

FOLKLORE AND DEVELOPMENT - THE RUNNER AND  
THE CHACER - THE ILLUSION OF CATCHING UP.

Owusu Brempong

In 1846, an English antiquarian William John Thoms coined the word "Folklore" in place of the phrase "popular antiquity". Since then, the word folklore has continued to be used to the present day. The first folklore department came into being in 1963 at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, in the United States of America. Several students from Africa, namely, Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, Sudan, Ghana, etc., have gone through Indiana University folklore department and they are now teaching or doing folklore research in their own countries. The miles is one of such scholars.

Some scholars, especially anthropologists have stipulated that folklore is reflection or a mirror of culture (Benedict 1935: xxxvii-xlii, Dundes 1965:32). The scene is different if we recapitulate how the concept folklore was originally coined. In Africa folklore is the backbone of culture a cultural system which continues to be part of our worldview, our local colour and our everyday life style. Hence, folklore is not popular antiquity for the African as Thoms coined the word for Europeans. Again, if folklore is the mirror of culture, then, we can only see the image of culture in the mirror and that what is behind the mirror is never seen; this is only a paradigm of looking and that what is behind the mirror might be greater than the image in the mirror. Folklore is part of the total cultural system and not only a reflection as it is already alleged. We, therefore, see culture as a conventional system of behaviour and folklore as "raw" or unconventional system of behaviour which reveals and explains the backbone of the total cultural behaviour systems.

Richard Dorson also believed that the African has no folklore since he has not as yet developed the class system for the lower class to be studied by the middle class. (Dorson 1972:4-67). With the following western trend of definition of folklore, I believe, the best way to produce the right kind of definition for the African for what we do as folklore, should come from an African language. If we thoroughly examine the tenet of our colonial predicament, it will perhaps be found at the bottom line that all knowledge begins with experience and we implicitly believe that it is only a fool who does not learn from his experiences. A simple illustration is that if one touches the fire and it burns him or her, repeating the same mistake makes one an impracticable fool. As the Akan proverb goes: "Okwasca na oma yetia ne hwowa so mprenu" literally meaning, "It is the foolish person who allows his testicles to be stepped on twice". Shall we take a pragmatic approach to this problem?

There are those who accept that our colonial masters have devoured our Africanity and that the problem is irreversible. We would like to say that this is false and that we can do something about his problem if only we want to.

Here, is a simple etiological tale to illustrate that this trend is reversible. Folklorists

always like to tell tales to illustrate a point.

There was once a strayed baby leopard who found a mother goat and her babies. The baby leopard followed the nanny-goat and her kids and when the kids drank their mother's milk the baby leopard also drank from nanny-goat's breast. The kind nanny-goat did not care; she nurtured the cub the same way as her own kids.

Both the baby leopard and the kiddy goats grew up and later began to learn how to eat grass. The Baby leopard also started to eat the grass. In a sense, the leopard cub behaved like a goat.

It happened that one day while the children were grazing in the pasture with their mammy, they ran into a leap, a number of leopards. One of the leopards chased them but he was able to catch only the leopard cub. When the elder leopard realised that he had a cub and not a goat, he brought it to where the leopards were having their dinner. A big deer had been killed for the big feast. The elder leopard instructed the cub to eat some of the raw meat but the baby leopard would not eat it. "You are a leopard and not a goat, you are one of us!" said the elder leopard. Later, he forced the cub by putting some of the venison (deer meat), into the cub's mouth and it was an extraordinary taste to the baby leopard; it enjoyed the taste very much and it started to wiggle it's tail.

Now what kind of lesson can we learn from this etiological tale? It will take some time to analyse the whole tale but the most important lesson to be drawn from it is the cub's identity. Unfortunately it lost it's identity to become a goat but has now rediscovered it.

Now we would like to borrow from the late Kwabena Sekyi, a Ghanaian philosopher, whose main idea was that "A constitution is born and never created". The continuity of our perpetual tie of subjection and allegiance with the Western countries is unnaturally born. Was the African born to be a slave for ever? But the African has been subservient since the beginning of his first contact with the West to this day. The time, it is to be hoped, is gone by when our main target of political, economic and social advancement is catching up with the West. This popular opinion on the subject is not palpable to sense. What kind of catching up do we have to do when the "organizer and his model" runner is already over one thousand miles ahead of us and the distance between us and him is impeded with thorns, nails and broken bottles. And with no shoes on our feet, is catching up not illusive? But then, the organizer tells us that we can catch up in the same race while his track is cleared and with longer straps, he is making the distance between us wider and wider.

Does progress mean catching up? Progress is moving forward, improvement, an advance towards perfection, improving and building from our own folklore; from our own natural resources. We have to build and improve on what we have to be able to get what we want. Such improvement does not mean transplantation of Western values which we have to pay exorbitantly for; something which does not nurture our expectation.

How can we perfect other people's notion when our own is not developed. We are aware that several Africans, especially Ghanaians, say that the Whiteman is next to God because he has superior brains. We are made to believe that God, the Omnipotent, Omniscient and the Omnipresent, made the Whiteman better than the Blackman. Oburonin ho ye hu, literally meaning "the Whiteman is wonderful". We do not accept this idea in it's entirety. The only difference between the Whiteman and the Blackman is that, the Whiteman is better organized in his own right and therefore it becomes difficult for the Blackman to cope with something which is different from his roots.

According to Lucian Pye, "Science, technology and modern nation states have come to be identified with world culture, progress and civilization". Similarly, development, modernization, and even "democracy", said to characterize this historical development, have come to attain the status of evolution universals and cultural absolutes. (Pye, 1964:345-67)

It is felt that the so called advanced members of this world culture are models worthy of emulation by the so called underdeveloped areas. The fear that diffusion of western scientific cultures might erode indigenous cultures in non-western societies tend to be ignored by the identification of "world cultures" with purely "material" elements (science, technology, administration, etc.) This rampant materialism is capable of disrupting the "spiritual foundation of the underdeveloped society". Ideally, the desire to fuse traditional cultures with new goals of development, i.e., western technological and material progress, is likely to bring about a great deal of confusion on what it is to be consolidated and what to be negated, and how much adaptation is necessary and how this fusing should be made.

The type of the folklore, we are talking about does not involve drumming, singing and dancing. Our folklore and culture are more than that; they involve the total life style of our people; our traditional skills or technology of producing material culture, i.e., architecture, weaving, basketry, pottery making, food ways-cookery (home science) and our linguistic habits, our mores, etc. can be improved with science civilization".

We are also made to believe that scientific knowledge belongs to the Whiteman only. This assertion can only be true when we do not involve ourselves in seeking the scientific knowledge. We should know where we are going before we start the journey. Scientific knowledge is a universal knowledge. We study the same physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics in our schools as non-Blacks do in their schools. Science rely on methods and mathematical calculations. Gordon Child in his book, *Man Makes Himself*, explains the functions of science as, "the classification of facts, the recognition of their sequence and relative significance. The scientific attitude is shown in the habit of forming judgement on the fact unbiased by personal feelings." (Child 1951:10). With scientific knowledge and folklore, we can improve our traditional skills, techniques, traditional arts, designs and symbols, tools, furniture, architecture, traditional costumes, agriculture, cookery, etc. The Japanese have done it and they have done it so well that even today the advancement in modern electronics, automobiles, computers, cameras, etc. is not illusive to them. In the 1950's Japanese products were not patronized in Ghana. We felt that they were rudimentary products instead, we preferred products from England. Today we clamor for Japanese products because they are the best.

Can we put science into our folklore? If the answer is *yes* how do we achieve this? This question must be answered. After several years of studying in the U.S.A., the author was happy to come back to see that Ghana has embarked on the concept of *Sankofa*. This is a very good idea for our nationalism i.e., nation building. But then, how are we going back to pick it up? How far do we have to go or how far can we go? We leave these questions to field research. We need an intensive and extensive field research to be able to find something from the tradition that will enhance our national development. Without extensive research we can never go back to find anything; we will only scratch the surface. Europeans and Americans come to do research on our lifestyles-folklore. We sit down and do not care about studding our own folklore and culture. Do you think the Europeans and the Americans are stupid to spend their monies studying us? They have their own reasons for studying us and therefore you must also have some reasons for studying yourselves. Do

not allow them to reason for you. We must study them too.

## Nationalism

Folklore which is the backbone of our culture can be used to put the people of this nation together for our national development. Without the people, there will be no development.

One of the most important functions of folklore is nationalism. The first national state to make political capital of folklore studies was the National Socialist government of Hitler. During the 1930's a massive literature of folklore was published in Germany to unite the Nazis. Folklore was devised for political agitation and propaganda. *Volks* was the nation and *Volkskunde* was the study of folklore.

Before then, in 1912 the Grimms brothers, Jacob and Wilhem, collected numerous folktales for the purpose of Nationalism. In Ghana we need a national folktale series as other countries have. We have folktale of Germany, folktale of Hungary, folktale of Norway etc. In 1800 Finland produced the *panchatantra* a national epic.

In the Soviet Union folklore was molded for commercial end. Folklore was used to sell communism to the people. Bishop Sarpong believe that chieftaincy could be used to unite the nation in a way that no one or no institution could. He stipulates; "Far from being a potential source of disunity, chieftaincy could unite the nation in a way that no one or no institution could. ———Each ethnic group could be urged to unite closely under its chief. This group then becomes a kind of cell vital to the whole nation"(Sarpong 1990; XXI) We believe our festivals and celebrations and other folklore materials could also unite us, because these various festivals confirm the concept of unity in diversity. As people come together, they are able to learn from each other and brotherhood could ensure.

## Education

Education which was once a function of the home has now become the province of the school. The impact of modern school system on our folklore and culture has not been able to solve our social problems. Schools themselves constitute social problems. Learning would be better if it is transmitted through parents language, since schools in modern complex societies move away from humanity at least in the use of foreign languages and alien tools. According to John Singleton (1973) modern schools have become a sorting device for social mobility - individual success in social status and economic reward tends to be distributed on the basis of years, kinds of schooling and the degrees received. In a sense, schools are gatekeepers of social mobility and they reinforce rather than change ascribed social status; the same lower-class status is reinforced as people lose out in the school game.

Singleton (1973) again states that, the culture of schools is in the same extent isolated from societies and communities in which they exist, that the distribution of schools around the world remain tributes to western colonialization. Schools emphasis from learning to teaching and a change from stable pattern of culture transmission to the teaching of what parents never knew. He condemns schools not be the best transmitter, and he believes that the family, peer groups and neighbourhood are far more effective agents for transmitting language, culture values, attitudes and customs.

In the United States of America, Eliot Wigginton found a device to entice the high school students to have interest in education. As a teacher of journalism at the Rabun Gap-Nacooche School in Georgia, he encouraged his students to write about themselves; what their parents do at home. The children collected ghost stories, information on spring wild plant food, spinning and weaving, traditional midwifery, burial customs, corn shuckings, wagon making and more affair of plain living. These student project have yielded the publication of the famous foxfire series, 1,2,3,4, etc., which is now the U.S.A. national treasure. This ongoing research is supported and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities' Education Division.

## Agriculture

The position regarding agricultural studies in Ghana has not really been very well understood. We now import rice, tomatoes, milk, beef, porkfeet, turkey tails etc. Cocoa, which is the main cash crop in Ghana, has really suffered due to the so-called modernization; especially by the introduction of western education. A far more serious issue is the massive increase in the outflow from primary, middle school and secondary leading to a dramatic growth in the unemployment among primary, middle, secondary and even university graduates. Since 1951 the situation has been vastly exaggerated and has become a crucial problem for government because of its fear of a rapid rise of the rate of juvenile delinquency.

Philip Foster wrote, "In attempting to indicate the relative sound economic and social basis upon which African expectations were based in the colonial period, it should not be overlooked that serious problems did arise so far as the employment situation for many school graduates was concerned (Foster 1968:137)

The aspiration of Ghanaian farmers is to educate their children in school which will enable them to assimilate western values. After school these children are expected to work at white collar jobs, however, the search for these jobs often turn out to be in vain. However, there are opportunities for individuals within the cash-crop sector of the agricultural economy. If Ghanaians would wish to use them, there are income earning opportunities connected with cocoa production (which had become increasingly important since the beginning of the century), but it has already been noted that parents invest money in the education of their children in order to enable the latter to leave farming. What factors therefore lead these children to ignore cash-cropping as a reasonable alternative to other forms of employment? Cocoa farming itself suffered from severe disabilities in the fact of other opportunities open to the products of the schools. Michael Lowy wrote "Agriculture has steadily declined in socio-economic importance and presently constitute only 12 per cent of those employed" (Lowy 1973:2)

In addition to the effect of Western education on agriculture, another problem is the modern mechanization of farming. Most of the farmers who grow cocoa in Ghana are considered simple people, yet they are pragmatic. They will only adopt an innovation they think will be beneficial to them. Initially they may adopt the use of an expensive fertilizer or machinery, but when found to be not beneficial in terms of expectations, they are more likely to abandon the new idea. At times the adoption of a new technology which is not properly understood may result in an economic disaster.

## Religion

We need to propagate our traditional religion since it is not only the backbone for our folklore but also for our total cultural systems. We are aware that the so-called born-again christians will not like this statement to be made. We are all christians but we have learnt that without our traditional religion, our chieftaincy systems and other social institutions, our festivals, our kinship systems, our folk medical practice, etc., will be lost for ever. Our traditions are our way of life, which is our worldview and our culture ethos.

The first goal of the European missionaries in Africa was to dissuade the Africans from their own cultural values. As Kofi Asare Opoku (1978) observed:

The negative attitude toward African culture which led to an intolerant rejection of African experience, has become a heritage of the church in Africa and up to the present time, when most of the churches are in African hands, there is still the feeling that too much familiarity with African culture would sap the essential christian flavour from the church's being and existence; and there is the constant insistence that the church must maintain its distinct identity and be different from the cultural environment in which it finds itself. Evidence of this may be found in the church's over-cautious attitude, bordering on fear, and its grudging acceptance of elements of African culture into its life and worship. (p iii)

Despite the fact that the early christian missionaries tried to dissuade Africans from their own heritage, the presence of traditional belief, within Africa christianity is overwhelming. The belief in the Supreme Being Nyame, Mawu, Allah, respect of the ancestors and the fear of the supernaturals, especially witchcraft, are all beliefs shared by christians, muslims and the practitioners of traditional religion. As an informant, a traditional priest, observed, "A christian who does not believe in witchcraft does not believe that there is the devil. Hence, any christian who does not believe in the devil does not believe in the powers of Jesus Christ".

All the various religions in Ghana share the same common belief in a Supreme Being. The traditional religion, although dealing with various deities, is not polytheistic as some scholars presume. The main concept of the traditional religion is focused on the Supreme Being, God. The deities are believed to be the children of God and these deities act as intermediaries between God and humanity. A corollary of this believe is seen in Catholic practices in which Christ, the Virgin Mary or other saints meditate between worshippers and God. In a sense, these religions appear to take different "roads" to the same destination.

### The Old Order Amish As cross-cultural Study

After several years of studying in the U.S.A., the author had to learn that studying other people's folklore and culture serves as a beacon for an understanding of his own. America is a land of fascinating cultural diversity and he was fortunate to visit American Indian reservations including The Old Order Amish. He had the chance to participate in some of the Native American Indian religious ceremonies.

For this work brief discussion is made on The Old Order Amish to show how these people, for centuries, have been able to stand against the so-called modernization, progress

and Western values.

The Amish are rural people spread in the U.S.A. They are the followers of Jacob Amman a Mennonite preacher who broke away from the church to form his own church now known as The Old Order Amish. They live in about twenty states including Virginia, Iowa, Ohio and Indiana.

The Amish raise their own food, build their own homes, make their own clothes, folk craft, folk customs, etc. The Amish family is largely a self-sustaining economic unit. There are no churches in Amishland. All religious services in Amishland are held in the home. Modern Commercial amusements are forbidden so that recreation also revolves around the home. There is no electricity, no radio or television. These people believe that they are the best farmers in the world and they also believe that working the soil, they are following the path that God intended. They make their own cheese, beef, milk, etc., and they are able to preserve food for several years. Basic to the Amish agricultural system is that they do not employ tractors or modern fertilizers in the field. They only use teams of horses instead of tractors; they find the use of tractors and fertilizers useless and expensive. As the Amish say, "when you put gasoline in the tractor all you get is smoke".

The Old Order Amish are well aware that they look different and they have no intention of changing. Their difference makes them feel close to one another and this accentuates the in-group feeling-solidarity for the whole group.

Amish farms are acknowledged to be among the best in the world. The Old Order Amish say: "it is a wise man, who makes himself as self-sufficient as possible." They try not to depend on the outside world and feeling of relative deprivation is therefore lacking (Kephart, 1987:4-42).

### **Conclusion**

Basically, Ghana is still a simple society. With proper planning and co-ordination of effort, the country can progress by embarking on the use of her own natural resources. Folkloreless people have foundation for their culture. Folklore should be blended with our so-called modern life (our economic, social and political institutions), so that we can show the best of our culture to the rest of the world. To show the world that we are distinct human beings with rich cultural heritage. We must show our proper local colours, worldview and ethos. It is through this that the world will respect us. With such kind of respect our dealings with the rest of the world in terms of our economy, politics, etc, will not suffer. It is through our folklore and folklife that we can be creative, to develop our nation Ghana. How should this be done?

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