The Worship of Ibrigmoe Deity of Ologbobiri Community, Southern Ljaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State

By

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Abstract

This study had investigated and discussed the worship of *Ibrigimoe* deity of the Olugbobiri people of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The author used the, sociological, phenomenological and historical approaches to guide the work. The deity in question had been of great benefit to the Olugbobiri people. It is a foundation deity to the people, but despite its numerous benevolent roles that it played to the survival of the Olugbobiri people, no research had been carried out in order to create record for its activities. This is the problem that this paper had attempted to address, to create literature on the deity for posterity. From the findings of the study, it was discovered that the deity had functioned and it is still playing the roles of the protection of the people from both external attack and spiritual attack by witches, wizards and sorcerers. It had also helped them to win wars in the days of inter community warfare, it has also blessed them almost in every area of their needs for example fertility of women, the fertility of their farm lands and this had enhanced good crop production by the people, enabled them to be successful in the area of their fishing occupation for the fishermen among them and had also helped them to win traditional sports like wrestling matches between them ad other sister Ijaw communities, etc. Sequel to the above-mentioned positive functions of the deity to the people, the author is suggesting that the worship of the deity by the people be encouraged to continued. Though the coming of Christianity into to the community had greatly affected its worship, but its beneficent contributions to the wellbeing of the people are undisputable, as such its activities be promoted. We should not allow the worship of the deity to

die like other potent shrines that have gone into extinction because of the coming of Christianity. The fate of Ibrigimoe deity should not be allowed to go that way.

Keywords: Worship, Ibrigmoe, Deity, Ologbobiri Community, Tradition, Ijaw

Introduction

This paper has discussed the Ibrigimoe deity of the Olugbobiri people in Southern Ijaw Local Government of Bayelsa State. *Olugbobiri* Community is an Ijaw Community and they have rich cultural heritage be-quitted to them by their forebears. They believe in ancestral worship, the existence of *Woyingi* to the supreme being like in all other Ijaw people's community and also believe and the worship of deities, but among the numerous deities that they believe in, the most paramount among them is the *Ibrigimoe* deity of our focus. Presently, it is observed that the indigenous religion of the people has been weakened because of the coming of Christianity, Islam and Western Culture. However, this does not mean that there are no Olugbobiri indigenes that still identify with the activities of the deity. There are some die-hard traditionalists among them that still held on dearly to their cultural heritage that was handed over to them by the forefathers of the community. The few of them that still worships the deity are termed by Christianity believers to be witches, wizards, satan, uncivilized people and evil individuals. Meanwhile, even the so-called Christians participates in the *Ungozu* festival that is celebrated annually in honour of the *Obrigrimoe* deity. Nevertheless, the number of the worshippers of this deity is being depleted every day as a result of death and the influence of the Christian Churches, yet there has been no effort to generate literature on the activities of the deity. This is the effort of this study, to generate information on this aspect of the Olugbobiri people's tradition and culture for posterity.

Discussion

The worship of divinities or deities have been in place all over the world from time immemorial. One can conveniently say that divinities or deities as the case may be has been in existence since man became conscious of life. In our area of research, thousands of years have gone past since the worship of divinities started. In Olugbobiri and other Ijaw Communities the worship of deities the *Ibirigmoe* deity

inclusive have been there since the founding of the Ijaw nation. The *Ibirigimoe* deity is an indigenous deity of the Olugbobiri people and its totem is the python snake. We cannot discuss the cultural practice of the Olugbobiri people without knowing their religion. The Olugbobiri people were believers of the indigenous religion before the coming of Western civilization and the alien religions into the area, for example Islam and Christianity. The Olugbobiri people were born into their traditional religion and so by implication they were born into the worship of *Ibrigimoe* and other deities in the community as part of their cultural heritage. Their ancestors worshipped it and passed it on from generation to generation even to this present generation. The *Ibrigimoe* deity is one of the most pronounced deities that the people still venerates despite the pressure of the numerous Christian believers in the area pushing for its worship to be discontinued. The deity is very paramount to them in their traditional scheme of things, as a result of that, in every Olugbobiri's man's house a room is dedicated for the worship of *Obirigimoe* deity. At the corner of the room, an alter is built and that area is enclosed eighter with white cloth or *alo* as it is called in the Ijaw language or young palm fronds known as *imunumunu* where the deity's symbol is kept and worshipped. On the alter, a small flat saucer is placed and some symbolic offering materials kept inside it. The materials are usually egg, small tumbler filled with the local gin, *ogogoro* or *konwuru*, sweet alligator pepper, native chalk, mineral drinks like fanta and coca cola or seven-up, native chalk, etc, dedicated to the god. These items must never be allowed to be exhausted on the alter.

The worship of the deity is done individually and congregationally, so on every morning before the start of the day's activities, the head of the individual families would take some *ogogoro* and libate to *Obirigimoe* deity insuring the family's activities for that day into the hand of the deity so that no one would have problems in form of accident, boat mishap among others. This is being done by all the households in Olugbobiri on a daily bases, (Toruwei, Oral Interview).

The deity affects all the endeavours of the Olugbobiri people in their day to day life. It is significant to them politically, economically, and otherwise. The totem of the deity the *adumu* or python snake is not killed or eating by any of its devotees. This is a very serious taboo that attracts severe penalty. It is believed that the deity protects them from being harmed by evil people like witches, wizards and

sorcerers, so they held it very dear to themselves. Sequel to the above, the snake python lives with the Olugbobiri people in the community. The sight of a python snake does not scare any of the indigenes of the community because they believe it has come to protect them, as such it is a common thing to see a python snake crawling on the foot path of the community and no one is perturbed (Joseph Endurance, Oral interview).

Worship of *Ibrigimoe* Deity

Ibrigimoe deity as earlier mentioned is a foundation deity of the Olugbobiri people by that we mean the deity was founded when the community was established by her founder. It is believed that the founder of the community was one of the sons of Olode who hailed from Ikebiri community, a sister community to Olugbobiri in Olodiama clan of Southern Ijaw Local Government of Bayelsa Sate. There is a school of thought, that said Olugbo one of the descendants of Olode founded Olugbobiri community and he is also attributed to have instituted the shrine of *Ibrigimoe* deity. As earlier indicated, the deity's totem is the python snake, and it is believed the snake fights to protect the Olugbobiri people when attacked physically too by either murderers or their adversaries. For this reason, the people would not renege from worshipping it. It is also attributed to the deity that it functions as a beneficent god that blesses the Olugbobiri people in the area of wealth, soil fertility for the farmers, good luck, fertility of women and men to be able to procreate and so on. No wonder, despite the pressure from the Christian religion's believers as earlier mentioned from persuading the community to do away with the worship of the deity, some ardent traditionalists among them still held on with its worship. (Samuel, 2019).

Meanwhile, the worship of this deity as we have earlier indicated are done both, individually and collectively. The collective or congregational worship of the deity takes place during a festival knowns *ongozu* festival celebrated in honour of the deity at the close of every year. This festival is always carried out in December of every year before the ushering in of the new year.

Before the 25th of December, for the festival, is an annual festival there is this tree at the end of the Southern part of the village which use to have catchy green colour of its leaves, but at this period, the leave used to turn red. This might not be

unconnected with its season, because trees have a period that it sheds its leaves to make way for new ones to spring up.

When the leaves that had turned red fell off from the branches of the tree and begin to wither and the leaves turn brown, a very large python snake would crawl into the shrine of *Obrigimoe* deity. This is the sign that symbolizes the presents of the *Ibrigimoe* deity with them and also the sign of the deity given approval for the festival to hold in the community and this usually attracts jubilation among the people that the deity has not only approved of the festival to be celebrated for the particular year in question but it has also come to celebrate with them. One of the reasons why the people rejoice for hosting the python snake at the *Ibrigimoe* shrine is that, they believed despite their short falls from maybe not obeying all the restrictions or laws of the deity, *Obrigimoe* still found them worthy and to approve of the festival and also to have come to felicitate with them. This is because, the python snake used to stay in *Ibrigimoe* shrine for the seven days that the festival normally last before it would crawl back into the river at the end of the last day of the festival. Another sign by the deity to show that it has approved of the festival to be celebrated is that all over that period, the community would experience the blowing of whirlwind all over the area. Sometimes, the wind would be so strong that it could even uproot trees and deroof houses. When this is consistent in the area, it is believed that the deity is present with them, (Endurance, 2025).

For the period that the python would be in the shrine, sacrifices of various types are offered to the python. These sacrifices are normally in the forms of libation of *ogogoro*, or k*ounwuru*, blood sacrifice that would involve the killing of fowls, goats, sheep etc. These animals are usually cooked and part of it offered to the python snake and the ancestors and other deities worshipped by the people before the rest will be consumed as sacred communion meal between the elders and cult members of the deity and the sacred. (Toruwei, oral interview).

During these seven days of the festival, there are also the social and entertainment part of it. The festival normally attracts Olugbobiri indigenes from far and wide and even people from other Ijaw communities and so there used to be events like challenge wrestling match between two notable wrestling champions in the area, masquerade display, beach party in this dispensation and display of traditional

dance troupes or groups to add flavour to the festival. There is also a cleansing ritual that is always carried out at the end of the festival, that is a day to the celebration of the incoming new year. This ritual was meant to purge the community of all evils that must have been either planted by sorcerers, that is, the people that prepares bad medicine to harm people and other evil machinations that some wicked people among them must have invoked to harm the indigenes of the community. This starts and ends with the *Ongozu* festival celebration in honour of the *Obrigimoe* deity. (Amaebi Lazarus, Oral interview)

At the early hours of the new Year day, all the women and men of Olugbobiri community would embark on a spiritual cleaning and cleansing exercise of the community. The adults in the community would sweep all the dirt's in the community and gather them at the water front. At about twelve midnight, they would use the implements that they used in gathering the dirt's like shovel, brooms and matches to strike against the wall of the houses in the community declaring that 'every evil that was planted in the community should go with the python snake into the river and leave the community. They would repeat this thrice and will then begin to throw all the dirt that they have gathered into the river as the python snake, totem of *Obrigimoe* too begin to crawl majestically into the river. They would also light candles and lanterns all over the water front of the community at this moment that the python snake leaves the shrine back to its abode, praying that all the evil or bad things in the community should go away along with the python as the snake goes and that from that moment hence forth, it is only blessings that they would want to experience, even in the in-coming New Year. All the lighted candles and lanterns would be kept into the early hours of the of the following day which is usually in the new year day before it is extinguished.

This ritual is performed to conclude the *Obrigimoe Ongozu* festivals celebration. It is celebrated in the form of a feast, so people eat, wine, dance and make merry. The celebration keeps the community agog and brings people together to socialize. However, some evil people among them has abused the protective power that the deity usually bestowed on the people of the community. In the good old days, it was said that the deity enables the Olugbobiri people to evade attack with a power that was bestowed on them by the deity, such powers are like if one is shot at, the

gun would not respond, even if it does, it will not get at his target or penetrate into the victim's body in order to cause injury. Power like to be able to miraculously escape head hunters like vanishing to the thin air or the attacker's eyes would be blinded spiritually so that they could not see the victim to pursue and attack but, in this dispensation, the youths uses the perceived power to harass, intimidate and extort money from people. They also use it as a cover as 'spiritual bullet proof' to vandalized oil pipe lines thereby causing oil spillage that destroys both crops and aquatic animals like fishes, and other aquatic reptiles in the area. This is an abuse of the perceived powers of the deity. The deity's power is only meant to protect people not to be used to intimidate, extort money or harass people. Its powers were not to be used for evil purposes, (Tuesday, oral interview).

Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed the *Ibrigimoe* deity of the Olugbobiri people in Southern Ijaw Local Government of Bayelsa State and from our findings, we realized that the deity is believed to have assisted the Ologbobiri community tremendously. The deity had functioned as god of protection, god of war, god of fertility, a god that gives them wealth and also a god that fights and killed the evil men among them like witches, wizards, sorcerers etc, who had planned or had caused evil in the community. The Olugbobiri people that were in danger of been killed by murderers or in the time of war by its adversaries, the *Ibrigimoe* deity had physically fought and saved them through its totem, the python snake.

The festival celebrated in its honour the *Ongozu* festival had being a source of socialization among the people thereby bringing the people together and by implication this had led to the enhancement of peace and tranquility in the community and is environs. Sequel to the above beneficent native of the god as we have highlighted, it is the desire of the author to conclude that the roles that the god had played in the community are benevolent roles and so its worship by the people be encouraged to continue. We should try and even the government of the day should encourage some of the positive traditions and cultural activities of the Ijaw people to continue. In the area of the *Ongozu* festival attached, to its worship, government of the state should encourage it and promote its status to that of national and international festival. This could be a source of tourism to enhance even the economic strength of the state government. It should be sponsored like

some of those cultural festivals like the Osun/Oshogbo festival, the Egungun etc that is of international tourist attraction to the country.

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