

Themes & Symbolism in *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ for Oduwole*

Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀



Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ masquerades are spectacles performed by the Yoruba people in Nigeria and Benin that celebrate the mystical power of women. With *ge*, meaning “to soothe, to placate, to pet or coddle,” *ẹ̀lẹ̀* meaning a woman’s private parts, and *dẹ̀* meaning “to soften with care or gentleness,” Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ refers to the concept of honouring women and their innate powers so that the entire community may reap the benefits of their life-giving forces.

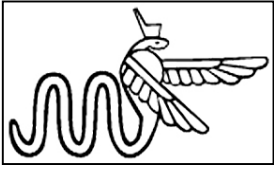
There are many different variations of the Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ spectacle, which varies from region to region, but this concept remains consistent throughout all of them. It is an incredible artistic manifestation of the power of women, which is evident in the concepts, costumes and masks, and location of the spectacle.

The masks are worn at an angle on the top of the head, with pairs of men wearing similar masks. The Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ headdress often consists of two parts: a lower mask and an upper superstructure. The lower mask depicts a woman’s face, its

composure expressing the qualities of calmness, patience, and “coolness” desired in women. The design of the superstructure is intended to placate the mothers by displaying their inner powers for all to see, thus pleasing them and ensuring the well-being of the community.

Birds represent the “messenger of the mothers” — an intermediary between woman and the gods — while snakes represent “power.” Snakes also symbolize the positive feminine qualities of patience and coolness. A snake coiled around the front also cautions vigilance with the saying “the snake sleeps but continues to see.”

Wadjet



Wadjet, was the royal cobra goddess of Ancient Egypt. As a deity of kingship, her image adorned the pharaoh's crown, when it was called the Uraeus. Depicted as a cobra poised to strike, Wadjet was a symbol of knowledge and wisdom.

The Ancient Egyptian goddess Wadjet was originally the protector of Lower Egypt but upon the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt she became the protector and patron of all Egypt. She is usually known as the "Cobra Goddess," or the "snake-headed" woman. Wadjet, sometimes known as Wadjit or Wedjet, in Egyptian means the green one, which seems befitting seeing as she is the cobra goddess.

Portrayed as a cobra wearing a Red Crown of Lower Egypt, Wadjet was a symbol of sovereignty. She and vulture Nekhbet, symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt, are the protectors of the King. Amulets of King Tutankhamen feature Wadjet and Nekhbet. Wadjet was worshiped in the ancient city of Buto in the Nile Delta. She is uraeus on the King's forehead, ready to spit venom or strike his enemies. One of the Pharaoh's names, the neby or "two ladies" name, refers to these two goddesses, Wadjet and Nekhbet.

Lotus Flower



The lotus flower appeared in legends originating from ancient Egypt. It played an important part in ancient Egyptian religion. The pure white lotus flower, the only plant to fruit and flower simultaneously, emerges from the depths of the muddy swamp. Growing from the mud at the bottom of ponds and streams, the exquisite lotus flower rises above the water and is usually white or pink with 15 or more oval, spreading petals, and a peculiar, flat seedcase at its centre.

The common Egyptian "lotus" is actually correctly called a water lily: the white lotus opens at dusk, the blue water lily opens in the morning. The lotus flower has, for thousands of years, symbolized spiritual enlightenment. Its purpose: to accelerate spiritual evolvment and enhance healing on every level within the system.

In a Buddhist context, regarding the lotus it is said: "The Buddha saw that most of the lotus plants stayed stuck in the mud, beneath the surface and the light of day, and some were barely breaking the surface, but there were a few lotuses that had broken forth into the sunlight and blossomed. The Buddha likened humans to the lotus flowers. Out of the deluded mud of human existence, filled with greed, hatred, and delusion, in a world where wars, oppression, and lust rule the masses, there are those who can and will rise above the muck and emerge victorious against suffering."

Peacocks

Peacocks are a symbol of beauty, prosperity, royalty, love, compassion, soul and peace. The male peacock goes to great lengths to attract his heart's desire. Since peacocks are pure at heart, loyal and faithful to their partners, they also symbolize eternal love.

Translation: Adorning Headdress

YORUBA	ENGLISH
Akanke.	To meet her is to love her.
K'o ṣoni òla la gbomu.	It's not from today that she is honourable, but from long ago.
O dọna ṣe aiye o dọna ṣe orun.	She guards the road into the world and guards the road to heaven.
Oluwa.	Powerful.
Aṣe.	Divine energy and life force.
Oloto ti orun.	From the heavens, sky-sent power.
Bunmi.	A gift.