

# Gender Discrimination in the Initiation of Women into the *Ifá* Cult

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**Abstract:** *Ifá* cult is a society considered to be an affair for men alone in many parts of the Yorùbá land. However, since Òròṃòḍimòḍì also known as Odù—the binding factor among the Babaláwo—was a woman and women are accorded great influence even among the gods, the complexity of the issue of women marginalisation is noteworthy. In Yorùbáland, both initiation into the *Ifá* Cult and Igbódù—the groove where the initiation takes place—are considered to be extremely sacred. This is because the value of *Ifá* is acknowledged in the people's religious life and other secular activities such that the Yoruba depend almost entirely on the knowledge of *Ifá* for ascertaining the will of Olódùmarè as regards the present and the future. In the past, given the sacredness and spiritual significance of *Ifá*, it was exclusively men's affair. But today, as a result of civilization, some females are also being initiated into the *Ifá* Cult. This act, however, has been criticized or opposed by some *Ifá* priests, who believe that initiating women into the Cult is not only against the will of *Ifá*, but also a reckless violation of the sacredness of the Cult. Yet, considering the values of Igbódù to every being in Yorùbáland, must women be prevented from taking part in this important act? The objective of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the reasons responsible for acceptance or rejection of women in the initiation into the *Ifá* Cult. This is with a view to knowing the implications of this trend on the individuals and society at large. To achieve this, 30 Babaláwo (*Ifá* priests) were purposively selected in all the six Yorùbá states and in-depth interview conducted. Data collected were content analysed.

**Keywords:** *Ifá* Cult, Initiation, Gender Discrimination, Igbódù, the Yorùbá .

## INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, women's role in the world today cannot be brushed aside or swept under the carpet as they have played and are still playing significant roles in the upliftment and sustenance of the world such that in the economic, political, social as well as religious spheres across the world, their commendable roles are adequately felt. Indeed, economically, women are at the forefront performing excellently in a bewildering manner and beyond expectation. No wonder some people are agitating for gender equality which in other words implies, the total liberation of women from the oppression of men and their domination of events and affairs relating to both of them.

There are lots of women economists contributing to the growth of the world economy. A very good example around us is Dr. Okonjo Iweala<sup>1</sup>, currently the World Bank official and a two term Finance Minister of Federal Republic of Nigeria during Qbasanjò and Jonathan administrations.

Also, politically, they are not found wanting. There are quite number of past and present women presidents in some countries of the world. Countries like China, Argentina, Bolivia, Iceland, Malta, Haiti, Guinea Bissau and Germany just to mention a few.<sup>2</sup> In Yorùbáland, there are women regents and kings. In *Ilé-Ifè*, there was once a female Qòni named Luwoo Gbagida who was nicknamed Ayare Akosulogbe from Owodo compound. (Adegbola, 2009) She was married to Chief Qbalòràn of Ilóde and

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.africa-confidential.com>. Retrieved on the 13th June, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> [www.guide2womenleaders.com](http://www.guide2womenleaders.com). Retrieved on the 13th June, 2016.

was the only woman Ọ̀nì. Likewise, in Adó Èkìtì, there was Yeyenirewu, a female appointed regent who refused to relinquish the throne. She was the one that terminated the tradition of installing Àbílàgbà - eldest son of Èwí. She eventually became the only woman Èwí of Adó Èkìtì that ruled for many years. (Olomola, 1984) Among many women that ruled in Ilẹ̀sà was Adẹ̀rẹ̀mí who fought the first war for Ilẹ̀sà people. Though she did not win the war, but her reign was peaceful before the war came. (Courlander, 1973) Presently, Queen Elizabeth is still the head of England.

Socially, women populate the world through their reproductive organ. According to Ilesanmi (2013), men and women are responsible for the production of children. However, women had always taken the leading role in the care of the children brought to life. They could prefer not to eat than for their children to sleep in an empty stomach. Religiously, hardly can we see any cult that women do not feature, most especially, in Africa and the Yorùbáland in particular, they play leading roles in these cult activities. They are often the major practitioners of every religion. In all the three principal religions we have in Nigeria today, women population is higher than that of men.

In spite of the enormous roles that women are playing in all spheres of life, there is still the issue of men domination and oppression particularly in the area of the initiation of women into the *Ifá* cult. Despite the fact that *Ifá* did not specifically say that women should not be initiated into the cult, some *Babaláwo* are still of the opinion that it is not right to initiate women into the cult. Their argument is based on the leading role that women played during initiation rites of *Omọ Awo* into *Ifá* cult. One of such roles is the fact that an *Omọ Awo* who must pass infidelity test before he can be initiated would be assigned a beautiful woman to attend to all his needs in a confinement where he would be for some days before the initiation. If he touches the woman by way of sexual intercourse, then the *Omọ Awo* is not qualified to be initiated. If otherwise, it is this woman that will hand him over to those *Babaláwo* that will initiate him at the entrance of Igbódù for him to be initiated. This test would be done without allowing the *omo awo* to know the reason which is his ability to discipline himself before his female clients. The argument of those who are against women initiation is, if a woman is to be initiated, who is going to be her *atọ̀kọ̀*- pilot or helmsman like she did for a male *Omọ Awo*?

However, those who insisted that women can be initiated based their argument on the fact that there is nowhere in *Ifá* that says women should not be initiated into the cult in spite of their roles in the initiation of others.

Considering the importance of initiation in the life of humanity as a life changer, especially from bad to good, one may be forced to ask for the reason why it must be made exclusively men affairs beyond the above reason given? Are women second class citizens and unimportant as far as *Ifá* cult is concerned? If they revolted and refused to play their roles in the initiation rites, what is going to be the outcome? These and many more are questions that this paper intends to answer.

### **The Role of Women in the Secular Life of the Yorùbá**

Women had contributed and are still contributing to the wheel of progress of the Yorùbá society in every ramification, economically, socially, politically, geographically, and in the area of religion. Economically, their contributions are enormous even right from the time when farming was still the only profession. They are found useful in carrying Yam seedling for planting, and harvesting of both food and cash crops. They also play major role in the preservation and of course cooking of these food items for the family. They keep the house clean and give children basic home education because children are always with the women most of the time. They are also successful in business like men. A good example is *Elẹ̀kọ̀dẹ̀rẹ̀* in *Odù Író̀sùn Mèjì* (Abimbola, 1968) who became wealthy through her business of *Èkọ̀* - Solid pap production and selling. Another good example is Ajé (Lijadu, 2001), the wife *Ọ̀rúnmilà* who had two hundred slaves that were assisting her to carry her wares to the market. This no doubt affirms that she was rich and successful in her business. Though she was a daughter to *Olókun* the owner of all the wealth on earth, notwithstanding, she was a successful business woman. Women's involvement in business during the post-colonial period is also noticeable. According to Majorie (2009), during the nineteenth century, women were most heavily involved in trade in western and central areas of the Yorùbáland.

Furthermore, women's involvement in the politics of Yorùbáland started from the time of the gods when divinities, according to the belief of the Yoruba were the first occupant of the earth. *Ọ̀ṣun* was one of the ruling class then and was the only woman among the gods that first came to the world, yet, she held all the male counterparts to ransom by thwarting their efforts on every occasion until they admitted and placed her in the right position. It was even *Ọ̀rúnmilà* that reminded them by asking them why *Ọ̀ṣun* was left behind. Àràbà Atúnfàgbònbiádá cited *Ọ̀ṣẹ̀núra*<sup>3</sup> the seventeenth *Odù*, also known as *Odùsọ* to buttress the above point. There *Ifá* says:

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<sup>3</sup> Araba Atunfagbonbiada. *Oral Interview*. Ipakodo, Ikorodu, Lagos.

*Konkorọ lawo Èwí nílẹ̀ Adó*  
*Oòrùn mú dèdè kanlẹ̀ lawo òde Ijẹrò*  
*Alákàn ní nbẹ̀ lódò*  
*Tí nlú aṣakara àyà pẹ̀ pẹ̀ pẹ̀*  
*A dífá fún igba Irúnmọlẹ̀ Olúkòtún*  
*A lukin fún Igba Irúnmọlẹ̀ Olúkòsì*  
*A dá fún Ọ̀tálẹ̀légbẹ̀je Irúnmọlẹ̀*  
*Tí wọn dátàrí ọ̀nà gbangba*  
*A dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmìlà baba*  
*Àgbonmìrẹ̀gún*  
*Nijọ́ tí wọn ntẹ̀run bọwá silẹ̀ ayé*  
*Wọn lagbo Orò*  
*Wọn lagbo Ọ̀pá*  
**Wọn lànà tẹ̀rẹ̀ tí Olúfẹ̀ ntọ**  
**Wọn ò fí tọ̀sun ẹ**  
*Wọn wá ngúnván,*  
*Iyán wọn nlẹ̀mọ*  
*Wọn nroka,*  
*Ọ̀kà wọn ndípètẹ̀*  
*Wọn pẹ̀gún ilẹ̀*  
*Eegún ilẹ̀ ò jẹ̀wọn*  
*Wọn pe Orò,*  
*Orò ò tilẹ̀ dàhùn*  
*Wọn pe Ọ̀pá*  
*Ọ̀pá ò tilẹ̀ fọ̀hùn*  
*Aperegede Àjùbà*  
*Àjùbà náà aperegede*  
*A dífá fún yẹ̀yẹ̀mi ẹ̀ngẹ̀ ẹ̀*  
*Olóòyà iyun*  
*Èyí tí gbé kọ̀kọ̀*  
*Tí wá nbágbà rùnmọlẹ̀ ẹ̀ jà*  
*Wọn wá lọ́ d'Ífá lọwọ́ Ọ̀rúnmìlà*  
*Wọn ní ta ló nbẹ̀bọ̀ àwọn jẹ́?*  
*Ọ̀rúnmìlà wípé, kílódé*  
*Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ fí tobínrín inú yín ẹ̀?*  
*Wọn ní Ọ̀sun lobínrín inú àwọn*  
*Ọ̀rúnmìlà wá ní*  
*Kí wọn lọ́ fí t'Ọ̀sun ẹ̀ kíá kíá*  
*Wọn wa fí t'Ọ̀sun ẹ̀*  
*Wọn gúnván*  
*Iyán wọn ò lẹ̀mọ,*  
*Wọn roka,*  
*Ọ̀kà wọn ò dípètẹ̀*  
*Wọn pe Orò*  
*Orò dún*  
*Wọn pe Ọ̀pá*  
*Ọ̀pá njẹ̀wọn*  
*Njẹ̀ iye wa báwa pénímọ̀*

Konkoro is the priest of Ado Ewi  
 The shining sun is the priest of Ijero  
 It is the crab that was in the water  
 That was using its chest to make noise  
 Cast divination for the right hand two hundred divinities  
 Oracle was consulted for the left two hundred divinities  
 Oracle was consulted to for one thousand four hundred and sixty divinities  
 On the centre of the road  
 Ifa Divination was made for Orunmila the father of  
 Agbonmiregun  
 On the day they were coming from heaven to earth  
 They pass through Oro sacred grove  
 They pass through Opa forest  
**They made a narrow path which Olufe passes**  
**They did not consider Osun**  
 They made pounded yam  
 It was not good  
 Then made oka (yam flour)  
 It was not good  
 They called household masquerade (ones father)  
 They did not respond  
 They call on Oro  
 Oro rebuffed them  
 They call on Opa  
 Opa did not voice out  
 Openly we pay homage  
 The homage was paid openly  
 Cast divination for Osun my mother  
 The owner of iyun comb  
 The one that stayed in the secluded place  
 And fighting with two hundred divinities  
 They went to Orunmila to go and consult Ifa  
 To ask for the person that was voiding their sacrifice  
 Orunmila asked why  
 They refused to marginalized the woman among them  
 They said it was Osun that was a woman among them  
 Orunmila said  
 They should go and obey Osun  
 They harking to her voice  
 They made pounded yam  
 Their pounded yam was okay  
 They made Oka,  
 Their oka was good  
 They call on Oro  
 Oro voiced out  
 They call Opa  
 Opa answered them  
 Oh you osu! Come to our aid today

*Ọṣun a fímọ jẹ tìrẹ ọ*  
*Iye wa báwa pénímọ*  
*Gúnyán gúnyán ilé Ìdó*  
*Obìnrin ní Í ẹ*  
*Rokà rokà ilé Ìdó*  
*Obìnrin ní Í ẹ*  
*Iye wa báwa pénímọ*  
*Ọṣun a fímọ jẹ tìrẹ ọ*  
*Òkè lóde Ìbàdàn*  
*Obìnrin ló bọba*  
*Kọba ó tó dọ̀rìṣà*  
*Ẹ jẹ ká lọ*  
*Ká lọ rẹ̀ kúnlẹ̀ fòbìnrin*  
*Gbogbo ẹlẹgbẹ mawo*  
**Obìnrin ló bọba**  
**Kọba ó tó dọ̀rìṣà**  
*Obìnrin ló bíwa*  
*Káwa ó tó dèniyàn rere*  
*Ẹ jẹ ká lọ rẹ̀ é kúnlẹ̀ fòbìnrin*  
**Obìnrin ló bíwa**  
*Ẹbáni kóre yèyẹ f'Ọṣun*  
*Ore yèyẹ mọlẹ̀ Ọ̀rìṣà.*

Osun we respect you  
 Oh you osu! Come to our aid today  
 The pounded yam maker of Ido  
 Is a woman  
 The oka maker of Ido  
 Is a woman  
 Oh you Osun! Come to our aid today  
 Osun we harking to your voice  
 Oke in the city of Ibadan  
 It was woman that gave birth to the king  
 Before Oba became divinity  
 Let us go  
 And knee for women  
 All the initiates  
**It was woman that gave birth to the king**  
**Before Oba became divinity**  
 Women gave birth to us  
 Before we became good human beings  
 Let us go and knee down for women  
**Women gave birth to us**  
 Join me to hail Osun  
 Homage to the mother of the divinities

Apart from this, the remarkable role played by Moremi has remained indelible in the history of Ifèland. She was able to rescue the people of Ife from the hands of *Úgbò* secret society who frequently come around to raid and squander the land. Following this success, she became a heroine that is always being celebrated in Ifè even till today as *Ìyá Ayé gbogbo* – mother of all and female deity of Ifè. (Adegbola, 2009) Likewise, the Ìbàdàn people realised the role that Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà, the *Ìyálóde* of Ìbàdàn (A woman who rose from a retail food trader to a commercial magnate with business connections in Lagos (Ikpe, 1997) played in the political and economic life of Ìbàdàn. She was economically rich with so many slaves, and was made the *Ìyálóde* of Ìbàdàn, one of the highest Chieftaincy titles for women in Yorùbáland. Indeed, women played big roles in modern politics of the Yorùbáland and Nigeria at large. For instance, under the leadership of Àlímótù Péléwúrà, Lagos market women rose against water rate, women taxation and some other levies in Lagos. (Mba, 1997) Also, women taxation in Abeokuta was stopped by Fúnmíláyò Ransom Kútì (Mba, 1997), another prominent figure.

During *Ifá* worship, homage is paid to women because it is believed that women gave birth to man, and through their reproductive organ, they populate the world. This largely explains the reason why the following song was composed to pay homage to women for bringing human to the world:

<i>Obìnrin lóbọba o</i>	Women are mothers of kings o
<i>Kọba ó tó dọ̀rìṣà</i>	Before kings became divinities
<i>Ẹ jẹ ká wólẹ̀ fòbìnrin</i>	Let us go and knee down for women
<b>Obìnrin ló bọba ọ</b>	<b>Women are mothers of kings o</b>
<i>Kọba ó tó dọ̀rìṣà.</i>	Before kings became divinities

Women do not only give birth, they also nurture the child from pregnancy to maturity. They educate the child at every stage of life; teach the child how to feed; how to walk; how to talk or respond to issues at home, within his or her peers, and before the elders; and how to do all these outside the home. They teach them sex education and how to relate with the opposite sex. They ensure their wards married from good homes and later have their own children. These are the important roles that women played in the Yorùbá society and African generally. Although it is not that men do not partake in the training of their children, yet, there is no gainsaying the fact that women play the greatest role because children are always with their mothers oftentimes.

For instance, in Yorùbáland, it is a general belief that a woman who is not useful for any good thing is a complete failure. This could be further affirmed in the words of Ilesanmi (2013):

Yorùbá women are not lazy, neither are they all images of a real gem, they are rather sensible and full of projectable traditions. They are also very gifted. Whatever men are, is owned to women who are their strength in Yorùbáland. The women are mothers, and they are like gold to be preserved.

Women also played significant role in the religious cult of the Yorùbáland, which is contrary to the people's assumption that women in Yorùbáland only get pregnant, give birth to children, take care of both their husband and children, and do a little bit of trading. (Ilesanmi, 2013) Thus, it is worthy of note that there is no cult in Yorùbáland that one would not find women playing prominent roles. In fact, the information gathered so far has revealed that it is women that prevented other women in some cults. An informant opines that the power associated with men in the secular world does not operate like that in the religious cults. Thus, in actual fact, women control every cult. However, because of jealousy, they prevent other women from joining some powerful cults (Olaniyan and Awo, 2015). Another interviewee argues that powerful women in the religious cult would not feel happy to see their husbands being controlled or ruled by a woman like them as such a man would not be able to direct the affairs of his home in such a situation (Olumide, 2015).

*Babawo* Atúnfágbonbíàdà affirmed that women are behind the establishments of most of the cults in Yorùbáland. According to him, it was a woman that brought to the world, the binding and unifying factor in *Ifá* cult today, that is *Odù* – the thirteenth wife of *Ọ́rúnmílà* who he had an agreement with such that till today, women are prevented from seeing *Odù*. In the *Orò* cult, women are also prominent. Though, the Yoruba assumed that *obinrin ò gbódò fọ́jú k'Orò, èyí tó bá fọ́jú k'Orò, Orò á gbe* – women must not see *Orò*, who ever see *Orò* among them would be devoured by *Orò*. This is done to prevent other women from coming in possibly to keep the secret secured. For instance, one of the women's titles in *Orò* cult is *Ajá* - dog, while another one is *Alàgbà* - elder. There is also the title of *Olùgbẹ̀jẹ̀*. *Ẹ̀dan* or *Ìyá* - the mother, of which all *Ògbóní* members are sucking her breasts, the power of the cult and the central focus of *Ògbóní*. The power of *Erelú* surpasses that of *Apènà* in the cult. Whatever she says is final.

*Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀* is a woman cult. (Ilesanmi, 2013) The witches' cult is mainly for women too. They control all the affairs within the cult with the exception of *abẹ̀sẹ̀* who is in charge of the killing and sharing of their victims. According to Agboola, they always have a bargaining power with *Babaláwo* without which the *Babaláwo* becomes powerless. This is seen in *Òdú Òtúrà Méjì* (Agboola, 1989) which says:

#### Akiyesi lodin abere

*A d'Ifá fun Ọ́rúnmílà*  
*Wọ́n ní ki baba o rubo Asení ...*

#### Akiyesi lodin abere

Cast divination for Orunmila  
He was asked to offer sacrifice against his enemies

In the *Odu Ifa* quoted above, *Ọ́rúnmílà* wanted to know the person behind his predicament. A man or a woman, he enquired. His *Okeponri*, that is, *Ifá* told him it is women, however, he refused to offer the sacrifice. The consequence of his action was, whatever he lays his hands on never prosper such that if he says somebody will be cured of his or her sickness, his or her condition would rather become worse. He went back to *Ifá* and *Ifá* says he should offer the same sacrifice, but this time, what he was supposed to offer once would be offered in five places. He did and stayed to see who would come and eat the sacrifice, since it was the usual practice in those days to offer sacrifice and stay behind to find out who would come and eat the sacrifice. As he was there, he saw *Erelú* of *Olu Ifẹ̀* – the witches. He exclaimed, he said he did not know they were the one. The witches then told him that once he acknowledges their existence and gave them their due respect, whatever he lays his hands upon would prosper. Since then, *Babaláwo*s must be in alliance with the witches if they wish to succeed in their endeavours. However, this was part of the excuses level against women's initiation into *Ifá* cult by those who did not support the idea. Indeed, women played significant roles in the life of *Ọ́rúnmílà*, the custodian of *Ifá*. *Ààbò* – protection in *Ẹ̀jì Ogbè* protected *Ọ́rúnmílà* from the hands of *Ajogun* who were death sickness, and *Ẹ̀ṣù* in *Ẹ̀jì Ogbè* (Ilesanmi, 2013). When *Ìwà* – character, the daughter of *Sùúrù* – patience left *Ọ́rúnmílà*, after marrying *Ẹ̀wà* – Beauty, things were no longer at ease for *Ọ́rúnmílà* until he decided to go and look for *Ìwà* in her father's house begging her to come back to his house. *Odù*, the head of witches and the wife of *Ọ́rúnmílà* still receive patronage and homage from all the *Babaláwo* till today. Thus, the song below is always rendered in her praise till today, especially, in any event relating to *Ifá* or paying homage to *Ifá*.

<i>Mo boju w'Odù mori re o</i>	I looked at Odu, I saw fortune
<i>Mo boju w'Odù mori</i>	I looked at Odu, I saw fortune
<i>Mo joju w'Odù mi o ku mo</i>	I looked at Odu, I won't die again
<i>Mo boju w'Odù mo rire</i> (Ifadare Amufawumi, 2016)	I looked at Odu, I saw fortune

According to Ifádare Amúfawumi (2016), no *Ifá* apprentice would be initiated as *Babaláwo* without paying homage to *Odù*, and at the same time take *Igbádù* from her (this is a calabash that contained all the materials relating to initiation into seeing *Odù*). In *Òdí Méjì* (Babawo Fatunmbi Alabi, 2015), *Ifá* also elevated women. The *Odù Ifá* has this to say about them:

<i>Kóròbótó Kóròbótó</i>	In an easy manner
<i>Ní wón npilè awọn</i>	Awon preparation is usually started
<i>Bó bá dókè tán á gbibú</i>	When it gets to the pick
<i>A má a gbomọrí odó</i>	It will require the use of pestle
<i>A má a gbomọrí ọlọ</i>	It will require the use of grinding stone
<i>A dífá fún Akẹsán</i>	Cast divination for Akesan
<i>Akẹsán tí í ẹ baálẹ ọjà olówó</i>	Akesan a leader of a rich market
<i>Akẹsán ọjà àkódá nílẹ ayé</i>	Akesan is the first market on earth
<i>Ọba ló sì ní</i>	It belongs to a king
<i>Obinrin sì ní ọba ọ̀n</i>	And the king was a woman
<i>Wón ní kó rúbo</i>	She was asked to offer sacrifice
<i>Ó rúbo</i>	She offered it
<i>Ó ní oun gbogbo nígba nígba</i>	She had all things in the count of two hundred
<i>Gbogbo ayé bá Akẹsán pé</i>	All the world started coming to the market

Another *Odù* also elevated women in *Ifá*. According to *Odù Ogbèsá* (Babawo Fatunmbi Alabi, 2015), there *Ifá* says:

<i>Àisínílẹ ọmọkúnrin</i>	The absence of man in the house
<i>Lobinrin fi njogún àdà</i>	Women inherits cutlasses
<i>A dífá fún Ọláyínká</i>	Divination was cast for Olayinka
<i>Òrólú ọmọ ìgbórè</i>	Orolu an indigene of Igbore
<i>Njẹ ètùtù ibá mà tirun ọ</i>	Surely, appeasement would have been exterminated
<i>Ètùtù ibá mà tirun</i>	Appeasement would have been exterminated
<i>Bí ọ bá sí Ọláyínká</i>	If not for the sake of Olayinka
<i>Ọmọ ìgbórè</i>	The indigene of Igbore
<i>Ètùtù ibá mà tirun.</i>	Appeasement would have been exterminated

### Initiation Rites in *Ifá* cult

Initiation rites in *Ifá* cult is the entry of a non-initiate into the sacred grove called *Igbódù* for such a person to be initiated. It is the most important aspect of *Ifá* priesthood for any trained *Ọmọ Awo*, *Babaláwo* or anyone who desires progress in life. Put in another form, it is the graduation done inside *Igbódù* after the completion of the rigorous training of *Ifá* divination or when one desired to re-trace his/her steps from the path of destruction or retrogression. Once an *Ifá* apprentice has completed his training, then he is qualified to be initiated in the sacred *Igbódù* grove, thus, qualified to practice *Ifá* divination. *Ìrètè Méjì* (Babawo Oluwawunsi Adekola, 2015) has established the importance of *Igbódù* where it says:

<i>Ètùtù ló làdó</i>	Appeasement owns Ado
<i>Ètùtù ló lẹyọ</i>	Appeasement owns Oyo
<i>Ètùtù ló nílẹ Ifẹ oòdayé</i>	Appeasement owns Ife Oodaye
<i>Adégbá dódù, òdodù dégbá</i>	Adigba dodu, adodu degba
<i>Àgbà tó gbodù ló gbàtùnú</i>	The elder that received odu is the one that received comfort.

According to Salami (2008), it is the ritual of imprinting the mark of *Olódùmarè* on everything for them to have identification to the things that are not of God, and for the initiate to attain his destiny. The importance of this has something to do with the concept of man in Yorùbá belief and the creation of the earth by *Olódùmarè*. It is the general belief of the Yorùbá and many religions on earth that the world, heaven, and everything therein were created by God known as *Olódùmarè* by the Yorùbá. Among what he created according to the religion of the Yorùbá was *Ifá*, the word of *Olódùmarè*, to be the guardian of man to perfection on earth. Since once *Orí* or *Ìpín* - destiny is chosen in heaven, man tends to forget before he gets to the earth to fulfill this destiny. (Moreover, certain *ẹbọ* must be offered in heaven before the choosing of this *orí*. This is to assist in choosing good *orí* that would make life easy here on earth) (Elebuibon, 2000). This is coupled with the activities of the opposing forces from the *Ajoguns* (Canizares, 2000), the witches and wizards, particularly the witches, who have seen the good destiny that man has chosen from heaven. This view is supported by an informant who cited *Odù Ofun Ika* (Babawo Awotale Adesoji, 2015) as an example. In the *Odù*, *Ifá* says:

<i>Òfún mọlé iká</i>	Ofun knows Ika's domain
<i>Ìká mọlé Òfún</i>	Ika knows Ofun's habitation
<i>Òkùnkùn mọlé òru</i>	Darkness knows midnight's house
<i>Fẹnifẹni á mọlé ọ̀gànjọ</i>	A lover knows the terrain at night
<i>A difá fún ọ̀òṣàálá ọ̀ṣẹ̀rẹ̀ìgbò</i>	Divined for Oosala Osereigbo
<i>Tí ntòrun bọ wálé ayé</i>	That came from heaven to the earth
<i>Yíó maa, fòsán tún ilé ayé ẹ</i>	Who would be using afternoon to organize the world
<i>Wọ̀n ní kó rúbọ</i>	He was asked to offer sacrifice
<i>Kí wọ̀n ó má maa fòru báájé</i>	So as to prevent people from destroying what he had done in the
afternoon	
<i>Nígbà ìwásẹ̀</i>	In the beginning,
<i>Gbogbo ire tédá ó bá ní láyé</i>	All the good things that human beings would have on earth
<i>Ọ̀òṣàálá ní nda</i>	The deity always creates them
<i>Wọ̀n ní kó rúbọ àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ tó nbò láyé</i>	He was asked to offer sacrifice for upcoming children
<i>Ọ̀òṣàálá gbẹ̀bọ̀ nbẹ̀, ó rúbọ</i>	The deity offered the sacrifice
<i>Ọ̀òṣàálá nfọ̀sán tún ayé ẹ</i>	The deity was organising the world in the afternoon
<i>Àwọ̀n iyámi nfòru bàá jẹ.</i>	The witches were destroying it at night

Therefore, by inscribing *Ifá* the word of *Olódùmarè*, that is, the signature of the *Odù* that comes out on the *Ọ̀mọ Awo* or any initiate by the *Babaláwo* during this initiation rites, the *Ọ̀mọ Awo* or the initiate becomes covered by the word as found in such an *Odù*. As said above, initiation can also be done for people who are not a trained or would be *Ifá* priests. These are the kinds of people for whom things are not goth life challenges, then, initiation rites of *Ifá* can come to their rescue.

### Discrimination against Women's Initiation into *Ifá* cult

In spite of all the positive roles that women played socially, economically, politically and religious wise, this negative thought still trailed women's efforts and activities not only in Yorùbá society alone, but throughout the world in general, particularly in the area of initiation to *Ifá* cult. In this modern world, despite the fact that women are found in every profession, they are believed to be unequal and inferior to men. This has led to gender equality campaign in almost all the countries of the world. In almost all the religions of the world, women always outnumbered men. Yet, they are not given equal opportunity. In Christian and Muslim dominated countries as an example, women are discriminated against as regards some positions in these religious organisations. Although in Christianity, things are a little bit better in the sense that women are now allowed to hold ministerial positions, especially in Nigeria, where there was stiff opposition to it before on the basis of the fact that Jesus did not address only female during his ministration. Rather, he guaranteed both male and female including children the kingdom of his father. Therefore, what Paul said regarding women's restriction in 1 Timothy 2<sup>11-13</sup> (Let woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man, but be in silence. For Adm was first formed then Eve.) was viewed as his own personal opinion by the church in Nigeria today. Besides, travelling to other parts of the world has made

some of the Christian churches shifted their position to favour women in their ministries. That is the reason why there are Rev. Mrs., Bishops, Evangelists and Pastors among women in Christianity. However, despite that, women ministers are still in the minority. Men domination over the women in Islam is still the order of the day. Up till now, they do not sit together in their places of worship.

Coming home to the indigenous religion, the situation is the same. In their congregation centres, women are not allowed to take lead in some of their activities except in the area of music, in spite of the fact that women's population in these worship temples are higher than men. Again, it is not only in the area of congregational services that women are not allowed to take charge. In the area of learning and initiation into a full Ifá Priest, women are discriminated against. Although, the Yorùbá say *bólè bá kóşu tó fewùrà silè, ká má pé gbogbo işu lolè kó* – if a thief carries white yam and leaves water yam behind, one should not conclude that the thief has taken the whole yam. What this implies is that there are still some few women who are initiated into Ifá cult, but they are in the minority because of the agitation against their being initiated into the cult. However, considering the importance of initiation rites into Ifá cult, in the life of humanity in general, one may be compelled to ask the question, why must women be excluded in the rites? We may also ask what is so much important in the initiation rites into Ifá cult that women should not be included. To fully understand this, we must know what it involves in the Ifá initiation rites.

Those who argued in favour of women's initiation are of the opinion that there is no place in Ifá divination system that says women should not be initiated. According to Òşágbèmi (Osagbemi Osarinu, 2016), he maintained that there is nothing wrong in initiating women into Ifá cult, the only difference is that during initiation, she would be restricted from certain rites. She would be prevented from sighting *Odù*, but every other rite, including *Ìta*, *Ìje*, *Ìtálá* and *Ìtádógún* with all the sacrifices involved can be done for her. This corroborated Salami's (Salami, 2008) view who believed that women can be initiated but prevented from sighting *Odù Olófin* who is equally a woman. In his own argument, he enquired: why is it that women are not allowed to witness an important aspect of initiation? In his answer to the question, he explains:

I think the answer to the question is arguably inexhaustible but we can conclude that the reason may be hidden in their nature. We would remember that Òşun made a pronouncement under Òşé Ònúrá concerning the concealment of ethics and institutions which are considered sacred from women. This concealment the Ifá verse says: was not ordered by Olódumarè but the deities after the incident that happened to the same Òşun as recorded earlier. However, in the true sense of it, women don't actually need to see, the *Odù* because it is part and parcel of their making. They have the *Odù* already in the form of a kind of latent energy which only needs the initiation to activate.

Aina Somadhi (2008) is of the opinion that women can be initiated into Ifá cult because she is an initiate herself. However, she went further to explain that women initiated into Ifá cult cannot partake in the eating of *Ìpaná Odù* food if the ritual of *Ìpaná Odù* has not been done for such a woman. She explained further that the ritual of *Ìpaná Odù* is not meant for women alone, men as well who did not perform the ritual cannot even touch the bowl used in carrying the food not to talk of eating it.

Again, those that argued against women's initiation into the Ifá cult based their argument on certain rites and procedures that must be performed by women during the initiation. One, if and when an *Omọ Awo* - apprentice is ready to be initiated, he is placed in a room where a beautiful woman is allocated to attend to all his needs before the initiation to test his ability on comporting, discipline and self-control against committing fornication with his female client when he eventually becomes an independent Ifá priest, so that his case will not be like that of *Àgbìgbò-níwònràn* in *Odù Òbàrà Méjì* (Abimbola, 1968) who was asked to go and untie the wife of Oníkoromèbí. On sighting her, he could not control himself, rather than to release her, he was making love with her there and this led to the death of both of them through the hand of *Qba Oníkoromèbí*. Two, they also argued that whenever a priest is to be initiated, it is a woman that will usher him into the initiation grove. To perform this rite, for a woman initiate, who is going to usher her in? This is a question *Babawo Èlúwólé Ifálósòbècè* (2016) asked. This also, is the position of *Babawo Ifáyemí Yókélépèkùn* (2016) who maintained that tradition must be followed. He cited *Òyèkú Méjì*, there Olójòngbòdú betrayed *Ikú* – death her husband, and many other places in Ifá where women betrayed their husbands. He concluded that women are betrayers; therefore, they should not be allowed to know the secrets of Ifá. Some of the *Odù Ifá* he sighted were also mentioned by Abimbola (1964) in *Òyèkú Méjì*, Salami<sup>4</sup> in *Òwónrín Ìrètè*, and Bascom<sup>5</sup> in *Ìrètè Òşé* to mention a few.

Also, it is believed by those who are against women initiation into Ifa cult that women themselves have a lot of ritual powers residing in in them which should be noted. Therefore, the interference of these powers and the side effects on women, e.g.

<sup>4</sup> Ayo Salami. *Ifa A Complete Communication*. Lagos: NIDD Publishing Company. 416.

<sup>5</sup> William Bascom. *Ifa Divination Communication between Man and God in West Africa*. U.S.A: Indiana University Press. 416.



blindness and bareness are enough reasons. We should also note that during monthly menstrual circle, women carry the power of death that could lead to the death of the priests engaging in the ritual. So, the power of life and death possessed by women and how it can influence the safety and wellness of both the woman and the *Ifá* priests during the initiation process is enough consideration to note and desist from such an act (Ifagbemi Yokelepekun, 2016). However, research carried out revealed that initiation into *Ifá* cult does not indicate that one must learn *Ifá* before he or she can be initiated into the cult. According to information gathered a child of five years old can be initiated into *Ifá* male or female. The only exception is the Apètèbí – wife of a *Babaláwo*. The reason for this, according to Somadhi (2008) is Apètèbí's husband who is a *Babaláwo* will take care of her spiritually.

## Conclusion:

Looking at both sides of the argument, one may conclude that both schools of thought are right. However, considering the benefits that may be derived from being initiated into the cult, one would then be tempted to agree that being initiated is better. Being initiated gives one opportunity to discover his past for the sake of the future. This is so because when one is initiated, he learns about the *Odù* that brought the person to the world, and the sacrifice associated with it. Then one knows his encounters that could possibly hinder one's progress in life, out of which we have the specific kind of food to eat and those to avoid, the kind of colours of clothes one can wear that will attract good luck, prosperity and joy. The religion that one should devote his time, money and life to. Also, during the initiation, if the person been initiated is not married, details of the kind of woman he can marry, whether tall, fat, short, black or fair in complexion, the *Odu* that comes out will be specified. It will, the *Odù* also specify the type of profession to take to in life so that one's life would prosper. This is the summary of what usually happened when one is initiated. But the unfortunate thing is, civilisation, modernity, western education and foreign religions have made us abandon these benefits, and that is the reason why some people are not successful in all areas of life. As research has revealed, there should not be any restriction for a particular set of people to be enjoying this benefit. It should be for the whole humanity so that our life and society would be better. After all, when rain falls, it falls on both male and female, old and young. The sun does not shine on one part and leave the rest. Likewise, the moons and *Olódùmarè* did not create specific set of people to enjoy him better than another. He created us all both male and female for us to serve him in every areas of life. Therefore, any woman that showed interest should be encouraged to be initiated. More so, if we consider their contributions to the existence and progress of the world of which they took and are still taking active roles in all aspects, especially religious leadership roles. *Ogbèyèkú* (Ojo Fadumiye, 2016) sums it up by saying:

*Ogbèyèkú baba àmùlù*  
*Orí ogbó, Orí atọ, Baba ẹdan*  
*Àjikan ní tààsè,*  
*A difá fún Ọkànlénigba imọlẹ*  
*Lọjọ tí wọn ntọrun bọ wálẹ ayé*  
*Wọn délé ayé tán,*  
*Wọn ẹlẹ ayé*  
*Ilẹ ayé ò rọjú*  
*Wọn bọrun àjìjà wọn,*  
*Ọrun àjìjà wọn ò tilẹ gbà*  
*Omi kéré kéré kéré ilẹ Olúfẹ*  
*Bẹrẹ sí ní wẹwù iràwé*  
*Ọpẹ kéré kéré kéré Ilẹ Olúfẹ*  
*Bẹrẹ sí ní dejiwọran*  
*Okó di pàsán*  
*Òbò di làbà*  
*Atọ gbe mokunrin nidi*  
*Ogbeyeku baba amulu*  
*Oun naa lo sefa fun Ọrúnmilà*

Ogbeyeku the father of the combined Ifa corpus  
 Ori Ogbo, Ori Ato father of edan  
 Ajikan is known for Aase  
 A divination was cast for two hundred and one divinities  
 On the day they were coming from heaven to the earth  
 They got to the earth  
 They managed the earth  
 The earth was not settled  
 They appease their Lords  
 Their Lords did not accept  
 The little river at Olufe's compound  
 Started drying  
 The small palm trees in the house of Olufe  
 Started drying  
 Penis did no function well  
 Likewise the vagina  
 The sperm in male people got dried  
 Ogbeyeku the father of combined Ifa corpus  
 Was the one that divined for Orunmila

<i>Nígbati baba nbo wa joye atayese</i>	When he was coming to the earth
<i>Nje Aje ti I somo Olokun, Obinrin ní</i>	Aje, the daughter of Olokun was a woman
<i>Olosa obinrin ní</i>	Olosa was a woman
<i>Ọ̀sun obinrin ní</i>	Osun was a woman
<i>Yemoja obinrin ní</i>	Yemoja was a woman
<i>Yemoro obinrin ní</i>	Yemoro was a woman.

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