

WOLE SOYINKA'S PLAY 'KONGI'S HARVEST':
A REVIEW OF EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER

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Abstract

Wole Soyinka is the only black African writer to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature(1986). The play 'Kongi's Harvest' is a microcosm of the contemporary political situation in Nigeria. In 'Kongi's Harvest' though Oba's political authority is curbed his spiritual and moral grip is retained. This enablems him to extract obedience from the functionaries of the new regime which is associated with military and tyranny. Soyinka articulated his ideals for a new political order in Nigeria. In this play the hero fights for justice, a transcendental and human justice.

Key Words: Encounter, Harvest

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Wole Soyinka is the only black African writer to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature(1986). His fictional, dramatic and poetical works are truly representative of African reality and sensibility. The play 'Kongi's Harvest' is a microcosm of the contemporary political situation in Nigeria. It shows that the modern replacement for the traditional authority is also a kind of dictatorship.

The head of the Yoruba Government is the Oba. He is a king, who rules both as a religious and political head and is surrounded by ceremony. In 'Kongi's Harvest' though Oba's political authority is curbed his spiritual and moral grip is retained. This enables him to extract obedience from the functionaries of the new regime which is associated with military and tyranny. Soyinka articulated his ideals for a new political order in Nigeria. In this play the hero fights for justice, a transcendental and human justice. In 'K.H' the issue under discussion is who controls the power in the state of ISMA? Is it the traditional ruler Oba Danlola or the usurper(tyrant) Kongi who is well endowed with modern equipments or Daodu, the modern idealist, who intends combining traditionalism with modernism.

The conflict is between President Kongi of Isma, a dictator and Oba Danlola, a king of Yoruba government who represents the old order. Kongi advocates new values and wants to destroy the older order. Oba Danlola resists the modernist forces and preserves tradition. He is shrewd enough to see in Kongi not sentiments of patriotism, but a sheer lust for power, with the trend pointing towards modernism.

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Kongi has imprisoned Oba Danlola and persuaded him to demonstrate his submission publically by handing over a portion of chosen yams to Kongi at a national festival, the festival of the New Yam.

Daodu, Oba Danlola's nephew is the manager of a collective farm, which has produced the finest yam of the year. Daodu is rational in his approach. He wants progress without abolishing the ancient traditional values. He wants to bring 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 acts as the mouthpiece for a saviour God- Ogun. Harvest season is the season of Ogun. Yams are considered to be one of the Ogun's favourite foods. Daodu is the representative of Ogun, while Segi is of Oya, the river Goddess, who was first married to Ogun and then to Shango. Dodu and Segi show that resistance is possible by clearing a path which the people can follow, if they have the courage.

The yam festival is a part of the traditional Yoruba society. Yams are harvested from about June each year, but the people can eat them only after the king has accepted the Yam at the festival. It is a cleansing ceremony after which the ordinary men eat without any fear of adverse results. Kongi may eat the Yam but the spiritual side of the ceremony is neglected by Kongi. He is only interested in eating the first Yam to demonstrate his absolute power. There are undertones of lament as the infrastructure of tradition is slowly crumbling. Tradition may not be perfect but it is humanistic as it is in harmony with nature.

Dodu is confident that Kongi will be overthrown. He wants to bring life into the barren world of the dictator Kongi. It is not easy to overthrow the dictator Kongi, especially as he is well-entrenched in his seat of power. A dictator like Kongi has to be prepared for his downfall. The harvest festival becomes a nightmare when he faces the stark reality of his autocratic rule. Danlola's love for pomp and majesty is not

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diminished even when he loses his political and spiritual power. The bond of trust does not exist between Kongi and the people, It is fear that forces them to acknowledge his power. Daodu is a quiet revolutionary who has no patience for the rituals and the slow dignity of traditional authority. He hates image building and terrorism which do not yield fruits.

Modernism can flourish only in the soil of tradition. It is accepted that old order has to change yielding to new, but the transition is not so smooth always. Success of any government depends on the combination of tradition and modernism. If one wants to retain his grip over power and greatness he has to have true humility and generosity. Egoism and the pursuit of power lead to the absolute darkness where there is nothing but destruction. "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.

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