

RE-MYTHOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION IN BENIN TRADITION.

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Abstract

This paper critically examines reincarnation in Benin Tradition being the practice of the people from the days of their creation till date. The work re-mythological concept of reincarnation in Benin tradition is very important that the researcher discuss the concept of reincarnation, history of Benin, concept of death and reincarnation, life before and after death, symbol in Benin traditional reincarnation and the implication of reincarnation. The researcher therefore argues that reincarnation is real whether you are a Christian or non-Christian; because the recent religions that have being constituted over the years has devolve rebirth and as such people now live and behave abnormally due to the wrong concept of know rebirth. Due to the essential nature of this research work, this research made use of historical analytical methods as well as personal communication (interview), books, journals. This work therefore, recommends among others the people should live a good to avoid trouble in the next life.

Keywords: Myth, Reincarnation, Traditon and Religion.

Introduction

Generally, reincarnation is considered in the African contest as a reality. There are known parts of Africa where Reincarnation is not practiced, whether the person is a malignant spirit or evil. Still, the person will reincarnate. In traditional African Religion, when a person dies, be it, man or woman, proper burial rites and ritual ceremonies must be performed appropriately because the dead person may reincarnate through any family member, most especially the immediate children. The Benin Tradition and culture hold this view of reincarnation so seriously that families are not to play or joke with it to know if the dead person has reincarnated before the burial ceremony. A mark is given as a way of identification when such is reborn. Elizabeth Onyedinma (2012) states that the word reincarnation is derived from the Latin root rein-Carne, meaning again in "flesh" or another flesh (body). It is a noun from the verb to reincarnate". The researcher agreed with the view above that reincarnation is about rebirth or coming again to life through another person in the family. This is also the Benin view of reincarnation. In other words, reincarnation is simply the view of the soul separate from the body at Death, which revolved into another body for another span of life. However, it has different variations, such as transmigration, rebirth, polygenesis, and second creation.

History of Benin Kingdom

According to Egharvba (2016:6) who asserted that the Benin kingdom/ Empire is regarded as the oldest and most highly developed state in the coastal hinterlands of West

Africa, dating perhaps to the eleventh century until the British Empire annexed it in 1897. By the 15th century, Edo, as a system of protected settlements, expanded into a thriving city-state, and the 12th Oba Ewuare the Great (1440-1473) developed the city-state into an Empire. Also, its administrative center Ubinu began to be known as Benin City by the Portuguese. Efforts at trying to get the early history and foundation of the ancient Benin kingdom had their first fruit in the work of Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* was published in 1968. According to Felix (2014), who quoted Egharevba stated, While acknowledging this pioneering effort at recording the history of the people, it must be quickly added that the findings of Egharevba, which said that: "Years ago, the Binis came from Egypt to found a more secure shelter in this part of the world after a short stay in Sudan and at Ile-Ife which the Benin people call Uhe" has been punctuated by scholars and thus doubts exist concerning the authenticity of the account. Felix (2014) further stated by referencing Afigbo that the controversy elicited by this position appeared to have been laid to rest by Afigbo when he said: the significance of these claims to Egyptian, or at any rate Middle East origin belongs to the broader framework of West African History and Sociology as they are found among most West African peoples who inhabit the Savanna or Forest zone, are Islamized or not. It is pretty straightforward, however, that in the present state of our knowledge about West Africa, they cannot be taken seriously by the serious-minded students of ...history". Moses (2011,1) disagreed with the view quoted by Felix of Egharevba (*A short History of Benin*) that Benin did not migrate from Egypt or Sudan. To Moses, Benin's or Edo have lived here since God's creation. A popular account of Benin origin which has passed on from one generation to another through the oral record, states that the youngest child of God Almighty (Osanobua) founded Benin. The researcher agreed with the view of Moses that Benin's or Edo people could not migrate from Egypt to settle in the Southwestern party of Nigeria; instead, they would have paid close to Egypt or Sudan. Moses further explained that, according to Benin Mythology, when God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, sent his seven children to planet earth, they were allowed to choose different things according to seniority. Some took wealth, power, wisdom, skills, etc. In the end, the youngest one was left with nothing but a bird advised him to take a snail shell (Ughughon-Edile) filled with sand. Moses concluded that when they got to the planet earth, the whole place was filled with water. The Bird advised him to empty the sand of the snail shell on the water where Benin is today. Ekhausosa (1995, 1) asserted that the Edo people of southwestern Nigeria are divided into several sub-units. Each of these units speaks a patois of the EDO stem language. One of these ethnic sub-units is the Binis.

CONCEPT OF DEATH BEFORE REINCARNATION IN BENIN TRADITION

According to Aloysius (2009), "Death is the time when the soul leaves the body to become a spirit. Africa mythology allows a great deal of space to the subject of Death. Usually, the same myths of creation that trace the origin of human beings include the origin of death" In Benin traditional Religion, it is believed that person who does not die must especially be deceased with children. The view is accurate of Benin's because whenever a person dies, they think they will be reborn through the biological children, and if the dead has not to be married, any member of the family will give birth to them. This is strongly believed to be true in the Benin Kingdom, and so the people are being careful when any of

their people, whether married or unmarried. According to Lewis (2010), "Death the cessation of life. Philosophical questions and Death include whether Death is final and irreversible. Can persons survive biological Death? Different beliefs about the surmounting of Death include belief in a resurrection of the body; survival of the soul as an immaterial reality, reincarnation, or the complete re-creation of a person after a period of nonexistence". Ezenweke (2012) agreed with the view above that "Death and the issues of Death take a glaring place in the socio-religious life of most African. It is an issue that has a unique and contrasting icon with the western view. This is because of the all-important role of Death in transition to the everlasting great beyond".

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CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION IN BENIN TRADITION

Samson Audu (2019) opens, "Reincarnation in a simple term connotes to come back again in the flesh. It claims that the soul or spirit passes through a (certain long) Chain of life and Death before it attains salvation" Lewis (2010) agreed with the view above that "reincarnation refers to the belief in the rebirth or return to human souls or persons to life again in some form after death. It is one of the oldest and most widespread beliefs in human cultures". Lewis further states that Sikhs believe in reincarnation and seek to overcome the painful cycle of death and rebirth (chaurasia) by following the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Ultimately, it is only God's grace that may allow one to attain Mukti (liberation), but one should try to become more Guru-Oriented (gursikh) and self-oriented (manmukh)."

Reincarnation in the Benin tradition is similar to some other African practices. There is a known where in Africa reincarnation is not known. Benin believes in return or rebirth after Death, despite the state of the dead person. According to Osaretin (personal interview 2022), reincarnation is actual in Benin, and he believes it wholeheartedly due to

some philosophical saying in Benin that a person reincarnates in fourteen (14) generations. The implication is that when someone dies, they will return to earth fourteen times before they will finally disappear. Osaretin further states that "In some cases, those who are not reborn is due to curse either by the family or ancestral curse, and such a person will not be reborn.

Before: Death to Reincarnation in Benin Tradition.

Again, there is a saying that whatever a man's soul shall reap before Death or after Death. The Benin Tradition believed so much in the type/way of life a man or woman lived before Death, and this will inform the next life he/she will live when reborn. According to Osaro (personal interview 2022), when a man or woman dies as a criminal, the act of criminality will continue even after the next life. He further states that when such a person dies, the family, before the burial ceremony, will have to mark the dead body if they are reborn; they know what to do. When such a person is reborn, the family they came through will now involve the entire family members to break the yoke of criminals. The researcher agreed with the view of Osaro because, in Christianity, the life lived on earth before Death determines your final destination, whether heaven or hell, either to live or die. The life you lived before Death traditionally defined how or what will happen to you in your next word or rebirth. To this, it is expedient traditionally that everyone, both male and female, should live a good life for the sake of gaining freedom in the next life.

Aftermath of Reincarnation in Benin Tradition.

It is the before reincarnation that determined the aftermath of reincarnation. According to Itohonsa (personal interview 2022), she states that whatever happens to a man or woman during and after birth is the aftermath of the life he/she lived before being reborn. Itohonsa further opens that anyone living now, whether good or bad, is what happened before. One should not blame anyone or witches for the present life they are living now. Itohonsa further concludes that the ancestors who grant every passage of life are also involved in reincarnation. If a person lived a bad life when next they reincarnate to live, people would repay with evil deeds mated on others before reincarnation. To this, the life you lived before Death determines the next life you will live in your next rebirth. The researcher regarded the view above as correct even though the mythological concept of this view may be fair and unfair to some people that the life you live before Death determines what life you live after rebirth.

Symbols in Benin Traditional Reincarnation

According to Adrian (1989), the term "symbol is incorrectly used today, for instance, to describe newly invented signs that are different from the normal alphabet and numerals. Admittedly, it may well be difficult to alter this practice in the future". In Benin, traditional symbols are also a mark of identification to know their believed ones who are dead and return or rebirth. In some cases, a pattern is given to them on their lap, leg, hand, or any part of their body before they are buried. This mark as a symbol is given to ascertain if a person comes back to life. The symbol helped to know an individual and recall the types of life they lived before Death occurred. Some of them who lived a terrible life, or who were cursed by the gods or died through any miss could be identified

by the mark on their body. This will help the living to know what to do due to the life they lived before Death which will determine if the present life will be good or bad.

In Africa, Traditional religious symbols occupy a vital position and are of great importance. For Africans, symbols are primarily used in line with their spiritual meaning and event that took place before the westerner education, even during Western education, and the character is still very much important. Since that is the only way between the physical and metaphysical. Elizabeth Ezenweke (2012) defines a sign in accordance to Hornby (1999); the character is a thing regarded by general view as naturally typifying or replace or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by the association in fact or through". According to Osaretin (personal interview 2022), the symbol is imperative in the Benin tradition. He further narrates his experience of a lady who had skied on her right leg before she died, and the child born after her burial by one of the children gave birth to a young lady who also has skied on her right leg.

The implication of Reincarnation in Benin Tradition

Whatever a man believes informed his or her lifestyle, and there is an implication to that effect. There is a strong believe in re-mythological concept of reincarnation in Benin tradition as an Africa. In this session the writer will discuss the implication of reincarnation in Benin Tradition Religion.

The Implication of Reincarnation on the Family

The position of reincarnation is very high in Benin tradition with its prospect of good and bad. Every family is very mindful on how and what they do to the deceased before burying the person and the history of what led to the death of the deceased is often kept in mind by the family members who were alive during that period of burial ceremony, this is done in order to ascertain how to treat the person when he or she comes back to life again. The re-mythology in this aspect is that reincarnation is real, with what happens in Benin Tradition today, it has shown that reincarnation is 80-90 percent real in Benin tradition and culture even Christians believe in curse, ancestors and with the concept of tradition and this also informed the prayer of most Christians that has to do with broken curses, spells and ancestors problems before they could embarrass success in their lives. This is done because the Christians believe the spirit of the dead person can interfere with the living thereby causing havoc in the lives of the individual.

The implications on the individual

The prospect about reincarnation on the individuals is that the person who dies has an opportunity to choose whether he or she will reincarnate to whatever state of life desirable by the lifestyle he or she lived before death. This has to do with the character and behaviour of individuals. For instance, it is believed when a woman who lived all her life as a sex worker, when she dies and reincarnates she will not be faithful to her husband because she has destroyed her life and some al-trances may have been released along the line by some known and unknown person which is capable of affecting her negatively in the next life to come. This is the same to both men and women, and the implication of these is that those who lived a bad life will experience misfortune in life as far as progress is concerned and it

is also believe that the ancestor will have punished the person for all the misbehave or misdeed towards self and others. But for those who lived good life, in their reincarnation the family they will come through will not experience any misfortune.

The implication of reincarnation in the Religion of the people

Religion is the belief in a spiritual reality which often including at least one deity, there is no way one can separate reincarnation from religion. Religion is for the people and the people are for religion because every religion addresses one issue or the other in the life and practices of the society. If the society most stands, then religions must be observed and practice. In Benin tradition religion has a great affirmation that the deity is in charge of both fortune and unfortunat act this made reincarnation to be real because it has to do with both living and the dead. It is the deity that rewards or punish anyone whether now or thereafter for their evil deeds. As so reincarnation is also another miss of valuing and dragging people to our traditional believe and practices from the religion angle.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The issue of reincarnation in Africa generally is very important. There is known in every part of Africa that reincarnation is practiced either in half or fully whether Christian or non-Christian. The Benin Tradition till date believe in reincarnation of every souls who exist and is believed to have come from Benin land, this has kept the Benin people to lived good life and properly give befitting burial by showing concern to the life lived before and after death before any burial ceremony. The view of reincarnation in Africa should be respected and given a deep consideration in every aspect of the people's tradition. This will help us to maintain good balanced living because of the hope of coming back to life.

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