

The Preservation and Conservation of Nigerian Cultural Heritage: An Impetus for Her Development

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Abstract: The preservation of the cultural heritage of a nation has become an impulse towards its development. Most states of the globe have come to realize that cultural heritage is an essential aspect of human life and its promotion and preservation an asset of a state. This study explores the problems inhibiting cultural integration in a developing country like Nigeria with plural and diversified cultures and the need to promote culture that stresses virtue, which is pivot to growth-oriented economy.

Key words: Cultural heritage, development, technology preservation, conservation, growth-oriented economy, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Organization (UNO) took cognizance of cultural heritage and adopted the convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH convention) on October 17, 2003. The term intangible cultural heritage is defined rather broadly and includes; the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects and artifacts associated therewith that communities, groups and in some cases individuals recognize as part of their heritage. This marked an important milestone in the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization's (UNESCO, 2002) programme on cultural heritage.

Prior to this time in 1972, the world heritage convention was adopted by UNESCO to encourage International cooperation for the protection of the cultural heritage of mankind and called upon the international community to help in the identification, protection and preservation of such heritage and not to take any deliberate measures, which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage situated on the territory of other states.

This was necessitated by concern that cultural heritage and natural heritage were increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions, which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction (Paul, 2004). There was also the recognition that the deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cultural heritage in perspective: It is essential that the concept of culture be understood. Culture is a universal concept and experience. In the Western world, there is a narrow view of culture, which restricts its meaning to ideas, values and attitudes. On the other hand, Africans look at culture as the preserved traditions or ways of life of their forefathers. Thus, most people limit the concept to such things as traditional dances, music, art, traditional institutions and rites of passage such as marriage, birth, initiation, burial and the likes (Ajayi, 2005). Though all these are aspects of culture, but not the totality of it. Culture is the established pattern of behaviour among a people, an all embracing and heterogeneous concept that encompasses every aspect of a man's life and experiences. It is perceived as a way of life or the totality of all human efforts and achievements in the struggle for survival in the midst of unfriendly and militant forces of nature. It is also the aggregate of all human inventions and discovery and the accumulation of socially acquired human characteristics. It is a collective and integrated whole, comprising everything about man's ideas, behaviour and products or anything relating to his needs as a social being. In other words, culture is the totality of the historical experience as a people, the values, the traditions, the beliefs, morals, world view and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society.

The need to integrate cultural activities and values in all spheres of life has been very loudly pronounced in the post-independence development of Nigeria. General ideas on Nigeria development were linked to the authentic cultural values. This effort has yielded little result because

we have not tried culturally to become zone people. The communalities of the traditional cultures as Africans (Nigerians) have been eroded in the years when communities raided one another for war captives, which were sold to Arabs and Europe as slaves and this tendency towards ethnicity has been reinforced in the competitive bidding first, for colonial favours and now for government contracts and financing. Nigeria has therefore, remained a country of plural and diversified cultures. The more serious problem is that education, which should be a factor of cultural integration has become within each culture a factor of alienation, disaggregation and disorientation (Ajayi, 2000a, b).

Alienation in the sense that the educated elites are alienated from their traditional cultures and values. Disaggregation in the sense that Western education places strong values on individualism in place of communal values and individualism in an alienated group promotes selfishness in place of social responsibility. Disorientation in the sense of being confused and lacking a sense of direction as a result of their being alienated from traditional values, with nothing concrete in its place (Ajayi, 2000a, b).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the pre-colonial past, the ruler and the ruled generally shared basically the same culture. They shared the same values, the same perception of right and wrong. Even when there was conquest, the ruler either tried to establish his own culture as the norm or he embraced the culture of those he ruled. The British were not particularly anxious to share their culture with colonial subjects. It was the colonial subjects looking for employment as subalterns of the colonial regime, who sought to take advantage of the Western education that was offered mostly by the missionaries (Ajayi, 2000a, b).

There is no doubt that Western education began the process of cultural alienation of the rising educated elite from the non-literate mass of the people. By the time of independence, as the Western educated elites were taking over power from the former colonial masters, two cultures had begun to emerge. One for the elites and other for the masses moulded by the perceptions of the traditional values. The clash between modernization (Westernization) on one hand and the traditional cultural values on the other hand could not have been avoided, but the educated elites remain fragmented and alienated from traditional cultures and values and have become very elective and selective in the values they chose to live by a major result of this is that the communities, even in the rural areas are losing their sense of moral solidarity and the capacity to inspire development.

For some time, the dichotomy did not seem to matter much as there were various factors mitigating the degree of alienation, the urban elite frequently going back to the village. It is however, important at this point to examine Ekeh (1990) analysis of the two cultures. He explained how the public servant who defrauded the State would be welcomed back home, as a hero, but the same official would not dare to face the criticism and shame that would result if he stole from his own people (Ekeh, 1990). The situation is worse today that the urban elite would steal not only from the state, but also sometimes from his own people. The modern elite has abandoned the people and if he came to them to seek for votes, he has to pay a bribe. Even some traditional rulers defraud the people and cannot always account for all they received on behalf of the people. The elite, like the colonial state, which they inherited has grown apart from the society. Increasingly, the state and the elite who control the state have become predators on the society. This situates the problem at a cultural level and indicates a moral and cultural void.

Historical experience as a determinant of national development:

It is imperative to stress here that the state of development in any society is the result of the historical experience of the people, which could help to retard or accelerate the level of development in that society. In the case of Nigeria, her historical experience dealt two hard blows simultaneously on her cultural and economic lives, the two vital ingredients of national development. The historical experience of the incorporation of the Nigerian economy into the world system could be traced to the three centuries of the slave trade which, certainly had major effects; depopulation and slave wars meant instability and lack of continuity. Slave wars inhibited trust since one society was busy trying to weaken its neighbour instead of seeking to promote trade with it. The basic effect of this was that land remained relatively plentiful; secessions and migrations remained frequent; inspite of major technological innovations. There was competition from imported textiles, imported copper and iron. It has however, been realized that these had little effect on the development of African technology, which weathered the storm of competition down to colonial times.

Colonialism had a devastating effect on African technological development. They used their control of power to enact and enforce legislation intended to discourage, if not to destroy, technological innovation. They gave the tin fields as concession to European firms and outlawed African participation in tin mining. Similarly, they copied the textile patterns and colours and imported mass-produced textile to compete.

They discouraged crafts and manufacturing, while they focused attention of producers only on export/import trade. Industrial policies in this period were essentially aimed at the discouragement and sometimes destruction of local initiatives that were likely to compete with European goods. The colonial state discriminated against indigenous entrepreneurs except, where their activities would do no more than service those of foreign investors. Local craft were looked down upon and cloth weaving industry, like other indigenous industry in Nigeria suffered during this period. This was due to the fact that indigenous people were forced to concentrate their energies on producing raw materials for export to Europe and they hardly had time to produce enough cotton or textile for their use. They therefore, had to rely more and more on imports from Europe. This was one of the several factors that contributed as an external influence in the rise and decline of Nigeria's textile technology. In addition, by flooding the Nigerian market with these manufactured goods and exporting agricultural products like cotton, palm oil, cocoa and groundnut, the imperialist discouraged domestic production of manufactured goods and inhibited the development of the requisite technology.

Just as the first world war has serious consequences for the trade of the colonies, the second world war also brought about a decline in revenue arising from shortfall in customs duties in 1939/40 session. This was aggravated by the closure of the French, Belgian, Dutch and German markets, which affected the British colonies adversely. This called for new economic policy aimed at ensuring the survival of colonial markets for the benefit of the metropole. Hence, Britain imposed import restrictions on non-sterling zones so as to conserve foreign exchange and use the supply of currency as a means of restricting imports from non-sterling areas. The colonial administration embarked on production drive since many of the manufactured goods could not be imported; there was a shift to the use of available local materials to make up for the war time scarcity and shortage. Thus, the imperial government began to encourage local production of some goods hitherto imported into the country. The imposition of stringent restrictions on imports stimulated the industries such as the manufacture of milk, sugar, cheese, bacon and orange juice. The encouragement given to import substituting industries no doubt enhanced further utilization of agricultural resources of Nigeria and provided employment for some people. The policy was discontinued after the war. However, some of the technology survived the colonial period in spite of such unfair competition and hostility from the colonial authorities. It is evident from the foregoing that the Nigeria historical experience has gone a long way in

determining her level of national development. The post independence experience followed the same trend. The newly emerged leaders pursued the colonial policies vigorously either directly or indirectly since they still rely on the former colonial masters for assistance towards attaining national development. One of the reasons for the past failure to attain sustainable development was because the cultural factor has been neglected in the various policies embarked on by the post-independent government. It is necessary therefore to examine the correlation between national development and culture.

Correlation between development and culture: Many people often fail to see the relationship between culture and development. Development implies healthy growth of a society and culture is the life of the society. This was clearly stated by the economic and social council of the UN in 1962.

The problem of the underdeveloped countries is not just growth, but development. Development is growth plus change. Change in turn is social and cultural as well as economic and qualitative as well as quantitative. The key concept must be improved quality of people's life (Ajayi, 2000a, b).

In other words, development is all about people. It implies social change, affecting the whole society, the whole way of life. Although, there are occasional references to the people, but that in the externally driven top to bottom concept of development, it is the people (that should be at the center of development) that are left out. Of course, there are many sides of the failure of development. Some people stress the failure on government and leadership. Others place, the emphasis on military rule, which prevented the growth of the political class and scorched the initial experiment in democracy. There is also the moral crisis, manifested in widespread corruption and the range of people who would go along with what they know to be wrong, until they no longer feel bad about it. There is in fact, a feeling of moral chaos, of total loss of values and lack of respect for human life. This is a reflection of the collapse of basic moral values at the level of both the individual and society.

No country can achieve national development scientific and technological, if it is pursued as an end in itself. In essence, there is cultural factor in technological development. When science and technology is imported from outside, it remains adventitious until it is integrated into the culture the life of the people. Technology can be borrowed or some aspects of other people's technology

cannot grow in a self-sustaining manner outside the context of culture. This is, because the growth of science and technology may be assisted by experiments in laboratories, as well as by studies, inventions and patents in the universities, but these do not grow and become sustainable development except within society and within particular cultures. The experiments, inventions and patents grow only when they are acquired as skills by individual artisans who apply technology to make things become part of living or part of life (Ajayi, 2004). While, education is the process by which the integration takes place and growth is stimulated. The political will with which should provide the motivation and the direction of development, as well as the economic sinews are based within the culture (Ajayi and Goma, 1996).

CONCLUSION

As, it has been mentioned earlier in this study, development is growth plus change. Change in turn is social and cultural as well as economic. The key concept must be improved quality of people's life. It is obvious that Nigeria has so far failed to develop during the five decades of development. There is the need to identify what can be done about it. Although, it is all right for the cynics who say that the whole idea of development is illusory, we cannot however because of that abandon the hope or stop making the effort to grow and improve the quality of life of the people. Without exerting the own internal effort to develop, we are doomed to be perpetual servants, former slaves, in the global society. First, we have to identify, where we have failed. We have failed in the extremely driven top to bottom approach to development, development that ignores the people. More than that we have created a cultural void and a moral crisis. Perhaps in the approach to development, we have been too hasty and tried to cut too many corners and the most dangerous consequence of this action was the cultural and moral void we have created. It is in filling, this cultural void that lies the solution. We cannot have growth-oriented economy, good governance, principled public officials and honest businessmen, without a culture that stresses virtue, integrity reaching out beyond oneself, working hard and caring. Several generations of ancestors have built up the concept of virtue within each separate culture in Nigeria. The Yoruba for instance have the concept of Omoluabi who in private and public life has regard for others, Ajayi (2000a, b). If we are serious about building up a Nigerian culture that will sustain an internally generated momentum for growth and adaptation and provide improved quality of life for the people, we need to build such a culture on the concept of virtue in the traditional cultures. It has been clearly shown that cultural factor is crucial to any meaningful development in Nigeria.

As for promoting technological development, the concept of technological development must not focus only on the large industrial complexes or imported machinery that are so dependent on further imports of raw material and spare parts, but on the direct application of technology to the problem of daily living. Similarly, the strategy of industrialization should begin with applying appropriate technology the use of technology to resolve the felt needs of the people to upgrade traditional arts and crafts into small and medium sized cottage industries that support self-reliant and labour intensive development. In other words, we should endeavour to develop the crafts, which have survived colonialism such as pottery, textiles, basketry and revive others such as mining technology and use these as the basis for developing small and middle scale industries. It is only by building in this way on the cumulative effort of the past that the technology and industrialization can move the society forward as a whole and without losing the identity and dynamism as a people.

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