

WOMEN AS VOCALISTS IN SANGO CULT OF YORUBA INDIGENOUS RELIGION: AN ANALOGY FOR THE ROLES OF MODERN WOMEN IN NIGERIAN POLITICS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In every aspect of our national development, the roles of women cannot be over emphasized. This fact is also applicable in the religious life of our country. Generally speaking, religious music is an important aspect of worship and it differs from one religious tradition to another. Although some cults in traditional religion are gender biased and exclude women from playing prominent roles yet, in others, they are indispensable. In this paper, an attempt is made to showcase the relevance of women in Yoruba Indigenous Religion especially, in the cult of Sango (the god of thunder). Although there are offices that women cannot occupy in this cult, their role as vocalists who champion the chanting of the concerned divinity is emphasized. An analogy is drawn for the unique roles of women in national development inspite of the notion that they are not allowed to play leading roles in Politics. The author employed historical-analytical method, personal observation, personal oral interview with the vocalists, and consulted relevant works of other scholars. The work discovers that a lot is revealed in the religious chanting about the attributes as well as the beliefs of the devotees in relation to the divinity. These can be likened to the significant roles of women in our society. The paper concludes that as the role of these women cannot be over emphasized in a non-scriptural religion where they preserve traditions, so are the unique roles of women in our society. Although the modern women may not be occupying certain political offices, they can still experience fulfilment by serving in several other areas of both domestic and national development.

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in any society cannot be over emphasised. This importance cuts across every sphere of life. For instance, in the religious life of the African, women are represented as the origin of human life through God in many tribal myths. Drawing an inference through such myths John Mbiti says, "The main idea here is to link human life directly with God through the woman. She is created by God, and in turn becomes the instrument of human life. She rightly becomes the one who passes on life."¹ Speaking further on the significance of their role in religion, the author also pointed out their engagement in prayers, not only for themselves and their family members, but also for the society in general.² In this paper however, their role in African Traditional Religion, especially, as vocalists in Sango cult of the Yoruba pantheon is considered. It is considered in light of the fact that the traditions of

¹Mbiti, John, "The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion." Available at www.afrikaworld.net. Accessed 14/7/2011

² Ibid.

the cult are preserved in the chants thus performing similar roles of written sacred texts. An inference of the roles of women in the cult is drawn for modern women in their desire for better participatory roles in politics and political offices in Nigeria.

SANGO CULT IN A TYPICAL YORUBA TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY 3

Sango is believed, by a legend, to be a powerful king in his life time. He was said to be the fourth Alafin of Oyo, who ruled his people with iron hands. He could bring fire out of his mouth, and display various magical arts. At a time, the situation was becoming unbearable for his subjects and of his chiefs challenged his authority. The pressure was becoming too tough for him and he cunningly set his opponents one against the other resulting into the death of one of them. The one who survived the plan bent on getting rid of the tyrant. Sango was forced out the throne and he finally committed suicide by hanging himself on an *ayan* tree. Taunted by Sango's opponents that the King had committed suicide, his followers came up with idea that he rather ascended into heaven. It was then believed that he fought his enemies who were ridiculing him and his followers by sending thunder and lightning. He was deified after his death. The followers always stand in defence of Sango to refute the notion about the manner of his death by declaring that *Oba ko so* meaning, "the King did not hang himself"⁴ Another version of the myth in connection with Sango claims that he was an offspring of Yemaja. He married three of his sisters namely: Oya (who later turned to River Niger); Osun (who became River Osun); and Oba (who became another river with that name). The image of the Orisa is always found standing in its shrine surrounded by those of his wives.⁵ Among the Yoruba, Sango is believed to be a tutelary divinity with priests and priestesses in its cult. It is one of the divinities that are worshipped throughout the Yorubaland.⁶

As stated earlier, Sango is one of the most popular cults that cut across Yorubaland. In Shao, the cult was brought to the community through Bioku who accompanied prince Olanibo, the first Ohoro from Oyo-Ile. A Sango worshipper, Bioku brought with him a number of deities, which became established in Shao. He became the chief priest for Sango cult with the title, *Ekerin Mogba*. The family compound, *Ile Ekerin* is located in the Oke Siniga Ward of Shao. Like every other religious cult, the adherents of Sango continued to grow from this family. Some joined the cult through the influence of friends. ⁷ Apart from this means, some also became members because their parents, on inquiry from Ifa, discovered that Sango is their child's chosen Orisa from heaven. Such were made to join the cult when they are mature enough for the rite of initiation. Another very important means is in the situation where the parents asked for the child from Sango. Such becomes a covenant child and joins the cult through proper initiation at the ripe age.⁸ Other people also become

3 The typical Yoruba Community referred to here is Shao, in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria.

4 Idowu, Bolaji. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. Great Britain: William Clowes and Son, 1962, p.88

5 Ellis, A. B. *Yorub-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast Of West Africa: their Religion, Manner, Customs, Laws, Language, etc* (1894) {scanned at sacred-texts.com, December, 1999}. Available at www.sacred-texts.com. Accessed on July 13, 2011.

6 Awolalu, J.O. and P.A. Dopamu, *West Africa Traditional Religion*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Onibonjo Press, 1979, p. 84.

7 Oke, Wole. *Shao: My People, Their Tradition, Custom and Culture*. Ilorin: Matanmi & Sons., 1996, pp. 62, 63

8 *Ibid.*, p.34

members of this cult when it is revealed to them through dreams or visions or through divination as a result of persistent sicknesses.⁹ For people in this category, the belief is that it will be difficult for them to make it in life until they take to these instructions. It is also apparent in the chant, presented for the researcher by two devotees in Shao, that when Sango strikes down an offender, the family members must give one of his children or close relation for initiation.

The membership of the cult is generally sustained, as a child replaces the deceased parent who belonged to the cult. The replacement is not limited to any gender, as such may be a male or female child. A good example of the later is that of Madam Wuraola Jimoh – one of the women who presented the chanting below.

The adherents of this cult in Shao are of two categories: The Mogba, (the Ekerin), and the Adosu (headed by the Baale Sango). Each of the Adosu's has his or her taboo (*eewo*), right from the time of initiation, the violation of which can lead to a sudden possession by the spirit of Sango.¹⁰ The point here is, apart from the annual festival time when one of the male devotees must be possessed, possession can also take place by the violation of a devotee's taboo irrespective of gender. According to Madam Wuraola Jimoh whose *eewo* is avoidance of sudden splash of water, what she usually does whenever she needs to cross a river with other people is to get into the river first and splashes water on herself. ¹¹ Whenever anyone acts in a way that breaks the taboo, the cult member in question would scream and run toward the offender with the aim of grasping him or her. In this high spirit, the blood of a cock, (whose head is suddenly pulled off), and palm oil are some of the items that would be required to calm the possessed down. ¹² Within the shortest possible time, the *bata* drummers would gather as he or she is led to the compound of the Ekerin Mogba for further rituals.

This form of casual possession can happen to a devotee irrespective of gender. However, more exciting and crowd-pulling ones are those in which a man is possessed. At the moment when the spirit descends on one, one is cut off from what he is doing. In the past, when most of the houses were thatched, he would reach out to the nearest thatched roof and pull out grasses. He sets the grasses on fire from the end and starts moving toward *Ekerin Magba* s compound. As mentioned before, the drummers would join him in the shortest possible time after the possession. From *Ekerin*, he moves to his own house to put on his ceremonial dress. The dress, which is usually sleeveless *buba* and knickers, are heavily decorated with cowry shells and dyed in red with camwood¹³ With this dress, a pot of fire on his head, and a wooden box containing his magical tools carried by a relation or a young *adosu*, the Sango – as now referred to– is set to dance round the town. As he moves round, the crowd gather behind him with whom he finally settles at the central market. For about two hours, the possessed man would be busy dancing and displaying magical powers. Such display can range from producing sweets, cigarettes and money to eating fire, sitting on sharp objects, cutting his tongue or drilling sharp iron through the tongue or slaying a man and bringing him back to life. These are always crowd-pulling scenes in the community.

⁹Bamgbose, Ojo, aged 71 years, the Baale Sango of Shao, Bamgbose Compound Oke-Boo, Shao, interviewed, December 25, 2002

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Jimoh, Wuraola aged 58 years and Layoonu Adeogun, aged 54 years, Sango Devotees and Singers, Alawon Compound, Shao, Songs recorded in Shao on July 6, 2004

¹²Alabi, Salawu. The Ekerin Mogba of Shao. Aged, 68 years, interviewed on August 14, 2002.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The relevance of this account here is the fact the women cult members do not go the extent of performing magic and thus comparatively less crowd-pulling and spectacular. Their major role, during the annual festival and other occasions is for the women *Adosu* to chant praises of Sango. The above description in which a possessed male devotee displays and pulls crowd and his fellow female in the same cult chants and dances along may project the cult as been gender bias. However, a closer look at the significance of such chanting in relation to the males' performances in Sango cult reveals differences in roles rather than importance.

CHANTING AS AN ORAL SACRED TEXT

In various religious traditions, there are texts that are regarded as sacred and are of great importance in the practice of such religion. These religious texts are called by various names including: scriptures, holy writ, or holy books. Such is the bible for the Christians and Qur'an for the Muslims. They are highly esteemed as they are believed to be divinely inspired and connected with the supernatural. In some religion, these religious texts are freely made available for the use of people while in other they are kept secret and reserved only for the use of the faithful and the initiates.¹⁴ The general idea and concept of scriptures is that they are only in a written form. As much as the existence of such is a common knowledge, it is also important to realise that in some religions there are no written religious texts. This is the situation in African Traditional Religion.¹⁵

Addressing the same issue Awolalu explains that it is a common knowledge that traditional religion in Africa lacks written literature to serve as its sacred book or scripture. This notwithstanding, the liturgy is well preserved through songs, chants, ritual, dance, carvings, myths, etc. Commenting on the importance of preserving the tradition through the aforementioned means by various cultic functionaries Awolalu says:

The people have always had their cultic functionaries whose main concern is to preserve, among other things, the traditional conduct of worship. These people approach their task with awe and seriousness, always conscious of the fact that any omission in the normal order of service or any wrong word uttered or song not properly rendered during the service, could incur the displeasure of the deity and jeopardise the efficacy of worship....where things depends on what is stored up in human memory.¹⁶

Commenting further on the nature of scripture as it applies to the Yoruba religion Olajubu states that, in Yoruba religion, the scripture is neither closed or static but is normally coded. The Oral form of scripture exists in form of Ifa corpus, certain legends as well as proverbs and wise sayings. In modern time, some sources of the oral text are been documented. Commenting further the author says,

...Yoruba scripture includes prescriptions that emanate from daily enactment of ritual through diverse modes of performance and recitations. Often this involves recitation of praise names (*oriki*) for the *orisa*, which may result in spirit possession from which messages are transmitted to worshippers. Hence the content of Yoruba scripture is dynamic and multifarious. Nonetheless, its prescriptions are agreeable and accessible to people worldwide irrespective of nationality or cultural affiliation.¹⁷

¹⁴ Religious Text. Available at www.en.wikipedia.org, the free encyclopedia Accessed 14/7/2011)

¹⁵ Olajubu, Oyeronke. Signifying Scriptures from an African Religious Perspective. Available at www.unilorin.edu.ng. Accessed 14/7/2011

¹⁶ Awolalu, J. Omsade, *Yoruba Belifs and Sacrificial Rites*. Burnt Mill, UK: Longman Group, 1979,pp. 99,100.

¹⁷ Olajubu,, Available at www.unilorin.edu.ng.

Through these songs of praise, the divinity's attributes, characters, activities as well as the beliefs of the adherents are revealed. The belief is, as in the people's social life, "that when the praise-names are given, or sung, the divinities will be moved to pay attention to the worshipers and thus heed their requests and wishes."¹⁸ From this angle, it is apparent that the term scripture cannot be limited to a text that is written or product that is finished. In its oral form, it should not be regarded as a text that exists with no relation to the people's experiences. According to Olajubu, "the process of recitation and memory recall could produce salient socio-cultural paradigm that impacts the people's religious consciousness significantly."¹⁹

TYPICAL CHANTING IN SANGO CULT

Different conceptions and the beliefs of the adherents of Sango in Yorubaland are revealed in the verses of the following chant as rendered by two of the outstanding Sango worshipping women in Shao community. Some stanzas of the chant are as follows:

	Yoruba Version		Translations
1.	<p><i>.Eni o ri mi wa ba jaye o. Atu won kaa nibi won ti n dana 'ro. Bilisi osa ti bi 'mo l'oro egbaa odun o o Ada fun Owaa 'lu baale koso Ewegbemi²⁰ dafun baba temi o si ru Eni o debo fun ti o ba ru Ewegbemi fii le re o maa lo. N ti se won o ni pada lehin won Atan na gun'gi bi a re eyin ta ni reyin ti o ni mu'na lowo Ojagun kanngu booli.</i></p>	1.	<p>The one I am destined to live in luxury with He that scatters the gathering of liars A devilish divinity that queries one of a case of over two thousand years He performed Ifa divination for the chief, himself Koso chief Ewegbemi, you perform Ifa divination for my own father and he makes the sacrifice Those who disregard your divination Ewegbemi, leave them with their choices They will live with their problems Such are like a man who lights a lamp to seek for eggs on top of a tree by night You are a fearful warrior.</p>
2.	<p><i>Konko jabele kaluku lo nse ti e. Eebo o p'olowo ma sowo Ana sara o pe n ma sin Sango o N' o sin Kkudaisi²¹ o onida 'rara Adalapa feekun rori omo o Yemoja²² O kiakia ti 'le monani wogba gbale</i></p>	2.	<p>There are individual differences where individuality is allowed to strive The white man prevents no trader from trading No one should hinder me from worshipping Sango I would worship Kudaisi one with a fiery sword One who, having broken his arms used his</p>

18+ Awolalu, p. 101

19+ Olajubu, ..., Available at www.unilorin.edu.ng.

20Another name for Sango which suggests his knowledge of herbal power.

21Another name for Sango meaning "one spared by death"

22A goddess among the Yoruba

			knees as pillow, an offspring of Yemoja One who hurriedly pursues Monani into the grove
3.	<i>A yo kesekese fo' o bo lagbaja²³ loju A kanka ti ri ka Oko mi O bo ni bode, se danda o Alajee p'ogun o ko Sango pe'gbeje Sango ni sansa' lubo Pere n ile pere l oko Elubo e lo ku danu l' ep' egbeje eeyan</i>	3.	One who tip-toes to dip fingers into Lagbaja's eyes The awesome one My husband, one who claims a share from the gatekeeper Sango, one who is difficult to be restricted within and without His flour alone was blown off and he Killed one hundred and forty thousand people.
4.	<i>Beeni oooo Sango peran merin s'Aasa a Oko mi dari wale o Ewedunni²⁴ pa dudu kan Oko mi pa 'yirin kan Sango pa gbe'borun un Oko mi pa gbe'gedu o o Pa nle pa ngbe Ab enu opo kan moyan kanmo. O fedun kan soso paa yan mefa</i>	4.	Yes! it is so indeed Sango killed four animals in Asa (River) My husband returned home Ewedunni killed one black animal My husband killed one white Sango killed one light blue Sango killed a talebearer My husband killed "him" which is like a timber carrier An indiscriminate killer with a wide track One who killed six people with only one thunderstone
5.	<i>Iregunade²⁵ Eni iyawo nse logbo o Baale koso. To ba de atunde omo Yemoja²⁶ Omo mo bale ko yeri yeri.</i>	5.	Iregunade The one highly honoured by his wife Chief of Koso One who appears repeatedly an offspring of 'Yemoja A lightening that lands with great Brightness
6.	<i>Ayo kese kese foo bo lag baja loju Bilisi oosa ti bi mo loro egbaa odun oo Alemo rere kerri o won 'nu</i>	6.	One who tip-toes to dip his fingers into Lagbaja's eyes A troublesome divinity who queries one of a case of over two thousand years

23 An indirect pronoun which is likely used to refer to a witch or wizard in this context

24 Another name for Sango which suggests his knowledge of herbal knowledge

25 These presenters (Wuraola and Layoonu) used the name to refer to each other when chanting.

26 A goddess among the Yoruba

	<p><i>bale koso</i> <i>Sango fe e de ti o gbodo ti o gbo ko</i> <i>lowo Baba won</i> <i>A gbona Songa lowo ruke rudo.</i></p>		<p>You who pursues a man until his head breaks off Chief of Koso Sango would soon come to seize the river and the farmland from their father He would seize the road to Songa town from an anarchy</p>
7.	<p><i>Oko o mi ni o</i> <i>Subu ni yanrin kere ni yangi ooo</i> <i>Aja n le eleko fi gbogbo ara ko won</i> <i>ni yangan</i> <i>Oko mi o ja nnu kolobo²⁷ reureu</i></p>	7.	<p>He is my husband He falls in a sandy path but walks freely in a rugged path One who fought with a corn meal seller and covered his whole body with her corn You that fights vigorously inside <i>the</i> <i>kolobo</i></p>
8.	<p><i>Iregun ade</i> <i>Owo yowo</i> <i>Bale koso</i> <i>Owo 'yowo oko Oya²⁸</i> <i>A wo'lu t ilu t ariwo</i> <i>To ba de atunde omo o</i> <i>Yemoja</i> <i>Oko o mi soro tan ina bu gba</i> <i>loke</i></p>	8.	<p>Oh yes! Iregunade You are a precious treasure, Chief of Koso Precious treasure the husband of Oya One who enters a town with drumming and noise One who appears repeatedly, an offspring of 'Yemoja My husband whose words were followed by a blazing fire on the sky</p>
9.	<p><i>Lai loke odo, o</i> <i>A riwo Sango la gbo n nu le o</i> <i>A n'pe n'le n'je n'gbo</i> <i>Baale kosoo</i> <i>A n'pe n'gbo n'je n'le</i> <i>Ogunwoledemi²⁹ Baale koso.</i> <i>To ba de atunde omoo</i> <i>Yemoja</i> <i>Opolo bomi senu ke ka wo.</i> <i>Elegba Baba Ogunmodede³⁰</i></p>	9.	<p>You appear beyond the river Yet, Sango remains noisy at home He is called at home but answers in the jungle Chief of Koso He is called in the jungle but answers at home Ogunwoledemi, Chief of Koso One who appears repeatedly, an offspring of Yemoja A toad that fills its mouth with water and croaks loudly A paralytic, father of Ogunmodede</p>
10.	<p><i>Sango ni o o o</i> <i>Ayo yo bi ologinni ooo</i></p>	10.	<p>Yes! Sango is He One who tip-toes like a cat You who unmistakably picks a rattle</p>

²⁷ An earthen for moulding corn meal among the Yoruba.

²⁸ A goddess among the Yoruba

²⁹ One of the names of Sango which reveals his relationship with Ogun – the god of iron

³⁰ *Ibid.*

	<i>Ada sere yo bi agbon Baale koso Salala eri pamo omo o Yemoja Ologbon Oyo ti won n pe ni were</i>		Chief of Koso The wiseman of Oyo that is regarded as a fool.
11.	<i>Eni ori mi wa ba je jaye Oko mi bi mo ba ri o leyin mo le bu Eegun Sango bi mo ba ri o leyin mo le bu Oosa Oko mi bi mo ba ri o leyin mo le fo koto Elepo Kaka k Elepo na mi Adenbaji owo re ni o gba lo Ina m oni moni ko to jo ni Oko mi odide moni moni yowu oju fo o laaye.</i>	11.	The one I am destined to live in luxury with My husband, with you behind me I can abuse the masquerade Sango, If I see you behind me I can abuse a deity My husband with you behind me I can break the keg of the oil seller The oil seller cannot beat me, Adebajji All she can do is to collect her money You, the familiar fire that burns My husband, you are the familiar parrot that forcefully plucks out the eyes of the living.
12.	<i>A da fun owa a'lu Baale koso Bi o ba si Ewegbemi o o o Won ba ko eegun lona won ba na eegun Bi o ba si Ikudaisi o o Won o ba ko'osa lona won a na Oosa Sango lo je mo je o baje. Eleri jagun jagun, Ara towo bo oko 'ja mu na lowo ab igimu deru b agbe.</i>	12.	He performed Ifa divination for the chief, Koso chief himself If not for your sake, Ewegbemi, People would have lost respect to the point of beaten up the masquerade on the way If not for your sake, Ikudaisi They should have violently confronted the deity on the way Sango, you are crowned the preserver of Traditions and the surety of warlords The thunder that fights with stone One with a snout that frightens a farmer
13	<i>Iregun adee, eni orimi wa ba jaiye oo Kengbe fi gbogbo ara dun me mumi me mumi Oole fi gbogbo ara ya 'run ka Omo Alaakubaru³Iti sere bi nnu</i>	13.	Iregunade, The one I am destined to live in luxury with A water pitcher that sounds as if It would resist being soaked in water You, the roof that receives warmth with all of its body You are the offspring of Allhau-Akbar born by the rattlegourd.
14.	<i>Sango ni oo</i>	14.	Sango is the one!

31 This is an Arabic expression which means "Allah is great".

	<p><i>Ape koro yi 'lu ka oo</i> <i>Bo ti wu o pe n le yi to oni</i> <i>r' alasiso</i> <i>Adal'apa fe kun ro ri omo Yemoja</i> <i>Oko mi oti bi iwe re bi ija</i></p>		<p>Who goes round with hunting No matter how long you stay around here you shall get no offender One who, having broken his arms uses his knees as pillow, an offspring of Iyemoja My husband, one who goes to battle from the Bathroom.</p>
15.	<p><i>Iregun Adeo owo yowo</i> <i>Baale koso</i> <i>Sango won ni o kirun, Oloo</i> <i>kirun,</i> <i>Oko mi won ni o gbawe, Olo</i> <i>le</i> <i>gbawee</i> <i>Aikirun, aigbawe Ewegbemi</i> <i>nba</i> <i>won muko asale</i></p>	15.	<p>Iregunade, precious treasure Chief of Koso Sango you are invited to be a Muslim, you refused My husband you are asked to fast you refused Without being a Muslim or fasting, Ewegbemi,</p>

The following can be deduced from the above chanting concerning Sango and his worshippers:

***The origin of Sango:** Sango is presented as an offspring of Iyemoja (cf. stanzas 2.). Lucas established this relationship when the scholar asserts that, Sango is one of the Yoruba deities that emanated from Iyemoja, a river goddess born by Obatala and Odudua.³² Due to this belief, an emblem of Iyemoja is placed beside that of Sango in Ekerin Mogba shrine and also carried along in possession during the festival. The people's conception of the deity also favours the Yoruba mythic version that refers to Sango as a deified Alaafin. The orisa is referred to as "*Ologbon Oyo ti won npe ni were.*" – The wise man of Oyo that was thought to be mad. He is known to be the husband of Oya (the Niger river goddess) as well as "Oba Oso" – the statement that denies the saying that "the king hanged himself. (cf stanzas 1,5,8, &10).

***The Names of Sango:** The orisa is known to be of many names e.g. Sango, Oba Koso, Ewegbemi, Ewedunni, Ikudaisi, Ikuyabesin, Owoyowo etc. (cf. stanzas: 1,2,3,4 etc)

***Sango and His Relationship to Orunmila Cult:** The people's belief also reflects in the myth that Sango was initiated into Ifa cult by Orunmila.³³ Therefore as a Babalawo, Sango can carry out divination, know the secrets of the mind and prescribe offerings and sacrifices. (cf. stanzas 1&12) He also sees all things because he can be in different places at the same time. (cf. stanza 9).

***Sango and His Relationship with the wicked ones:** Sango is believed to be a straightforward orisa who does not tolerate unfaithfulness from people. He hunts for offenders and does not gloss over wicked acts even if committed several years in the past. He

³² Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas....*, p.97

³³ Cf. Adeoye, *Asa Ati Ise Yoruba*, pp. 28, 29

is associated with thunder and lightning because he attacks through them. He is of a fearful appearance. (cf. stanzas 1,4,6,8, &14).

***Sango and other Deities** – Sango is considered to be the defender of other deities who are accorded respect for his sake. (cf. stanzas 12)

***Sango and Islam** – The orisa is seen to be in relation with Islam and Muslims. He is referred to as “Omo alaakubaru”, “alagada aliamudu”. The former is an Arabic word used by the Muslims meaning “Allah is great” and the latter relates to Arabic alphabet. He is also presented to eat with the Muslims during the Ramadan (fasting period). (cf. stanzas: 13& 15)

***Sango and the Adherents:** They believe they are attached to this Orisa by destiny. They should therefore be given freedom of worship without any molestation. Sango is seen as a great defender of his devotees and their confidence in him affords untold bravery. The fact that maize wine and maize meals are used as sacrifice to this deity is also revealed. (cf. stanzas: 1,2,7, & 13).

From the foregoing, the role of women, as vocalists in Sango cult, is simply synonymous to that of the sacred text of a religious tradition. From this angle, we can now examine how Nigerian women are faring in the political participation since 1999.

NIGERIAN WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Nigeria as a nation groaned under the military rule for fifteen consecutive years before the political activities took off in 1999. In the new political dispensation, Nigerians have served in various elective and appointive offices. However, many are of the opinion that the power distribution and participation in governance had not been without gender biases. In this regard, Oladoye describes the degree of participation of women thus:

In 1999 ... the percentage of women participation in politics was about 2%. While 2003 and 2007 the percentage was about 4% and 7% respectively. As at 2011, the total percentage of women in political offices in the country was measured at about 8%. This could really explain the gender gap in politics, more so, describe that there is a long way to go in addressing the issue of gender balancing.³⁴

According to Huntington and Dominiiguez, political participation can be defined as “activity of private citizens designed to influence government decision making.” In their view, such participation can direct or otherwise. The former is applicable where the citizens concerned are involved in the government and the latter in situations where such served as observers but making contributions to the system.³⁵

ATTEMPTS AND CHALLENGES CONFRONTING NIGERIAN WOMEN

Borrowing a lift from the above, it may not be out order to briefly review the recent efforts of some Nigerian women in political participation. Professor Dora Akunyili had served successfully as the Director for NAFDAC and later as the Minister of Information and

34 Oladoye, Deji. In Retrospect: 2011 April polls and Gender Ranking in Nigeria. Available at www.agora.nigeriaelections.org, 18 May 2011, Accessed 11/7/2011

35 Hutington, S and Dominquez, J. “Political development.” Green Stain and Polsby (Eds), *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 3*, Massachussets: Adison Wesley, 1975, quoted in Chukwuemeka, Emma. Democratization and Women’s Political Space in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal, *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 2011, Vol. 1, No. 1. Available at www.macrothink.org, Accessed on 11/7/2011

Communications. In spite of her unique contributions to the development of the country, she lost in the election for a senatorial seat in Anambra State. Sarah Jubril was courageous enough to file for presidency in her party, hoping to break the apparent taboo of excluding women from the presidential race. Unfortunately, she lost the election at the primary level. In a similar but with an additional dimension, Ebiti Ndok demonstrated her own courage and patriotism by registering a political party and ran as the presidential candidate. The desire of the woman of value could not see the light of the day as she was accused and arrested of issuing “dud cheques.”³⁶

Although this may sound discouraging, yet women have never given up in their efforts in nation building. Commenting on the immense contribution of women in the process of election, Toyin Ajao, a feminist blogger and Peace and Security Fellow of King’s College, London, declared that in Nigeria, with the total population of 15 million, it was estimated that over 73.5 million of those who registered for voting were women. She also observed that though women may not be in the fore front of political candidature, “they are often active in campaigns for men, organizing events, cooking and mobilizing.”³⁷ Also commenting on how women are sometimes treated by their men counterparts in politics, Akiode-Abiola asserts that women are hardly allowed to secure executive offices in their respective political parties. In some instances where they had such access, they are usually relegated to positions of little effects in decision making such as “welfare, ex-officio or social organizers.”³⁸

The low level of success in women political participation has been linked to diverse challenges from within and without the female folks. Ukor has observed that in spite of the efforts of the government of this nation, at its various levels, for women to get empowered so as to take active parts in the political affairs of Nigeria, show interest and make tangible contributions to national development; the responses had not been appreciable. According to the author, “Women have continued to be audibly and visibly silent on key national issues. Only a negligible few have come out to participate politically at the transitional and gladiatorial levels.”³⁹

The discouraging experiences of some women in the hands of their male counterparts in politics also called for a redress. For instance, it was reported that in the 2007 run up election of the ruling, People’s Democratic Party (PDP) in Ogun state, Iyabo Anishulowo, a onetime minister of this country, had to leave her party to join All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). This became her last resort as she alleged that some PDP party leaders were demanding for sex from her before she could run for an elective post under the party’s platform in the state. According to the source, the allegation has not, since then, been refuted.⁴⁰ Women have also

36 Kinoti, Kathambi. Nigeria Elections Reflect Slow Progress For Women (AWID) from www.awid.org, available at www.free2runonline.com.ng. Accessed on 5/7/2011

37 Ibid.

38 Akiode-Afolabi, Abiola, Nigeria's Electoral Reform and the Prospect for Women's Participation in the 2011 Elections. Available at www.boellnigeria.org Accessed on 5/7/2011.

39 Ukor, C Women and Politics: The Nigerian Experience, Lagos: Mangroove Publishers, 2008, quoted in Chukwuemeka.

40 Women And Politics In Nigeria. Available at www.234next.com , Accessed on 11/7/2011

been challenged to be proactive in the promotion of their own cause. It has also been noticed that instead of some women to team up with their colleagues who desire appointive political positions, they are often robbed of the opportunities as a result of “petty jealousies and pettiness.” In most cases, the men folk often seized such opportunities to override the women.⁴¹

It is a common knowledge in Nigerian politics that most of the women that are gaining upper hands are those with godfather or who have strong politicians as their biological father or husband. Women in those categories enjoy better media coverage and financially buoyant to contest and win election more easily. According to Kathambi Kinoti, in her article titled, “Nigeria Elections Reflect Slow Progress For Women (AWID),” cited the example of the election between Yemisi Ransom-Kuti, an icon in women’s right campaign and Mrs Oluremi Tinubu, the wife of the former governor of Lagos state, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinumbi. The victory of the later over the former cannot be disconnected from the above mentioned factors.⁴²

In Nigeria, radio and television are the most effective ways of reaching the grass root with political campaigns, according to Kinoti, in some parts of the country; it was a prohibition for women to mount campaign on such electronic media. It was therefore an effort in the right direction when a special website, free2runonline, was launched by Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), to provide better coverage and representations for women. This became necessary since the media, most of which are privately owned, were either too expensive, partial and sometimes sentimental in their coverage for female political aspirants. Ajaio also made very important observations in connection with Nigerian voters and political candidatures as it affects women. According to her, “The Nigerian electorate is now beginning to vote for credible leaders and not those who are likely to engage in corruption and embezzle public funds when they get to power.” She however asserts that “The public only gets to know about candidates that have enough money for their campaigns to reach a wider audience.”⁴³

Akiode-Afolabi, Abiola, in her article titled, “Nigeria's Electoral Reform and the Prospect for Women's Participation in the 2011 Elections” presents a catalogue of factors that are militating against women’s participation in politics in Nigeria. In her own words she explained that,

among the factors affecting women participation in politics in Nigeria are: gender and cultural patterns, ideology, pre-determined social roles assigned to women, male dominance and control, conflicting demands on the time of women candidates due to their domestic and social responsibilities and women’s lack of confidence to run elections. Others include women perception of politics as a dirty game, lack of funds and resources as politics is heavily monetised, poverty and unemployment, illiteracy and limited access to education, the dual burden of domestic task and professional obligation, lack of confidence in other women, lack of access to information and the multiple effect of violence against women. Nomination and selection processes of candidates in political parties usually consider women as the second best. In most cases, women are usually considered fit for nomination only if they have powerful

41 Ibid.

42 Kinoti,... Available at www.free2runonline.com.ng.

43 Ibid.

men as their pillars. Besides, the processes are usually so heavily monetized that most women with lean financial muscles are elbowed out of the race from the outset.⁴⁴ From the above quotation, it is obvious that the issue of gender in relation to women political participation is very complex.

A WORLD-WIDE ISSUE

In her work titled, “Women Centered Politics: A new concept for exploring women Political perception” Bryan asserts that the issue of low participation of women in politics and political office holding are not peculiar to Nigeria but rather worldwide.⁴⁵ The following tables reveal the situation of gender issues in some countries of the world including Nigeria.

Table One: Democratisation of suffrage in selected countries

Country	Male Universal Suffrage	Female Universal Suffrage
Australia	1903	1908
Canada	1915/18	1920
France	1869/71	1946
Great Britain	1877	1928
Italy	1925	1946
Sweden	1423	1921
Portugal	1911	1974
Japan	1918/19	1947
Nigeria	1922	1979

The table shows that while men in Nigeria were given voting rights since 1922, women began voting in 1979 – after fifty seven years.⁴⁶

Another table also reveals the constitutional history in relation to gender electorate and exclusion of women since the colonial period.

Table Two: Democratisation of suffrage in Nigeria

YEAR	CONSTITUTION	SUFFRAGE
1914	Amalgamation	None
1922	Clifford	Adult Males with annual income of N100
1946	Richards	Adult Males with annual income of N50
1951	Macpherson	Adult Males who paid their taxes
1954	Lyttleton	Adult Males+ Females in East & West
1960	Independence	Adult Males+ Females in

⁴⁴ Akiole-Afolabi, Available at www.boellnigeria.org

⁴⁵ Bryan, M (2005) Women centered Politics: A new concept for exploring women Political perception, Groat Jeonna, M (Ed) *Women Studies in the new millennium: Doing things differently*: London: Macmillan Publishers, quoted in Chukwuemeka.

⁴⁶ Alemika, E.E.O. and Agugua, a. O. (2001), Gender Relations and Discrimination in Nigeria Police Force. Lagos, Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) used by Shonubi, Omolara Gender and Political Leadership in Nigeria available at www.centrelsd.org Accessed on 5/7/2011)

		East & West
1963	Republican	Adult Males+ Females in East & West
1979	Presidential	Adult Males & Females

As stated earlier, it was in 1979 that the constitution permitted women all over the country to vote. The restrictions, as shown in the two tables above, had bearing in the women political leadership in the country. The table below showing women representation in governance in the fourth republic confirms the fact.⁴⁷

Table Three: Female Representation in Governance in the Fourth Republic (Ibid.)

ORGAN	TOTAL NO	NO OF WOMEN	% WOMEN
Fed. Executive Council	49	6	12.2
Senate	109	3	2.8
House of Reps	360	12	3.3
Governors	36	0	0
State Deputy Governors	36	1	2.8
State Houses of Assembly	995	12	1.2
Speakers	36	0 ^[1]	0
Local Government Chairmen	774	9	1.2
Local Government Councilors	8,800	143	1.6

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGES

In the attempt to trim down the challenges confronting women in the area of political participation in Nigeria, suggestions have come from various quarters. Among these are the following:

It has been observed that countries of the world where women have highest representation in legislative arm such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark, employed proportional representation in their electoral system along with voluntary party-based quota system in achieving their aims. Application of such electoral system coupled with quota system will go a long way in improving women participation than attempting to change the political culture or economic level of the women.⁴⁸ In Africa, women participations are encouraged in countries like Rwanda and Uganda by reserving seats in electoral system for their women as well as adopting proportional representations.⁴⁹

For Kathambi Kinoti, since Nigeria has committed itself to encourage and permit women in political participation by ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples'

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ 2011 Elections Gender Ranking in Political Parties & Other Issues in Women's Participation. Available at www.boellnigeria.org, May 10, 2011, accessed on 11/7/2011.

⁴⁹ Kinoti,... Available at www.free2runonline.com.ng.

Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), the National Gender Policy which permits women participation up to 35%, and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the country should act accordingly. Women leaders like Abiola Akiode-Afolabi stood her ground in some states that political parties should sign agreements to increase women appointive positions to gain the supports of women.⁵⁰

Another suggestion toward the realisation of the goal to increase women's lots in political participation is for Nigerian women to collaborate with women groups globally. Attending international programs for women will afford them exposure and exchange of ideas from women from other parts of the world. Such international fora includes United Nations Conferences on Women; Movements for Women's Representation in America, Asia, and Europe. It has been discovered that great experiences were acquired through various publications, activities, and organizations by Namibian and South African women activists who while in exile, were able to interact with fellow women from other parts of the world. Establishing and maintaining close interactions with women in civil society and gender advocacy groups is also considered to be of great benefits for women who desire to gain ground in national political arena.⁵¹

According to Adedoyin, women "must begin to build war chests, which we can deploy to advance our own agenda and we must be ready to support party activities and fund women who are actively seeking political office."⁵² The recommendation of Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, the Executive Director of Women Advocate Research & Documentation Centre - WARDC, Lagos, is for women to be proactive in future elections, by identifying and recruiting women who show interest in politics. She is also of the opinion that women should not wait for the time of election before they begin to negotiate in their respective parties for the 2007 National Gender Policy that advocated for 35% participation for women.⁵³

WOMEN'S UNIQUENESS, IMPORTANCE, AND INDISPENSABILITY

Although, the dream of projecting women to a height that may be relatively comparative with those of the men counterparts in political participation might have not been fully realized, the contributions of few that succeeded in holding notable offices cannot be forgotten. According to Chukwuemeka, "names of women like Professor Grace Aelele-Wiliams, Dr. Tokunbo Awolowo-Dosume (sic), Professor Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and so on ..."⁵⁴ Other notable women in Nigeria will include the celebrated icon in Academic, Professor Bolanle Awe, and the courageous Professor Dora Akunyili to mention but a few. Many of these great women of values and virtues made land mark achievements that can hardly be surpassed by any of their male counterparts.

Looking at women's values from traditional point of view Chinsman explains that women, in both time and space, are always given traditional recognition for their unique contributions to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ 2011 Elections.... Available at www.boellnigeria.org

⁵² Women And Politics...., Available at www.234next.com

⁵³ Akiode-Afolabi, Available at www.boellnigeria.org

⁵⁴ Chukwuemeka, Emma. Democratization and Women's Political Space in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal, *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 2011, Vol. 1, No. 1. Available at www.macrothink.org, Accessed on 11/7/2011

the development and continuous existence of their respective societies. Commenting further the author says,

Women had also exhibited appreciable managerial and organizational skills in their roles as mothers, homemakers, character molders (sic) and sustainers of humanity. Their supportive roles through engagement in pottery, weaving, spinning and other socio-economic activities were indispensable to the existence of their families and societies by extension;...⁵⁵

In a similar way Chukwuemeka summarizes women's indispensable role in any human society when he says, "women constitute the foundation of any society. One cannot talk about society without talking about the family, nor can one talk about the family without talking about the women... their ingenuity serves and sustains the family."⁵⁶

From religious perspective, a source declared that though heredity and leadership among the Yoruba and many other West African tribal groups is dominantly patriarchal, the role of women as the custodians of wisdom, mystical power, as well as providers of guardians in spiritual matters remain unchallenged. This idea is made plain in Yoruba theology where, according to Odu Irete, there was a cosmogonical marriage between Orunmila and Odu. In this relationship, the oracular and divinatory powers used by Orunmila belong to his wife, Odu. Commenting further on this a source reinstates that, "It is Odu who has given Orunmilla the 'Awo', the secret power to control 'the Ashe', the sacred bird that participated in the creation process, scratching the earth poured by Orunmilla to create the first land of Ife. ... Although women rarely enjoyed political power among the Yoruba, their spiritual power was indeed evident."⁵⁷

In Yoruba culture, gender differences does not suggest oppression and domination of one over the other as the case may be in some cultures but a complementary relationship. A source puts it this way, "A complementary gender relation is entrenched at every level of the Yoruba socioreligious consciousness, as both male and female principles are crucial to a smooth living experience. Social, political, and religious structures reflect this perception in both their membership and their modes of operation. Further, neither of the genders can lay claim to a monopoly of the "private" or "public" domain as they may be able to do in other cultures." The term complementary is further qualified with 'neutral' "to refer not to equality or parity but to cooperation and specified areas of control for the female as well as the male. The religious setting is an arena in which the dynamics attending these concepts are displayed extensively." She then draws the conclusion by saying that "... among the Yoruba (therefore), the question to ask about the state of the sexes is not which sex is dominant but, rather, over which areas does each sex enjoy prominence. Further, the prominence that one sex enjoys in a particular area of human activity does not make the people in that sexual category independent of people in the other."⁵⁸

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

⁵⁵ Chinsman, A (2005) Ethnic Pluralism and Democratic Stability. Available at <http://www.acadjournals.org/2005/index.htm>.

⁵⁶ Chukwuemeka, ..., Available at www.macrothink.org

⁵⁷ Yoruba Religion: The Cornerstone of Society. Available at www.assatashakur.org. Accessed on 28/9/2011

⁵⁸ Seeing through a Woman's Eye: Yoruba Religious Tradition and Gender Relations. Available at www.accessmylibrary.com/article. Accessed on 28/9/2011

The unique roles of women cut across every facet of our society. In this work, attempt was made to present their roles in the cult of Sango, the god of thunder, as practiced in Yorubaland. It was presented that the membership in this cult is opened to both gender and can come in different forms. The work employed the religious experiences of the cult members in a typical Yoruba traditional community, Shao, for illustration. In some certain aspects of the cult's activities, it appears as if male members were dominating and becoming spectacular especially during the annual festival when a male member is possessed and displayed magical arts. The work revealed that though a female initiate are not popular for such crowd-pulling display rather they are involved in chanting and dancing during such occasions. To an outsider, a role such as chanting may sound less attractive and unpopular unless its importance is unveiled as oral sacred text where the traditions of the whole cult is preserved. In world religions, like Christianity and Islam, the religions hold their sustainability to such written holy texts. As stated in the work, the roles of women here is revealed by the importance and indispensability of the chant, which though in a oral form as it found in other African traditional religious strands, represents the scripture. What is a religion without a scriptural guide – be it written or oral? Women are greatly honoured in the cult to be the custodians of such important treasure.

From the above illustration, the work x-rayed the political participation of women in Nigeria since 1999 when the country after many years of the military rules was opportune to practice democratic form of government. It was made clear that since the resumption of democracy Nigerian women have been active in one form or the other. Attempts had been made by many of them to actively participate in politics and hold political offices. Although the attempts had not been hitch-free, some were able to weather the storms and left behind them records that may not be easily surpassed even by their male political counterparts. The work however, presented the challenges and some recommended solutions to improve the level of participation. It is made manifest in the work the fact that the relatively low level of women participation in politics is not peculiar to Nigeria but it is rather a world-wide issue.

As observed by some other researchers on gender issues, the above conditions of women in political participation, in the opinion of this author does not, in any way, indicate that they are not important in our society. Even in this political aspect of the nation where women appear to play silent roles, such roles, what form they may be, are essential for the success of the democracy. One may say, “show me a political leader who is truly succeeding in his assignments without the supports of a good wife and I will show you a man who cannot succeed in nation building due to his domestic failure.” It is a common adage that “beside every successful man, there is always a woman. Political records of this country reveal that many men and women could not realized their political ambitions because they lacked good home and therefore rated irresponsible to lead their nation. The readers may recall that a onetime highly placed member of the house of representative quickly arranged for marriage shortly before he took the oath of office. This may not be unconnected with the stated facts.

In conclusion, one can frankly state that in the issue under consideration, as well as other spheres of national developments, women supports may be as silent and unnoticed as those of the women vocalists in Sango cult, it is a fact that their absence indicates the termination of a meaningful existence of the society and national democratic governance. Differences should not be mistaken for importance, when it comes to the role a particular gender or the other plays in his or her contributions to national development. Again, since no man exists without the *initial* and *continuous* supports of a woman, the success of any man or society, even in political leadership and participation, cannot be dissociated from his human source – a woman.