

In Honour of a War Deity: Ọ̀bẹ̀dú Festival in Ọ̀bà-Ilé in Ọ̀sun State, Nigeria

by

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Abstract

This paper focuses on an account of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú, a deity in Yorùbá land that is popular and instrumental to the survival of the Ọ̀bà-Ilé people in Ọ̀sun State, Nigeria. Data for the study was drawn from interviews conducted with eight informants in Ọ̀bà-Ilé which comprised of the king, three chiefs, three Ọ̀bẹ̀dú priests, and the palace bard. Apart from the interviews, the town was visited during the annual festival of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú and where the performances were recorded. In paying attention to the history and orature of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú, it was found out that Ọ̀bẹ̀dú who was deified, was also a great herbalist, warrior and Ifá priest during his life time. It was concluded that the survival of Ọ̀bà-Ilé and the progress achieved, could be linked to the observance of the Ọ̀bẹ̀dú festival, and that a failure not continue the event would be detrimental to the community.

Introduction

The worldview of the Yorùbá, a race which is domiciled mainly in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, cannot be properly understood without a good knowledge of their belief about their deities and gods. In Yorùbá mythology, gods and deities are next to Olódùmarè and, as such, they are revered and worshipped (Idowu 1962). The Yorùbá believe in spirits, ancestors and unseen forces and whenever they are confronted with some problems, they often seek the support of gods and deities by offering sacrifices to them and by appeasing them. In the same manner, the Yorùbá believe in and worship the òrìṣà (i.e., gods) because they (the Yorùbá) consider Olódùmarè (i.e. God) to be too big and unique for any human being to have a direct access to and that God “does not interfere directly in natural events and history but works through a host of intermediaries” (see Idowu 1962: 56). The supremacy and the exalted position of God is highly recognized among the Yorùbá as noted by Idowu (1973:56) when he says:

Yorùbá theology emphasises the unique status of Olódùmarè. He is supreme over all on earth and in heaven, acknowledged by all the divinities as the Head to whom all authority belongs and all allegiance is due. . . His status of supremacy is absolute. Things happen when He approves, things do not come to pass if He disapproves. In worship, the Yorùbá holds Him ultimately First and Last; in man's daily life, He has the ultimate pre-eminence.

The òrìṣà and deities thus serve as the intermediaries between God and Man in Yorùbá cosmology just as Jesus is believed to be the intercessor between God and Man in Christianity. Farrow (1962:30) explains why the Yorùbá do not consult Olódùmarè directly by saying “God is too exalted to be approached with the familiarity shown towards the divinities and too high and distant to be offered sacrifices and prayers”. Adeoye (1979) also supports Farrow’s view by claiming that divinities serve as intermediaries between God and human beings; and whenever there are teething problems confronting human beings, whether as individuals or as a community, it is these divinities that can appease Olódùmarè. Adeoye (1979:10) has this to say concerning the mediating roles of gods and divinities:

Ìgbàgbò àwọn baba-ńlá wa ni pé àwọn Irúnmọ̀lẹ̀ ati àwọn òrìṣà tabi àkàndá èdà wa láàrin Ọ̀lọ̀run àti àwa èdà ọ̀wọ̀ rẹ̀ tí ó dá sí ilẹ̀ ayé; àti pé ní àtètèkọ̀ṣe tí Ọ̀lọ̀run dá imọ̀ràn pé, ẹ̀ wá, ẹ̀ jẹ́ kí á dá ènìyàn ní àwòrán ara wa, àwọn tí ó kẹ́ sí ni àwọn irúnmọ̀lẹ̀, èyí sì ni àwọn irúnmọ̀lẹ̀ nàà: Ọ̀bàtálá, Ọ̀rúnmilá, Ọ̀gún, Èṣù, Èlà àti Ṣàngó. Ọ̀lọ̀run yìí ni Olúwa àwọn Irúnmọ̀lẹ̀ wọ̀nyí àti àwọn àkàndá èdà tí ó di òrìṣà tí ó fi jẹ́ pé ọ̀kànlénírínwó òrìṣà ni o wa ni ilẹ̀ Yorùbá.

(The belief of our ancestors is that divinities and gods as well as deified-ancestors serve as intermediaries between God and human beings on earth; and in the beginning when God said, ‘Come, let us create man in our own image’, those He invited were divinities, and the divinities are Ọ̀bàtálá, Ọ̀rúnmilá, Ogun, Èṣù, Èlà and Ṣàngó. God is the Lord over all these divinities and heroes that became gods which makes the number of divinities in Yorùbá land four hundred and one.)

According to Kanu (2013:539), the divinities are the off-springs of the Supreme Being who “share aspects of the divine status” and are accountable to God in the way they relate with human beings.

There is a serious controversy regarding the exact number of divinities in Yorùbá land as the figure often ranges from 201, 1700, 1440 to 401 (see Idowu 1962). However, each divinity has a specific duty or function assigned to him by God. For instance, in Yorùbá mythology, Ọ̀bàtálá or Ọ̀rìṣà-ńlá is the divinity responsible for molding human beings, Ọ̀rúnmilá specializes in healing and revealing secrets while Ọ̀ṣun is the goddess that is in charge of giving children to barren women. Also, in the African worldview, there is hierarchy among the divinities. Idowu (1962:71) says:

Òrìṣà-nlá is the supreme divinity of Yorùbá land. As his name implies, he is the great or arch-divinity. It is sometimes said that he (Ọbàtálá) is the father of all the òrìṣà of Yorùbáland and it was he who gave each one of them the name òrìṣà, thus naming them after himself.

Yorùbá gods are worshipped by their devotees and, in most cases, each of the gods has an ‘abọrẹ’, who is referred to by different names such as àwòrò, abọrìṣà, abọkẹ, babaláwo, ìyálórìṣà and bàbálórìṣà. The abọrẹ is the spiritual leader of a particular god and it is his or her duties to ensure that sacrifices are offered to the god at the appropriate time. According to Dopámú (1981:38), deities and gods “have their shrines, temples, devotees, priests and priestesses, and they are offered worship and receive day-to-day sacrifices.” Apart from the day-to-day sacrifices and occasional offerings to òrìṣà when an individual is advised to do so, almost every deity is celebrated at a particular period of the year. In most towns in Yorùbá land (e.g., Ilé-Ifẹ, Oṅdó, Òmù-Òkẹ, Adó-Èkìtì and Ìrè-Èkìtì) for instance, we have *Ọdún Ọ̀gún* (Ọ̀gún festival) which sometimes lasts for a week. During this period, people would come from different places (home and abroad) to celebrate with the devotees of Ọ̀gún, to ask Ọ̀gún for one thing or the other or to show appreciation for what Ọ̀gún did for them the previous year.

As it is generally believed, failure to worship the gods of the land and offer sacrifices to them at the appropriate time may result in epidemic, barrenness, death of the young and the old as well as chaos. There are thus several reasons why people revere and worship their deities as hinted at above. While farmers who want their farm products to be bountiful can worship Òrìṣà oko, couples who are barren and are in need of children may run to Ọ̀ṣun just as hunters and warriors going to war must seek the approval of Ọ̀gún and Sàngó before embarking on such a war. As many as deities are in Yorùbá land, they have different areas of specialization: some are for healing; Ọbàtálá specializes in creation while others are known for giving children to barren women. Westerlund (2006:121) supports this view by saying “God is the ruler, and the divinities are his ministers or servants. Each of them *is governor of a certain department* and constantly controlled by God” (italics mine).

Having given a general background, the present study is aimed at revisiting the belief that Ọ̀gún and other arch-divinities such as Sàngó are the only war gods in Yorùbá land. While Ọ̀gún is notorious for being the god of war across Yorùbá land (Dopamu 1981), there are other town-specific deities and lesser gods who had, in the past, protected their towns against invasion and who had also helped their towns to become victorious during wars in the past. Sadly, the vast literature on war deities focus on Ọ̀gún, Sàngó, Ọya and Ọ̀ṣun at the expense of town-specific deities and their roles in saving their people during wars (Idowu 1973; Westerlund 2006). In view of the fact that there is no known scholarly work on Obedu, to the best of our knowledge, this study provides an account of Obedu as a deity in Oba-Ile by focusing mainly on his status as a warrior and its festival.

Festivals in Yorùbá Land

There are numerous works on Yorùbá festivals starting from the time of Ogunba and Irele(1978), Ogunba (1967) to the recent time of Ogungbile (1998) and Olaniyan (2014). Festivals constitute an important part in the life of Yorùbá people generally. Most festivals in Yorùbá land are religious and as Idowu (1962:5) has remarked, “the keynote of their [Yorùbá people] life is their religion. In all things they are religious, religion forms the foundation and the all governing principle of life for them.” Ogungbile (1998) links festivals to a form of religious identity which enables people of a community to come together and participate in the celebration of their deities. Such participation in honour of traditional deities becomes a chief means of forming a social bond, solidarity and identity formation (Ogungbile 1998). It is in their festivals that their cultures, language, dance, music and taboos are reflected. Oderinde (2011:2) also points out that “Festival periods are luminal periods when people come together as a group, renew their relationships and strengthen their cohesion. They are sort of sacred times when people are free from the social constraints of normal life in an intense form of social communion and solidarity.” Usually, the period is a period of re-union and it also affords people of the opportunity to reflect on the past deeds of their ancestors and heroes. More than this, people are often closer to their gods and deities through the observance of certain traditions and customs. Festivals are annual among the Yorùbá; they occur sometimes on a particular day and month of the year and at times, the day is determined after consulting Ifá as “he serves as a middle-man or the go-between of other gods and the people, and between the people and their ancestors” (Şobola 1988:6).

According to Olaniyan (2014:327), a festival is “a celebration, a commemoration to mark a particular event or a situation.” A festival may also be performed to honour a hero or deity with a view to bringing to the memory of the living the feats performed by such a hero in the past and how he or she positively impacted his or her society. A brief review of one or two of this is provided here. Awolalu and Dopamu (2005:153) say:

Most festivals are associated with specific divinities, spirits or ancestors and they are, therefore, religious in outlook. Among the Yorùbá, for example, each divinity has an annual festival associated with him or her and this is called *Ọdún* (festival). *Ọdún* also means year and when used in relation to festival it means an “annual festival”. This means that major festivals among the Yorùbá come up every season or year.

Akintan (2013), by focusing on female-oriented cults’ annual festivals in *Ìjẹ̀bùland* investigates how modernity has affected the performances of traditional religious festivals in the area. Some of these female-oriented festivals are *Iyemulẹ* and *Iyemoji*. She remarks that female-oriented cults’ festivals in *Ìjẹ̀bùland* often take place every year for fourteen days except in *Ìjẹ̀bù-Igbó* where they take place for twenty-one days. The study chronicles the day-to-day events of each of the fourteen days by focusing on the roles of the various participants.

She claims that “Though, through modern education, technological know-how, contact with other world religions, some aspects of the religion have changed, some aspects still survive and some would be changed or transformed to meet the needs of the changing times and generation to come” (Akintan 2013:272) as, in spite of their affinities with Islam and Christianity, Ìjẹ̀bú people still “take active part in the celebration of the traditional festivals” (p274). The study concludes that Ìjẹ̀bú festivals will continue to thrive because they serve as social bonds that encourage group solidarity for the entire community and that Ìjẹ̀bú people “now tie other important events like development programs, fund raising and awards of traditional chieftaincy titles to the celebration of the festivals” (p. 275). An earlier study, Akanji and Dada (2012), has reported how foreign religions (Christianity and Islam) have been affecting some Yorùbá festivals. One of such festivals is Orò festival. During Orò festival, women are not allowed to participate or go out when Orò is out as they must not see Orò emblem. For men, it is a festival that allows them to be free and a bit loose as they can use vulgar words as they like. Akanji and Dada (2012:21), remarking on the clashes between adherents of Orò and those of Christianity and Islam, say “In recent days, Orò festival has become a serious contending issue in Yorùbá Society between the Orò cult members and adherents of other religions (Christianity and Islam)”.

Olaniyan (2014) examines Ọ̀ṣun Ọ̀ṣogbo festival in Ọ̀ṣun State by concentrating on the day-to-day activities of how Ọ̀ṣun is celebrated from the preparatory stage of the festival to the actual performance stage. Ọ̀láníyan’s study was divided into three sections. First, the study examined three important myths, among other myths, that surrounded the origin of Ọ̀ṣun as a deity and, second, provided a full account of the day-to-day activities of the celebration of this deity. Finally, the study analysed the various features of a festival theatre as exemplified in the festival. The word observed that theatrical elements such as dramatic personae, arena, costume, dance and music abound in Ọ̀ṣun festival. The paper concluded that if various cultural festivals in Nigeria must be deployed to boost the economy of the country through tourist attraction, they have to be upgraded to national and international status.

Methodology

The data for this study were drawn from the interviews conducted from 2011 to 2012 at Ọ̀bà-Ilé in Ọ̀lórunda Local Government, Ọ̀ṣun State. Eight people were interviewed and before the interview was conducted, they showed their willingness to participate and be asked questions. They were also assured that their anonymity would be protected but some of them, especially those who were chiefs and indigenes, wanted their names to be mentioned for some reasons probably known to them. Those that were interviewed included the king, Ọ̀lóbà-Ọ̀bèdú Ọ̀ba Michael Adébisí Ọ̀láyínká, the Balógun of Ọ̀bà-Ilé, Dr Kólá Oyewo, the Eésà of Ọ̀bà-Ilé, Chief Rájí, the Arugbá (the female calabash carrier), the Àwòrò of Ọ̀bèdú as well as the palace bard. The interview with each of the participants lasted for an average of an hour and the interviews were tape-recorded while our research assistant took pictures with a photo camera.

During the interviews, the questions that the participants were asked bothered on the history of Ọ̀bà-Ilé, how it was founded, the deities in the town, the primacy of Ọ̀bèdú over other deities and what the consequence of not observing Ọ̀bèdú festival could be. Apart from the interviews, we visited the town during the annual festivals of Ọ̀bèdú and the performances were recorded with a video camera which enabled the researcher to have pictures of the major participants in the festival. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed by drawing insights from some of the works on festivals and deities reviewed above.

Data Analysis and Discussions

In this section, we shall discuss different aspects through which Ọ̀bèdú can be examined. The section shows Ọ̀bèdú as a co-founder of Ọ̀bà-Ilé, as a warrior and as a deity among others.

Ọ̀bèdú as a Deity and as a Co-founder of Ọ̀bà-Ilé: The Historical Evidence

There is no way one can recount the history of Ọ̀bà-Ilé without emphasising the role of Ọ̀bèdú because without him, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for Ọ̀bà-Ilé in Ọ̀ṣun State to be founded. Ọ̀bà-Ilé is a small community which is about twenty kilometers northwest of Ọ̀ṣogbo; it is in Ọ̀lórundá Local Government Area of Ọ̀ṣun State. According to the king, His Royal Majesty, Ọ̀ba Michael Adébíṣí Ọ̀láyínká, the town was founded around 12th century by Odùyalé Àgámú who happened to be one of Odùduwà's sons. The king narrated that Odùyalé was an Ifá priest as well as a renowned herbalist. Though an Ifá priest and a herbalist, his wives were barren and he could not rear children. When he made inquiry from another babaláwo (Ifá priest), he was asked to leave Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and found his own town if he really wanted to have children. As soon as he left the priest, he went straight to his close friend, Ọ̀bèdú who was a hunter and a herbalist, to let him know what he was asked to do. Ọ̀bèdú who was older than Odùyalé encouraged him to heed the advice of the oracle.

Odùyalé made up his mind to leave Ilé-Ifẹ̀; he went to bid his friend (Ọ̀bèdú) farewell and when he got there, Ọ̀bèdú, a herbalist who had promised to help his friend, gave Odùyalé a charm which would enable him to fly to the place that Ifá had already designated for him. And Ọ̀bèdú also promised his friend that he would always be with him and that as soon as he got to the designated place, he (Ọ̀bèdú) would be there waiting for him.

Odùyalé then went to tell his father, Odùduwà, and bid him farewell. Odùduwà gave his son the following items: adé ilẹ̀kẹ̀ (a beaded crown), ọ̀paga (an iron walking stick), Ọ̀dùro (a heavy iron rod) and jùfù (a magical bangle) to show that he (Odùyalé) was actually Odùduwà's son.

When Odùyalé used the charm his friend gave him, he suddenly found himself in a savannah forest where there were many demons shouting:

Kò ní balẹ̀	He will not descend
Kò ní balẹ̀	He will not descend
Kò ní balẹ̀.	He will not descend

Ọ̀bẹ̀dú, Odùyalé’s friend, suddenly appeared as promised, fought those demons and chased them away. After chasing them away, he started saying:

Ó balẹ̀ o o	He has descended
Ó balẹ̀ o o	He has descended
Ó balẹ̀ o o	He has descended

It was from this expression ‘Ó ba lẹ̀ o o, Ó ba lẹ̀ o o’ meaning ‘he has descended, he has descended) that the name Ọ̀bà-Ilé emanated from. This is why Ọ̀bà-Ilé indigenes are often referred to as “Ọ̀bà n̄ já, ọ̀mọ asẹ̀lokè” which means “Ọ̀bà people that descended from the sky.” Oyègòkè (2005:4) supported this when he said:

Then Odùyalé conjured the magical power given to him, flew above and landed in one thick forest called the ‘Forest of Demons’ (Igbó Àwọ̀n Ọ̀rọ̀). As he was trying to land, he was hearing voices shouting ‘Ó ba-lẹ̀ oo, Ó ba-lẹ̀ oo’ meaning he is landing, he is landing, which later metamorphosed to Ọ̀bà-Ilé and that is why Ọ̀bà-Ilé people are called ‘Ọ̀bà n̄ já ọ̀mọ sẹ̀lokè’ that is, Ọ̀bà people that descended from the sky.

After settling down with his wives in this town, Odùyalé had children and became very wealthy. Given his closeness with Ọ̀bẹ̀dú and the immeasurable assistance that Ọ̀bẹ̀dú had given Odùyalé, the name Ọ̀bẹ̀dú became permanently reflected in the title of Ọ̀bà-Ilé king till today: the kings are referred to as Olọ̀bà-Ọ̀bẹ̀dú of Ọ̀bà-Ilé and Odùyalé was the first Olọ̀bà-Ọ̀bẹ̀dú of Ọ̀bà-Ilé.

It was gathered that after several years, Ọ̀bẹ̀dú, being a spirit, a warrior and a hunter, had to leave Ọ̀bà-Ilé because he was always moving from one place to another. However, he promised the people of Ọ̀bà-Ilé that, in the event of any war, they should all gather together and be drumming. He instructed them that as they were drumming, they should also be shouting ‘Koríko dide, Èrúwà dide’ (Grasses stand up, grasses stand up) and that he would appear and fight for them. Ọ̀bẹ̀dú left and nobody knew his whereabouts for years.

The people of the town then thought that they should experiment what Ọ̀bẹ̀dú said even if there was no war: they did not believe him. After much persuasion, the king and the chiefs agreed with them. They started shouting the name of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú. Surprisingly, Ọ̀bẹ̀dú appeared with a multitude of warriors and started killing the supposed enemies. They had killed several people before Ọ̀bẹ̀dú realized that they were actually killing the indigenes of Ọ̀bà-Ilé. Ọ̀bẹ̀dú felt extremely sad and betrayed and he swore that as from that day no indigene of Ọ̀bà-Ilé must ever set his eyes on him again. That is why it is forbidden for any Ọ̀bà-Ilé indigene to go to the shrine of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú or be one of his priests. So, Ọ̀bẹ̀dú disappeared into the mother earth at Àdààsò where Ọ̀bà-Ilé was situated then. This place, Àdààsò, is where the shrine of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú is till today and this is the place he is being worshiped every year. As from that day, Ọ̀bẹ̀dú became an important deity in Ọ̀bà-Ilé. Whenever a war was to break out, the people of Ọ̀bà would go and offer sacrifices to Ọ̀bẹ̀dú through the priest, Àwòrò, who must be a non-indigene and they always won. They lived in Àdààsò for many years before they moved down to where they are today. It was during the reign of Ọ̀nǽ, the third Ọ̀lọ̀bà-Ọ̀bẹ̀dú of Ọ̀bà-Ilé, that they left and relocated to where they are now. During the Fùlaní war, some of them left for Akíntàngúgúlú otherwise known as Igbó Ọ̀lọ̀bà in Ìkirun, some went to Ọ̀bátẹ̀dó in Ọ̀sogbo while others remained where they are today. The majority of Ọ̀bà-Ilé people are farmers while some of them are artisans and fishermen.

Ọ̀bẹ̀dú as Herbalist

As can be gathered from the story above, Ọ̀bẹ̀dú was a herbalist. Ọ̀bẹ̀dú as a deity in Ọ̀bà-Ilé was revealed to be a renowned herbalist who had multifarious charms as shown in the following excerpt from the orature.

Excerpt 1

Adérohunmú!	Adérohunmú
Ọ̀bẹ̀dú Ọ̀bà	The Ọ̀bẹ̀dú of Ọ̀bà
Ọ̀títí Àgbé oníkòòkò odò	Ọ̀títí Àgbé; the one who planted cocoyam beside the river
Ọ̀mọ A-ṣu-pérépére-káko	The son of he who has several children
Ọ̀bẹ̀dú máà jẹ n ṣì rìn	Ọ̀bẹ̀dú let me not walk astray
Ọ̀bẹ̀dú máà jẹ n ṣì rìn	Let me not eat poison
Ọ̀bẹ̀dú máà jẹ n ṣì jẹ,	Ọ̀bẹ̀dú let me not meet wicked people
Ọ̀bẹ̀dú máà jẹ n pàdẹ abatenijé	Ọ̀bẹ̀dú
Ọ̀bẹ̀dú!	One day
Ojúmọ kan,	One charm
Oògùn kan,	Two days
Ojúmọ méjì,	Two charms
Oògùn méjì,	That charm that is not effective has one ingredient
Oògùn tí ò jẹ, ewé rẹ ló kù kan.	Missing

Olòbà Obèdú	The Obèdú of Òbà
Baba mi òògùn gunmọ galè	My father with terrible charms
Sàlàkọ ní bẹ ẹ lópọ oògùn	Sàlàkọ said if you have many charms
Ó ní bẹ ẹ lékèé kò ní jẹ	If you are not honest, they will not be effective
Omọ A-bòògùn-yí-gbì kájà	The son of he whose charms wander on the àjà (ceiling)

Excerpt 1 show that Obèdú is a herbalist who has many charms given the fact that a day is for a charm, and two days for two charms. This suggests that he produces a new charm every day and the efficacy of his charm cannot be questioned: Oògùn tí ò jẹ, ewé rẹ ló kù kan (Any charm that is not effective has an ingredient missing). Obèdú is Òtítí Àgbé which means nobody can wage war against him and win because of his charms. This excerpt confirms the king's claim above that Obèdú was well-versed in traditional medicine. It can also be gathered from the above excerpt that people, recognizing that he is a deity, often pray to him and make certain requests of him: Obèdú mǎà jẹ n s̄i jẹ (Obèdú, let me not eat poison). The Arugbá of Obèdú, during our interview with her, said:

Tí ẹnìkẹni tí ó n wá n̄nkankan tàbí òmíràn bá wá pèlú inú kan yòò sì tẹ ẹ lówó. Tí kò bá ti lo inú méjì, gbogbo n̄nkan tí ó bá n wá ni yòò di s̄ise. Kó sá ti béèrè pèlú inú kan ló se kókó.

If anybody that is in lack of one thing or the other came with faith, he would get it. If he has faith and he does not doubt, whatever he came for would be done and achieved. What is important is for the person to make his or her request with faith.

It is also indicated above that Obèdú is a lover of children; he had numerous children and that is why he is referred to as “Omọ A-ṣu-pẹrẹpẹrẹ-káko” (The son of he who has several children). In order to feed his children, he had to plant cocoyam; an indication that he was also a farmer. Very obvious in Excerpt 1 is the use of repetition which is an important stylistic device in oríkì (see Olátúnjí 1984). Each of Obèdú and Oògùn appears six times while there is syntactic parallelism in the two lines “Obèdú mǎà jẹ n s̄i rìn (Obèdú let me not walk astray) and “Obèdú mǎà jẹ n s̄i jẹ” (Obèdú, let me not eat poison).

His status as a herbalist could also be linked to the fact that he was an Ifá priest, babaláwo, while he was alive. Ifa priests are known to be endowed with the knowledge of charms and sacrifices (see Borokini and Lawal 2014). He is referred to as:

Excerpt 2

Adérohunmú!	Adérohunmú
A-jí-gbò-tIfá ni	The devotee of Ifá
A-jí-gbò-tòpèlè-ni	The devotee of the divine chain
Ifá náà ó gbè ọ	You will be rewarded by Ifá
Ọpèlè á tún tí ẹ ẹ ẹ	Ọpèlè will honour you
Olórí awo ni	The chief priest of Ifá
A-jí-gbò-tIfá	The devotee of Ifá
Olórí awo.	The chief priest

He was not just a babaláwo, he was a devoted one who rose to the exalted position of Ifá Chief Priest. As shown in the second and third lines, when he was alive, he had no other business other than Ifá divination

Ọbèdú as a Warrior

Ọbèdú was a war deity as evident in the narration of how Ọbà-Ilé was founded. Many of the interviewees testified to the fact that because of Ọbèdú, Ọbà-Ilé had never been conquered. The Balógun of Ọbà-Ilé, Chief Dr Kólá Oyewọ, during an interview with him, said:

Ọbèdú jẹ akíkanjú òrìṣà nínú ìlú yìí. Ó máa n ẹ irànlówọ fún wa ní àkókò ogun; á bá wa ja ogun, a sì máa n ẹgun àwọn ọtá wa. Òrìṣà jagunjagun ni òrìṣà yìí n ẹ. Ọbèdú máa n gba Ọbà-Ilé là ní àkókò ogun, kò sí bí ogun náà ẹ lè gbóná tó bí ajere tí ó lè kó Ọbà-Ilé lọ. Bí àpẹẹẹ, ní ìgbà ayé Ọbèdú, òun ni ó bá Ọlòbà Odùyalé ẹgun àwọn ẹbọra tí ó dojú ìjà kọ ọ nígbà tí ó fi Ilé-Ifẹ silẹ láti wá tẹ Ọbà-Ilé dó. Bákán náà, lẹyìn ìgbà tí ó di òrìṣà àkúnlẹbọ tán, ó tún bá àwọn Ọbà-Ilé jagun ẹgun àwọn Fúlàní.

(Ọbèdú was a great deity in this town. He always helped us during the time of war; he would fight the war, and we always conquered our enemies. He was a great warrior. Ọbèdú often saved Ọbà-Ilé in the time of war, and no matter how terrible the war was, Ọbà-Ilé would not be conquered. For instance, when Ọbèdú was alive, he helped King Odùyalé to conquer the demons that waged war against him when he left Ilé-Ifẹ to found Ọbà-Ilé. Similarly, after he had become a deity, he led the Ọbà-Ilé people to fight and win the Fúlàní's war.)

As Finnegan (1977) and Olátúnjí (1984) have pointed out, the attributes and the characters of a person are usually found in their praise poetry. In the praise poetry of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú lineage, Ọ̀bẹ̀dú is often presented to us as a warrior:

Excerpt 3

Ọ̀mọ Aláwowò tó gbìyan	The son of a massive cave
Tó gberú,	The can accommodate slaves
Tó gbọ̀mọ	That can accommodate children

The palace bard, during the interview, explained that these three lines portrayed Ọ̀bẹ̀dú as a wise warrior who would never expose his children to unnecessary danger. When he was alive, he had a cave where he normally kept Ọ̀bà-Ilé indigenes especially women and children for protection during war. Even after he became a deity, Ọ̀bà-Ilé indigenes always hid in this dungeon during war as one of the chiefs said. As we were told, this cave which is located very close to the shrine at Àdààsò, still exists at Ọ̀bà-Ilé till today.

Ọ̀bẹ̀dú Festival in Ọ̀bà-Ilé, Ọ̀ṣun State

Ọ̀bẹ̀dú festival is an annual festival that brings all the indigenes of Ọ̀bà-Ilé together every year. This festival usually takes place on the last Sunday of October every year but the preparation for it starts in September every year when all the Ifá priests in the town would gather at the King's palace to consult Ifá so as to be properly guided towards the preparation. The preparation towards this annual festival often spans an average of a month before the actual date of the festival. During this month, the Ifá priests and Ọ̀bẹ̀dú priest would be appeasing Ọ̀bẹ̀dú by offering various sacrifices to him at his shrine located at Àdààsò, an outskirt of the town.

The final day of the festival is the most interesting one. This is when visitors and indigenes come around, launch projects that can bring advancement to the town and donate generously towards the actualization of such projects. Early in the morning of the final day, the Arugbá (the calabash carrier) of Ọ̀bẹ̀dú will carry a calabash containing the sacrifice for Ọ̀bẹ̀dú and will dance around the town.

Figure 1: The Arugbá of Ọ̀bèdú in Ọ̀bà-Ilé, Ọ̀sun State



As she dances around the town, she will be praying and people will be following her around; dancing, praying and making specific requests. The Arugba dance is accompanied by songs and the dance goes on till around 4pm in the evening.

Before she comes back around 4pm, the Agbópàá of Ọ̀bèdú, the man who carries the Ọ̀bèdú staff, will go to Ọ̀bèdú shrine to bring the staff to the palace. As soon as the staff gets to the palace, the king, all the chiefs and Ọ̀bèdú adherents will then follow Agbópàá to the shrine to offer the yearly sacrifice. As pointed out earlier, the Agbópàá and other Ọ̀bèdú priests together with non-indigenes will then go to Ọ̀bèdú shrine and the indigenes will have to wait for them at some distance to the shrine. At the shrine, the priests will offer another set of sacrifices to Ọ̀bèdú with items such as kolanut, pounded yam, palm wine, bitter nut and ègúsí (melon) soup. It is believed that once this is done, there will be peace in the town and epidemics will not break out. The priests will also pray for the King and the chiefs and all indigenes of Ọ̀bà-Ilé. It is about this time that those who have one request or the other will make their requests and those who want to redeem their pledges for requests granted will also do so.

Figure 2: The Agbópàá of Ọ̀bèdú in Ọ̀bà-Ilé, Ọ̀ṣun State



When asked what could happen if Ọ̀bèdú's festival is not observed for a year, the Arugbá of Ọ̀bèdú exclaimed and said:

Há à, wàhálà lè seṣẹ̀. Àwọn ilú tó ti wá le gbógun tí wa, ta ni yó bá wa jagun, tí ogun bá dé? Ọ̀jò lè ma rọ̀ rárá. Bì Ọ̀bèdú se jẹ̀ òrìṣà Ọ̀gún tó, bí ọ̀jò kò bá rọ̀ tàbí tó bá n bínú, tí a bá ti bọ̀ ọ̀, ọ̀jò á rọ̀; ara á sì tù wá. Tí a kò bá bọ̀ ọ̀, àjàkálẹ̀ àrùn lè bẹ̀ sílẹ̀; tí ara á sì máa ni àti ara ilé, àti ará oko.

(Ah, there may be catastrophe. The neighbouring towns may wage war against us. When the war breaks out, who will fight for us? Rain may refuse to fall. As Ọ̀bèdú is a warrior, if there is no rain or when he is angry, as soon as we offer sacrifices to him, rain will fall and everybody will be at peace. If we do not worship him, there may be epidemics, and everybody will be suffering.)

There are some taboos that are related to Ọ̀bèdú as a deity. First is the fact that the king and all indigenes of Oba must never enter his shrine. Another taboo is that green drawl soup known as ewédú must not get to his shrine. None of the people interviewed could give the reason for this but they said the consequence of taking it there is that there will be a quarrel and people will be fighting one another right from the shrine.

Conclusion

This paper has given an account of a deity that is not very popular across Yorùbá land but who is very important in the life of a community, Ọ̀bà-Ilé, in Ọ̀ṣun State. As demonstrated in the account, the history of Ọ̀bà-Ilé, an important ancient city in Ọ̀ṣun State, is not complete and cannot even be told without references to this deity. The study, by examining the orature and the myths of Ọ̀bèdú, showed that Ọ̀bèdú was a human being who became deified for his good deeds among his people. When he was alive, he was a warrior, a herbalist, a farmer and an Ifá priest. Ọ̀bèdú festival can also be likened to other festivals in Yorubaland as it has features like shrine, sacrifice, taboos, performance involving orature and dance, priests, and other ritual features. It can be concluded that the secret behind the existence and success of Ọ̀bà-Ilé till today is as a result of the observance of Ọ̀bèdú festival and the annual sacrifices offered to this deity.

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