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Utilitarian and Ritualistic Significances of the Calabash in the Kedjom Chiefdoms (Babanki) of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon

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Abstract: This paper analyses the utilitarian and ritualistic significance of the calabash in the Kedjom chiefdoms. The calabash was one of the artifacts with great cultural significance in the Kedjom Kingdom. The study argues that the place of the calabash in the Kedjom society was also expressed by their craft and arts which sustained the community mores. Therefore, crafts of calabashes were not just means of expressing cultural mentality but also became determinant in a search for livelihood for the people, as well as an instrument used for high level diplomacy. The study adopts the qualitative approach to assess the place of the calabash in Kedjom chiefdoms. Our findings reveal that though the advent of colonialism and colonial agents such as missionary activities has tried to downplay the significance, meaning, importance and place of this art in the life of the people, the calabash remains valuable in the life and history of the Kedjom Chiefdoms.

Keywords: Calabash, Kedjom, Utilitarian, Ritualistic, Grassfields, Bamenda

INTRODUCTION

Kedjom is one of the several independent polities that constituted the Tikar ethnic composition that settled in the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon. The origin of this polity can be traced as far back as the sixteenth century. Kedjom is made up of two centralized chiefdom's known as Kedjom Keku (Kedjom of the Forest)[1] and Kedjom Ketinguh (Kedjom under the rocks).[2]Today, the Kedjom people are known as the Babankis. This name originated when the Bali Chamba and Bamum referred to them as Banki (Yenshu, 2001). To this, the affix "Ba" (people) was added to give Babanki meaning 'the people of Banki". The village occupies a contiguous territory between latitude 6^0 10' North and latitude 5^0 55' South of the equator and longitude 10^0 20' East and longitude 10^0 10' West of the Greenwich Meridian. Kedjom shares boundaries with Kom to the north, Babungo, Bamessing and Oku to the east, Bambili, Bambui and Awing to the south and Bafut to the west (Yenshu, 2001). Kedjom has a population of over 20,000 inhabitants (Mutan, 2001).

In Cameroon and other parts of the Bamenda chiefdoms including Kedjom, there existed several folk objects which served utilitarian and ritualistic purposes. Some examples of these folk objects included grinding stones, caps, stools, baskets, drinking horn cups, traditional regalia and spears. However, some of these ancient folk objects had been extinct as a result of the influence of modernity. In spite of modern influence on these objects, the calabash was able to survive the changes and continued to be used in the Kedjom society up to the recent years. For a better understanding of the study, the next part engages some conceptual clarification.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The calabash remains a significant cultural artifact across the African continent. It usage has attracted scholarly research and publications. Some of the extant literature on the calabash is reviewed within the context of the present study. Blier argues that when a container was needed to mixed medicine, the patient went to a nearby local market and purchased a calabash. Also, calabash adorned with beads was used in the king's palace for drinking water and palm wine (Blier, 1998). Konan adds that Bura mothers used calabash head covers to protect their babies from the sun and flies. Equally, the calabash was used in the market places to sell prepared food and stored grains, rice and peanuts (Konan, 1974). Nychas on his part contends that the calabash was also used in Zambia in the process of preparing a traditional

[1]The Kedjom Keku is also referred as Big Babanki
[2]The Kedjom Ketiguh is also referred to as Small Babanki also called and spelled differently as Babanki-tungoh (Tungaw, Tungo or Kidjem-Ketinguh),

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milk product called Mabisi. In the course of the fermentation which usually lasted forty-eight hours, the calabash was used to stir and sieve before consumption (Nychas, 2019).

Similarly, Abubakar avers that the calabash was used as bowls, bottles, instruments or for economic and social activities such as fishing, musical instruments and for spiritual and medical purposes. The author adds that industrialization and the rate of urbanization in Africa and other parts of Asia and the Latin American regions has significantly reduced the role and place of the calabash. These made the preservation of the calabash to have hopes only in the world of antiquity, arts, galleries and museums where calabashes were only used in beautification, transmission of history and/or information and for ceremonies rather than its original value that served as food and water containers (Abubakar, 2018). Knöpfli discusses the place of the calabash in the Bamenda chiefdoms in Cameroon. He argues that the calabash has retained its honourable value in a traditional settings used during birth celebration, *Manjong* and meeting house and the storage of palm wine. He further stresses on the fact that a broken calabash was not useless but had a place on the people's tradition (Knöpfli, 2001). This existing literature sets a good premise for the present study as it clarifies the academic niche which the study sets out to fill- the utilitarian and ritualistic significance of the calabash in the Kedjom chiefdom of Cameroon.

The Calabash in the Kedjom Culture

The calabash known in Kedjom language (Ga'ah Kedjom) as *Ketchom* or *Kətyom* is also referred to differently in different contexts. What is referred as calabash is the dried hollow shell of a gourd used in various traditional homes. There are two types of calabash gourds; the bottle gourd (*cucurbita maxima*, *langenariasiceraria*) and the tree gourd (*crescentiacujete*) (Knöpfli, 2001). The bottle gourd is mostly grown by the Kedjom people themselves while the tree gourd was bought either from the Ndop Plain and Esimbi area or imported from the northern regions of Cameroon. The calabash was an embodiment of material heritage, a reflection of culture and an identity within the Kedjom society. According to Viyu:

> In Kedjom tradition, calabash was split into two symmetrical but opposing halves, base and lid; one containing the visible, the human, the earthly, the other the invisible, the ethereal the eternal. The top half signifies masculinity as well as the sky/heaven which reflects the realm of invisible spirits. The bottom half represents femininity which represents the living and nonliving things to exist. Thus, calabash plays a role in ritual practice and serves as a container for spiritual, magical substance as well as for utensils purpose (2020).

Also, Konan intimates that:

> A young girl used to receive numerous decorated calabashes of different sizes and designs as gifts at the time of her marriage; nowadays she often receives brightly colored metal pans, plates and bowls. In the future, it seems likely that calabash containers will increasingly be replaced by metal and other manufactured materials which are desired because they are "modern" (Konan, 1974).

The foregoing statements clearly establish the significant place the calabash occupies in traditional African society in general and the Kedjom chiefdom in particular. To this effect, the calabash is one of the symbols of African rural life because it was used to share and understand the people's mores (Oladumiye, 2018). In the Kedjom cosmology, calabashes have been largely ignored because they were so much a part of the people's way of daily life. Unless one made a special effort to look for them, they may scarcely be noticed. It is against this background that the utilitarian and ritualistic purposes of the calabash in the Kedjom chiefdoms form the crux of the present study.

Utilitarian Purposes of the Calabash in Kedjom

The calabash served utilitarian purposes in the Kedjom chiefdom. There were designed to be used as utensils rather than decorated with motifs for artistic purposes. These calabashes were used for domestic purposes such as carrying and storing water, palm oil, as dishes to serve corn fufu (staple meal of the people), as musical instruments, storing of gunpowder and medicines, preservation of palm wine, used for drawing water from a big cask as well as served as served as drinking cups.

Ketchom calabash refers to the hollow dry shell used for fetching and keeping drinking water. A colloquial stemming from this practice holds that: "it is better for the water to spill than for the calabash itself to get broken". The calabash refers to a woman, especially one in pregnancy a situation considered as delicate as it is fragile. The water refers to the foetus and the proverb is used to refer to a miscarriage. Evidently, the calabash assumes symbolic importance which is an indication that it is deep in the people's psyche, culture and tradition.

The use of the calabash in preserving drinking water is fast declining. The calabash used to be the normal container for fetch water from the stream to the house. Today, this is mostly done in enamel basins, aluminum pots and plastic buckets. Nevertheless, there are instances where the calabash has retained its use as a water-container. Every person who goes on a long journey carries along a small bottle calabash filled with drinking water and so does every

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woman who has to travel to her farm or the weekly market (Knöpfli, 2001). The *Ketchom* calabash played a fascinating role during the migratory trend of the Kedjom people especially around the 18th and 19th centuries. In fact, drinking water was stored in calabashes and carried along by the men, women and youths (Shiembom, 2020).

Figure 1. The *Ketchom* Calabash
Source: Hans Knöpfli, *Baskets and Calabashes, Palms and People*. Crafts and Technologies: Some Traditional Craftsmen and Women of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon. *Part 3: Utensils for Everyday Life* (Limbe: Presbook, 2001), 99.

Kəzu'wan and *Nshofwa* calabashes remain significant in the Kedjom chiefdoms. In the course of their movements and settlement, they were filled with palm oil which used to rub the navel of a new born baby especially children born in the palace. Also, *Nshofwa* was filled with drinkable water for a newborn (Atong, 2020) especially on long journeys. The Fon had a calabash called *Sho'ntuh* which was not necessarily different from the ordinary man's calabash in design or structure. The *Sho'ntuh* was usually corked with ordinary raffia palm leaves or a peace plant fitted into it to serve as a lid. Traditionally, any calabash of palm wine corked with raffia palm leaves or peace plant was destined for the Fon. Any woman who saw that sign bowed until the calabash bearer (Nchinda) passed by. Men generally showed sign of respect and reverence to things destined for the palace. No noble man may have his own calabash corked in a similar way (Ghogah, 2020). In this regard, Mbunwe-Samba explains the mutual relationship between the royal wine pot and the calabash in the Bamenda Grassfields chiefdoms:

> These were widespread in the entire Area. The pot was used for the distribution of raffia palm wine during ceremonies. A small calabash wine server with a hole on its side accompanied it. All raffia wine that was brought to the palace was poured into this pot and the calabash wine server was used to serve everyone who came to the palace. It was carved with animal and cowries shell motifs signifying royalty (Mbunwe-Samba, 1986).

However, mutations have taken place in the art of calabash designing in Kedjom chiefdoms around the 20th and 21st centuries through their inter-community trading and local handicrafts sectors in the Bamenda Grassfields. The modern way of designing the Fon's calabash (royal calabash) was by adorning with beads or cowries at brim filled with palm wine reserved for the Fon. This is because they would be used in the king's palace for drinking water and palm wine (Blier, 1998: 196-7). Historically, the design of this calabash was introduced by the Mbororo community that settled around the hills of Sabga in Kedjom Ketinguh in 1905 (Afumbi, 2020).

Bwom, *Febuom*, *Ngiue* and *Kobonne* calabashes were used for the fetching and storage of water. For example, *Bwom* calabash was used for drinking water. As Berns and Hudson agree, calabashes were used for serving drinks and for storing sacred concoctions (Bens & Hudson, 1986). To this effect, *Bwom* is a small bottle-shaped calabash serving as a drinking vessel in the Kedjom society. Equally, *Ngiue* was also a small-sized bottle-shaped gourd with an opening cut in the side and used for drawing wine from a big cask (*Uking*) to serve people in public gatherings. Although plastic jars are now widely used, in purely ritualistic ceremonies, the use of *Ngiue* is still in forced. More so, *Febuom* was a rounded shell of a gourd with an opening cut from its side used as a cup. Today, the people of Kedjom still use this *Febuom* calabash as their drinking cups. What remains surprising but interesting is that, elderly men and kingmakers move to occasions with the *Febuom* inside their bags (Afumbi, 2019). These calabashes had a significant role in the people's political, economic, socio-cultural and religious lifestyles of the chiefdoms. Equally, *Kobonne* is a split gourd shell used for serving corn fufu, water, corn beer (*Nkang*) though it use is fast disappearing. Approximately in the 20th century,

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under the respective reigns of Fon Anguh, Fon Vubangsi, Fon Aseh, Fon Vugah II, Fon Shiteh and Fon Vuyuhgo, the utilitarian uses of these calabashes flourished in the chiefdoms.

Zua'ah/Febwa'ah calabash is approximately an eight liters container used for the transaction of in-law demands especially palm oil during marital rites. The peculiarity of an oil calabash was that in most cases the natural calabash neck was replaced by a nicely carved, wider, wooden neck meticulously sewn onto the calabash bowl. A crown-like stopper was fitted in the wooden neck. A nicely plaited rope handle was fitted on to two ropes sewn onto the calabash bowl (Knöpfli, 2001).

Another area in which the calabash was used was in music. This was particularly true of the *Fəjo'ojo'o* calabash or hand-rattles as it was called in Gah-kedjom. In this regard, calabashes with necks play an important role as a musical instrument, especially the calabash rattles. The bowl is rounded by a network of knotted strings. The seeds of the edible *black bush plum (Canarium Schweinsfurthii)* are threaded into the network between the knots. The neck of the calabash serves as a handle. Thus, calabash rattles can be used during music in a variety of different ways. Shaken or rotated they make a sharp, distinct and fascinating sound. Held stationary and struck with the palm of the hand they gave a deep sound. The calabash rattle was essential for all forms of indigenous music everywhere in the Western Grasslands (Knöpfli, 2002). Historically, the calabash hand-rattles remained an inseparable part of the tradition and culture of the Kedjom chiefdoms. In most ceremonies and festivities such as enthronement of Fons as well as death and birth celebrations, the use of *Fəjo'ojo'o* was essential. Most cultural associations and dancing groups in Grassfields chiefdoms used this instrument right through the 20th up to the 21st centuries.

KenkiehKeban/Nkiume calabash is a wedge-shaped portion of the gourd shell which is specially prepared for the serving of corn fufu from a pot. In the Kedjom culture, food cooked without the use of *Keban* might be considered tasteless or not palatable. To this effect, this calabash continued to be an important commonly used cultural artifact in Kedjom society. The *Kenkieh Keban/nkiume* calabash was most in use in the 20th century. Also, the presence of plastic saucer to an extent has caused the fast disappearance of this *Keban* (Ntuban, 2020) used by the Kedjom people as a kitchen utensil.

Ŋgiməkain and *Fe-dju'dju* calabashes were used to store gunpowder and medicines in the Kedjom chiefdoms. The outer shell of the *Ŋgiməkain* calabash was covered with animal skin. This was to ensure that the gun power was kept dry and safe as a vital tool in times of warfare. Till date, people still 'shoot die' symbolically shooting the unseen enemies during annual festivals. Noticeable, is the fact that, if the gunpowder in a person's dane gun does not explode promptly at the right time upon the person's performance of a brave hero's display, the person exposes himself to ridicule and public disgrace. Therefore, in order to avoid such unpleasant situations, the surfaces of small, handy calabashes are coated with goat hide, and a carefully made stopper was fitted over the calabash's neck. With a rope handle fixed to it the gunpowder calabash could be attached to the warrior's belt (Knöpfli, 2002).

This *Ŋgiməkain* was kept strictly out of the reach of children and family members who were not members of the initiated groups such as the *Manjong*. Most of these calabashes were hung on the house wall of the keeper because there were no ceremonies in Kedjom that warranted the use of shooting guns for which gunpowder was needed. Furthermore, the *Fe-dju'dju* calabash was particularly used for storing powder medicines. All sorts of indigenous medicines were prepared and/or kept in calabashes- whereby liquid medicines were kept in big open calabash bowls while powdered medicines were stored in small calabashes with stoppers (Knöpfli, 2002).

Therefore, *Ŋgiməkain and Fe-dju'dju* were used to expose the people's cultural mores. For example, during the recent inter-tribal war between the Kedjom chiefdoms and Bambili community around the early 1990s, the use of the *Ŋgiməkain and Fe-dju'dju* was significant as it projected the warrior's potency and fortification.

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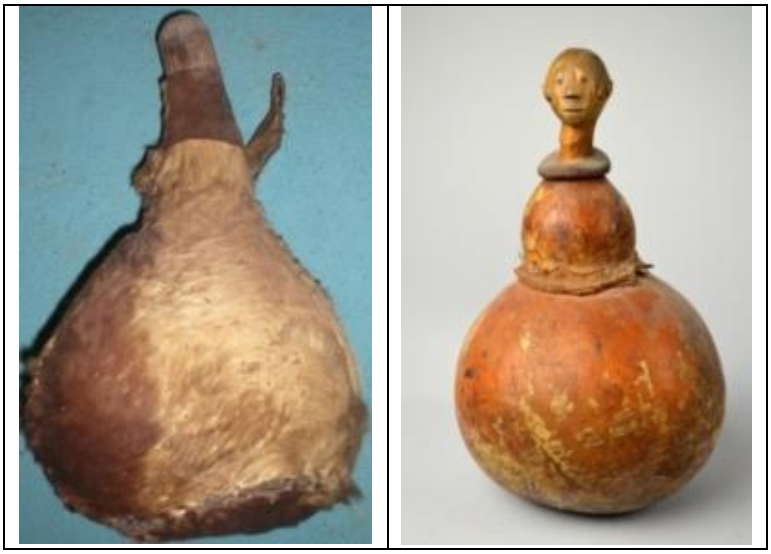

Figure 2. The *Ŋgiməkain and Fe-dju'dju* Calabash
Source: Author's collection 20th February 2020

Ndiueh-kekiek calabash is a small gourd shell used for storing the ground charcoal used in lighting smoking pipes. The use of the calabash was lost because the custom of smoking pipes had waned as most smokers preferred the modern cigarettes (Nungbuen, 2020). Historically, the use of *Ndiueh-kekiek* calabash had a major influence during the Kedjom migratory experience but declined in the 18th and 19th centuries. At each stop points, the use of *Ndiueh-kekiek* remained essential as the warriors used them in smoking pipes as well as lighting fires to cook and to keep themselves warm.

Mbouh and *Da'ah (Sa'ah)* calabashes had an enormous role in the history of Kedjom chiefdoms. The *Mbouh* is a bottle gourd shell used for storing and fermenting corn-beer while *Da'ah* is a bottle gourd shell encased in a woven shell, with a grass-ring or other form of base used for storing palm wine. This calabash essentially served as a jug. During most occasions or festivities in the Kedjom village, it was common place to find elderly men taking along them *Da'ah* to store palm wine and corn beer (*Nkang)* (Mashu, 2020). Equally, in some homes, you could find grandparents who used these *Mbouh* and *Da'ah* calabashes to store their *Nkang* for personal use as well as for the entertainment of visitors.

In fact calabashes served great utilitarian functions in the traditional Kedjom society up the present times. However, other functions of the calabash were ritualistic in nature. This will form the nub of the section below.

Ritualistic Purposes of the Calabash

Calabashes were also used in performing rituals in the Kedjom chiefdoms during particular ceremonies and festivities. Historical records through existent literature and human narrative have shown that calabashes were widely used for ritualistic purposes.

The *Nshof* calabash is a medium-sized bottle gourd shell without engravings and polished with cam-wood. Usually, it is used for fertility rituals because the water from it was fetched from a special spring which was believed to bring fertility to those who drink of it. The calabash is still very much used within this era and assumes the status of an object of cultural artifact. Consequently, the *Nshof* calabash was mostly used during the *Nzowain* dance.[3] The dancers, to this effect, especially the women, put palm oil in the mouths of young women, and rubbed palm oil on the legs of men to enhance fruitfulness and potency. During the course of this traditional dance ritual, water was poured on the backs of matured women who had not yet conceived or given birth to a surviving child or children. On their part, the men received their own part of the water poured upon their lower abdomen (Chumbom, 2019).

Similarly, the *Ke-ghen* calabash is a rounded part of the gourd, after the neck has been removed which is used as a container for the liquid medicines especially in rituals and twin birth ceremonies. As part of the traditional religion of the Kedjom people, this kind of calabash utensil was also used by palm wine tappers. According to Alufandoseh Malili (*Tanyi*) *Ke-ghen* calabash is used on the occasion of birth celebrations, notably for twins. On the first appearance of a newly born child or children before the public, water was thrown on the mother and on the child or children out of the

[3] *Nzowain* literally means "song for the child after birth".

***Corresponding Author:** Richard Tanto Talla

half-calabash, as a sign of blessing. A paste is made with camwood powder. The feet and legs of the mother were rubbed with this, while the father drank some water out of the same calabash.

Nkəŋ Rituals

In many a house in Kedjom society, there was a section known as "altar" inside the kitchen built with sun dried bricks or raffia palm bamboos, attached to the wall of the kitchen. This place is called *Nkəŋ* which contained cultural artifacts such as calabashes and clay pots. The Kedjom people have asserted in their traditional and cultural beliefs that these artifacts represented *Vunyingong* (children of God) meaning the children of that family. The *Nkəŋ* ritual was always performed when there was a family problem as well as upon social illness within the family. In the course of performing this rite, the head of the family called *Njingeŋ* (successor) had a specific dressing style. He wore his cap, beads, held his drinking horn cup and creeping leaves called *Lour* were wrapped round his neck. Thus, all the children of the family sat inside the kitchen with each child having his or her own *Nkəŋ* ritual names. Therefore, the objective was to wash out the misfortunes from the family. Scholars held that the veneration of ancestors stood for cleansing and purification. This was not different from what Knöpfli's assertion that the motivation for the veneration of ancestors was threefold. In the first place, ancestors were venerated by the living in order to obtain help from them. The living invoked the ancestors' help and protection against diseases and death. Again, people beseeched them for timely sunshine and rain to ensure a good harvest and for good fortune. Lastly, ancestors were venerated in order to forestall a possible outbreak of anger. The ancestors' anger may be aroused if the living abandoned a set of traditional values (Knöpfli, 2002).

To this effect, palm wine was poured inside a calabash while a calabash filled with water was mixed with charms and stalks of the peace plants. Here, the calabash filled with water was used to wash the hands, face and legs of each child as a sign of blessing. Equally, the calabash filled with palm wine was poured to the successor's drinking horn while libation was performed seeking their forefathers' protections. After this libation, every child drank from this cup indicating that unity is strength. Here, it was noticeable that when the last lineage of that family died, he or she was buried with calabashes and the clay pot (Aleh, 2020). Calabashes could be used to explain the importance of Kedjom indigenous beliefs and human dimensions that made specific cultural distinctions.

In addition, a majority of the sorcerers used calabashes to establish causal explanations for physical and social ills which caused social disruption in the family. The sorcerers postulate that the use of calabashes in their shrines was to give a specific calm thought to solve the seekers problems especially washing them with water from the calabash. Furthermore, during the annual dance and renewal celebrations, women who had given birth to twins were drawn to this festival. They were rubbed with palm or castor oil all over, and decorated with special hair style, jewelry and camwood. Their presence affirmed the chiefdom's prosperity and the Fon's competence as a multiplier. Thus, the Fon filled the calabashes *Nshofwa (gourd for child)* with raffia wine, a liquid 'blessing'. This palm wine was tapped from the royal raffia palm grooves (Gemoh, 2020). The history of the calabash in Kedjom society through its multiple functions urged the indigenous population to seek better ways of preservation because the history of Kedjom people and their lifestyle highly depended on calabashes.

Regulatory Societies

In the Kedjom society, most regulatory societies often used calabashes for diverse purposes. The members of a masked secret society in charge of blessings the "juju" and their bearers, or cooling down the *Akam* (leader/captain) during the performance of a dance, sprinkled medicine on them of any vessel other than a calabash (Knöpfli, 2002). Some masquerades danced with calabashes. The head (*Ti-mukum*) of *Mukong* masked secret society explains the significance of the calabash in the "juju" dance. He intimates that:

> Under normal circumstances when *Mukong* masquerades are dancing in the course of death celebrations, the turn out participants especially women who are barren regained fertility. This is because the water which comes out from the calabash touched any barren women and performed cleansing and purifications from the infertility (Ngeajung, 2019).

Furthermore, the spirits embodied in some masks were so aggressive and dangerous that they had to be accompanied by a medicine man with an open magical calabash in his left hand and a peace plant in his right hand. He danced backwards in front of the "juju", continually sprinkling liquid portion on the "juju's" feet to cool him down as well as to soothe him. The purpose for this sprinkling of the portion was to prevent their "juju" from going wild and doing harm to the onlookers and ultimately cause the wooden "juju" or mask head to fall (Knöpfli, 2002). Hans-Joachim Koloss confirms that the "calabash" associated with masks was said to contain "the strongest and most dangerous potion or medicine" (Koloss, 2000).

***Corresponding Author:** Richard Tanto Talla

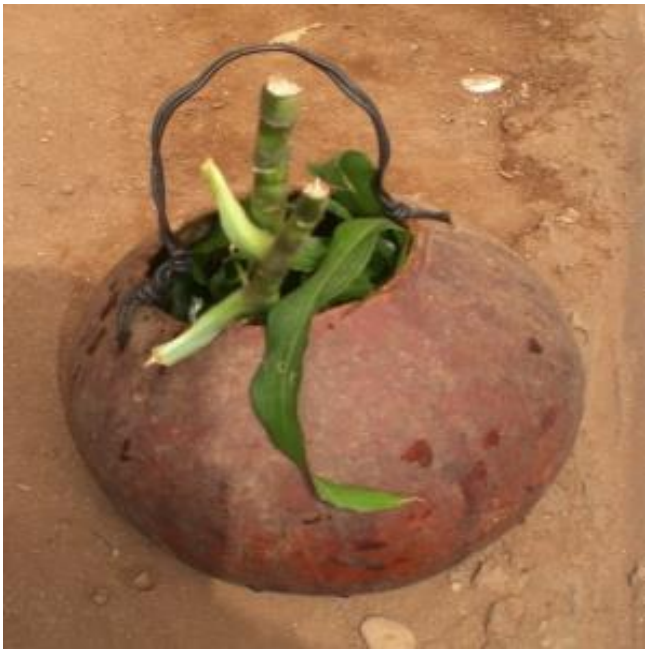

Figure 3. The Calabash used by Regulatory Societies
Source: Author's collection 20th February 2020

In some instances, it could happen that the anchorage of the wooden mask on the head of the "juju" breaks, and falls on the ground. This is considered one of the most serious abominations in the land. The interpretation usually given to such a happening is that somebody hated the spirit embodied in that particular mask and intended to bring about its downfall. When the wooden mask-head fell down, this was believed to be the proof that an enemy had used his charm on the mask and it had been effective (Knöpfli, 2002). Koloss observes the place of traditional potions in the Cameroon Grassfields,

> In principle, all secret societies of the Cameroon Grasslands have medicine in their possession and are concerned with all matters in its relation. These medicine societies employ earthenware vessels, calabashes, grinding stones and sacred musical instruments… Their rituals… and… medicines are considered exceptionally strong and dangerous. This reputation is enhanced by the secrecy surrounding…their activities... Little is actually known about medicine societies, and it is not commonplace to speak about them publicly... (2000: 235-279).

Libations

Libation in Africa was a ritual of heritage, a drink offered to honour and please the Creator, the lesser divinities, the sacred ancestors, humans- present and not present, as well as the entire community. This ritual was also practiced in many other parts of the world. Among Africans it could also be deployed to issue curses upon wrongdoers.[4] According to Brempong (2000), libation is the act of the pouring of wine or any alcoholic drink on the ground while reciting a prayer to God, Mother Earth, the deities and the ancestors. Therefore, it could be agreed that libation is the act of pouring out of a liquid such as water, wine or oil, as a sacrifice to God, the divinities or in honour of a dead person. While the libation was being poured, the officiating priest also poured out the people's requests to God or the divinity through incantations. The importance of libation lay in the belief that since the liquor softened the ground, it symbolically opened the way to the presence of the divine powers and spirits. Thus, in the process, the family head could pour libation to the ancestral spirit on behalf of the family to present the requests of the family members (Lateju *et al.*, 2008).

The pouring of libation was so essential to the vitality and authenticity of any traditional event. It seemed like without it, nothing could happen (Ghansah, 2012). In the Kedjom society and other parts of Africa, the pouring of libation was considered as an act in which the indigenous people showed respect and esteem for their ancestors. The pouring of libation was the public display of the strong relationship between the living and the dead. Also, it demonstrated the fact that these relationships continued to exist even after death, and that death alone was not powerful enough to break this bond (Opoku, 1978). Furthermore, the calabash was used to pour libation on to the traditional ethnic and family gods (ancestors). The ancestors knew and recognized no other container than this, blessed as it was by ancient usage. A particular calabash used for libation was handed down to the younger generation by the fore-fathers. Everyone

[4] http://webcache.googleusercontent.com-Libation: A Ritual of Heritage in African Life by kimaniNehusi

***Corresponding Author:** Richard Tanto Talla

believed that if libation was poured from any vessel other than a calabash or a titled cup, the offering would not be accepted by the ancestors.

In Kedjom society, calabashes were used in pouring of libations especially on the eve of ceremonies such as obituary when the family members gathered. Hence, wine was mixed with water in the calabash. The head of the family went with it to the door. He made a speech chasing away those with evil intentions aimed at disturbing the peace of the family, giving them their share of the drink from the calabash outside the door. Then he turned to those seated in the house who came with nothing but good and peaceful intentions and offered theirs. While speaking to them he poured their share of the drink from the calabash along the threshold of the room in which they were sitting (Knöpfli, 2001). During the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in the Kedjom society, calabashes were used in the pouring of libations especially in cases where calamities had happened to the people.

The foregoing demonstrates clearly that the significance of the calabash especially in ritual performances cannot be overemphasized. The calabash has thus remained a significant utilitarian and ritualistic article in the Kedjom chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to establish the utilitarian and ritualistic significances of the calabash in the Kedjom chiefdom of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. The Calabash had a significant role on the cultural aesthetics and lifestyle of the Kedjom people. This was because the tangible object conveyed, transmitted and preserved their material heritage. Thus, the calabash was an embodiment of material heritage, a reflection of culture and identity within the society. In many aspects, a cracked calabash was not useless because the place of the calabash in the Kedjom chiefdoms had diverse cultural symbolisms. Thus, cracked calabashes were known to be used for other purposes like the preservation of kitchen substances. The calabash was revered, rarely discarded and was patched and re-patched, through the passing of time.

In the Kedjom chiefdoms, as in other chiefdoms in the Bamenda Grassfileds where gourds had flourished, the advent of the modern era led to the introduction of glasses and plastic cups that replaced the calabash utensils. Contemporary markets display brightly colored enameled pans and bowls and many people now use them instead of calabashes. In spite of this, the study demonstrates that the place of the calabash in the Kedjom culture was linked to spiritual connotations as displayed in their sculptures, music, dances, myths and legends that attempted to portray the religious and spiritual convictions of the people. Kedjom artistic creations in Bamenda Grassfields has been and remained the true and sensitive sign of dynamic reality of its cultural life. Through oral interviews, the calabash was found to be an inseparable artifact in the Kedjom culture because of its utilitarian and ritualistic significance. This was because the people's way of life and social value were engraved upon the calabashes by symbols portraying various aspects like migration, settlement, epidemics, births, marriages, coronations secret societies, farming, war and rituals.

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