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AN OVERVIEW OF ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ANNANG PROVERBS

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ABSTRACT: Proverbs form the foundation of moral, religious and political philosophy. Proverbs feature greatly at traditional festivals and religious celebrations, and the art of story-telling conveying the people’s worldview in myths and legends is entrenched in their daily existence, as a carry over legacy from their ancestors. This work is carried out to examine the ethical significance of Annang proverbs. The inability of people to have accurate acquaintance with the verbal forms and understanding of the ideas contained in it becomes the problem. One of the purposes is to encourage the documentation of Annang literature. To achieve this purpose, the historical phenomenology method was used in this study. One of the functions of proverb is that it is used as a guide to human conduct, judgment and decision in the society. It is recommended that government include Annang dialect in the school curriculum in order to help promote, preserve and boost the educational sector.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well established fact that African Traditional Religion has no scriptural documents in form of revealed truths like Christianity and Islam. The traditional religious heritage is built upon oral tradition. Hence Madu (1996) notes that “some people have questioned the accuracy of oral traditions, as there is the tendency of falsifications, additions and subtraction as it is transmitted from one generation to another”. However, it must be remembered that oral traditions are a feature of all religions. The basic and relevant truths are often passed on unhampered or altered. Therefore, in Annang traditional society, none

of the manifestations of religious consciousness has been preserved in a sacred scripture but it is “written” or documented in proverbs, liturgies, taboos, songs and works of art. African utterances are full of proverbs which reveal a lot about African religious beliefs, especially ideas about God, and Annang traditional society is not an exception. For Achebe (1958) “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”. In fact, proverb is a short, well-known saying, expressing a truth or pointing out a moral (Quarcoopome, 1987). They are best appreciated and understood when used in the context they have their real meaning. Proverbs (*Ufied*) are based purely on the common experiences of people, facts and observations.

Proverbs (*Ufied*) and fables or tales, which already exist by the hundreds and even thousands, are also continually produced and used by the young and old (Umanah, 2001). The difficulty lies in getting them correctly in the right usage during many a moon light night especially in tales. Their style and spirit partly expressed by theatrical changes of voice, songs, imitations of noises and interjections, are as in the case of the speeches generally lost in writing them down. Again, proverbs (*Ufied*) though they may form as it were, the expression of the law and manners of the tribe or country, they appear often very ambiguous and allow for bad and unclean use (Burton, 1969).

The purpose of this work is to create awareness and to educate the readers on derogatory statements and opinions made by arm-chair European writers regarding the absence of oral literature in Africa. Also, to show how proverbs (*ufied*) of Annang people reveal their attitude in understanding their world, and goes to show also how they perceived order in nature.

To achieve this purpose, oral interviews and references to written and existing works on the subject is used. The historical phenomenology is used since it is a written description of a people, its customs, beliefs and behaviours which statistical analysis would fail to measure, as it involve descriptions, views or opinions of the people.

This work would help the reader to really understand the application and usage of proverbs in the right situation. It would further contribute a bulk of knowledge to scholarship particularly being acquainted with Annang dialect and literature. The structure of this work is arranged thus: general introduction, brief history of the Annang people, functions of proverb, value of proverbs, conclusion and recommendations.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANNANG PEOPLE

Annangland forms a significant cultural presence in South Southern Nigeria. It is one of the indigenous ethnic groups of this geo-political zone found in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The 2006 census however, estimated their population at 1.1Million (Census, 2006). The Annang ethnic group is divided into eight grass root political entities called Local Government Areas. They are: Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun Local Government Areas (Essien, 2005). According to Enang (1975) and Ekanem (2006) “situated within the Cross River basin, between latitudes $4^{\circ}.25^1$ and 7° North and longitudes $7^{\circ}.15^1$ and $9^{\circ}.30^1$ East, Annang is bounded on the North and West by the Igbo while the Ibibio make up its Eastern and Southern neighbours.”

Noah (1980) opined that “the Annang migrated from Arochukwu to the different sub-culture areas of Annang which they have found themselves today”. Others contend that they migrated from somewhere to their present homeland (Essien, 1990; Udodata, 1993). This is reinforced by Ukpong *et al* (2001) when the authors noted that “they migrated with their Ibibio brothers from Southern Sudan to Southern Cameroon and later to Ibom village in Arochukwu”. Some people contend that the Annang people have always lived where they are living now from the beginning of time (Ekanem, 2006). Annang is ethnically homogenous and as one travels across Annangland, one is shaded by canopies of palm oil, palm wine and coconut trees in a sea of green lofty tropical vegetation (Udodata, 2006). Thus, their economic system is principally based on agricultural subsistence and exchange economy.

They have great tradition in music and are renowned in arts and sculpture. As a people, they are very religious, generous, determine and honest, simple and sincere (Ikinwot, 2013, Interview). Annang social unit consist of the *Ufok* (family), *Irib Ete* (household/patrilineal relatives), *Ekpuk* (groups of patrilineal relatives tracing their genealogy to a common ancestor or fore-father), *Awio* (village), *Imaan* (clan) (Meek, 1937 and Ekanem, 2006).

Like other Africans, religion cuts through the whole life of Annang people. Thus, the people believe in a Supreme Deity called *Awasi*, *Nnem* (intermediary deities and spirits), Ancestors, *Aruru* (invisible and unidentifiable force) (Parrinder, 1969; Idowu, 1973; Enang, 1975; Enang, 1982). Therefore, social and religious concern is seen in a single oneness in Annang community.

Ethical Proverbs

Ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which means wisdom, conduct, culture or way of life (Okwueze, 2003). Many regard ethics as a branch of philosophy concerned with what is morally good or bad, right or wrong. To buttress this point, Moris Walkings defines ethics as a system of moral principles (Corin, 1948). Therefore, the words ‘ethics’ and ‘ethical’ are often used as synonyms for the words moral and morals especially in contexts which make references to the ethics or to the morality of a person or group (Okwueze, 2003).

The Annang use ethical proverbs to solve ethical problems confronting them and suggest ways in which it has been solved in time past. The use of these proverbs creates an atmosphere of moral rightness and makes the community comfortable for living. This is because any act capable of perpetrating evil caused by an individual in the society affects the whole of the community or society. It is against this background that the following ethical proverb is considered: proverbs about environment/nature, human relationships, hardwork and industry, and philosophy of life.

Proverbs about Environment/Nature

- (i) Ajo akum, usen ikwereke.
Sun dark, days not finished.

(As night falls, it unfolds an unending days).

This proverb explains that striving to survive and making ends meet does not end in a day. If one is unable to achieve a set goal in a particular day, there is always another day for continuity.

- (ii) Asop mkpad isang, usen ked araduk abe udukikot.
Fast leg walk, day one enter pit snake.
(Restless feet will one day walk into a snake pit).

This proverb warns of an impending doom to those who keep moving from one place to the other without having any important thing doing. Such people run the risk of entering into places of trouble in which they never bargain for and may have to learn a bitter lesson of their lives (Cletus, 2013, Interview).

- (iii) Uked irung anyie abong.
All land has chief.
(In every community, there is a leader).

This proverb teaches that where there is no leader in a community, there is bound to be chaos. In other words, there must be a leader or ruler in every society.

Proverbs about Human Relationships

- (i) Adieke ikang atagha ikud nne mkpok, unen ibokoke.
If fire burn tortoise with shell, hen not escape.
(If fire consumes the tortoise with its hard shell, the feather-coated hen will not escape).

In a community, if a king is kidnapped then his subjects are in serious trouble or a man of proven integrity/substance happens to be detained, then an ordinary citizen must have to be careful because he/she could be jailed. This proverb also teaches that no condition is permanent (Emmanuel, 2013, Interview).

- (ii) Agwo udono ajem awia- ibok.
Man sick find medicine- man.
(A sick person looks for a doctor for help).

People with ill health of any kind are to go looking for those who could help them cure their afflictions. People are also informed by this proverb to share their problems with others as help could be extended to them. This proverb discourages myopic and wishful thinking.

- (iii) Atem adia ikpong k' adim abon akom.

Cook eat alone that rain beat roof.
(Rain beats the roof of “cook-eat-alone”).

Selfishness is kicked against in Annang society. This is evident in their clarion call for people to be their brother’s keeper at all times. This proverb promotes the joy of sharing things with others.

Proverbs about Hardwork and Industry

- (i) Agwo k’uno ifu ndidia.
Man not give lazy food.
(A lazy man deserves no food).

In Annang traditional society, laziness was frowned at and highly discouraged. Every member of the community were to be hardworking in order to achieve their set goals and targets in life. Lazy men and women were ridiculed in songs while hoping that they would have a change of attitude.

- (ii) Ifu akang ujo adod udok.
Lazy deny voice unto hoe.
(A bad workman puts blame on his tools).

To blame ones tool is an attempt to excuse ones own lack of skills and unseriousness. This is because good workmanship does not solely rest or depend on the quality of the tools used.

- (iii) Agwo utom adod utip utom.
Man work deserve reward work.
(The labourer is worthy of his hire).

Any person that has been called upon to work should be rewarded duly. On no account should anyone cheat on a worker who has successfully completed his/her work. This and their likes are the moral teachings that Annang society stands for and teaches.

- (iv) Tep-tep edim ajoho abang.
Drop-by-drop rain fills pot.
(Drop by drop rain fills a pot).

People are advised to start from somewhere whether in business or private venture, no matter how demanding their efforts may be because they would succeed someday.

- (v) Bung ifia nim k’ekarika adi.
Break firewood keep for harmattan has come.

(Gather up firewood, harmathan has come).

This proverb advises that people should take and make good use of opportunities wisely to avoid disappointments in future. People need to prepare themselves against the future as harmathan period precedes the rainy season (Idiong, 2013, Interview).

Proverbs about Philosophy of Life

- (i) Uked agwo atie nt' inyang, inanake mbie.
All man is like sea, lack not dirt.
(Everyone is likened to a river, which lacks no dirt).

This proverb explains the infallibility of man. It teaches that no man is perfect. This means that unnecessary passing of blame and finding faults on others becomes baseless as every person has the good, bad and ugly side of a character.

- (ii) Anyong asejian ebok.
Sky deceive monkey.
(Even monkeys do fall from tree top).

Hunters note that once in a while leading monkeys misjudge distance or over confidently take a bad jump and falls even as they are known to be the best tree climbers in the animal world. Likewise men do assume and it fails in an endeavour that they were sure of.

- (iii) Udeme ndisa ibeheke ikpong.
Share peck not concern cocoyam.
(Pecking matters does not concern cocoyam).

According to the nature of cocoyam, they can thrive without pecks (*ndisa*). Therefore it is unnecessary to provide them with one. This proverb brings to light the importance of making distinctions between two problems which do require distinct solutions as well. In order words, every case is different and should be judged on its own merit.

- (iv) Mmon amakpene iboho k' inua akapa etap.
Water late too much in mouth turn saliva.
(Water that stays long in the mouth turns to saliva).

An immediate solution or attention should be sought in a particular case that one may find oneself in as a waste of time may cause even more danger. Again, in the case of promising someone favour or gift, it is better to fulfill them at record time so that it does not become a mockery.

- (v) Edeme akpedidehe agwo ifiok ikpiduno nne edet.
Tongue is not man wisdom would not live with teeth.
(The tongue must be wise to live amicably with the teeth).

Teeth are notorious as far as biting is concerned. The tongue, though powerful appears timid and always trying to avoid the teeth that live in the same mouth with it. Both could stay peacefully together, however, due to the wisdom of the tongue. This proverb teaches co-existence of distinct elements or persons. Therefore, people should exercise tolerance towards one another even when they differ in opinion, view and lifestyle.

FUNCTION OF PROVERBS

- (i) Mokwunye (1978) holds that “from time immemorial proverbs have been in use as a source of practical and moral education based on man’s social experience”.
- (ii) Proverbs bring out clearly obscure points in a conversation or argument, and are used to avoid giving direct answers to direct questions (Fafunwa, 1974).

VALUE OF PROVERBS

- (i) They are used not only for the moral upbringing of children but also for religious, intellectual exercises, and trustworthy witnesses to the social, political and economic ideas of the Annang.
- (ii) A child’s reasoning faculty and creativity is developed with the use of proverbs.
- (iii) Proverbs reflects even more clearly than other forms of folklore, the deepest values of a people, showing the drives that motivate behavior and the controls that regularize the relations of an individual to his fellows (Simon and Ottenberg, 1975).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Proverbs are based purely on the common experiences of people, facts and observations. The value of proverbs as a source of materials for religious beliefs of non-literate people is derived from the high regard in which proverbs (ufied) are held in Annang as a society. Ethical proverbs demonstrate human relationships to nature as well as the environment, which are all tied to the religious beliefs of the people. Proverbs of this sort seem to guide man’s act and behaviour in the society, thereby judging between the right or good conduct and wrong or bad conduct. They are drawn from the wide gamut of Annang cultural experience such as: attitudes, values, emotions, perceptions, natural occurrences, thoughts and feelings. Some proverbs are quite elaborate in form, and occasionally are accompanied by song or themselves are sung. The great number possessed by a given

people indicate their place in everyday life, and one hears them continuously quoted and it is true wherever African culture has become rooted. A second look at ethical proverbs shows that they were taken seriously by the Annang in a bid to finding permanent solution to most of their problems and also used as a tool for social order. In other words, the ethical foundation of Annang society is based on shame. This is because any act capable of perpetrating evil caused by an individual affects the entire community. Despite the problem of understanding the proper use and application of Annang proverbs, it was inferred that they have functions and values that permeate every aspect of the people's life. Recommendations are proffered to further strengthen and encourage the use of Annang proverbs as a tool for education in our society.

- (i) There should be a determined effort by individuals and non-governmental organisations (NGO's), to open up gateways for seminars, concerts, competitions, symposia, in a bid to promoting Annang language.
- (ii) Government should play a key role in ensuring that an inclusion of Annang dialect in the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities is achieved.

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