with the singing of a national anthem by the retinue and drummers:

The pot that will eat fat
Its bottom must be
The squirrel that will long crack nuts
Its footpad must be sore
The sweetest wine has flowed down
The tapper’s shattered shins. (CP-2 60)

The three images in the anthem (the first two are Yoruba proverbs) convey the phenomenon of withering and fading out. It refers to the society which is spiritually worn out and debilitated. The jingling anthem further illustrates the political situation in Ismaland, where the new regime-built on new political theories, the isms of Ismaland – has displaced the old regime of traditional ruler:

ism to ism for ism is ism
of isms and isms on absolute-ism
To demonstrate the tree of life
Is sprung from broken peat
And we the rotted bark, spurned
When the tree swells its pot.
The mucus that is snorted out
When King’s new race blows. (CP-2 61)

The anthem reflects the situation in Ismaland where Kongi, a dictatorial ruler has usurped power from Danola, the legitimate traditional king. The King holds a position
of influence in African society. The metaphor of 'god' for the king stresses the spiritual authority of the emperor, who has the supreme authority of anointing the head with the oil of sacrifice but the absolute supremacy of Oba has been curbed by the political leader, Kongi, who has put him in detention. The king exhibits his helplessness at the loss of power, when Kongi’s Superintendent forcibly stops his dance by grabbing the wrist of the lead drummer:

Good friend, you merely stopped
My drums. But they were silenced
On the day when Kongi cast aside
My props of wisdom, the day he
Drove the old Aweri from their seats. (CP-2 63)

The royal drums symbolize power and majesty of traditional African king but the Superintendent’s authority to silence them shows the curtailment of this power of king by a modern ruler.

The anthem, therefore, becomes symptomatic of the tension raging in the Nigerian society where tradition, which is the bed-rock of any civilization, is disintegrating under the influence of modern dictators. Although Soyinka never advocates blind adherence to tradition, his firm faith in the flow of old into the new is implicit here.

Ogun provides the ideal for the Soyinka hero. He is the god of Iron and of war, destruction and carnage, and the god of creativity. So Ogun heroes are a kind of paradox, they destroy and create life. Daodu, who disrupts the traditional order by bursting the drum, is also the leading farmer, working hard to save the state. Here the hero fights for justice, a transcendental and human justice. In Kongi’s Harvest, the issue under discussion is, who controls the power in the State of Isma? Is it the traditional ruler Oba Danlola; or the usurper Kongi, who is well endowed with modern equipment and methods of coercion; or Daodu, the modern idealist, who intends combining traditionalism with modernism? In the struggle, it is Daodu who takes the initiative. With this dialectics as the background, Soyinka’s political vision becomes clear. The dramatist’s pressing problem is the suppression of the individual’s natural rights in Nigeria. He sought the establishment of new political order that protects the individual’s fundamental human rights. He respects all administration which respects an individual’s rights to personal sovereignty.
The paradoxical nature of the Ogun hero is crucial to the assessment of Soyinka’s political vision. Who is to be the ideal leader? Soyinka’s annoyance with the existing leader stems from his qualities of destruction. He does not create; in Kongi’s Harvest, Kongi’s energies are diverted towards becoming the spirit of the ‘Harvest’ but no thought is given to the spirit of cultivation.

The first decade of political independence in Africa produced many petty dictators and Soyinka bases his protagonists on these dictators. Kongi’s Harvest traces the career of an African dictator. The conflict is between President Kongi of Isma, a dictator and Oba Danlola, a paramount king in the land, and one who represents the old order. The situation is a typical one with Oba Danlola resisting the onslaught of modernist forces and the natural instinct for self-preservation. He is shrewd enough to see in Kongi not sentiments of patriotism, but a sheer lust for power. With the trend pointing towards modernism, Kongi’s power is in the ascendant, and has detained Oba Danlola and his aides in special camps.

Soyinka’s iconoclasm and resilience makes him a highly controversial 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 Aké illuminates this fact. The young Wole’s words to Odemo, a chief: “If I don’t prostrate myself to god, why should I prostrate to you? You are just a man like my father aren’t you?” (Aké 125).

Soyinka, the skilful dramatist, never omits to hit at the Achilles’ heel of the rulers with his double-edged irony. Kongi’s Harvest presents the depravities of the traditional king, Oba Danlola on the one hand and the blood-thirsty tendencies of modern dictators like Kongi on the other hand. The detention by the dictator gives a mask to Oba to chide and satirize Kongi and his regime. He gains our sympathies at the beginning of the play, but as the play unfolds this mask starts coming down.

Kongi’s sole objective is to stifle the tradition and take over the supreme authority. As Jones remarks:
The oba is a protector of his people to the extent of being prepared to give his life in protection of their own...drawing the poison from the root – to make eating and living safe for the governed. This is the ultimate responsibility of rule. Without this kind of attitude to the ruled, the ruler is not entitled to their deep loyalty and reverence. This idea is fundamental to Kongi’s Harvest. It is because the oba’s regime rests on this basic assumption, that his regime emerges as being morally superior to the physically more successful regime of Kongi which is based entirely on a shallow personality cult and a vicious selfishness. (The Writing of Wole Soyinka 102)

Kongi is a megalomaniac leader and is a true representative of modern post-colonial leaders of Africa. He has built his castle by suppressing the regime of Oba Danlola. Kongi’s Retreat in the mountains is a dimly lit place of hypocrisy and superficiality, where human beings are living under forced suppression and deprivation.

However, the scheme of things is disturbed and a macabre spectacle marks the abrupt end of the festival. Daodu, on the other hand, is rational in his approach. He wants progress without abolishing the ancient traditional values. He wants to strike a balance between the traditional forces and the forces of modernism. He wants to fight the superficialities of some modern ideas. Daodu’s intention is not just to introduce new ideas but to pave the way for destroying those forces which block the road to progress. Daodu has demonstrated his powers of leadership and his ability to promote fecundity by his position on the farming settlement which has produced the largest new yam. He is associated with music, poetry, the creative use of words (he coins slogans with ease) and with Segi. He is the true Spirit of Harvest, and guided by Segi, he preaches Life. He embodies the life force. Daodu acts as the mouthpiece for a saviour god, who was on earth only to suffer, and, later returns to earth to enjoy. This unnamed god first visited earth in the guise of Ogun. Ogun’s name is not mentioned, but his presence is felt. Harvest season is the season of Ogun, and palm-wine is of great importance in the worship of Ogun. Yams are considered to be one of Ogun’s favourite foods. Daodu is the representative of Ogun; while Segi is the representative of Oya, the river goddess who was first married to Ogun and then to Shango.
It is not remarkable that the human agents, Daodu and Segi are united by mutual love. Segi, like Oya, is both terrifying and attractive, one who can bring death and destruction, but can also be pleasant and charming. Segi is irresistibly attractive, and both ruthless and tender, and like Oya, is brave and not impressed by brutal violence. The lyrics of a song in her honour establish the mystery of the lady: ‘The being of Segi / Swirls the night / In potions round my head’. Segi is one of a line of ‘super women’ in Soyinka’s plays which stretches back to Rola / Madame Tortoise and even to Sidi, all ‘right cannibal(s) of the female species’. She fulfills an important dramatic function: she establishes that the female principle supports the opposition to dictatorship and, on occasions, leads it.

Daodu and Segi show that resistance is possible by clearing a path which the people can follow, if they have the courage. They are the mouth pieces of Soyinka’s protest against the dictatorship rampant in Nigeria after its Independence.

The play is deeply rooted in tradition, especially in the concepts concerning the feast of the new Yam and in the use of proverbs and in the ritual of the King’s dance. Oyin Ogunba makes a useful observation:

In Kongi’s Harvest the design is that of a King’s festival, specially a Yoruba King’s festival. 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. (The Movement of Transition 190)

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 the Yoruba community, but the people can eat them only after the King has accepted the Yam at the festival. As the first citizen he has to eat the first Yam. It is a cleansing ceremony after which the ordinary men eat without fear of adverse results. The Feast of the New Yam is an indispensable ritual of celebration in a tradition bound Africa. This prime crop symbolizes the supremacy and power of the clan. It embodies the fertility of the tribe and guarantees its continued procreation through harmonious interaction with nature. The harvest festival symbolizes the cleansing of the clan’s
sins, and the restoration of its health, through the medium of the spiritual head. This New Yam festival imposes a burden of responsibility on its divine ruler. With the new times, the significance is slightly altered. Kongi may eat the first yam but the spiritual side of the ceremony is neglected by him. He is only interested in eating the first Yam to demonstrate his ascendancy to absolute power. We realize that the king is an embodiment of the society’s spiritual personality. There are undertone 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. The Oba Danlola suffering acquires the dimensions of martyrdom: “The King’s umbrella / Gives no more shade” (68).

Kongi’s state is labeled as Isma as the regime is fond of ‘isms’. His rule is typical of the rule that exists in many countries – Kongi stifles the people’s cultural life, and replaces it with repression. There is no interaction between the ruler and the people. Communication is in one direction since the “government rediffusion sets … talk and talk, and never / Take a lone word in reply” (61). Thus Kongi’s rule is marked by barren words and vicious police action rather than by consultation with the people and by concerted action. (Peters 199).

Kongi is a typical politician, more keen on image building than administration. He has formed two associations by replacing the ancient bodies of the traditional ruler – Reformed Aweri Fraternity and Carpenter’s Brigade. The former is an instrument of intellectual and spiritual repression where as the latter is an instrument of physical repression by Kongi. In the words of Kongi: “They [Carpenter’s Brigade] complement my sleepy Aweris here. These ones look after my intellectual needs, the Brigade take care of the occasional physical requirements” (CP-2 91).

Oba’s Aweri (wise men) have been replaced by Reformed Aweri Fraternity, consisting of six men. In Part One of the play, in the mountain retreat, against the background of Chant in honour of Kongi, the Aweris bicker and squabble as they endeavour to manufacture an image for the dictator. In the Retreat, the atmosphere is sterile, the jargon barren, and the image making synthetic. The Aweris are concerned only with image building. The Fourth Aweri declares: “We need an image. Tomorrow being our first appearance in public, it is essential that we find an image” (70). Kongi
and his advisors contribute to what is called Kongism. The function of the Aweri philosophers is to foster and establish the image of Kongi as a messiah. Their aim is to generate an aura of mystery around their leader's head. The First Aweri has an inclination towards the traditional. He recognizes some of the values of tradition. He wants to form "a conclave of patriarchs" (71). It is clearly understood that what the Aweri philosophers and Kongi and the so-called modern rulers are doing, is merely renaming old institutions. The other Aweris are averse to this idea of image building. They want elements of science to be introduced into the system, but are not able to define 'positive scientificism'. The Fourth Aweri makes a different suggestion altogether: "We might consider a scientific image. This would be a positive stamp and one very much in tune with our contemporary situation. Our pronouncements should be dominated by a positive scientificism" (71). None of them is able to define what 'positive scientificism' is.

The aim of the new regime seems to be the establishment of a government based on Enlightened Ritualism. They want to formulate a philosophy which is understood by one and all, and is practical. Oba Danlola and all other institutions will be treated as "glamourised fossilism". The Aweris are guilty of corruption, but indignant with the accusation aimed at them by the Secretary. The Fourth Aweri is a crazy believer of the present, "one who is sunk in intellectual reverie" (Ogunba 180). He just plays around with concepts - 'Enlightened Ritualism,' 'comprehensive philosophies', 'glamourised fossilism'. These strike a learned note, but produce no results, as his head is in the clouds, far removed from the world of reality and pragmatism. He is carried away by one idea - the idea of modernization. He does not have contact with the people for whom he wants to introduce reforms. The Secretary lashes out at the Aweri. This verbal attack has a paralyzing impact on the Fourth Aweri - his dream world collapses. The Fifth Aweri strikes a deal with the Secretary - he charges him fees for suggestion, and the solution is that Kongi should grant reprieve to the condemned men as an inducement to Oba Danlola to surrender. The fees that he demands is food. He then makes a devastating statement: "But tell him he can kill them later in detention. Have them shot trying to escape or something. But first demonstrate his power over life and death by granting them a last minute reprieve" (86). This bizarre suggestion must have been introduced by Soyinka to demonstrate...
how widespread Kongism is in the contemporary African world. In February 1961 Patrick Lumumba, the Prime Minister of Congo was killed, but it was announced that he was accidentally shot while trying to escape from prison.

Kongi displays various qualities of a dictator. He expects the Aweri to write books with his name affixed as the author. Since Kongi is the ‘spirit of Harvest’ everything will date from ‘Kongi’s Harvest’. Hereafter, dates will be like 200 A.H. Kongi prefers K.H. as it is less ambiguous and for the purpose of backdating, B.K.H. (Before Kongi’s Harvest) would be ideal. The foreign photographer is summoned to give publicity to his image as a life-giving spirit. The secretary’s aim is to project that image in every heart and head. After much persuasion, Kongi agrees to give reprieve to the condemned men. The announcement will be made at the last moment, making it as sensational as the publicity gimmick of launching a new product in the market. Kongi is a brutal egoist, a man who has animalism of a man climbing to power.

Segi performs a symbolic action. She puts her father’s head in a copper salver which is passed from hand to hand, until it reaches Kongi, and then Segi throws open the lid. Kongi is shocked and is rendered speechless. Segi has exposed Kongi’s diabolic and cannibalistic nature. What it symbolizes is that Kongi has succeeded in producing the destructive forces of life, and that he is the new spirit of Death, not the spirit of Harvest or resurgence. Kongi recovers from this temporary shock, and a new Kongi is born more tyrannical than ever before. This forces people like the Secretary, Oba Danlola, Sarumi and others to go into exile to form the nucleus of a resistance movement to liquidate him and his absolutism. His totalitarianism uses all horrifying tactics, and we realize that Kongism cannot remain endemic to Africa. Soyinka seems to take courage from the fact that Kongi and Kongism have no future, and no community can tolerate a tyrannical megalomaniac for long. Kongi is dehumanized, and Isma will reject him one day. Power has drained every drop of life in him. A concerted effort by the members of the community will result in his downfall. These are Soyinka’s efforts when he voices his protest.

The first section of the play ‘Hemlock’ suggests that a heavy responsibility rest with the Oba Danlola. He has to work for the welfare of the people. He eats the new Yam in order to absorb the poison, so as to make eating and living safe for the people. This
is the ultimate responsibility of the ruler. It is this which makes the Oba’s rule superior to that of Kongi’s, which is based on physical powers. It is a rule built around personality cult and a vicious selfishness. It is self-centered regime, as Kongi is not one who cares for the welfare of the people. It is not a facile opposition of the old and the new – it is an opposition between the humane and the monstrous, between the giver of life and the bringer of death. The title ‘Hemlock’ indicates tragedy with its implication of poison and the death of Socrates.

Kongi’s life is a publicity stunt – he fasts but has no concern for the welfare of the people. The asceticism is assumed for the benefit of image building. The Reformed Aweri complain of starvation as they are compulsorily imprisoned with Kongi on a near starvation diet. The total effect of the scenes is one of barrenness, a denial of truth and life. On the other hand, Segi’s night club is a scene of life. Daodu, too, suggests life. He is close to the source of life, as he works on land. Kongi’s regime is one of repression. It is marked by brutality and a play on words – it is an exercise on scientific exorcism. Kongi and his men are trapped in a situation where to preserve their sanity, they use words and slogans as mere jargon.

There is always a clash between traditionalism and modernism. The play dramatizes this conflict. Though its immediate concern is with the African context, it acquires a universal tone. It is an accepted dictum that the old order has to change, yielding place to the new, but the transition is not so smooth always. Most of the countries with unstable elected governments face a situation where the old order collapses, and the new one is not able to adjust to growth. ‘Hemlock’, the opening part seems to hint at the cup of humiliation which the Oba is forced to drink at the hands of Kongi, and the Superintendent. ‘Hangover’, the last part shows the unpleasant effects of totalitarianism.

Soyinka does not delude himself, or allow his play to delude those working for change, into thinking that it is easy to overthrow tyranny. He encourages enterprising opposition: gestures of defiance are never to him ‘mere gestures’ and should always be made. The man dies, Soyinka later wrote in his prison notes, in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny. The plotters in the play, Kongi’s Harvest, had known that failure was likely, almost inevitable; encouragement should be drawn from their determination to do what they believed was right despite the knowledge of almost
certain failure. The man in Daodu – and the woman in Segi – live right ‘Season’. 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 shambles. (38)

Many critics have identified Kongi as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana. Many aspects of Kongi’s personality like his habit of retiring to the seclusion of the mountains and posing as a messiah and his hysterics, especially his gimmick of speaking in a strained emotional tone, remind the people of Nkrumah. He was one of the first African dictators showing totalitarian tendencies like announcing detention act, curbing of traditional authority, a systematic indoctrination of the youth, and posing as a saviour. Soyinka has made a very strong point; 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. The strong political overtones in his plays convey his deep concern for the amelioration of society which in his opinion lies in the hands of young people, who are close to their roots and have a progressive vision.

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. The play ends on a note of confusion when, “A mixture of the royal music and anthem rises loudly, plays for a short while, comes to an abrupt halt as the iron-grating descends and hits the ground with a loud, final clang”.

Soyinka’s unflinching faith in characters like Igwezu, Demoke, Segi and Daodu, who constitute a constructive amalgamation of tradition and modernism, gets reflected in his works. Being a politically agile and vociferous critic of his times, his plays always depict a character who rises above the selfish rulers. Soyinka believes that the future of Africa lies in the hands of such people, who have the courage 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 anew. Let him take from the palm only its wine and not crucify lives upon it. (CP-2 128)

Daodu, therefore, 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 of Transition 199).

If Daodu is the ‘man of the future’, then it can not be ignored that Segi is the driving force behind this man and has the potential of shaping the destiny of both her man and Ismaland.

The play ends on a note of confusion. We are left wondering about the fate of protagonists. Kongi’s secretary is seen going towards the border. This indicates that all 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 moans his plight: “But/Contented? That is one uneasy crown/Which still eludes my willing head” (136).

We are sure that no solution has evolved. We agree with Umukoro that “Soyinka’s political vision in this play is suspended, awaiting the end of the strife” (179).

Soyinka, despite the political nature of his satire in the play, is also concerned with attitudes rather than just political blue-prints. Kongi is not Nkrumah or Banda or any one else, he is a combination of the repressive, anti-life propensities which Soyinka associated with certain aspects of a breed of leaders. In a programme note to his second production he emphasized this element by writing: “The play is not about Kongi, it is about Kongism. Therefore while it has been suggested with some justification that there are some resemblances between the character of Kongi and that of ex-President Nkrumah – the play was indeed first presented in December 1965,
while Nkrumah was still in power – it must be emphasized that Kongism has never been dethroned in Black Africa. There are a thousand more forms of Kongism – from the crude and blasphemous to the subtle and sanctimonious… All roads lead to same direction, and down this hill, striking sparks from careless skulls, Kongi rides again” (Quoted in Gibbs, Wole Soyinka 97).