

Research Paper

Literary and Cultural Aspects of Ogun Deity: A Study of Ogun Festival in Ondoland

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Ogun festival among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria and among Africans generally, has been the subject of many learned discourses. This is largely illustrative of the popularity of the deity as an integral aspect of cultural heritage and as a vehicle for social cohesion. However, the cultural aspect of how Ogun deity is worshipped during Ogun festival by the Yoruba particularly the Ondo people, demands a deeper religious appreciation on which researchers of comparative mythology and religion have not done enough. This, thus, constituted the subject of this paper. The paper, therefore, focused on the exploration of the literary and cultural aspects of Ogun deity in relation to Ogun festival in Ondoland. It further examined the origin and role of Ogun deity in Yorubaland, Ogun in Ondo, the cultural basis of Ogun in Ondo, cardinal attributes of Ogun deity, role of worshippers in Ogun festival, mode of worship and its importance, Ogun and social harmony in Ondo; in order to appraise the immense significance of the various exploits and life – style that were recorded about Ogun deity in Ondoland. The aesthetic value or merit of this cultural form, however, is to the Ondo secondary to its religious significance. This was discussed from mythological and spiritual perspectives. The paper established that the worship of Ogun deity is an oral tradition deeply rooted in the culture of the people and that it is essential to preserve its indigenous nature. It revealed that Ogun deity plays pivotal roles in the social, religious and political milieu of the Ondo people. The paper demonstrated that the worship of Ogun deity in Ondoland is not only a way of life but it has also transcended traditional, christian and muslim beliefs. It concluded that in Ondo, Ogun deity worship with its rich literary and cultural features is a source of unity in the society, and in a position to derive economic gains relating to tourist activities. However, it is imperative that African countries implement credible cultural policies to index, protect and promote the still existing deitist festivals and a somewhat delicate cultural heritage.

Keywords; Ogun deity, Yoruba, Ondoland, Festival, Literary and Cultural aspects, Cardinal attributes, Mythological, Cultural heritage

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INTRODUCTION

An abundance of oral literature in Africa is fully preserved in poetic and cultural forms many of which are more developed in some countries than the others. There is, in Nigeria, a very important festival that most people look forward to both in the urban areas and in the villages.

This festival gives the people concerned (both directly and indirectly) an opportunity for displaying unrestricted pomp, joy and extravagance. This festival is the Ogun festival in the traditional Yoruba fashion, with particular reference to the Ondo people.

The Yoruba can be found along the western coast of Africa. Yorubaland (Yoruba: Ile – Yoruba), the cultural region of the Yoruba people, south – western Nigeria, comprises today's Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Kwara, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos as well as part of Kogi bound together by language, traditions and religious beliefs and practices.

Yoruba is the second largest language group in Africa, consisting over 20 million people. The term "Yoruba" according to Salamone (2010:319), encompasses about twenty-five separate groups, each one culturally different from the other. Islam, Christianity, and the "traditional". Yoruba pantheon, the *Orisa*, are all embraced in Yorubaland. The bond shared by all Yoruba people is the centrality of ritual to specific occasions, as well as to everyday life.

Ondo, the second Largest City in Ondo State (created on 3 February 1976 from the former Western State), Nigeria, is strategically sited at the intersection of roads from Ile-Ife, Akure, Okitipupa and other major towns in that axis. In the years of yore, the present Ondo was no great town; just a sparsely populated settlement with scattered huts where a primitive race engaged in farming and blacksmithing" (Adeboye, 2010:31).

As a result of its location, Ondo was a major transit town from Lagos and Ibadan to other towns in the north – eastern axis of Yorubaland, especially during the many wars that ravaged the Yoruba nation in the 19th century. It steadily emerged as a major conduit for goods from Lagos and to other parts of Yorubaland. From then, Ondo started asserting itself as an important community in the Yoruba nation.

Ogun festival is 'premodial' among the Ondo people because the festival is timeless for it is centuries old, while the beliefs and worships associated with it constitute traditional ideologies and taproots of ethnic culture. It is with this theme of Ogun festival that this paper is concerned. The emphasis is only on the exploration of the literary and cultural aspects of Ogun deity in relation to Ogun festival in Ondoland that connect the community as a whole. With few exceptions, much of what is classified here as Ogun festival in Ondoland could also be found in other Yoruba communities. However, specific variations caused by local peculiarities make an interesting study.

The foregoing and many other preliminary and major critical assumptions have conspired to create the template for my topic in this discourse "Literary and Cultural Aspects of Ogun Deity: A Study of Ogun Festival in Ondoland". The paper is divided into six sections. The first examines the origin and role of Ogun deity in Yorubaland. The second section deals with the origin of Ogun deity in Ondo. The third section discusses the issue of the cultural basis of Ogun deity in Ondo. The fourth part looks at the role of worshippers in Ogun festival. The fifth section deals with the appreciation of Ogun in Ondo-cultural context. The final part is the

conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper has benefited from earlier writing on Yoruba Oral Poetry in that they have pointed the way to further analysis which is attempted here. The paper is based on the fieldwork which I carried out on the literary and cultural aspects of Ogun Deity, the recorded samples are used in this paper. All the recorded samples came mostly from the blacksmiths of Ogbonkowo area in Ondo, Ondo State. All unacknowledged quotations are from my personal collections. The recordings were done on magnetic and visual tapes, and the sounds transcribed as recorded.

To translate *Ogun* songs, prayers and incantations, into English and yet preserve their exact meaning is not an easy task. I have, however, tried to meet the difficulty by being rather literal and keeping very close to the original form in my translation.

Origin and Role of Ogun Deity in Yorubaland

Ogun is one of the earliest Yoruba deities that are said to derive their power directly from 'Olodumare' or 'Olorun' (the Supreme Being, or God; the sustainer and upholder of the universe). Ogun is an important and highly regarded Yoruba deity. He is described as a 'a pan-Yoruba deity of fairly uniform character and significance', the 'deity of iron and war' (J.D.Y Peel, 1994:1).

According to Yoruba mythology, Ogun was a hunter who usually came down from heaven by a 'spider's thread upon the primordial masy waste' (Idowu, 1962:85) for his hunting expedition. This was before the earth was founded. "There was a critical lacuna, in the finishing of the universe as a unified cohesive form, especially in terms of linkages between physical and metaphysical beings and between those beings and the forces of nature" (Yakubu, 2010: 43).

However, 'when the earth was founded and its furniture arranged' (Idowu, 1962: 85), Ogun and other deities decided to come down from heaven in order to take over the affairs of the world. But they were unable to get through the bush 'at a place of "no road", and came 'to a halt' (Idowu, 1962:85) and resigned by submitting to fate. Orisanla 'tried to cut a way through, but his machete bent because it was lead. Of all the divinities, it was only Ogun who possessed the implement which was adequate for the task' (Idowu, 1962:86). So, 'he cleared a part with his magical tool. As a result of this, Ogun was invited to be their chief or head' (Simpson, 1980:25). By virtue of his power and status, Ogun received the title of *Osir-Imale* which means Chief among the divinities' (Idowu, 1962:86) when they arrived at Ile – Ife, the

“headquarters”.

Therefore, Ogun was unable to adjust himself to live a settled – community life because of his prowess in hunting and carnage. So, he decided to dwell on “Top of the hill” – *Ori-Oke*, as ‘the lone One’.

After a short time, Ogun ‘became tired of his seclusion and sought the settled life which he once rejected. At first, his fierce and forbidding appearance made it impossible for him to find a home in any community (Mbiti, 1969:53). The elders of *Ire* would achieve what other gods fail to achieve. They begged and persuaded Ogun into accepting to become their king. Ogun is crowned the king of *Ire* “Ogun, On’ire” - “Ogun, the lord of *Ire*”, and that became the beginning of a major travail of the people of the town. Thence, ‘Ogun – the great warrior, exhibitionist stud, annihilator and imbiber extra ordinaire – was leading his men in battle, doing what he did best – slaughtering the enemies of his people’ (Udu Yakubu, 2010: 43). His relationship with man is one of perpetual hazard. The traditional bard at *Ire* – Ekiti, according to Oyin Ogunba (2005:14) captured this ghoulish nature of Ogun in their chant when they sing (Table 1):

Table 1

<i>Ojilelegbeje oniyan</i>	One thousand four hundred and forty
people <i>Kee suse ninu oko Ogun</i>	Working in Ogun’s farm
<i>Ororo ebibu ni</i>	They are all in bits and pieces,
<i>Se li ei lorun,</i>	Have no necks
<i>Eyi koo ba loren</i>	Those who have necks
<i>Seli ei lori</i>	Have no heads.

The people of *Ire* mourn the day they invited a god to be their king. As an annihilator, neither Ogun nor his sword understands the word “retreat” in war. His “superfluity of naughtiness” and “sadistic pleasure in wickedness” is made clear in the saying (Table 2):

Table 2

<i>Nibo l’ati pade re?</i>	Where does one meet him?
<i>A pade re n’ibi ija;</i>	One meets him in the place of battle;
<i>A pade re n’ibi ita;</i>	One meets him in the place of wrangling;
<i>A pde re n’ibi agbara eje</i>	One meets him in the place where torrents of blood,
<i>Gbe nda ni l’orun bi omi ago</i>	Fill with longing as a cup of water does the thirsty (Idowu, 1962: 80).

According to Omolafe (1988:36), Ogun’s devotees fondly address him as ‘Ogun Alada meji; o nfi kan sako, o nfi kan yena’ (‘Ogun, the owner of two cutlasses; with one, he cultivates the farm, and with the other he clears the road’). Ogun is greatly honoured as the great master artist; and as the god of iron and steel; he is accorded great respect among the other deities. ‘He is universally acknowledged; according to (Idowu 1962:85), in the indigenous belief of the Yoruba as a most indispensable divinity, in as much as all iron and steel belong to him.

Among the Yoruba pantheon (*Orisanla*; sometimes called *Obatala*, *Orunmila*, *Esu*, *Sango*, *Saponna*, *Ela* etc), Ogun occupies an important place and wields great power. He is held to be in control of everything that is made of iron. In order not to incur Ogun’s wrath, his devotees handle with every care metal tools or things made of iron, such as knives, cutlasses and automobiles. As a matter of fact (Abiodun, 2003:208), in the use of metal implements, devotees of Ogun are careful to follow the rules and regulations spelt out by Ogun. This explains why drivers, farmers and blacksmiths offer regular sacrifices to Ogun, so as to win his favor in whatever they do.

In the words of Oladipo (1988:89), Ogun is believed to have put finishing touches to the creation of man; he made human bones and assembled them. He completed *Orisanla*’s job of moulding the physical body of man by the cutting or craving of hands and legs to the shapes. In traditional Yoruba society, ‘such things as circumcision, tribal marking, tattooing, or any surgical operations that may be necessary to keep man in good health’ (Idowu, 1962:87) are associated with Ogun.

So great and famous was his prowess all over Yorubaland then that it was commonly acknowledged that he never lost any battle to an opponent. Indeed, Ogun could have been described as a prodigy of war. The secrets of his successes laid not only in his gallantry at war but also in the skills with which he was able to manipulate his implements of war which were believed to have been charged with fire. These implements were derived from steel and they included guns, cutlasses and matchets. So, the basis of his military successes rested on the effectiveness of steel. These achievements were renowned all over Yorubaland, including places like *Ile* – *Ife*, *Ire*, *Oyo*, *Ekiti* and *Ondo*. So, in these places, it was a common practice to chant incantations and songs in praise of Ogun.

Origin of Ogun Deity in Ondo

Those who founded Ondo, at the beginning of the 16th century, according to Rev. Samuel Johnson (1957) were no common place wayfarers with prosaic, pedestrian pedigree. They were men and women enveloped in royal garments straight from the place of the *Alaafin* of *Oyo*,

the then powerful leader of the Yoruba race. Among the cities, towns and villages that make-up Yoruba nation, Ondo is blessed with unique history; it is perhaps the only major Yoruba town that its founding King was a woman.

Early in the history of Ondo, wars played a very prominent role in her relationship with her neighboring towns. Intermittent wars came successively and Ondo was not able to ward off her enemies easily. Also, it was about this time that the military fame of Ogun spread all over Yorubaland. So, Ondo then decided to seek Ogun's assistance. This was what led him to depart Ile – Ife, his premodial home. This ceremonious departure was to create a "land – mark" in the history of the Ondo people. This is because with the subsequent warfares, Ogun was able to solve the problems of external invasion for a very long time, and even afterwards. Moreover, Ogun's prowess was so great and vivid in the minds of the people that until this day, Ondos have vowed never to be defeated again. This bears some elements of truth because the people always strove to fight with same zeal as their fore-fathers acquired from Ogun. This is a lasting impact because Ogun remains a source of psychological inspiration during war.

Ogun Diety in Ondo

In appreciation of Ogun's achievements, the Ondos then started to worship him and they were known as "children of Ogun". Ogun worship later on turned out to be a source of unity in the society. This will be discussed later in this paper.

One thing that must be appreciated is the relationship of Ogun with the Supreme God. All Ogun worshippers believe firmly in the existence of a Supreme Being (Eledumare) or God. Ogun, they believe, is one of the several deities chosen by Eledumare to represent Him here on earth. In other words, "Ogun is to act as a go – between for God and man by occupying that vacuum which is created by man's yearnings for direct contact with God" (Olu-Osayomi, 2013:65).

The role of Ogun amongst the other gods is a very important one because steel or iron plays a very prominent part in the daily life of the individual. This is why apart from Sango the god of thunder, Ogun is the most significant deity in Yorubaland. For the Ondos, Ogun is even more important by virtue of his military achievements in Ondo history.

This is a vague analysis of the foundation and development of Ogun worship in Yorubaland and Ondo especially. It should be realized that Ogun worship is not restricted to only these areas because it includes those places where the power of Ogun as god of iron is acknowledged. This is why we discover that it takes place in certain parts of Iboland and Benin. However, that of the Ondo is unique, because it has developed into a cult in

which most members of the community in Ondo participate.

The Cultural Basis of Ogun Deity in Ondo

Like other human communities, Ondo had its moments of joy and ecstasy as reflected in Ogun festival. The worship of Ogun culminates in an annual festival which is called the 'Ogun festival'. This festival is of such importance that it happens to be the most significant local festival in Ondo town. It is a festival held not only in commemoration of the achievements and power of Ogun but it is also used as a means of appeasing Ogun for the short – comings of the people over the past year. Above all, this festival serves as the only opportunity of bringing all the worshippers together in the year. Through it, they are all unified physically and spiritually under the common acknowledgment of Ogun's power. This is why everyone looks forward every year to the festival.

The worship of Ogun is an oral tradition inherent in the culture of the people and handed down from one generation to the other. This is why it is not easy to date back its origin. A child born into a house where Ogun is worshipped is not necessarily formally taught the norms of the cult. Rather, he picks it up gradually from those around him. This is because Ogun plays a very prominent role in the daily affairs of the life of the people. Ogun affects the basic societal institutions like naming ceremonies, marriages, burials and initiations, to mention but a few. This will also be discussed later.

The historical settlement of Ogun in Ondo has highly influenced distribution of worshippers around the town. For instance, today, the base of Ogun worshippers is *Ogbomkwo* area which is mostly inhabited by the majority of the blacksmiths in the town. This can be explained by the fact that this was the area where Ogun was said to have first settled on arrival at Ondo. So Ogun's impact was felt directly here. On the morning of the festival, you would see the excitement on the face of everybody. The people would be happy. From early in the morning, you would be hearing the heavy sound of pestles in the mortars as each household prepared pounded yam, known as *iyana-Ogun*. During the festival proper, there would be so many spectacular acrobatic displays and lot of choreographed dances by the celebrators.

By virtue of the fact that steel or iron is the basis of their occupation, the blacksmiths see themselves as serving Ogun directly. In other words, they esteem their work in a spiritual manner, because relative to all other worshippers (as shall be seen later), they have the greatest contact with iron (the basis of Ogun's power). This is also the reason why the blacksmiths form the bulk of the worshippers.

It is therefore not surprising that the growth of Ogun worship started from this area. With time, other places

like Ododibo, Odojomu, Yaba and Okelisa sprang up as centers of worship. The factor binding all the worshippers in these areas is the predominance of iron in their occupations. Invariably this predominance of iron manifests power and greatness in their lives.

Role of Worshippers in Ogun Festival

Ogun festival is one of the festivals in Ondo that attracts people from far and near. Others are *Odun Oba*, *Oramfe*, *Ekimogun day celebration* etc. However, it will be worthwhile to discuss the role of the various groups of worshippers in relation to Ogun festival. Ondo people have a great respect for the office of the Osemawe, the paramount ruler of Ondo Kingdom. Like the other Obas in other Yoruba Kingdoms, the Osamawe of Ondo is hailed as Kabiyesi, Alase, Ekeji Orisa, the commander who cannot be questioned, second only to the gods. Western civilization has no doubt eroded into the stature of the Oba in the modern set up. Yet, the king remains very powerful personally within and outside his domain. The Osemawe of Ondo with other members of the royal family constitutes the head of all the worshippers. This is of great cultural and traditional significance because it is a pre-requisite for any heir to the kingship to be a staunch believer and worshipper of Ogun. It is commonly believed that the reign of an Oba who worships Ogun is likely to be more successful than that of an Oba who does not. This means that Ogun enhances the popularity of the reign of the Oba, and it also enables the whole community to be bound together under a "representative" of Ogun. This is advantageous to the Oba; he stands to gain the confidence of his subjects. The present king is, however, bringing some colour back to the carnival. He is said to be attracting some patronage to the Ogun festival, especially from corporate organizations.

As the head of all worshippers therefore, it is the duty of the Oba to declare Ogun festival officially open. This is usually done a day before the general ceremony. It is marked by several rituals which he has to perform at his palace on behalf of his people. These rituals are performed to propitiate Ogun and ask for a life more abundant for the future. These rituals are accompanied by incantations and chants in praise of Ogun's past achievements. On the following day, which is the day when the real festival actually takes place, other members of the royal family join the worshippers in the day's festivities.

The Appreciation of Ogun in Ondo – Cultural Context

In order to be able to appreciate fully the cultural context of Ogun, it is important to realize that African festivals and rituals constitute dramatic performances. Although it

cannot be described according to our perception of modern drama where the spectators and actors are separated, aspects of drama can still be perceived through dancing, miming, songs and drumming all of which entertain the people. All these characteristics are also present during Ogun festivals or sacrifices.

Ogun worship has become a tradition handed down from one generation to the other. This is manifested in the celebration of Ogun festival annually. Consequently, it is obvious that the norms of the cult have become embedded in the culture over the years. This is why it has become essential to preserve its indigenous touch. It can also explain why western culture has not been able to infiltrate too much into its ideals, because if that happens, it means "adulterating" the roots of the culture. One can conclude that Ogun cult is now a means of strengthening the culture. This is enhanced by the fact that it promotes unity in the social, religious and psychological sense. Several Ondos identify themselves with one another by virtue of the fact that they all share common beliefs in Ogun as god of Iron and war. These beliefs are usually introduced during societal functions like burials, naming ceremonies, marriages, initiation ceremonies etc. These are all aspects of the culture which are performed according to the rites of Ogun by his believers. Non-believers differ from them in this respect. These functions bring worshippers and non-believers together and they are all bound together at least during the respective ceremony.

At this point, this paper discusses briefly the role of Ogun in these ceremonies. During naming ceremonies homage must first be paid to Ogun by invoking his presence through the chanting of incantations. This will be succeeded by rituals. To perform the ritual, Ogun must be present and this can take the form of any iron implement. This is accompanied by the other articles which are used for the normal or ordinary worship. The Ogun priest then prays for the child (Table 3):

Table 3

Prayer	Translation
Oo ni shi Ogun lo o	<i>You will not misuse Ogun</i>
Ooni ri ija Ogun o	<i>You will not see the wrath of Ogun</i>
Ooni fi Ogun se enikeni lese o	<i>You will not harm anyone with Ogun</i>

These are prayers dedicated to Ogun for guidance and assistance for the child. The child will then be named by the chief priest.

Children born into the "house of Ogun" (a house where Ogun is worshipped) are easily recognised by their names. They usually bear names like Ogunsakin, Oguntulire, Ogumade or Oguntade. All these names have Ogun in them because Ogun is a source or title from which the names are derived. In Yorubaland, names of

people are derived from their historical background or the circumstances of their birth. A family or individual that bears "Akin" (Akintade, Akinbola) is renowned for its military prowess and virility. While those whose names include 'Ade' (Adegbite, Adejomu) are known for their royal background because 'Ade' in Yoruba means crown. In this case too, those in whose name "Ogun" exists have connections with the god of Iron. This is why in Ondo, the children of most hunters, farmers and blacksmiths especially bear 'Ogun'.

During burials, the ceremony takes a different pattern for Ogun worshippers. Before the corpse is buried, seven gunshots are released into the air for twenty-one days. During the burial, rituals are performed to Ogun as a means of distinguishing the dead as a child of Ogun. These rituals are accompanied by incantations. Prayers are also said and are meant for the salvation of the soul of the dead person. Here, Ogun is invoked to act as a mediator between God Almighty and the dead person so that his soul is acceptable to God.

The institution of marriage is also influenced by Ogun worship. If a female child of Ogun decides to get married, she departs her house with prayers for goodluck in her marital home. As usual, this involves certain rituals and incantations to Ogun. Also, she takes her own 'Ogun' along with her to continue her worship. It is believed that the marital bond is strengthened where two Ogun worshippers get married. So, even in aspects of marriage, unity is an important factor which Ogun worship effects between individuals and families.

The entire belief in the spiritual power of Ogun as god of Iron is psychological. It relies on the ability of the individual to have complete faith in Ogun as the "force" behind his life. This is why before a person can start to worship, he must acknowledge Ogun's power and swear an oath of allegiance to it. Above all, he must accept that his power is one that is capable of protection, preservation and destruction as well. The individual must also regard Ogun as a god of justice which means that the deity acts on principles of justice even against its followers when they err. Swearing by Ogun, for instance, is regarded as a severe form of punishment. In fact, in the colonial days, the British government recognized the validity of this form of swearing in the judicial courts by non – Christian witnesses. The oath is administered by handing a piece of iron to the witness to kiss. Some people prefer to swear by the ground. This is based on the belief that the ground which contains deposits of iron ore will hurl the person to early death if he gives a false witness. This is as effective as swearing by the god himself or a piece of iron.

With all these beliefs about Ogun therefore, a very profound consequence on the mind, is that of instilling self – discipline. For anyone to successfully carry out the worship he must be disciplined, in other words, he must have a control over his emotional, psychological and

spiritual being. Also he/she must have the ability to discern between good and evil and behave accordingly. Worshippers regard perjury as an offence punishable in the olden days by death. These considerations are very important because Ogun's power is so great that if it strikes, it must do so justly. Therefore, the consequences must not be underestimated, where Ogun is invoked to fight for an unjust course. For these reasons therefore, a worshipper is required to be properly disciplined so as not to misuse Ogun's power because it is like a boomerang which can back-fire.

In certain cases where an individual or the community offends Ogun, he is required to placate the god through sacrifices or face its wrath. All these beliefs are commonly held and respected among members of the cult so much that they strive to avoid evil deeds against one another.

Another psychological influence which Ogun has on people can be seen in his role as a "consultant". Since Ogun is a patron of hunters and soldiers, no hunter or soldier dares proceed on a hunting or military expedition (respectively) without first consulting the deity as regards his prospects. He may have to make some sacrifices. Blacksmiths, and other artisans who make use of iron implements look-up to Ogun for protection and to help them achieve success in their work. Success can only be achieved if their implements (iron) are blessed by Ogun. This is why the soldier for example regards his iron sword or spear as sacred. The blacksmith also regards his anvil and forge as sacred.

Ogun can also help develop the psychological instincts of a person. For instance, Ogun warns "his child" of impending dangers by making him discern or foresee a danger intuitively. People believe that this is one means through which Ogun communicates with his people. When danger or evil lurks around the corner, the person starts feeling uneasy. This uneasiness can take the form of the person developing a sort of "heat" inside the body. This is why Ogun's children are very sensitive. So, Ogun guards his followers by giving them a foresight into future events. It is also believed that Ogun can also communicate through dreams and visions. Several things are said to be revealed through these media. For example, if one is to be a prospective worshipper, you can easily know if you find yourself eating in your dreams. Also, solutions to pressing problems can be revealed in dreams or visions where *Ogun* demands certain sacrifices from the individual. After such sacrifices, the problems are solved. This is usually applicable to various maladies which are believed to be curable only after consultation with Ogun.

In Ondo society, *Ogun* has influenced certain norms and values of the people, especially as regards the life of his followers. These norms are concerned with certain moral and social aspects of the people's environment. Ogun has had the effect of influencing these aspects of

the culture so much that it has brought about an increased standard of morals and discipline. As earlier mentioned before a person can profess to be true worshipper of Ogun, he must attain a certain standard of moral upliftment. This can only be achieved through self – denial as regards certain habits. It is this self-denial that this paper is now going to discuss.

The moral aspect of the cult can be summarized in the words “exemplary behaviour”. At all times, a child of Ogun is expected to show remarkable character. This is centered on the idea that Ogun is a just god which inspires people to do good always and where a person falls below expectations, he should equally expect Ogun to fall short in his assistance towards him. Thus, a person who is not morally strong can never expect Ogun to help him against his enemies for example. So, far from being a wicked and destructive god as people say, Ogun is a god that helps to develop the sense of good or righteousness. Therefore, this can explain why all followers of Ogun are morally bound not to steal, for example, it is believed that if this happens, Ogun will not fail to disgrace the culprit publicly because the person would be punished and may even die through the power of Ogun. It is likely that punishment will be brought about by an iron implement.

The other rules binding Ogun worshippers can be regarded as social norms. Usually, these norms vary within the society, depending on the requirements of one’s Ogun. However, there are certain universally binding ones. For example, no child of Ogun is allowed to have any dealings with a slave or someone of slave decent. This includes marital or social relations. This practice has a historical origin in Ondo. In the olden days, during any great crisis especially wars, slaves were used for human sacrifices to propitiate the god. As a result, they were looked down upon. Moreover, since the sacrifices they were used for were usually those which involved the purification and cleansing of the society, they were equally regarded as unclean being. This is one of the reasons why even uptill today, slaves are still regarded with contempt.

Some Ogun worshippers (with special reference to the blacksmiths) are forbidden to pick yam from fire with an iron cooking utensil. Also, they must not eat any black vegetables or black snakes. Other people are forbidden to take late night meals, they must not eat after the light have come on in the evening. Some say they are not to buy cooked food like ‘akara’ (bean cake) on the street. Usually, most Ogun followers are obliged not to pick things (especially iron implements, money and gold) on the roadside.

These are all different forms of tradition which have changed with time into norms. One regards them as oral traditions because they are not formally written or taught, in other words, they cannot be learnt from books. They gradually acquired as a person becomes of age. Despite

the fact that there is no “formal legal body” to enact them, the worshippers are still profoundly faithful and loyal to them, because they are spiritually binding. Once a person takes the oath to become a child of Ogun, he automatically pledges to all its requirements. Little wonder then when people who violate these norms have to make costly sacrifices to appease Ogun. Despite the fact that these norms have passed down from one generation to another in Ondo, they have not lost their original moral force.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it is evident that Ogun deity plays a prominent role in the lives of the Yorubas and their community. In fact, in Ondoland, Ogun cult is a way of thinking and behaving. It is therefore, a way of life. It has transcended traditional, Christian and Muslim beliefs. Since it is deeply rooted in the culture of the people, it is essential to preserve its indigenous nature. This is why Ogun festival is celebrated annually in Ondo. It helps to reenact the norms and values which constitute an important part of the culture. Moreover, the culture of a society is its source of uniqueness and self-realization. Considering the way of lives of Ogun worshippers in Ondo state, obedience to injunction of Ogun deity leads to prosperity and peaceful co-existence, while disobedience brings doom. "This is a testimony to the major role that the transcendent, the mysterious and the metaphysical play and continue to play in the lives of the people despite the presence of the trappings of modernization" (Faniran, 2010: 497).

Importantly also, this paper has examined the complex and rich cultural aspect of Ogun deity in relation to Ogun festival in Ondo which is still very much in existence in today’s literature. Also, Ogun festival with its rich cultural features is not only a source of unity but also a form of dramatic expression of these cultural qualities. The opinion of this paper is that its use should be encouraged and not condemned because it is a tradition that the Ondos have identified with. It is an index of the cultural experience of the Ondos; a symbol of their social and cultural identity. It is, therefore, anticipated that its adherence will assist in resolving some of the socio-political difficulties of Nigeria in the drive towards engendering a collective form of human advancement.

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