

Some Perspectives on the Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle River Kaduna Valley in the Pre-Colonial Period

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Abstract

The Middle River Kaduna Valley is a strip of land that is located in the Eastern part of Niger State of North Central Nigeria. Today, this area is referred to as Minna emirate. The dominant ethnic group inhabiting the region are Gbagyi. In the pre-colonial period the Gbagyi in the area of study have their religion. This religion to Gbagyi, are things that involved their personal and communal experience of scared and set of beliefs and practices that defines the relations between the people and sacred or divinity. As Gbagyi's Ideas that are exclusive and relate to their existence, characteristics and worship of deity or deities, the religion provides the Gbagyi with social comfort, acts as social control which individual conducts are regularized and served as a power source of sanctions that constitutes values which the Gbagyi society relied upon. It is against this background that this paper would provide some perspectives on the Gbagyi religious beliefs and practices with a view to creating a clear understanding on the traditional religious beliefs and practices, it's significance, and position today considering the historical development the Gbagyi went through as a result of their contact with foreign cultures.*

Keywords: *Religious Beliefs and Practices, Gbagyi, Middle River Kaduna Valley, Pre-Colonial Period*

Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine and to provide some perspectives on the religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle River Kaduna Valley in the pre-colonial period. From time immemorial the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley have their religious beliefs and practices. These systems of beliefs and practices are the ways through which they express their acknowledgement of the divine and communicate with, the hope to gain experience of that which lies behind their ordinary experiences. The religious beliefs and

-The Middle River Kaduna Valley is a strip of land area that is located in the Eastern part of Niger State of modern Nigeria. Today this area is referred to as Minna emirate. The dominant ethnic group inhabiting the region and its people see Isah, B.N. 'The Evolution of the State Systems Among The Gbagyi of the Middle River Kaduna Valley C. 1860-1981', Ph.D Thesis, Abuja: University of Abuja, 2003 and also see Bawa, M.M., 'The Life and Time of Alhaji Ahmadu Bahago The first Emir of Minna, M.A. Dissertation, Abuja: University of Abuja, 2003.

practices of the Gbagyi provide strong linkages between the lives of the people with the world of the ancestors. This had enabled the Gbagyi(in the study area) in the period under examination to maintain constant and symbiotic relations with their ancestors who the Gbagyi understood to be intimately concerned and involved in their everyday life. As a way of life, the religious beliefs and practices of the Gbagyi represent their ideas, concepts and norms that characterized the Gbagyi's symbols and sacred places, which were transmitted from one generation to generations. These religious beliefs and practices manifest themselves in communal ceremonies or divinatory rites in which members of the Gbagyi community are not only overcome by force but also excited to the point of going into meditative trance in response to rhythmic drumming or singing. The background and materials for this paper are derived mainly from primary sources particularly oral traditions collected through series of interviews with Gbagyi traditional religions practitioners and adherents. The study also used of some secondary sources to elaborate on some of the issues quite central to the topic of the paper.

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on identifying the contributions already made on the subject/topic under investigation. In reviewing the related literature we concentrated on the contributions of some scholars concerning the Gbagyi history including their religious beliefs and practices. While considering the literature for review, an attempt was made to select some works that were directly or indirectly related to the topic under examination. This was deliberately done in order to provide a clear perspective on the existing literature. These works includes: *Gbagyi and the Nigerian Nation* Shednayi(1999), *Topics on Gbagyi History* Byanyiko(1979), *Notes on Some Aspects of Gbagyi History* Bala(2008), *Gbagyi as a Native* Galadima(2000), *Gbagyi/Gwari Culture* Diko(1988), *Gbagyiza: History and Culture of Gbagyi Speaking People* Sada(1996), 'Northern Provinces under colonial rule:1900-1959'Sa'ad(1980), and 'The Impact of British Colonial Rule on Gbagyi 1900-1960: A Study of Political Change'Sule(1988). In these works Shednayi(1999), Bayanyiko(1979), Bala(2008) and Galadima(2000) focus their attention on the origin of the Gbagyi and also examined their pre-colonial, economic and political life. Diko(1988) and Sada(1996) concentrated on the customs and traditions of the Gbagyi. In addition, while Sa'ad's(1980) article provides a detailed account of the reaction or resistance of the Gbagyi against the British colonialists in their administration of the Gbagyi land. Sule(1988) on the other hand examines how the new political order introduced by the British affected the workings of the pre-colonial political and administrative structures among the Gbagyi. It is evident that the works are important and relevant to the understanding of the history of the Gbagyi including those inhabiting the Middle River Kaduna Valley. However, a vacuum still exists as these scholars did not mention/discuss the religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi. Though, Diko(1988) and Sada(199) only outlined the religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyias an aspect of their culture, they do not provide detailed accounts of them. This article therefore fills the gap by providing some perspectives on the religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle River Kaduna Valley in the pre-colonial

period. Bringing to limelight the pre-colonial religious beliefs and practices of the Gbagyi would enable the people to understand few things about their past. Their past in other words may be relevant to understanding of their present situation. The religious beliefs of Gbagyi are less concerned with doctrines or faith than rituals, ceremonies, lived practices and lived traditions; they are, however, based on reality to the divine and institutionalized on a particular belief.

The Gbagyi Religious Beliefs System And Practices

The dominant social institution that govern the affairs of Gbagyi of the Middle River Kaduna Valley in the pre- colonial period was religion Shuaibu and Hassan(1962:45). Religion of the Gbagyi as mentioned in the preface of their social control which regularized the people's conduct Shazin(2007:72). This religion of the Gbagyi do not only represents the power source of moral sections of the people but also give meaning and significance to the Gbagyi's lives both in the world of living and world of death Enoch and Yusuf(2016:26). Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the Gbagyi in the study area adhered to their traditional religion Zakari(2008:15). The worship of *A'shata*- gods was the foundation elements of faith for the Gbagyi which constitutes part of their lives Darling (2004:25). The Gbagyi in the study area in the pre- colonial period believed and worshipped many *A'shata*- gods which to the people each of the gods has it's functions which was largely believed to punish. Whenever the Gbagyi in this period was pre-occupied with seeking to avert punishment the god would visit them Filaba (2007:25). They constantly engaged in worshipping this god during hard times such as bad harvest, famine and outbreak of plague, when the going is good the Gbagyi saw no need to worry about this god Shekwo (1986:42).

It is pertinent to note that however, despite the above, does not mean that the Gbagyi including those inhabiting the middle River Kaduna Valley were completely devoid of the idea of a Supreme Being Mallam Godeyinze (2014). The Gbagyi in the region of study believed that there exists one Supreme Being called *Shekwoyi* and *Swashe*- god by *Gbagyi Matayi* or *Ngenge* – Eastern and *Gbagyi Nkwa* – the Western respectively Idris (2006:20). All the Gbagyi conventionally worshipped the *Shekwoyi* or *Swashe*- God with the believe that he is the creator WHO created the universe and everything in the earth and sea Yusuf (2014:27). According to Gbagyi, the *Shewoyi* or *Swashe*. God is high above the sky, sovereign, benevolent with a sound sense of justice, thruth, mercy and love. He regulates all aspects of humans activities an control's all things and heaven Yusuf(2004:27). As an omnipotent god Gbagyi take oath in its name with a conviction that his office rewards good and punishes evil ones Mallam Bello Napwa(2014). In the Gbagyi religious beliefs the *Shekwoyi* or *Swashe*- God is not only so powerful but also a distant being WHO cannot be seen by ordinary man or woman nor spoken to directly unless through an intermediary hence the need for *A'shata*- deities. In the study area, these deities are suspended in a place called *Kabago* or *Kabashi* which is located in *A'etsu mygo*- Chief's palace. The Chief was the custodian of this demons Gbwefi(1995:15).

The initiation rites in Gbagyi traditional religious beliefs and practices are done in *A'piboknu*- households/family cult and in the *A'zhi*-town/community cult Mallam Barde Shabwa(2014). The religious ceremonies or festivals to mark the initiation rites are not publicized or made public and elaborative but secretaries Mallam Pinze Shuka(2013). The presiding officer who was the chief priest teach the male youth the secret of the religion. They were not to reveal the secret of the religion to anybody. Any attempt to divulge the secret of the religion, the initiated would die Mallam Baje Kubu (2014).

In the practice of their religious beliefs, the Gbagyi in the study area worship in places that includes river banks, trunks of a big tree, caves and hill tops Mallam Barde Shabwa(2014). However, the most popular and recognized and popular places of worship of the Gbagyi are *Kabago / Kabashi* and *Zhibata-* shrine hut. It was at the these places of worship that Gbagyi observed rituals and offered prayers Mallam Musa Karebure (2014). It is argued that all the ceremonies or worship activities which includes, singing, dancing, animal sacrifice and consumption of traditional wine called *Eje* in Gbagyi language are featured Zakari (2008:20).

In essence, as observed the Gbagyi including those of middle River Kaduna Valley Prior to the advent of the Islam and British colonialists which paved the way for introduction of Christian religion in the region of study were strict adherents of African traditional religion Zakari (2008:10). However, their major religious beliefs and practices of the Gbagyi are: (a) Belief in *A'nangozhi* – spirits and (b) Belief in *A'nyibgango* – ancestors.

1) **The *A'nangozhi* – Spirits religious belief And practice**

The *Nangozhi* (sing.) or *A'nangozhi* (pl.) is the name of spirit/spirits in Gbagyi language. The Gbagyi believed in the existence of spirits Mallam Maku Shagabe(2012). The spirits are the apparitional entities which form a separate category of being from those described as divinities. They are considered as powerful and abstract, but they take human shapes Mallam Maku Shagabe(2012). The spirits are non-descript immortal and invisible entities which do not possess material body. However, as immaterial and incorporeal, they incarnate material things, or assume various dimensions so as to be seen whenever they Baraje(1998:25) wish. Apart from helping the Gbagyi diviners, mediums, oracles and medicine men in their work, they also provides the people with explanation of many mysteries which they encounter in the universe. The Gbagyi believed that these *A'nangozhi* – spirits do not only lived in the forest and bush, but also in the water. The called these spirits *Nuwari*, that is water spirits. The people are of the view that water also serve as a home for water spirits. It is at this place i.e water that spirit and their human agents operates and transact business Mallam Garba Bangajiya(2018). In this type of business they buy and sell. The payment in this spiritual undertaking could be immediately or installment basis. The payment could be made in cash or in kind or by giving humans being Mallam Garba Bangajiya(2018). If a *Nuwari* member gives a human being as a means of payment of his debt, the person would die physically and would be buried. The dead person whom the goods were purchased for the duration of seven years after which the dead person regains his or her freedom in the spirit world Mallam Garba Bangajiya(2018).

Meanwhile, the Gbagyi believe as an aspect of their religious beliefs and practice that there are two types of *A'nangozhi* – spirits, namely (a) *A'nangozhilabiyi/bibiri* – bad/wicked spirits and (b) *A'nangozhimari* – good spirits Mallam Danladi Dangbe (2000).

1. a) *A'nangozhilabiyi/bibiri* – Bad/Wicked spirits

These are the type of spirits which the Gbagyi believed were capable of causing terrible harm such as madness and epilepsy Mallam Danladi Dangbe (2000). Besides, the above they can also caused small pox and death itself. These spirits are believed to have the power to drive a person away from home and make him live in the forest and above all can cause havoc, especially if they operates as witches and wizards Baba (1982:35). Similarly, the Gbagyi also believed that the *Nangozhi* – spirit of a wicked person such as *A'sheri* – witches or wizards come back to the earth in form of a bat, a wasp or a vulture and harm people Temple (1926:123). In addition, some people use these spirits to harm their fellow human beings.

1. b) *A'nangozhimari* – Good spirits

The good spirits on the other hand act as guardians Bala (2008:16) They bring prosperity and good luck, guide one's steps leading to his/her destiny in life; they also help to wade off evil spirits. In addition, these spirits act as soothsayers Bala (2008:16). In forest and bushes it is believed that there are many *A'kabashi* – shrines. These *A'kabashi* – shrines are associated with specific *A'nangozhimari* – good spirits that are said to be in charge of planting, hunting, and harvest etc. It is said that these *A'nangozhimari* – good spirits are called upon to give their blessings at the beginning of each season of the year. Indeed, all the professions practiced by the Gbagyi have a guardian *Nangozhi* – spirit that have to be appropriated and to call their blessings by those who practice the profession. The worship of these *A'nangozhi* – spirits whether bad/wicked or good spirit was done by the Gbagyi on Wednesday and in the afternoon. It is belived by the Gbagyi that to worship the spirits on this day and in the specified period/time anything requested are granted by the spirits more than any other day and time Mallam Danlami Shuka(2014). During the worship of the *Nangozhi* – spirit, the worshippers who are males are to be in red costumes Mallam Danlami Shuka (2014) the reason for this represent a symbol of obedience and prayers offered and sacrificed made in this dress are answered at the spot by *Nangozhi* – spirit without hesitation Mallam Danlami Shuka (2014).

In essence, the belief and recognition of the roles of the *A'nangozhi* – spirits either positive or negative made the Gbagyi to honor and worship them in *A'kabashi* – shrines or *A'zhibata* – shrines which are located at individual *Api* – family/household and at a designated places in *Azhi* – town/community through libation, sacrifice of animals, vegetables, cooked food, prayers, exorcism, divination and others are made Gbewfi (1995:12). The Gbagyi in the pre-colonial period in the study area also believed and worshipped the *A'nyigbango* – ancestors as religious beliefs and practice.

2) *The A'nyigbango* - Ancestors religious belief and practice

The *Nyigbango* (Sing.) or *A'nyigbango* (Pl.) is the name of ancestor/ancestors in Gbagyi language. The belief and worship of *A'nyigbango* - ancestors represents another system of belief in the pre-colonial period among the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley. This belief system forms an integral part of the people's religion which in the Gbagyi traditional thought was not only central but also an essential pillar in their religious practices. The Gbagyi believed that the departed members of their community play a significant role in the affairs of the living and ancestors are born again into subsequent generation Galadima (2000:15).

Among the Gbagyi for ancestors who once lived in their midst and now live in the land of the *A'nangozhi* – spirits, to qualify as ancestors must fulfill certain conditions. These conditions must include the condition of the ancestors in the world and manner of their death,

which will determine their entry into the ranks of the revered group of *A'nyigbango* - ancestors whom they argue form the back bone of their society Koce (1990:18) . The Gbagyi went further to say that for one to qualify as an ancestor he must have:

- i) Lived an exemplary life,
- ii) Lived to a ripe old age and have children. A person who dies childless is not acknowledged as an ancestor,
- iii) Died a good death i.e. his death must not have been due to accident, suicide or any other violent acts,
- iv) Death must not be caused by unclean diseases such as lunacy, leprosy Shuaibu (1962:45) etc.

It is pertinent to note that in the Gbagyi belief in the ancestors as an aspect of their religion both male and female deceased who met the above conditions are considered or qualified to be an ancestors Diko (1988:25). In the pre-colonial period, the ancestors according to Gbagyi are known to perform the following functions after their death. These functions however includes;

First, they act as 'mediators'. In this function, though the ancestors are inferior to God; thus they functions as mediators between God and humans. The Gbagyi believed that the spirit of the deceased ancestry reside in his deistic and dynamistic spiritual realm. In addition, the ancestors in this function serve as the geo-between humans and God Beyers (<http://www.hts.org>. 2018:4).

Second, 'scared communication', this was another function believed to be performed by *A'nyigbango* - ancestors after death. In this function, after his demise he remains in contact with descendants for quite some time. This enables him to take part in the daily routine of the family Beyers (<http://www.hts.org>. 2018:4).

Third, the *A'nyigbango* - ancestors also function as supernatural or have scared status'. In this function, the Gbagyi believed that the ancestors have some powers. They use these powers not only to bestow gifts of good fortune but also to cause harm and misfortune for those who neglect to acknowledge them Mallam Magaji Gbangba (2015).

Fourth, companion of the journey of life', was another important function which the Gbagyi believed the ancestors performed after their death. They are of the opinion that since life is the rhythmic progression through different stages which all humans are subject. These phases include: birth, puberty, adulthood and old age and death, the ancestors in this regard the Gbagyi believed that they assist the people in the successful completion of the cycle of life, thus ancestors acts as guide to this journey in life Mallam Magaji Gbangba (2015).

Fifth, 'guardian of tradition', represents another functions of the ancestors. The Gbagyi believed that it in this function the ancestors and the examples set by them acts as a social conscience of their community. The norms and values given by the ancestors after their death assist individual not only to live a proper life but also ensures harmonious where everybody knows and understands their place and functions Mallam Magaji Gbangba (2015).

The functions of the ancestors are that they are our elders and predecessors who have trodden the path of life which the living are now treading and above all the strong belief that death increases the power of the ancestors which they used to offer more help or assistance to the living Baba (1982:35) made the Gbagyi to fear and adore the ancestors using different

specialized method of communication through libation and prayers Baba (1982:35). Apart from the religious beliefs, and practices the Gbagyi also have religious cultural festivals which as an aspect of their religion are celebrated throughout the Middle River Kaduna Valley in the pre-colonial period.

Significance of the Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Gbagyi

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the Gbagyi traditional worshippers have gained a lot and benefited greatly from *Anangozhi*-spirits and *Anyigbango*-ancestors religious beliefs and practices which made the belief systems and practices significant to Gbagyi in the study area in several ways.

Firstly the belief in *Wyaiwyaiyiro a ga sunyi*-life after death instilled in Gbagyi by their traditional religion beliefs and practices have a great influence on the life of the Gbagyi in the study area. The concept has made the Gbagyi in the study area to recognize and draw his consciousness to man-God relationship. The belief also provides the moral values which guides and regulates their lives on earth Mallam Garba Bangajiya (2018). In this way as argued, the belief systems and practices gives meanings to Gbagyi's life and show them their limitations and made them believe that life is short and temporal thus the need for Gbagyi to depend solely on *Shekwoyi/Swashe*-God Mallam Garba Bangajiya (2018). Besides, the belief system and practices have made the Gbagyi to believe that if person dies his/her soul go to a special place called *Aku*-next world to meet his/her predeceased relations for the continuation of life Mallam Danladi Dangbe (2000). The *Aku* to Gbagyi traditional worshippers is synonymous to the concept of Hereafter in Islam where God will reward the good doers and punish the evil/wicked ones Mallam Kallamu Adamu (2015).

Secondly, the trials of culprits before *Azhiba*- shrines has a great impact on the life of the Gbagyi and his society in the study area in the pre-colonial period. In the Gbagyi traditional religion, the *Abebirisuyi*-wicked people such as *Azawuyi*- murderers, *Awyigberi*-thieves, *Asheri*- witches/wizards and many other offenders are tried before *Azhiba*-shrines, which was done to determine the guilty through spiritual powers. The traditional religious beliefs and practices in this direction regulates and check the Gbagyi people's attitudes, crimes and social vices in their communities Iyasare (1994:20). The powers of these *Azhiba*- Shrines in checking crimes and unwanted behaviours have contributed significantly in making the middle Kaduna valley a crime free zone in the pre-colonial period Baraje (1988:35).

Thirdly, the treatment and healing of sickness and illness through the traditional religious beliefs and practices have assisted the Gbagyi traditional worshippers in the traditional health delivery system. The believe by the Gbagyi traditional worshippers that illness and sickness are caused by supernatural powers made the people in the study area in the pre-colonial to highly utilized their traditional religion and its methods in the treatment and of sickness (Mallam Pinze Shuka (2013). Sickness such as epilepsy, bareness, impotency, madness, convulsion, leprosy and other spiritual ailment are treated and cured through *Agorabey*-ritual, *Akakayi*- ritual, *Amadawa*- ritual, *Amwamwo*- ritual, *Gbinu*- ritual, *Kushi*-masquerade ritual religious cultural festival celebration dances etc. with *Aberi*- witch doctors intervention with the aid of *Aynafubwu*- jinns Shazhin (2007:25). Even though modern health care centres were built or established in the study area during the colonial and post colonial era, the Gbagyi in the area of study continued not only to patronized but also depend heavily on their traditional religious beliefs and practices including its methods of treating and healing of sickness and illness Shazin (2013). The reason for this development is lack of confidence in

the modern health care delivery system and many of the Gbagyi people in the study area complained that they do not have money to pay their hospital bills and buy drugs prescribed for them by doctors thus making the traditional religious beliefs and practices including its methods of treating and healing of sickness and illness to be rooted in the respective Gbagyi families in the middle River Kaduna Valley Mallam Waziri Shazhi (20016).

Fourthly, the Gbagyi in the in the pre-colonial period have many religious cultural festivals and socio-cultural ceremonies, but issues such as marriage, birth, naming, burial rites, initiation, puberty, and bumper harvest were given hundred percent attention by the Gbagyi traditional worshippers Mallam Zagi Tanko (2018). It was during the observation of religious rites and celebrations of socio-cultural ceremonies that the valuable benefits of the Gbagyi individual are maintained Baraje (1998:25). Beside through sacrifice different grains, food, animals and *Ashaku*- pots and *Agbabo/Anyiku*- grounds of *eje*- traditional wine are presented to the Chief priest and worshippers Iyasare (1994:25). The above as argued leave the traditional worshippers and officials with economic impact, and allowed them to have a taste of different types of food and drinks thus affecting their eating and drinking habits Iyasare (1994:26).

Fifthly, the rules, code and regulations guiding the traditional religious beliefs and practices has also had an impact on the life of the Gbagyi. For instance, the rule of the traditional religion relating to food, meat and drinks meant for sacrifice which stipulate that no food, meat and *eje*- traditional wine meant for sacrifice to *Zhiba*- shrine to be taken outside of *Zhibata*- shrine house, this rule as observed has put or laid to rest the fear on the part of the chief priest and his fellow worshippers of rejection of their request, sacrifice and prayers Shazin (2007:15).

In essence from the above it is clear that the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Gbagyi have been serving not only the people's needs but also strengthened their relationship with the forces of nature of outside the world. The above which encompasses the Gbagyi's unwritten code of existence has in the pre-colonial period made Gbagyi to held it in high esteem which remain a bedrock that govern the entire Gbagyi life and his society. This unique traditional religious beliefs and practices among Gbagyi in the study area in a later date did not only suffer decline but disappearance among the people.

The Position of the Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley Today

The venerability accorded by the Gbagyi to their traditional religious beliefs and practices made it possible for it to dominate the entire life of the Gbagyi in the pre-colonial period. This development remains the same in the early and second quarters of the twentieth century. But in the course of history and passage of time particularly from the middle of the twentieth century this unique religious beliefs and practices began its decline and today it has disappeared among the Gbagyi. This decline is attributable to several factors.

First, the contact of the Gbagyi with Islam and Christianity in the 19th and the early part of the 20thcenturies represents one of the many reasons that brought about the decline and disappearance in the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi in the region of study today. This contact with these foreign cultures marked a turning point in the history of religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi. These foreign cultures i.e. Islam and Christianity introduced cultural programmes, which created imbalance ranging from language, and social relationship with communities in Africa, the Gbagyi communities of the Middle

Kaduna Valley inclusive Baraje (1998:40). The implications of the above includes, direct assault on the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valleys' consciousness and individual psychological habit favorable to the advancement of Islamic and Christian missionary view on Gbagyi. Indeed the introduction of Islamic and Christian cultural way of life entrenches and solidifies Islamic and Christian ideology which eventually made Gbagyi in the study area a perpetual dependent Baraje (1998:40).

Second, the direct affront on the Gbagyi traditional religious beliefs and practices is another reason which contributed greatly to the decline and disappearance to the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi. Today the religious beliefs and practices of the Gbagyi is condemned and branded heathen savage and barbaric Iyasare (1994:18) To make things worse the two foreign cultures built ideological institutions such as Islamiyyah schools, mosques, westernized schools and churches which were controlled by Muslims and Christians respectively Danburi (2007:78). These institutions are not only geared towards complete routing of the Gbagyi traditional ways of life but also strengthening of Islamic and Christian ideology Mallam Ahmad Kanpani (2015), thus the decline and disappearance of the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the people in the study area.

Third, the control of the bodies and spirits Mallam Ahmad Kanpani (2015), of the Gbagyi as a result of their contact with the foreign cultures also made a great impact which brought the decline of the religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley. This act control the two i.e. bodies and spirits of the Gbagyi created a new system repressing cultural life of the Gbagyi in the region Mallam Ahmad Kanpani (2015), hence the decline in the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the people.

Fourth, the introduction of the capitalist economy Zahar (1972:33) into the Middle Kaduna Valley by the European colonialists in the early part of the twentieth century is another important factor which contributed greatly to the decline and disappearance of the traditional religious beliefs and practices. The presence of this capitalist economy in the study area in this period led to the mass rural drift of the Gbagyi traditional worshippers of the hitherto pre-colonial economy who moved enmass to the emerging urban centre in the region such as Minna in search of greener pastures Idris (2017:30) These Gbagyi traditionalists hardly often come back home as a religious responsibility to participate in the traditional religious festivals and rites as an aspect of the Gbagyi traditional religious beliefs and practices Mallam Waziri Shazhi (2016). The consequence of this development is that it has reduced its aural essence that links three world of existence Mallam Waziri Shazhi (2016).

Fifth, the Islamization programmes launched among the Gbagyi by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Sokoto in 1963 – 65 Idris (2006:30) is another important factor that led to the decline and disappearance of the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley. This Islamization programme led to the conversion of large number of Gbagyi traditional religious worshippers and their leaders in the region Idris (2006:52). The conversion programmes among the Gbagyi was accompanied by the destruction of the places of traditional religious worships i.e. *A'zhiba* - Shrines throughout the Middle Kaduna Valley. Those who accepted or were converted into Islam were asked to break their *A'shata* – idols, because its worship contradict the Islamic principles of monotheism Idris (2006:27). Besides the above the traditional religious festivals, which form an integral part of Gbagyi traditional religious beliefs and practices were outlawed Idris (2006:30) Indeed the above development contributed greatly in the decrease in the number of Gbagyi traditional

believers, as well as the decline and disappearance of the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley.

In addition to the above the death of the few remnants of Gbagyi traditional worshippers who refused to embrace Islam and Christianity Mallam Mindayi Jami(2015) in the region of study also play significant roles in the decline and disappearance of the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the people in the area of study. The death of Chief priests, the custodians of the sacred places reserved for the Gbagyi traditional religious rites and other officials as observed had contributed greatly to the decline and disappearance of the traditional religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley today Mallam Mindayi Jami(2015).

Conclusion

The above discussion on the religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi of the Middle Kaduna Valley in this paper allows us to conclude that the Gbagyi people in the pre-colonial period have a unique indigenous belief System and practices which was part of their culture. Unlike, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Gbagyi has no sacred texts or creeds, however, their expressions are found in oral traditions, rituals, myths, festivals etc. This religious beliefs and practices are very important to the Gbagyi. It contains great deal of wisdom and insights and how the Gbagyi in the study area can best live and interact with his environment. Besides, it provides a strong linkage between the life of human and the world of the ancestors and has enables the Gbagyi in the region of study to maintain constant and symbiotic relations with their ancestors who the people understood to be intimately concerned, and involved in their descendants' everyday affairs. The contribution of this chapter to the existing knowledge cannot be underestimated. It does not only increase the frontiers of people's knowledge on the history of the religious beliefs and practices and expand the research areas as there are no comprehensive works on the subject matter but also encourage the Gbagyi in the study area to revive their extinct religious beliefs and practices. This becomes necessary because it would be ironic for Gbagyi including those inhabiting the Middle River Kaduna Valley to embrace the future without perceiving what they have created yesterday as well as the means they used to create it and the reasons for selecting those particular means.

Recommendations

The contact of the Gbagyi and their traditional religious beliefs and practices with alien cultures i.e. Islam and Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively brought not only to the decline but also disappearance of this unique belief system of the people. The article frowned at this erosion. However, since the Gbagyi Muslims and Christians despite their high commitment to Islam and Christianity today continued to patronize the indigenous beliefs system which they argued is part of their culture, we therefore, suggests that:

- The cultural centers and foundations halls of fame should be established throughout the nook and crannies of the Middle River Kaduna Valley and their main objective should aimed at protecting the religious beliefs and practices among the Gbagyi so as to enable it remain parallel to face the challenges of Islam and Christianity.
- Since many of the religious rites associated with Gbagyi traditional religious beliefs and practices are performed during the religious cultural festival celebration, we urge for the revival of cultural celebration. The celebration of these cultural festival should be held meticulously throughout the length and breath of the middle River Kaduna Valley.

- Conveyors of the Gbagyi traditional religious beliefs and practices should be safeguarded. These conveyors who are chief priest and other officials and are considered experts and living legends, should be made to teach the young Gbagyi the elements of the traditional knowledge relating to the Gbagyi traditional religious beliefs and practices.
- The remaining Gbagyi traditional worshippers who have not embraced Islam and Christianity should embark on membership drive, and encourage, made the religion attractive to younger Gbagyi and increase their curiosity and interest in the indigenous religious system.
- The Gbagyi individuals who are interested in the promotion of the Gbagyi cultural heritage should be made to include the traditional religion in their agenda. He should create data bank for researchers to conduct researches on the Gbagyi traditional religious. The findings of the research should not only documented but also codified into a literature that will be used by present and future generation yet to born.

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Interviews

- Interview with Mallam Ahmad Kanpani (74years), Carpenter, Tungan Mallam, Paiko, Minna, Niger State, 25th July, 2015.
- Interview with Mallam Baje Kubu (65years), Herbalist, Kuyi, Bosso, Minna, Niger State, 21st February, 2014.
- Interview with Mallam Barde Shabwa (72years), Kubwa, Kuta, Minna, Niger State, 13th April, 2014.
- Interview with Mallam Bello Napwa (80 years), Herbalist, Bukpe, Bosso, Minna, Niger State, 5th April, 2014
- Interview with Mallam Danladi Dangbe (65years), Herbalist, Paigo, Minna, Niger State, 15th march, 2000.
- Interview with Mallam Garba Bangajiya (80years), Traditionalists, Kuta, Minna, Niger State, 25th August, 2018.
- Interview with Mallam Godeiza Mapa (70 years), Traditionalist, Guni Minna, Niger State, 25th May, 2014.
- Interview with Mallam Kallamu Adamu (58years), Employee with (NOA), Minna, Niger State, 11th April, 2015.
- Interview with Mallam Magaji Gbangba (78years), Traditionalist, Shakwatu, Minna, Niger State, 14th March, 2015.
- Interview with Mallam Maku Shagabe (75years), Traditional Healer, Guni, Minna, Niger State, 12th May, 2012.
- Interview with Mallam Mindayi Jami (75years), Traditionalists, Maikunkele, Bosso, Minna, Niger State, 13th October, 2015.
- Interview with Mallam Musa Karebure (68years), Gabadna, Paiko, Minna, Niger State, 12th January, 2014.

Interview with Mallam Pinze Shuka (71years), Traditionalist, Kontongba, Paiko, Minna, Niger State, 25th September, 2013.

Interview with Mallam Waziri Shazhi (74years), Former Custodian of *Zhiba* - Shrine, Dnagu Village, Bosso, Minna, Niger State, 28th June, 2016.

Interview with Mallam ZagiTanko (70years), Traditionalists, Zumba, Kuta, Minna, Niger State, 28th August, 2018.