

## Traditional Magic and Medicine as Instrument of Social Integration in Okunland, Kogi State

<sup>1</sup>Akanle Tayo Dare, <sup>2</sup>Shaibu Oguche Albert & <sup>3</sup>Ukpoju Abel Odi

<sup>1,2&3</sup>Department of Christian Religious Studies  
Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa

Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijcsird.v10.i1.10

### Abstract

In African Indigenous culture, the means of dealing successfully with traditional problems like diseases, sorcerers, witches, enemies, and lack of success in life experiences, have been developed. The use of magic and medicine had helped to deal with some of these problems which are life threatening and source of disintegration in the society. Modernization and globalization had made most people to now over rely on modern medicine which had created a wide gap in the socio-cultural integration of the Okun people. The need for cultural re-awakening and positive re-discovery of a tool of social integration is urgent. This paper examines the phenomena of magic and medicine as an instrument of social integration with reference to the Okun people of Kogi State. It also examines how magic and medicine could be used in solving some socio-economic, therapeutic, political and cultural problems emanating from the society. A phenomenological analysis of African traditional medicine and magic as a methodology was used for this write-up. As qualitative research, this work intends to focus primarily on non-statistical means of both the design on the one hand, and data gathering and analysis on the other hand. The method of data collection would involve both the primary and secondary sources of data collection. The major finding is that modern medicine is not sufficient in providing the complete answer to most of our medical problems. The paper concluded that before we can provide complete solution to our various socio-political, economic and medical problems, African traditional medicine and magic would have to be used along with modern medicine.

**Keywords:** *Traditional, Magic, Medicine and Okunland*

*Corresponding Author:* Akanle Tayo Dare

### **Background to the Study**

African traditional magic and medicine are not only our cultural heritage, but should be guided and guarded. It should be uplifted and we should allow it to occupy its proper position in our community. This is necessary because modern medicine, if taken as the only solution to our medical problem will fail us and before the people know what is happening, it will be too late because a stitch in time save nine.

The clarion call therefore is that there is a vacuum to be fill and this vacuum emanates from the fact that we have whole-heartedly relied on modern medicine alone and in order to be able to fill the vacuum, African traditional medicine and even magic must be incorporated to play its proper role in our medical health delivery system. It is only when we are able to do this that we will have a well-integrated society, politically, economically and socially. Even today, when science had conquered the world, magic, religion and science are still dominant factors in many societies, particularly in Africa. Among the Okun people of Nigeria, for example, magic, medicine, religion and science have survived today, playing different roles and adapting themselves to new solutions. This paper examines the phenomena of magic and medicine as an instrument of social integration with particular reference to the Okun people of south western Nigeria. Since African Traditional Medicine is not neglected and millions of Nigerians take seriously, including the use of magic, it is therefore necessary to bring into the therapeutic system so that we will be able to enjoy a well balance medical support.

### **Meaning of Magic and Medicine among the Okun people**

There is no doubt that the concept of medicine is intermingled with that of magic in many parts of Africa. Anthropologists and sociologists who had visited Africa usually confused the two because of their close relationship. Dopamu (1993:44) also pointed out that some dictionaries also do not help matters and their definitions of magic and medicine are patently misleading. Even today, many scholars including Africans, have continued to discuss magic as if it were inclusively medicine. The fact is that the practitioners of magic and medicine know the difference between the two.

It is true that the practice of magic and medicine is closely related but their goals are always different. Among the Okun people, both are known by the name, Oogun, Egbogi or Isegun. But this is only in theory, in consequence of their being related to nature and the supernatural. There are recognizable similarities between magic and medicine which must have informed similarity in name. In both, we use herbs, leaves, roots, barks; various animals and their skins, bones, heads; various reptiles like lizards, snake, chameleon; various insects like butterfly, fly, ant and bees; other inammate objects like sand, water, stone and other types of liquid (Dopamu: 2000).

Medicine is different from magic (Dopamu: 1985). So also, in practice the Okun medicine is Oogun iwosan (medicine for curing disease). Its purpose is both therapeutic for the treatment and curing of disease) and prophylactic (intended to prevent disease). As Oogun, iwosan, it is substance used for treating disease. But as sise oogun (practice of oogun), it is the science of treating and understanding disease (Longman Dictionary: 1987). That is why the onisegun

(the practitioner of oogun or the professional) does not concern himself only with the treatment of disease, but he also understands the nature and etiology of disease or illness before embarking on treatment. It is in view of this that we define Okun medicine as:

*The traditional art and science of the prevention and cure of diseases. It is the use of natural substance to prevent, treat or cure diseases. It can also mean medicament used internally or externally (Dopamu : 1979).*

Magic, on the other hand is non-therapeutic in nature. It caters for concerns that are not associated with disease or illness. Human beings want victory, success, luck, protection from danger, good harvest, successful business, success in examination, protection against accident, protection against forces of evil, others to love them and a host of other needs. These concerns are quite distinct from pathological or therapeutic conditions of human beings, and they are mainly dealt with by the uses of magic. And yet, the Okun people call this magic oogun.

The use of oogun for both magic and medicine may confuse an observer or an outsider. Indeed, the etymology of the word oogun is unknown. One may assume that the use of one word for both practices was informed by the recognizable similarities between the two practices, especially in the use of the resources of nature. Thus, egbogi is often used in a good sense, while oogun may be used either in a good sense or in a bad sense, depending on the speaker and the situation in which it is used. A good magician or medicine-man is called elgbogi, onisegun or olosanyin, while the sorcerer is called oloogun. With this explanation, we define Okun magic as:

*The art of using the available resources of nature to procure non-therapeutic needs of man. It is the art of influencing course of events by means of supernatural control of nature and invocation of spirit aids (Dopamu 1979).*

The paper notes that incantations and invocations of divinities appear more in magic than in medicine. Indeed, most medicines do not require incantations. But when magic is used to compliment medicine in the treatment of diseases of an extraordinary character, the procedure had magical as well as therapeutic effects and it is described as magical medicine. So far, we have dealt with an analysis of African traditional medicine, magic and magical-medicine. In the following exercise we will observe into details the essence and significance of African traditional magic and medicine from the economic, social, political, therapeutic and cultural perspective. In a nutshell, we will demonstrate and show in details how African traditional medicine has been operating as a factor of social integration in the Okun community in particular and Nigeria at large.

### **African Traditional Medicine and Magic as a Factor of Economic Integration**

At this juncture, it has to be mentioned that in the Okun community when it comes to business and commercial activities, the role of medicine and magic is very important. Apart from the fact that the Okun people are hardworking they believe that before they can embark on any commercial activities, the gods and goddesses must be contacted and hence they pray thus: ki Edumare maa se je ki a seise onise (May Olodumare prevent us from doing another person's job).

With reference to the above, they believe that if you are not in the profession granted to you by Olodumare you cannot be prosperous (Babalola: 1991). Next to this is hard work. Having chosen your God-given career, you have to work hard. The people believe in hard work and hence they say! “Ole ni ebi maa pea” (it is the lazy man that will go hungry).

Having examined the philosophy of the Okun thus, it is in their pertinent belief that prosperity is in the hands of God. They believe in using awure or oogun to attract economic prosperity. In the light of this, the Okun businessmen and women are known to bury certain magical items in their place of work where they may not be visible to their customers. At times they can hang them in a particular corner not visible to people coming to buy goods from them. Apart from this, they can make use of incisions on their bodies or around their wrists. They do these things in order to attract customers. In Okun magic, this is known as aworo. It is their belief that the greater the number of people coming to buy from you, the more money you will be able to make. Many people are ready to make use of aworo in order to make more money without minding their religious yearnings. This is a very important area in which African magic has done a lot socially and sociologically among the people.

#### **African Traditional Medicine and Magic as a Factor of Socio-Political Integration**

In the socio-political arena, the role of African traditional medicine as a factor of social integration cannot be over emphasized. In the choice and installation of Baales, Chiefs, Obas and political heads, African traditional medicine and magic plays a very important role.

When it comes to the selection or choice of an Oba or Baale, the community has to contact an oracle and the community will not go beyond the choice of the oracle (Olorunmonu: 2020). From the candidates' perspectives, they are known to make use of magic in order to be a winner since the race is going to be competitive. Here, the Okun people believe that there is no harm in making use of magic in getting whatever one needs. Here, magic has been described as the short way to spiritual bliss.

During marriage, the gods are also known to be consulted so that the right partner can be chosen for the bride and bridegroom respectively. It is also to be noted that magic can be used to win the love of a beautiful woman. In the society, those that are victims of problems that defy natural solutions are known to make use of magic to rectify or ameliorate the solution. For instance, if a man is too lazy and finds it very difficult to go out and provide for the needs of his family, elderly people in the family can make use of magic on his behalf. Apart from that, if a woman also finds it difficult to make ends meet, magic could also be used on her behalf. If a woman or a man finds it difficult to get a future partner the Okun people believe that they can make use of magic.

In the community, if there are communal problems such as untimely death, accidents, famine and other disasters, the oracle will be contacted and necessary sacrifices will be offered together with the additional use of magic. The examples above show us the importance of African traditional magic and medicine as an instrument of social integration. It remains for us to add that people will go a long way to make use of magic and medicine to ameliorate the situation without minding their religious affiliations.

### **The Therapeutic Role of African Traditional Magic and Medicine as an Instrument of Social Integration in the Okun Community**

It is important to reiterate right from the beginning that healing is a very important issue in the life of everybody irrespective of religion. When it comes to mystical causation, African traditional medicine is known to play a very significant role (Babalola: 1993).

As soon as anybody is sick, members of the family will gather together to make sure that the sickness is overcome. If it is an ailment that belongs to the natural arena like cold, fever, headache and pains, it will not attract the attention of anybody outside the victim. It is believed that such ailments could easily be treated by the victim or by the practitioners of modern medicine by making use of Panadol and injections. However, if the headache and pains refuse to go, it then means that the sickness is no more natural. It has moved to the corridor of the spirits; hence such ailment or ailments could be described as natural-turned mystical ailments (Babalola: 2005).

In natural-turned mystical ailments, friends and family members (immediate and extended) are known to rally round to give suggestive solutions to the ailments. As a result of the information collection from the field, we have been able to discover that no amount of diagnosis such as X-rays, radiology, radiography, radioscopy or radiotherapy could provide solutions to some ailments. The reason is that these ailments have been discovered to be caused by spirits and spiritual elements such as witches and sorcerers and in order to provide solutions to the problems, a spiritual diagnosis will have to be undertaken. The Okun people will say that such ailments are the types that are caused by “aye” or “alaye”.

When natural-turned mystical ailments refuse to have solution, they could even move to the corridor of the mystical to become mystical instead of remaining as natural-turned mystical ailments. Mystical ailments include sterility, impotence, bareness and protracted pregnancies. That is also some problems which are not diseases such as inability to make ends meet and laziness. These problems can be handled by the use of magic. The Okun people are of the opinion that nothing could provide the solution to these ailments except through the consultation of the oracle. When the oracle is consulted, the factors responsible for the ailments will be uncovered and the necessary sacrifices for solving the problem will be prescribed. It is important to mention the fact that apart from making use of sacrifice to combat the problems with mystical causation, magic plays a vital role in eliminating most of the problems. In this category we could mention beautiful women and handsome men that are unable to secure matrimonial partners. The solution to this type of problems is beyond the ordinary but the oracle will definitely give the solution to the problem. If that is the case, we can conclude that the phenomena of magic and medicine are not just for assisting victims in getting what they want but the phenomena are important instruments of social integration because they make the people to become their brethren's keepers socially and sociologically.

### **Impact of African Magic on African Culture**

It is not an over-emphasis to mention that Africa has a very wealthy cultural heritage. When discussing African Cultural heritage, we should not fail to remember African songs, African

music, African drama, African dance, African drums, African proverbs and African dresses (Dopamu, 2000).

It has to be mentioned at this juncture that these cultural contents of African heritage have existed for many centuries and the force of Islamisation and Christianisation have not been able to conquer them (Babalola: 2002). The reason is that the Africans have a revival and resurgence of their culture. In the University for instance, there is the academic study of African Religion and this has helped African culture to maintain its status quo. Apart from this, there are institutes of cultural studies attached to some University for the resurgence of African culture.

One-point worthy of note here is that African magic is the vehicle through which the activities mentioned below are being carried out because without magic, the activities cannot come into the lime light. When people use magic, there is the explosion of energy and power and when power explodes, supernatural results are known to be triggered by the people (Babalola: 2004). Additionally, it has to be stressed that it is during the anniversary of traditional festivals that the resurgence of the African cultural heritage is witnessed to the fullest because that period gives opportunity to the people to make use of several magical items. In a nutshell, magical activities accelerate cultural resurgence and cultural phenomena can also promote tourism. For instance, Ogun festival, Olojo festival, Arunni festival, Egungun festival and Imole festival annually attracts tourists from different parts of the world.

During the annual festivals, the priests, priestesses and the egungun will display by making use of magic. They perform a lot of wonders and things like making fire to come out of their mouths, walking in the space and jumping over the roofs of houses without anything aiding them. All these things remind us of the significance of African traditional magic. From the above, it is crystal clear that African magic is doing a lot to promote African culture and where and when African culture is being promoted. There is no doubt that socio-economic growth will be released into the community. Furthermore, it is this presence of magic in African cultural practice during festivals that has made the cultural practice to be very meaningful otherwise everything would just become ordinary things but because magic is foundational to them they have therefore become extraordinary (Olorunmonu : 2020). In the light of the above, the activities of the priests, priestesses and the egungun are not just only for entertainment. They are used for solving various socio-economic and political problems facing individuals and the community at large.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The submission so far concerns the analysis of African magic and medicine as important instruments of social integration in the Okun community. A phenomenological analysis of African traditional medicine and magic as a methodology was used for this write-up. The meaning of magic and medicine to the Okun people were analyzed. The author moved into the theoretical analysis of magic and medicine. With this basic theoretical understanding of magic and medicine, and using phenomenology of religion as our methodology, the author then discussed how magic and medicine could be used in solving some socio-economic, therapeutic, political and cultural problems emanating from the society.

It must be noted that modern medicine is not sufficient in providing the complete answer for most of our medical problems. Before we can provide complete solution to our various socio-political, economic, and medical problems, African traditional medicine and magic would have to be used along with modern medicine. The Yoruba will say: “*Nkan eni kii di meji kinu o bini*” (it is better to have diverse solutions to problems rather than just having one). The point being emphasized is that it will be a very grievous mistake if we totally rely on modern medicine in an attempt to provide solution to some of our problems, it is even glaring that there are some problems that modern medicine cannot tackle as explained above (Elujoba : 1999).

Finally, it is to be reiterated that if African continent is to be unique in anything, it will not be in the development of nuclear weapons or in the race to occupy the moon and stars, our conquest of the world can come through the development of the inherent culture such as traditional medicine. Acupuncture was part of Chinese medical culture previously unacceptable to the outside world, but today, having been scientifically proven, it is the most wonderful techniques of anesthesia attracting a lot of foreign exchange (Sofowora : 1993). The research remark that African traditional medicine has a very sound scientific basis. It has contributed a lot as an instrument of social integration in the Okun community in this age of multiplicity of religions and advanced science and technology.

The author is therefore suggesting as follows:

- i. There should be a dialogue between the practitioners of African traditional medicine and modern medicine.
- ii. We should not use our knowledge to destroy African traditional medicine. Traditional medicine is our main socio-cultural heritage and it will be grievous to use our education to destroy it, rather we ought to regard our education as a process of learning how best to utilize and develop our culture.
- iii. The government should encourage both practitioners of modern and traditional medicine to function adequately by giving them the necessary support. We can start by mobilizing, restraining and incorporating our traditional medicine and traditional medical practitioners for primary health care activities, and with all the other health promoting facilities (e.g portable water, increased for production, sanitation) put in place, we might achieve health for all in the year 2030.

## References

- Babaloloa, E. O. (1991). The economic impact of indigenous religions upon the Yoruba society, *The Owo Experience in Asia Journal of Theology*, 5(1).
- Babaloloa, E. O. (1993). *Religion and healing in the Yoruba society of Nigeria*, University of Morburg Press, et passion.
- Babaloloa, E. O. (2002). *African cultural revolution of Islam and Christianity in Yoruba land*, Eternal Communications, et passion.
- Babaloloa, E. O. (2004). The role of the physical and natural science in the anatomy of African Traditional Medicine in ALORE *Ilorin Journal of the Humanities*, 14.
- Babaloloa, E. O. (2005). *The persistence of African traditional medicine in contemporary Nigerian Society* in E.O Babalola (ed).
- Dopamu, P. A. (1979). *Yoruba Magic and Medicine and their Relevance for today*, in Religions, *Journal of the Nigerian Association for the study of Religions*, 4.
- Dopamu, P. A. (1985). Health and healing within the traditional African religious context, in ORITA: Ibadan *Journal of Religious Studies*, Xvii.
- Dopamu, P. A. (1993). *Traditional medicine with particular reference to the Yoruba of Western Nigeria*, in Gloria Thomas – Emeagwali (ed.) African Systems of Science, Technology and Arts: The Nigeria Experience.
- Dopamu, P. A. (2000). *Yoruba traditional medicine in health care delivery*, in Mike Lawal (ed), Yoruba life and culture.
- Dopamu, P. A. (2000). *Yoruba Traditional Medicine in Health Care Delivery*.
- Elujoba, A. A. (1999). *Pharmacognosy for Health and Culture ... The P.H.C. Jungle communication*. This is the lecture presented by Professor A.A. Elujoba, Department of Pharmacognosy on Tuesday, May 11<sup>th</sup> 1999.
- Olorunmonu, M. D. (2020). Interview on 10/04/2020 at Isanlu. He is one of the Kingmaker. He is 92 years old.
- See the definition of medicine in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, New edition, 1987.
- Sofowora, A. (1993). *Medical plants and traditional medicine in Africa*, Spectrum Books.