

'Kongism' in *Kongi's Harvest*

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Abstract

The play is based on the situation of postcolonial Africa and the political leaders of that time the postcolonial leaders of African countries engaged themselves in power and corruption. The play Kongi's Harvest displays the same situation. The central character Kongi wants to become king and usurper the state from earlier King Danlola. He started ruling state according to his style called Kongism. Under the Kongism he established different institutions to create his image in the society. Thus he creates illusion in the mind of Isma people only to achieve the power and gain wealth.

Keywords: Postcolonial, power, Kongism, institutions, etc

Kongi's Harvest is Soyinka's, a noble prize winner dramatist, one of the most analyzed plays in English literature. The play is based on the situation of postcolonial Africa and the political leaders of that time. The present article concentrates on Kongi, the major character of the play, and his way to acquire the state and way of rule. This can be called Kongism and it is socio-political disease to the African countries. Kongi is so ambitious and ruthless and he wants to become a King of Isma land. He appointed different institutions to create his image among the masses. One of them is Carpenter's Brigade. The praise song of Carpenter's brigade compares Kongi to Christ and calls him Saviour:

For Kongi is our father

And Kongi's is our man

Kongi is our mother

Kongi is our man

And Kongi is our Saviour

Redeemer, prince of power

For Ismas and for Kongi

We are proud to live or die!

The song refers Kongi as the mother and the savior of Isma people but in reality it is nothing but an illusion. Such type of song is created to make the propaganda only and to cheat the innocent and illiterate people of Isma land.

The play shows two dictators- one is Oba Danlola, representing traditional and another Kongi, modern. The play displays some similarity between Kongi and ex-president Kwame Nkrumah and Hasting Banda, postcolonial leaders of Ghana and Malaur respectively. Both leaders were obsessed with image building and in the play same things happen. Thus kongism is the representative of African phenomenon. This play is not about Kongi, it is about Kongism.. To define the Kongism , one need to compare two characters. Kongi and his opponent Oba Danlola who was earlier king. In the play it is Kongi who dominates the plot and all other things. The play centers on the presentation of New Yam in the harvest festival and Kongi's preparation for this particular festival.

Kongi desires, by using illegal ways and force, Oba to present him the New Yam in the festival which is actually, traditionally, to be presented to Oba. This act will show, according to the tradition, to the public that legally Kongi has become the King and the reign of Kongi has started. And again he does not want that people should blame him as usurper of Oba's rule. Kongi wanted to legitimize the ceremony because he has threat from the Traditional ruler Oba and Daodu, the budding leader of the farmers.

In his path of acquiring the rule Kongi has appointed Organizing Secretary, a very practical and shrewd man, to manage everything. He is very famous for his spy system named the Right and Left Ears of State. His main task is to create such atmosphere in the society so that people of Isma believe that a benevolent King is taking charge and he will bring very positive changes in the society and make the development of Isma land. For this purpose he (Secretary) has used legal and illegal ways. He has hung some people in front of the society who oppose Kongi to create threat in the mind of People. Everywhere spies are kept to inform about the situation. Organizing Secretary also supports bribery and in the jail frequently the wives of prisoner's allowed to visit them by receiving money. These kinds of ways are used by Kongi and his administrative people. Thus instead of doing any constructive work from the officials Kongi has engaged these people in creating his image and killing those people who become obstacle in his ways. Through the character of Organizing Secretary Soyinka commented on the then office bearers of the contemporary leaders.

In one incident he counsels Reformed Aweri Fraternity regarding the image of Kongi:

The leader's image for the next Five-Year Development Plan will be that of a benevolent father of the nation. This will strongly projected at tomorrow's Harvest Festival which has been chosen as the official start to the Five-Year Plan. The Key word is Harmony. Total Harmony.

Again in other incident he says to all the supporters of Kongi:

All we want is some way of persuading King Danlola to bring the New Yam to Kongi with his own hands. I have organized the rest-the agricultural show to select the prize winning Yam, the feast, the bazaar, the music, the dance. Only one thing is missing- Oba Danlola. And gentlemen, that problem is yours. Kong desires that the King performs all his customary spiritual functions, only this time, that he perform them to him, our leader. Kongi must preside as the Spirit of Harvest, in pursuance of the Five-Year Development Plan.

Kongi has also appointed Reformed Aweri Fraternity who work to enhance the image of their Leader. Their task is told by Forth Aweri:

I think I see something of the Leader's vision of this harmony. To replace the old superstitious festival by a state ceremony governed by the principle of Enlightened Ritualism. It is therefore essential that Oba Danlola, his bitterest opponent, appear in full antiquated splendour surrounded by his Aweri Conclave of Elders who beyond the outward trappings of pomp and ceremony and a regular supply of snuff, have no other interest in the running of the state....The period of the isolated saws and wisdoms is over, suspended by a more systematic formulation of comprehensive philosophies...Our function, for the benefit of those who still do not know it...And Danlola, the regressive autocrat, will with his own hands present the Leader with the New Yam, thereby acknowledging the Supremacy of the State over his former areas of authority spiritual or secular. From then on, the state will adopt towards him and to all similar institutions the policy of the glamorized fossilism.

The Reformed Aweri wants to create modern image of the Kongi as opposed to the traditional image of the Danlola. They see themselves as a "conclave of modern patriarchs" and as "youthful elders of state". In contrast to the pronouncements of the Oba and his followers (always surrounded in the text with Yoruba songs and the wisdoms of proverbial language), the Aweris - from First to Sixth - speak in the language of what they call "positive scientificism". They quote from the Leader's last publication:

FIFTH: Ah yes. Nor proverbs nor verse, only ideograms in algebraic quantum. If the square of $XQY(2bc)$ equals QA into the square root of X , then the progressive forces must prevail over the reactionary in the span of .32 of a single generation.

Soyinka emphasized the showy nature of Kongi and his leadership. This is again the satire on the then contemporary political leaders. He planned to control the history i.e. gone time. Thus he renamed the previous years as, for example 150 K.H. and B.K.H. (Before Kongi's Harvest). He has also given different poses to the foreign News Reporters).

These are, the stage direction informs us, "a series of 'Last Supper' poses - iyan (pounded yam) serving variation": "A Leader's Temptation", "Agony on the Mountains", "The loneliness of the Pure", "The Uneasy Head", "The Face of Benevolence", "The Giver of Life", and "A Saint at Twilight". He has also created the pictures of Projects which he is going to implement after acquiring the kingship. The names of these projects are Kongi Terminus, Kongi University, Kongi Dam, Kongi Refineries, Kongi Airport, etc. These things clearly show that how he is possessed in creating his own name and image. By doing this he is deceiving the illiterate people of Isma. And he believes that this is the way of building an image in the mind of Isma in particular and Africa in general. Throughout the drama the strategy which Kongi has used to dethrone the Danlola and the rule of earlier King i.e. Danlola throws light on the nature of the African People. These people are too superstitious as they don't dare to utter a word against the King Danlola because they believe that Danlola has got the spiritual power and if they utter any word against him or oppose him God will condemn them. By using such nature of African people Danlola has ruled the land for many years without doing any constructive work to develop the region and instead of doing this the corruption in all sections of society and administration is widened. The people around him especially Old Aweri people enjoyed the authoritative positions and they don't allow common people to contact the King. In the Society any work can't be done without bribe. So in this situation people expect someone should come and change the system but Kongi, would be King, does not create any hope in the mind of Isma people but just the illusion. Instead of doing any valuable work in the society he has given emphasis on making only plan. And for this purpose he appointed Reformed Aweri Community to make the Five Year Development Plan. In it Kongi wanted the inclusive development of the society but these so called Aweri people are not intelligent people but they just make believe that they are intelligent. They do not discuss in the sessions but at times they do and most of the times they are worried about the eating. This shows that their greedy nature and they just want to remain close to the Kongi.

Finally by criticizing the Kongi one cannot say that Oba Danlola is the alternative leader for the Isma people. However he is projected here as following the traditional roots. Throughout the play Oba Danlola and his men mock the Kongi and his way but Danlola isn't also projected as the right leader for the development of Isma land. Thus in the drama Soyinka has clearly showed the picture of African country, through the situation of Isma land, after getting independence where he tried to find out the cultural values of Africa in the court of Danlola and Kongi but unfortunately these leaders have lost the commitment they happen to have.

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