

Mythico-History in Yorùbá Culture: A Study of Origin of Odù Ifá Corpus

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Abstract

Ifá corpus is an anthology of aphorism maxims, oral poetry and riddles handed over from one generation to the other. It is a system of genealogical thought, belief ideology and philosophy of Yorùbá people. Several works on Ifá centre on its personal, thematic preoccupation, its roles in finding solution to day-to-day problems, and guidance and counseling and other areas; however, despite these extensive works, little attention has been given to mythico-historical consciousness in Ifá corpus; this work, therefore, fills the gap. It employs socio-semiotic theory of Saussure, a branch of semiotics adopted for interpreting each Odù (Corpus). The theory is chosen because of its foreign definition as the scientific study of signs that take the form of words, images, sounds, or objects. Data for this study are taken from relevant verses of Ifá textual materials and content analysed in order to make valid inference through interpreter of codes of the materials. Foundings of this study indicate that Ifa functions in the context of peoples sacred belief and thought, it aids in processing their history because it signifies the origin of system of thought that inculcates what was in existence, and transmits cultural values from-generation to generation.

Keywords: Ifá corpus, myth, historical preservation Yorùbá

Introduction

Ifá corpus in Yorùbá worldview has received robust attention in discourses among scholars, because of its purposiveness, peculiarity and uniqueness. This is also mentioned by Chirila (2014) who explains that “on account of its popularity in the diasporas, particularly in Cuba and Brazil, as well as

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in the United States, the Yorùbá spiritual tradition and pantheon attract a good deal of attention.” As a result, it is no fallacy to assert the *ẹsẹ-Ifá* is the most popular and studied, of the examples of Yorùbá poetry, home and abroad. Scholars and/or critics who have explored and written on *ẹsẹ-ifá* myths therefore include Bascom (1969), Abímbọlá (1975, 2005a, 2006b, 2016), Longe (1983), Euba (1990), Gbadamosi (1997), Okunmakinde (2006), Adégbindin (2014) and many more.

Elẹbuibọn (2014) succinctly points out that *ẹsẹ-Ifá* is “the repository of all information concerning the language, culture and belief system of the Yorùbá as a people...hence, the scope of ifá literary corpus is so encompassing that it entails details about all the sociological peculiarities of the Yorùbá people.” They contain answers to the request of client and are carefully rendered by a priest well-versed in the art of form. They are categorised into *Odù*, and there are 256 *odù*. These *odù* are also sub-classified into two: the major *odù* (16) and derivative *odù* (240). Each of these corpus has hundreds of verses (short and long) referred to as the corpus, and they have a structural sequence (Abímbọlá, 2015:26). Its contents are, therefore, based on the interactions of the components of the ecosystem. It shows the indigenous African view of their environment. Abímbọlá (2015:30) explicates that “there are many poems focusing attention on hills, rivers wild and domestic animals, birds, insects, etc. All these components of the ecosystem are anthropomorphized in Ifá to achieve the desired goal without inhibitions.

It suffices to mention that these scholars and writers have written extensively on the origin of *Ifá*, his persona, thematic preoccupation and stylistic analysis of the corpus, his role in conflict resolution and/or guidance and counseling and several other areas. *Ẹsẹ-Ifá* (Ifá verse) is rooted in *odù*, which can also be likened to the sacred books, the Bible and Quran. *Odù*, as Eze (1998:171) expounds, is “a collection of thousands of aphorisms, poems, and riddles passed on from generation to generation of *babaláwo*. These *odù* were believed to be divinities that also came from heaven. *Odù* is obtained either by throwing the palm nuts or by casting divine chain (McClelland, 1982:46; Adégbídin, 2014:59). If corpus are

embodiments of thoughts, beliefs and philosophy of the Yorùbá people, they represent the traditional Yorùbá world view. They form one of the repertoires of history, medicine, myth, legend, etc.

Theoretical Underpinning

Socio-semiotic and Culture Theory

Socio-semiotics, a branch of semiotics, is adopted for interpreting the data derived from sixteen Odù verses of Ifá because of its relationship with culture. Considering the popular definition of semiotics, as the scientific study of signs (Saussure, 1983), signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odour, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meanings. According to Peire, C.S. (1931:58), nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign. Social semiotics investigates human signifying practices in specific social and cultural circumstances, and tries to explain meaning-making as a social practice (van Leeuwen, 2005). It is strongly inspired by Paris School of Semiotics and especially by the work of Roland Barthes (1977) although, according to Van Leeuwen (2005), it was elaborated in the 1980s and 1990s by the work of the Sydney Semiotics Circle whose members include Jennifer Briddle, Terry Threadgold, Gunther Kress among others. Thibault (1991) defines social-semiotics as the study of human social meaning-making practices of all types. This shows that meanings are jointly made by the participants to some social activity-structure. Van Leeuwen(2005) posits that key impetus for its development was Michael Halliday, who termed it as “socio-semiotics.”

Semiotics, as originally defined by Ferdinand de Saussure, is “the science of the life of signs in society” (Saussure, 1974:117). In social semiotics, the focus changes from the “sign” to the way people use semiotic resources both to produce communicative artifacts and events and to interpret them (Chandler, 2006). This, according to Ochigbo (2007), is also a form of semiotic production in the context of specific social situations and practices. This altered focus shows how individual creativity, changing

historical circumstances, and new social identities and projects can change patterns of usage and design (Hodge and Kress, 1988). According to Thibault (1991), the main task of social semiotics is to develop analytical and theoretical frameworks which can explain meaning-making in a social context. Harris (2006) asserts that one of the fundamental points of any effective socio-semiotics is to establish how the text is related to a particular society.

Culture, according to Babalola (2010), is the super-structure that reflects the nature of socio-economic basis of a group of people. Culture can be said to be that complex, which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other abilities acquired by man. According to Ukachukwu (2010), it is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture, in this sense, is a system of collectively held values. He also cites Schein Edgar's definition of culture as "the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, which operates unconsciously and in a definite fashion (taken for granted), it explains an organization's view of itself and its environment" (2010:16). According to Awosanmi (2010), culture chronicles man's historical, private and public achievements and interactions within a broad social which has meanings to members of the cultural practices; semioticians treat it as signs object or actions which have meanings to member of the cultural group, seeking to identify the rules or conventions of the codes which underline the production of meanings within that culture. Also, according to Ilésanmí (2004), culture influences all works of arts, and it exists all over the world in varied forms and idiosyncrasies.

Literature Defined

Origin of Odù

"Odù ifá" is the interpretation of Yorùbá ifá divination based on a set of established signs and accounts. It is a vast body of literary prose and poetry that encapsulates the experiences and wisdom of the Yorùbá. There

are sixteen major Odù, each with its identification signs and name, and each of the sixteen has their own sixteen subordinate Odù. Altogether, therefore, there are (16 x 16) 256 odù. Each of the 256 odù has extensive narratives (prose and poem) about lives of gods, human and/or animal in Yorùbá cosmology (Abímbólá, 2006).

Pemberton (2007) points out that while the different versions Odù can be found in many cultures, they have certain basic element in common, but their interpretation varies and are often determined by cultural values, oral traditions and social experiences of the people who practice the divination.

The history of Ifá divination among the Yorùbá can be said to be as old as the Yorùbá race itself and its origin perhaps too far back in history to be exact.

According to Abímbólá, Authority on Ifá (2006:11), the Yorùbá believed that Ifá (otherwise known as Ọ̀rúnmilà) was of the four hundred divinities who came from ọ̀run (heaven) to ayé (earth). Olódùmarè (the Supreme Being) had charged each one divinities with particular function to be performed on earth.

Ifá was put in charge of divination because of his great wisdom which he acquired as a result of his presence when Olódùmarè created the universe. Ifá therefore knew all the hidden secrets of the universe. This is why his praise name is "Akéréfinúşogbón," the small one whose mind is full of wisdom (Abímbólá, 2005:1).

The birth of "Odù Ifá" deals with the final return of Ọ̀rúnmilà to ọ̀run (heaven) and his replacement here on earth by Ikin (the sacred palm kernel of divination) which therefore became the most important instrument in the Ifá divination paraphernalia.

The story of a time at Ifẹ̀ when Ọ̀rúnmilà had two children and his enemies boasted that "father would never have a child in this city of Ifẹ̀." But, his enemies were proved wrong because Ọ̀rúnmilà later had his first eight children: Alára, Ọ̀wàràngún-àga, Ọ̀lọ̀yémoyin, Ontagi-òlẹ̀lẹ̀, Èlẹ̀jẹ̀lẹ̀mòpẹ̀ àti Ọ̀lówò. All the eight children became important kings in several part of Yorubá land. The first born was crowned as Alára, King of Ará,

While the Second son was installed as Ajerò and the last born became the Ọlọwò king of the important eastern Yorùbá town of Ọwò.

During an important occasion when Ọrúnmilà was celebrating a ritual, he sent for all his eight children who had all become notable chiefs of their own domains. They all responded and paid obeisance to their father, saluting him with words “Àbọ́rúbọ̀yè bọ́ síṣẹ́” (may the ritual be blessed and acceptable).

But Ọlọwò, the last born of them all, refused to salute their father. Furthermore he was dressed in exactly the same type of outfit as Ọrúnmilà, an action which symbolized his rejection of their father’s authority and superiority. While all his seven senior brothers bowed one by one before the father, he refused to bow and stood erect. His father asked him to say, “May the sacrifices be blessed and accepted like his brothers but he refused and said:

*Ìwọ Ọrúnmilà sọdùn, o sọdùn kọ;
 Ọ̀un Ọlọ̀wọ̀ náà sọdùn, ọ̀un sọ̀n ko.
 Ìwọ Ọrúnmilà f’òsùn idẹ lọwọ;
 Ọ̀un Ọlọ̀wọ̀ náà f’òsùn idẹ lọwọ.
 Ìwọ Ọrúnmilà bọ sálúbàtà idẹ;
 Ọ̀un Ọlọ̀wọ̀ bọ sálúbàtà idẹ.
 Ìwọ Ọrúnmilà dádé;
 Ọ̀un Ọlọ̀wọ̀ náà dádé.
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni wọ̀n sì ní
 Ènikan kì í forí adé balẹ̀ fẹ̀nikan*

[You, Ọrúnmilà, wrap yourself with ọ̀dun cloth
 I, Ọlọ̀wọ̀, wrap myself with ọ̀dùn cloth
 You, Ọrúnmilà carry ọ̀sùn walking stick
 I, Ọlọ̀wọ̀, carry Ọ̀sùn walking stick made of brass
 You, Ọrúnmilà, wear a pair of brass sandals

I, Ọlówò wear a pair of brass sandals
You, Ọrúnmilà wear a crown
I, Ọlówò, also wear a crown
And, it is usually said that
Nobody uses a crowned head to bow down for
another person.]

The result of the harsh words, denoting the total rejection of Ọrúnmilà's authority over one of his own children, was that Ọrúnmilà became enraged and he snatched away the Ọ̀sùn walking stick held by Ọlówò. This action symbolized the seizure of authority from Ọlówò. Ọ̀sùn walking stick is used only by high ranking Ifá priests as a symbol of their authority and superiority. The seizure of it from Ọlówò therefore represented the withdrawal of the authority which Ọrúnmilà had given to his children as important priestly rulers. But Ọrúnmilà's reaction to the foolish action of Ọlówò did not stop there. The filial disobedience of Ọlówò led to the final return of Ọrúnmilà to Ọrun (heaven) when he pitched his tent at the foot of the much climbed palm tree which branched here and there and had sixteen hut-like heads." This is not surprising since Ọrúnmilà represented the principle of order, wisdom, authority, fertility and continuity on the young earth. His departure from the earth, therefore, led to the collapse of order and continuity. Rain immediately stopped falling. The fertility cycle both in plants and animals was disrupted, threatening man and his environment with total extinction.

The inhabitants of the young earth, faced with catastrophe and extinction, clamored for the return of Ọrúnmilà. They called on his children to go and beg their father to return to the earth so that peace, order and continuity might be restored. When the children of Ọrúnmilà got to Ọrun (at that time in Yorùbá mythology, there wasn't complete physical separation between heaven to the earth), they begged their father to return to the earth. They chanted his praise names and insisted that he should go back with them to his home,

Ifá ká ralé o;

Ọmọ Eníre,
Ọmọ Enìrẹ,
Ọmọ enìkan sàka bí àgbón.
Ifá ká relé o,
Èwí ùlé Adó
Osonà n' Defa,
Èrìnmi l'óde Ọwò,
Ifá ká relé o;
Ifá let us retreat home
The offspring of Èni rẹ
The offspring of Èni rẹ
Offspring who is swift like wasp
Ifá let retreat home
Hippopotamus at Owo
Ifá let us retreat home.

But their father bluntly refused to follow them, and instead he asked them to stretch their hands forward and gave them sixteen sacred palm kernel Ifá divination. He said;

Bẹ ẹ bá délé,
Bẹ ẹ bá f'ówóó ní
Èni t'ẹ ẹ mọo bi nù-nu
Bẹ ẹ bá délé
Bẹ ẹ bá f'áyaá ní
Èni t'ẹ ẹ mọo bi nù-nu
Bẹ ẹ bá délé
Bẹ ẹ bá f'ọmọọ bí
Èni t'ẹ ẹ mọo bi nù-nu
Ile t'ẹ ẹ bá f'ẹẹ kọ láyé

Eni t'ẹ ẹ mọp bi nù-nu.
Ire gbogbo t'ẹ ẹ bá, fẹ́ẹ ní'áyé
Eni t'ẹ ẹ bi nù-nu
Ìgbà tí wón délé,
Gbogbo ire náà ní wón rí
Ọ́rúnmilà afèdèfẹ̀yò,
Èlààsòdè
Ifá re'lé Olóku kò dé mọ
Ó l'ẹni t'ẹ ẹ bá rí,
Ẹ sá mọp pè ní baba.
[When you get home,
If you wish to have money,
That is the person you are to consult
If you wish to have wives,
That is the person you are to consult
If you wish to have children,
That is the person you are to consult...]

The Emergence and Hierarchy of Sixteen Principals Of Odù

Ọ́rúnmilà was the first Babaláwo (priest) who walked the earth. He's the custodian of wisdom, the only one among the descendants of Olódùmarè, who can give prophesies of the future, the present and can change the outcomes of situations in order to bring more perfections, power, success and happiness. He passed down, to his learners (priests), the entire knowledge held within all 250 Odù's; the paths and life destined to be played out here on earth by all humans, but it is only Ọ́rúnmilà who knew all the verses in entirety. In each Odù, there are hundreds of Ẹsẹ verses or poems that describe, in details, a particular client who approached an Ifá priest because of some issues of life.

Odù, the wife of Ọ̀rúnmilà, gave birth to sixteen children called ODÙ IFÁ (the principal Odù). They are as follows:

- Èjì Ogbè: (The last born)*
- Ọ̀yèkú Méjì*
- Ìwòrì Méjì*
- Odí Méjì*
- Òwónrín Méjì*
- Òbàrà Méjì*
- Òkànràn Méjì*
- Ògúndá Méjì*
- Òsá Méjì*
- Ìká Méjì*
- Òtúúrúpòn Méjì*
- Òtúá Méjì*
- Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀ Méjì*
- Ọ̀sé Méjì*
- Òfún Méjì (The first born) / Ọ̀ràngún Méjì*

The first ranking among them is *Èjì-Ogbè*, who was the last born, and the last ranking among them is *Òfú-Méjì*, the eldest son among the *Odù ifá*. *Èjì Ogbè* was the one crowned as king among them in spite of being the youngest among them, according to the verses of *Èjì-Ogbè* as follows

- Ọ̀tọ̀tọ̀, ọ̀rọ̀rọ̀, ọ̀tọ̀tọ̀ làá jẹ̀pà, ọ̀tọ̀tọ̀ làá jẹ̀*
- ìmumu*
- Ohun torítórí níwọ̀n fí fún ọ̀ba makíní Ode ikanje*
- Kó lè ba fí ohun torítórí tani lóre*
- Adífáfún Èjì-Ogbè lo ba olúfẹ̀ tún ayé o so bi igba*
- Àimò iwà fún ara won ni*
- Ara isewájú wá dì ará ikeyìn.*

[Differently differently
We consume grandnuts
Differently we consume imuni
Reasons upon reasons
It has a reason why King of Makin was
Enthroned mikanje
So that he can gift one thing of reason
Divination was performed for Èjì Ogbè
That helps Olúfẹ̀ repaire the world
Not knowing others character
Made the leader to become the
Follower.]

The story goes thus: after Ọ̀rúnmilà had left earth to heaven, the king of Ifá land summoned Ọ̀rúnmilà to come back to earth to help him to resolve some problems within the community. Ọ̀rúnmilà said he could not go back to earth again, so he then sent his sixteen children called *Odù Ifá*, as they were well trained and had full knowledge of Ifá to help the king of Ifa' solve his problems. Ọ̀rúnmilà immediately told them of their impending journey. The emissary led by Ọ̀fún Méjì the eldest son of Ọ̀rúnmilà excluded the last born who is *Èjì-Ogbè* in the journey, whereas he was the one who wanted to consult the oracle about the journey.

Ọ̀fú Méjì led the team, and after a few days journey, they met the son of the king of the forest who informed them that his father was requesting their assistance in solving his own problem before they went to see the king of Ifè. *Ọ̀fún Méjì* rejected the request and replied to the boy that when they were through with the king of Ifè, he and his team would come back to assist him. He then asked the boy the road that would take them to Ifè. The boy gave them the wrong direction and the team set out. In the meantime, *Èjì Ogbè* had set out on the journey, lagging a few days behind the team of Odù. He met the boy on his way and the once again requested assistance on behalf of his father the king. *Èjì Ogbè* quickly set off to assist the king of

the forest. When he had divined and resolved the king troubles, he asked the boy to set him straight on the road to Ifè. *Èjì Ogbè* reached Ifè at just the right time, divined for the king and made all necessary sacrifices to bring about grand resolution. The king of Ifè was happy with the work. He then honored *Èjì Ogbè* and crowned him as king before them and he had been crowned as leader of all the *Odù Ifá*. The others from *Òyékú Méjì* to *Òsé Méjì* then ashamed, and he was the last *Odù Ifá* to praise him; the others blamed and chastised *Òfú Méjì* because of his pride and rudeness and he retreated into the forest where he spent some days, without ever reaching Ifè land on time.

Because *Òfú Méjì* is the eldest they still respect his word's message when decisions arise. The Ifá priests shout *Héé Pàà!* Whenever he appears, while they shout *Sáàkì* When *Èjì Ogbè* appears because of his supremacy.

Thus *Òrúnmilà* replaced himself and his authority with the sixteen sacred palm kernel of Ifá divination known as 'Ikin'. When he was on the earth, *Òrúnmilà* himself was the direct link between *Òrun* (heaven) and *ayé* (earth). With his final return to *Òrun* and the birth of the sixteen sacred palm kernel, one more intermediary was added to the communication process between the earth and heavenly powers. Human beings in their communication with *Òrun* would therefore have to go from the sixteen sacred palm kernels to *Òrúnmilà* himself before they could reach the heavenly powers. Thus, the Ifá geomantic system, based on elaborate paraphernalia of divination and a complex literary corpus, was born. Though *Òrúnmilà*, like many of the other Yorùbá divinities, finally returned to heaven, he bequeathed to his children and his disciples a divination system through which the Yorùbá people believe the wishes of *Olódùmarè* and other divinities could always be ascertained. Here are the sixteen *Odù* signs;

The signs that stand for each *Odù*

(Àwọn àmì tí ó dúró fún *Odù* kòòkan nìwònyí;

(1) I I (2) II II (3) II II (4) I I

I I II II I I II II

I I II II I I II II

I I II II II II I

Èjì Ogbè Oyeḱú Méjì Ìwòrì Méjì Odù Méjì

(5) I I (6) II II (7) I I (8) II II

I I II II II II II

I I I II II II II

I I I I II II I I

Ìròsùn Méjì Owoḱrín Méjì Oḃàrà Méjì

Oḱànràn Méjì

(9) I I (10) II II (11) II II (12) II II

I I I I I II II

I I I I II II I I

I I I I II II II II

Ògúndá Méjì Oṣá Méjì Ìká Méjì

Òtúúrúpoḱ Méjì

(13) I I (14) I I (15) I I (16) II II

II II I I II II I I

I I II II I I II II

I I I I II II I I

Semiotic-Interpretation of Each Odù Ifá

Ogbè Méjì occupies the first position in the fixed order of Odù. Its esoteric representation is White Hole which symbolizes the light. It symbolizes all that is known and unknown in the universe. It is an image of all those forces that create the day. Èjì Ogbè is the sign of life, a vigorous awakening. It rules the head. This Odù denotes plenty of good and plenty evil. It expresses a need to acquire wisdom and humility. It represents perfect alignment between Ori and Iponri. It maintains high ethical standards which will be rewarded with enlightenment and abundance. In Èjì Ogbè, barren women are blessed with children after sacrifice.

Physical element: Water; water takes the precedence of all

other elements. It is recognised as “The Father of the Elements.”

Physical body element: Brain and Nerves

Children would be disposed to be travelers, pioneers, sailors or heads of organizations.

Òyèkú Méjì occupies the second position in the fixed order of Odù. Its representation is Black Disk Or Hole. It signifies darkness and unhappiness, and warns of death, sickness, worry. In addition, a bad omen yet also carries with it the solution to all these problems.

It speaks of the comings and goings between heaven and earth. This Odù denotes that death and all other evil will appear and disappear. It represents the power of spiritual transformation and reincarnation.

Physical element: Fire

Physical body element: Hair of body and neck

Children would be disposed to be agriculturists, masons or market masters.

Ìwòrì Méjì occupies the third position in order of Odù. Its esoteric representation is Hyena. It is a night mover, a predator, or scavenger. It is an image of those forces that are into cognition and purposeful activity—a natural gangster, fountain of youth.

Anyone born by this particular Odù will not be barren; they always produce children but their children do not stay with them.

Physical element: Air

Physical body element: Eyes and Kidney

Mental power: Has the power of pulling good to you

Òdì Méjì occupies the fourth position in the Odù. It is represented by Divided Circle which symbolizes the reproductive organs of women indiscreet curiosity. It is a very aggressive and pugnacious, conceited, prominent fighter. It reveals how *Òrúnmìlà* claimed the *iyamis*, market women, and their use of honey to sweeten the good things of life.

Physical element: Earth
Physical body element: buttocks and hips
Children would be disposed to be rule

Ìròsùn Méjì occupies the fifth position in the Odù. Its representation is a Hole, which symbolizes the possibility of accidents and misfortune. It is the image of the need to embrace caution. In *Ìròsùn Méjì*, you are inclined to do things the hard way.

Physical body element: blood, liver and arteries
Children would be disposed to be Secretaries or Journalist.

Òwónrín Méjì occupies the sixth position in the Odù. Its representation is two triangles surrounding three points, which symbolizes the invisible forces that create mixture in the universe. It is an image to use as the bases of Ifá numerology. It is a dangerous sign, an indication of persistent drought, famine and lingering disease. Children would be disposed to be Physicians or Electricians.

Òbàrà Méjì occupies the seventh position in the Odù. Its representation is the Rope, which symbolizes the force of attachment. It is an image of duration of human accomplishment. This Odù denotes poverty and want but as last prosperity and happiness. It is the Odù of commerce

Physical body element: Abdomen and Intestines
Children would be disposed to be traders or mystics

Òkànràn Méjì occupies the eighth position in the Odù. Its representation is twin faces which symbolizes power of dual forces. It is an image of bipolar strength. *Òkànràn* is the seat of the emotion and psychic energy. It relates to *Sàngó*

Physical body element: heart, veins and nails
Children would be disposed to be smiths, mechanics or hangmen

Ògúndá Méjì occupies the ninth position in the Odù. Its representation is the dagger which symbolizes the power of metal to be forged into tools.

It is an image of virility. The Odù relates to Ògún who led the second reconnaissance mission from heaven to earth. References to the need of some sort of protection. That protection relates to the need to survive rather than becoming the sacrifice for someone else's survival. This Odù denotes war and total victory.

Physical body element: Male organ

Children would be disposed to be soldiers, butcher or burglars

Òsá Méjì occupies the tenth position in the Odù. Its representation is a female face surrounded by a lunar crescent and a sky filled with stars which symbolize the secret society. In *Òsá* your friend can be your worst enemy. It denotes prospect of many children and plenty riches.

Physical body element: Female organs

Children would be disposed to be Aviators

Ìká Méjì occupies the eleventh position in the Odù. Its representation is ojo the primordial serpent which symbolizes the reptiles of the forest. *Ìká* is an image of the use of fire for protection.

Physical body element: Muscles and shoulders

Children would be disposed to be shipwrights, theatre managers or musicians

Òtúrúpòn Méjì occupies the twelfth position in the Odù. Its representation is the baby in the mother's womb which symbolizes premature birth and abortion. It is an image of instability within the forces of the earth. This Odù denotes the prospect of twin babies. It reveals how the faculty of intelligence came to the world. It deals with spirit's consequence of lack of courage. *Òtúrúpòn* people are very spacey. They have all these great ideas with no reality. They daydream often, it relates to Egúngún (ancestor society).

Physical body element: Bones of the body

Children would be disposed to be scientists or chemists

Òtúá Méjì occupies thirteenth position in the Odù. Its representation is the *kasan*, which is a blouse worn by advisers to the chief and soldiers that symbolizes the interaction between various ethnic groups. It is an image of the power of the word. It denotes victory over enemies and prospect of many children. The Odù relates to Ifá and deserters from his cause.

Physical body element: arms, heads and lungs

Children would be disposed to be diplomats, fishmongers and lawyers.

Ìretè Méjì occupies fourteenth position in the Odù. Its esoteric representation is square within a circle the circle symbolizes that which is unknown and the square symbolizes that which is known. It is an image of mutiny and rebellion which either brings long life or infections disease. *Ìretè* denotes initiation Ifá

Physical body element: legs, feet, spleen

Children would be disposed to be dyers or brewers.

Òsé Méjì occupies fifteenth position in the Odù. Its representation is the crescent moon which symbolizes female fertility. It is an image of female creativity. It advises to look for money with caution and discretion so that money might not destroy one.

Physical body element: breasts and bladder

Children would be disposed to be spiritualist or reformers.

Òfún Méjì occupies the sixteenth position in the Odù. Its esoteric representation is an egg marked with 12 paired points and four horizontal lines which together symbolizes the 16 Odù Méjì. It is of birth universal principles. It denotes all the different characters and types of people in the world.

Physical body element: Rostrum, nostrils and throat

Children would be disposed to be judges, police, diviners or wine merchants.

In a divination session, the client is asked to whisper their problem to a coin, cowry shell or any legal tender. He then drops it on the divination tray. The diviner, called *babaláwo*, literally interpreted to mean father of secrets, salutes *Ifá* and urges *Ifá* to provide the appropriate answer to the client's problem without delay. He calls on *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*, a deity believed to have been present with *Olódùmarè* at the time of creation and who believed to know the prenatal destiny (*àyànmọ́*) of every human being. He offer *ibà* (Salute in acknowledgement of supremacy) to life (the earth) *Olódùmarè* (the Almighty God). The diviner also calls on ancestor diviners to witness the preceding before he then casts the palm kernel (*ikin*) eight times, he marks the result of each cast on the *iyèrosùn* (powder on the diviner's tray). The result must match one of the two hundred and fifty six possible *odù* signs.

A shorter version of casting *Ifá* is done by using divination chain (*Ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀ Ifá*). This tool consists of eight seed pods or small copper-alloy plates with concave or convex surface linked together by a metal or bead chain. The diviner hold the chain at its centre point and casts it so that it falls on an already laid cloth before him to reveal the pattern of the *Odù* sign.

On sighting the revelation of the cast, the diviner recalls the associated storyline or poem revealed in *Odù* sign. The client of the diviner must be attentive at this point because the solution to the problem will be revealed in the *Odù* chant.

In the chant of the diviner, the party concerned hears of others who have suffered various problems, some perhaps greater than those that brought the suppliant to *Ifá* and joy they knew after performing the sacrifices that *Ifá* had asked them to make. At intervals, the diviner taps the divination tray with *Ìrọ̀kẹ̀ Ifá* (divination tapper). The person consulting *Ifá* is afterwards expected to perform the prescribed sacrifices.

The chants, many at times, end with lines revealing that after the person in the *Odù* of *Ifá* had performed the required sacrifice, thing became better for him.

The line offer run thus:

Ìgbà tí ó dáfá

Wọn ní ẹbọ ni ó wá a rú
Ó sì rú u
Ìgbà ó rúbọ tán
Ló bá dipé ohun gbogbo ñlọ déédé
Orin awo wá bọ si lenu.
He took his problems to Ifá
He was told to perform sacrifice
And he performed sacrifice
He became a happy man
He started to sing the song of Ifá priests

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has extensively examined the mythical history of origin of Odù Ifá, its essence in the culture of Yorùbá people and its potential as an avenue to preserve and document Yorùbá History. We also analyzed the semiotic interpretation of each Odù as it affects human life and existence. Odù Ifá is a great philosophy; it can be regarded as the unwritten textbook of Yorùbá culture in its true historical and philosophical perspective. It reveals the great wisdom a

nd power of Olódùmarè in Òrúnmilà, the ‘Elèrì-ìpín (witness to destiny) of human being, providing solution to every problem here on earth.

It is no exaggeration, therefore, that mythical history is very important in man’s life. It ensures social awareness and spiritual stability. Above all, it is a tool of core aboriginal data for man’s growth and development.

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