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## Universal values and local passions: Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* in the global context

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This paper intends to analyse Wole Soyinka's play *Kongi's Harvest*, set in the imaginary nation of Ismaland of Africa as a political satire and how it parodies the status and role of modern dictators. While Soyinka's play deals with the African tribe, it indirectly symbolises the present political geography in several ways. The symbolism and parody is not limited to the African continent only. Rulers similar to Kongi have appeared in many states. Though the states may have little in common, yet the characters of the play represent the role and propaganda spread by modern government systems where the press, the intellectuals and in some cases even the opposition is a mere farce., forces bent on sweeping away the roots of their traditional knowledge. The setting may appear too distant and somewhat 'sleepy' but the text gives us an opportunity to look into the unique colour non-Western contexts may give to experiences too mundane for second thoughts. It is important to understand what alternate or non-Western forms of modernity the text can present to us and to what extent these ideas are similar to each other.

This paper intends to grasp the fate of such non-conforming notions which this text represent. It will study the advent of modernism in Ismaland and what consequence is affected on the local population. It shall try to discover if the effects have a global significance and more importantly whether such literature form a unique canon of their own without being adjusted to the existing canon of world literature.

The play is divided into four sections namely Hemlock, First Part, Second Part, and. Hangover. The first section 'Hemlock' serves as a Prologue to the play.

To understand the clash of tradition versus modernity in *Kongi's Harvest*, it is important to understand the character of Kongi. Kongism may be considered to be a representative African phenomenon. Kongism, as projected by Wole Soyinka, can be understood as an examination of the complementary figures of Kongi and his opponent Oba Danlola. The two figures define

Kongism and the system it has replaced, through the portrayal of the personalities. By contrasting the alternative leadership-models, Soyinka tries to bring into focus the systems that had existed and the resultant replacement, which can actually evade any society that is undergoing political changes. The following lines from the play verbally define what Kongi tries to be presented as in the minds of the people.

“For Kongi is our father

And Kongi is our man

Kongi is our mother

Kongi is our man

And Kongi is our Saviour Redeemer,

prince of power

For Isms and for Kongi

We’re proud to live or die!” (KH 116)

Kongi’s megalomaniac nature is presented through the praise song of the Carpenter’s brigade compares Kongi to Christ by calling him a saviour whom they will sweat endlessly for.

Tradition plays a very important role in Africa. The factious land Isma people follow their culture and revere their deity, Ogun. In the play Kongi’s Harvest, dictatorial power is used by the new ruler to bring or rather buy respect or coercion from the subjects. In the beginning part which is referred to as Hemlock by Wole Soyinka, the essential struggle between the new regime and the exiting regime is staged very precisely. The prologue presents to the audience what they may expect from the play. In fact Hemlock sets the entire tone of the play.

“The pot that will eat fat

Its bottom must be scorched

The squirrel that will long crack nuts

Its footpad must be sore

The sweetest wine has flowed down

The tapper’s shattered shins

And there is more, oh-oh

Who says there isn't more

Who says there isn't plenty a word

In a penny newspaper"(55)

The above words very precisely says the struggle or the consequences that comes with trying too hard. It speaks for itself the sufferings of those who have worked hard to bring some essence to their existence and how they end up at the receiving end of everything. The words also create a satirical vibe that gives a pre-setting to the plot of the play that would satirise the new design of ruling system where fake propaganda would be the base of public welfare and where ultimately the subjects would remain nothing but merely puppets subject to the whims of the rulers. It clearly predisposes that the new ruler would only use lot of words to dissuade and motivate the public but no real welfare would actually trickle down to the masses.

Essentially, its modern totalitarian regime seeks to destroy the traditional order as a competitive force and carry it into its own and this struggle for its legitimacy, dignity, interest and power is evident in Hemlock from the beginning. The clash between traditional Oba Danlola and Kongi's modernity. Kongs displays an almost nervous distrust of everyone around him. Through coercion he buys authority and traditional legitimacy which he then reluctantly surrenders all to himself. Thus he grows by himself into the main reservoir of all powers

Kongi represents the modern dictator who is not able to trust even his closest supporters or people who actually work for him. Without naming any of the dictators or authoritarian rulers who have ruled different states of the world political geography or have been brought down from positions of power, some qualities are found to be common. Kongi tries very hard to build an image of strength and power to create an image of a great ruler to the outsiders as well as to instill fear in the minds of his subjects so that they do not attempt any act of rebellion and thereby jeopardize his rule. There is hardly any plan for real development and all the resources of the state are spent to create an illusion of development and progress. The modern usurper is not really interested in the culture and tradition of the state or to enter into the field of welfare. His paranoia is so great that he does not think much before causing the death of political prisoners on anyone who has or anyone who may oppose his ruling.

In Hemlock he is regarded as a monster which should have been scorched before it achieved its full destructive proportions. Through satire Soyinka registers his distaste for such ugly aspects of modern societies in Africa. Kongi's protectors or guards are actually henchmen in disguise who go after Kongi's competitors or any one who dares to challenge Kongi in his ruling, most ruthlessly.

And this is confirmed in the words of their anthem:

We spread the creed of Kongism

To every son and daughter

And heads too slow to learn it

Will feel our mallets' weight.(109)

The yam festival is of significant contribution here as it is a symbol for the conflict that has arisen between the old regime and the new ruler. It is important for Kongi that Oba Danlola, the outgoing leader himself presents the yam to him so as to legitimise his position as the new ruler and for Oba Danlola, to present the yam to the new ruler in front of his former subjects would mean a complete surrender to the new oppressive regime in heart and spirit. Kongi understands the impact of this public spectacle which would benefit him and the following lines foreshadow the death of the old traditions in the hands of Kongi's new age propaganda.

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 Kongi's new race blows(20)

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