SPIRITUALITY OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Eucharia Opara Ugochi, PhD
Department of Religions and Intercultural Studies.
Veritas University Abuja,
oparaureuk@gmail.com, oparae@veritas.edu.ng, +2348057779884

Abstract

Women are the female human beings created by God. They play vital roles in the spiritual and mundane lives of mankind in society. An existing society without women is a non-existing society with a baseless formation that creates a vacuum of peace, love, and unity for its posterity. Down the ages, womanhood, depicted in the personality of Eve, the first female creature of God, as testified by the Holy Scriptures (the Bible and Quran, respectively), brings fulfilment to other human counterparts. It is imperative for a woman to exhibit certain inherent roles applicable to her status, irrespective of societal recognition or appraisal. In African society, women are treasured pearls, bringing solace to their afflictions. In view of the preamble, the study endeavours to examine the spirituality of African women in development. Spirituality entails faith and practices, prayer, rationality, and psychological and emotional responses to actions in every activity. Interviews and related literature are basically approached to obtain the necessary data to analyse thematically. The study reveals the inactions of African women, which are intrinsically embedded in their spirituality of love, service, hope, care, and justice, that can be harnessed and geared towards sustainable development in African communities. The spirituality of African women is overtly showcased in their assertions of things in their environments.

 Keywords: Africa, Women, Spirituality, Development, Prayer

Introduction

The human being comprises spirit, soul, and body, with the spirit representing the divine's invisible ownership of the human person. It draws one to seek heavenly things from the realm of heaven, distinct from the material world. Spirituality encompasses elements such as meditation, reasoning, prayer, faith, hope, love, and sacrifice, which connect individuals to higher aspects of life. According to Yolanda, (2011:1) "Spirituality is a comprehensive life orientation that determines one's identity. Spirituality includes every dimension of human life. It is about one's entire human existence as an authentic person in God's presence". This suggests that women's spirituality involves their embodiment within a circle of life's many dimensions, where their implicit behavior is authentically expressed. This aligns with the biblical teaching,

"by their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:15-20). Women's spirituality often manifests through various activities geared toward development, reflecting their intrinsic nature.

Women's spirituality often involves the realm of fantasy. As defined by the Encarta Dictionary, fantasy is "imaginative power: the creative power by the imagination, impractical idea, unrealistic, psychology creation of mental images." Women frequently engage in creating mental images through imagination and dreams, experiencing moments of sobriety and contemplation. This state, however, can result in false expectations and unfulfilled dreams, often manifesting in unrealistic and impractical ideas (Kiura 2001: 30). Negative aspects of spirituality, such as gossip, can arise in this state, clouding minds with envy and jealousy. However, these negative tendencies can be redirected toward productivity and development, transforming challenges into opportunities (Opara 2023: 42). The word "African woman" refers to a wide range of cultures, histories, and experiences across the African continent. Women in Africa have important roles in their societies, both in formal and informal settings. They frequently engage in a variety of economic pursuits, ranging from agriculture to entrepreneurship, and hold important positions in politics and social movements. Rwanda, for example, has the greatest ratio of female parliamentarians in the world, with women holding more than half of the seats. However, many regions continue to face issues such as gender inequality, restricted access to education, and gender-based violence.

Despite the hurdles, there has been improvement. Women have incredibly high cultural expectations. In many African societies, women are expected to put family and marriage first. This conventional viewpoint can often limit women's potential while emphasising their essential role in home and communal life. Women are essential to Africa's economy, especially in agriculture and trade. They frequently run modest companies that contribute significantly to food production and household income. The number of female politicians, scholars, and activists is rising. Women are becoming more active in pushing for gender equality and social justice across the continent. This study unveils the intrinsic and extrinsicSpiritual life of African women in the contribution of development and societal progress. The Christian scripture affirms that, 'from the abundant of the heart, the mouth speaks.' Oral and related literature data gathered are presented and analyzed thematically. Succinctly, the spirituality of women is the embodiment of women.

Concept of Spirit of African Women

African women's understanding of "spirit" is inextricably linked to their cultural, spiritual, and communal identities. African spirituality frequently highlights the link to ancestors and the community. Women play an important role in preserving these links

through rituals, storytelling, and everyday behaviours that acknowledge their ancestry.African women's rituals are culturally significant and diverse among cultures. In Ghana, the Dipo ritual ceremony is performed. This is a coming-of-age ceremony for young females in the Krobo community. The girls go through a number of ceremonies, including purification and the wearing of unique beads, which represent their preparedness for marriage and femininity. The Gelede ceremonial celebration, celebrated by the Yoruba people in Nigeria, commemorates women and their role in society. It uses elaborate masks and costumes in shows that combine art, dance, and social commentary.

In Sierra Leone and Liberia, the Sande Society prepares females for womanhood. The initiation curriculum comprises lessons on women, societal obligations, and traditional wisdom. Young women in Nigeria's Efik and Igbo (IruMgbede), Ira Ofe, communities are segregated into "fattening chambers," where they are pampered and educated on womanhood, marriage, and motherhood. This practice is viewed as a precursor to their future duties as husbands and mothers.Umhlanga (Reed Dance) (South Africa) is an annual rite in which young Zulu ladies offer reeds to the queen. It honours femininity, promotes purity, and is an important cultural event. The Senufo people of Ivory Coast initiate girls into the hidden Poro society through a multi-year process. This introduction program involves instruction in domestic skills, personal grooming, and cultural understanding. These ceremonies not only commemorate significant life events but also strengthen cultural values and communal relationships. They emphasise the importance of women in maintaining and disseminating cultural heritage.

African women frequently embody spirituality in their daily lives. This is seen in their responsibilities as health visitors, healers, and leaders in their communities. Their spirituality is more than a belief system; it is a way of life that shapes their actions and interactions.Spirituality gives African women a sense of strength and empowerment. It provides them with courage and hope as they face obstacles and adversity. This resilience is frequently demonstrated through creative activities such as dancing, music, and art.African spirituality views life holistically, integrating the physical, emotional, and spiritual domains. Women frequently function as guardians of this holistic perspective, ensuring that spiritual practices are integrated into the fabric of daily life.In many African cultures, women are seen as spiritual leaders and mediators. They conduct rituals, offer prayers, and serve as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds.The concept of "spirit" can be explored from various philosophical and theological perspectives, each offering unique insights. In philosophy, the term "spirit" often refers to the immaterial aspect of reality, which is beyond the physical and perceptible by the senses (Hagel 1977). Spirit is associated with divine, from a theological standpoint, the spirit is frequently associated with the divine or the sacred. In Christian theology, for example, the Holy Spirit is considered one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, embodying God's presence and action in the world (McGrath 2011).

According to James (1902) spirit is perceived as a manifestation of the One Principle, which is beyond human comprehension and thought. Blavatsky (1888) argues that the human spirit is often described as the essence of a person, encompassing their consciousness, emotions, and will.

Embodiment of Spirituality in African Women

African women's spirituality entails a holistic embodiment of their existence in various spheres of life, from family to community involvement.Opara (2021: 211) argues that, their spirituality is often expressed through implicit behaviors that align with their moral and ethical values. The scriptures support this concept by stating, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:15-20). Women's spirituality is evident in their nurturing roles, perseverance, and moral guidance, which contribute to the development of their families and communities.The spirituality of African women is deeply rooted in their cultural, social, and historical contexts. It often embodies a holistic approach that integrates the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. The embodiment of spirituality among African women involves holistic integration, in which (Sampson 2016). African women's spirituality often involves a seamless integration of the sacred and the secular. This means that everyday activities, such as cooking, farming, and child-rearing, are imbued with spiritual significance Adichie (2003). Spirituality is often expressed through communal rituals and ceremonies. These rituals, which may include dance, music, and storytelling, serve to strengthen community bonds and connect individuals to their ancestors and the divine.Bassard (2020) assert that the physical body is seen as a vessel for spiritual expression. Practices such as dance and movement are not just forms of art but are also ways to connect with spiritual forces and express one's spirituality. Spirituality provides a source of strength and resilience, helping women to cope with challenges such as colonialism, gender discrimination, and economic hardship. Healing practices often involve a combination of traditional medicine and spiritual rituals. Embodiment of the spirituality in African women involves womanist theology (Afua 2000). This approach emphasizes the importance of women's experiences and perspectives in understanding spirituality. It often highlights the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class in shaping spiritual practices and beliefs (Amenga-Etego 2006).

Imagination and Spirituality: The Realm of Fantasy

The spirituality of women often engages with the realm of imagination and fantasy. This creative space allows women to envision possibilities beyond their immediate circumstances, fueling their hope and resilience. However, these spiritual fantasies sometimes lead to false expectations, with some women indulging in unproductive dreams. Despite this, African women often channel this imaginative spirituality into constructive actions, using their dreams as motivation to better their families and communities.

African women have always been admired for their perseverance, strength, and

ingenuity (Opara and Matthew 2022:103). However, their rich creative world, influenced by spirituality, tradition, and lived experiences, is sometimes disregarded. In many African traditions, creativity is inextricably linked with spirituality. Stories, myths, and legends serve as vehicles for passing down cultural values, historical knowledge, and spiritual beliefs. These stories frequently have fantasy aspects such as magical beings, ancestral spirits, and supernatural abilities. These stories help women understand their place in the world, the nature of their relationships, and the value of community.Fantasy can be an effective technique for dealing with misfortune. When confronted with adversity such as poverty, injustice, and abuse, women may resort to fantasy worlds for consolation and hope.

Reasoning and Meditation as Pillars of Spirituality

A core element of women's spirituality is reasoning, particularly in matters involving the family. Women have historically nurtured children from conception to adulthood, using profound reasoning to discern their offspring's needs (Hagee 2007: 9). This reasoning is rooted in meditation, defined as "the practice of emptying your mind of thoughts and feelings to relax completely or for religious reason" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). Women often engage in deep contemplation about their families, continuously reflecting on their loved ones' actions and futures. This reflective practice enables them to align their thoughts with God's will, propelling them toward spiritual growth (Opara 2021:59).

The spiritual lives of African women manifest significantly in reasoning and meditation. Historically, women have been the primary caregivers, nurturing their families with profound thought and consideration. The act of reasoning allows women to address family and societal issues with wisdom, often leading to sound decision-making that benefits their communities. Meditation further supports this, enabling women to connect deeply with the divine, seeking guidance and clarity in their daily lives.

Meditation, the practice of focusing the mind on a single point or thought, is another important pillar of African women's spirituality. It is often used as a tool for inner peace, self-reflection, and connection with the divine. Meditation can take various forms, including prayer, chanting, drumming, and dance. By engaging in meditation, African women cultivate a sense of calm, clarity, and resilience.Their deep reflections often translate into actions that foster peace, unity, and growth in their surroundings. This study investigates reasoning and meditation as two major pillars of African women's spirituality, focusing on their role in promoting personal growth, communal engagement, development and resilience.Reasoning and meditation are not mutually exclusive; rather, they complement one other. Reasoning gives an intellectual foundation for comprehending the universe, whereas meditation facilitates deeper introspection and connection with the divine. Together, they constitute a comprehensive approach to spiritual development.

Prayer as a Cornerstone of Women's Spirituality

Prayer is a vital aspect of African women's spirituality. It is a way of communicating with God. Women's dedication to prayer is a source of strength and guidance, allowing them to lead their families spiritually. Women often take on leadership roles in family and community prayers, setting the spiritual tone and reinforcing moral values. This spiritual dialogue provides them with a profound connection to the divine, fostering a deep sense of faith, hope, and resilience (Cogan 1990: 14). Prayer acts as a powerful source of energy, offering sustaining power and spiritual strength (Ignacimuthu 2004: 104).Prayers are also channels through which women express gratitude, seek guidance, and intercede for their loved ones. Their commitment to prayer cultivates a sense of peace and stability within their households, contributing to social harmony. Prayer not only strengthens women's personal spirituality but also serves as a communal activity that binds families and communities together.**Opara (2021: 210) argues that,** prayer can be a source of guidance, offering wisdom, comfort, and strength during challenging times. Through prayer, women can express their faith, gratitude, and hopes, affirming their spiritual beliefs. Women have used prayer as a tool for collective empowerment and social change. Through prayer, they form a personal connection with the spiritual realm, taking strength and inspiration from their religions.

Faith, Hope, and Love: The Triad of Women's Spirituality

Faith, hope, and love are central to the spiritual lives of African women, enabling them to navigate life's challenges with resilience (Opara 2021:102). Faith is described as a supernatural gift that allows believers to trust in God without doubt (CCD 4). This faith empowers women to persevere in the face of adversity, instilling in them the confidence to work towards their goals and the betterment of their families.When faced with misfortune, African women frequently turn to faith for strength and empowerment. Religious beliefs and practices can give women a feeling of hope, purpose, and community, allowing them to deal with issues like poverty, prejudice, and social justice.Faith may provide women a sense of cultural identity and belonging, helping them to reconnect with their heritage and rituals (Chitando 2007). For example, some women may face prejudice or marginalisation in their religious communities, limiting their opportunities for empowerment. Furthermore, the relationship between faith and growth can be complex and multifaceted, making it vital to avoid generalisations or stereotypes. Despite these limits, faith has immense potential to continue to aid in the development of African women.

Hope plays a crucial role in the spiritual journey of African women, granting them the psychological balance to overcome obstacles. "Hope stands the test of time and is relevant to all ages" (Ignacimuthu 42). This sense of hope fosters optimism, helping women maintain emotional stability and focus on positive outcomes despite difficult circumstances.African women's spirituality is inextricably linked to their cultural, social, and religious life, frequently displaying a rich tapestry of beliefs and practices

that include both indigenous African religions and Christianity or Islam (Atta and Opara 2024:93). African women's spirituality represents resilience, hope, and a deep connection to the divine, environment, and community.

Traditional African faiths have an important role in creating African women's spirituality (Amenga 2006). These faiths highlight the sacredness of nature, ancestors, and the interconnection of all living things. African women frequently express their faith through rituals, dances, prayers, and sacrifices to appease the ancestors or deities. Women's roles in these religions vary by regions, although they frequently serve as custodians of family and communal spirituality, healers, and leaders of certain rites. Their spiritual duties enable them to be symbols of hope in their communities (Otonko and Opara 2023:192).

Women frequently engage in divination, herbal medicine, and healing techniques, which are thought to promote community balance and well-being. African women, as stewards of life and bearers of children, embody the divine creative force. This is a tremendous source of optimism, especially during times of adversity like disease, violence, or social upheaval. Both Christian and Islamic African women emphasize prayer, community, and charity as expressions of their spirituality (Atta and Opara 2024:96). For many, religion becomes a source of hope, particularly in contexts of poverty, disease, and political instability.

 African women's spirituality is also a source of hope and resilience in the face of oppression, gender-based violence, and marginalization (Malueke 2000). This spirituality often gives them the strength to advocate for justice, equality, and peace within their communities. For example, Oduyoye (2001) argues the fact that, women's movements in various African countries often emerge from religious settings where women draw on spiritual values to demand social change.

Love, perhaps the most profound of these virtues, is the driving force behind many of the actions of African women. Women's spirituality is deeply rooted in love, which is reflected in their roles as caregivers, mothers, and community members. Love motivates women to make sacrifices for the well-being of others, whether through nurturing their children, supporting their spouses, or serving their communities. According to Ilori (1994:59), "Love covers a multitude of faults and is essential in the adult who would be effective as a teacher of adolescents". This sacrificial love extends beyond the family, influencing community development and social cohesion. In African women's spirituality, love is considered an all-encompassing power that involves compassion, caring, and duty for others, rather than just romantic love. This spiritual perspective of love is founded on both traditional African religious beliefs and more modern behaviours influenced by Christianity and Islam (Otonko and Opara 2023:195). In this framework, love is intertwined with spiritual responsibility, with the individual's well-being linked to the group.

In African Christianity, love is often centered around the teachings of Jesus, emphasizing love for God, love for neighbour, and the importance of forgiveness (Atta and Opara 2024:94).African women often use love as a spiritual tool of resistance against oppression, patriarchy, and injustice. Love is not only a personal emotion for African women but also a powerful spiritual force for social change (Amenga-Etego 2011). African women in leadership, both in traditional spiritual roles and in religious institutions, often emphasize love as the foundation for peacebuilding and reconciliation in post-conflict settings. Their spiritual practices of love are tied to healing both the personal and the collective wounds of their communities (Kanyoro 2002).In addition,Maluleke (2000) argues on the fact that, Love is important to African women's spiritual identities, whether they practice traditional African faiths, Christianity, or Islam. It serves as a guiding concept for their relationships with others, their communities, and the divine.

Sacrifice and Service in the Lives of African Women

The spirituality of African women often translates into acts of sacrifice and service, both in the domestic sphere and in the broader community. Women frequently take on the burdens of family care, including housework and child-rearing, often with little recognition. Yolanda notes that "women are taught to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others and, in doing so, they disappear into the background" (Yolanda 2011: 3). This sacrificial spirit, however, is a testament to their strength and dedication, driving societal stability and development.

Women's sacrifices extend to community service, where they often play pivotal roles in social and religious activities. In many African traditional religions, women serve as priestesses, diviners, and spiritual leaders, guiding their communities through religious rites and rituals (Ugwu and Ugwueye 2004: 33). In Christian churches, women increasingly assume leadership positions such as deacons, pastors, and evangelists, contributing significantly to the spiritual growth and moral guidance of their congregations (Threlfall-Holmes 2014: 614).

In many traditional African religions, sacrifice plays a crucial role in maintaining harmony between the physical world and the spiritual realm (Oduyoye 1995). For African women, the act of sacrifice is often intertwined with their roles as nurturers, healers, and spiritual mediators within their families and communities. In many civilisations, African women make sacrifices during significant life events like delivery, marriage, and death. According to Kanyoro (2001), women frequently make sacrifices in the context of motherhood, foregoing personal objectives, time, and finances to secure their children's success and well-being. This sacrifice is viewed as part of their spiritual mission because many African women think that motherhood is a divine responsibility. In times of social or political instability, women have given up their comfort, safety, and sometimes their lives to fight for justice and equality. Phiri (2004)

argues that, whether in anti-colonial efforts, post-colonial movements for women's rights, or contemporary action against gender-based violence, sacrifice has been a defining feature of African women's resistance. Their sacrifices contribute to the well-being of others, shaping them as central figures of strength and resilience within African society (Amenga-Etego 2006). African women frequently view service as an act of devotion, whether in the form of caring, community leadership, or spiritual activities.

In traditional African religions, service is a fundamentally spiritual act that is frequently linked to community well-being and the balance of the physical and spiritual realms. Women, especially those who function as priestesses, healers, or spiritual leaders, volunteer their skills, expertise, and time to benefit both their communities and the spiritual entities they worship. Service in this context also includes nurturing the next generation, ensuring the preservation of cultural and spiritual traditions. Women's roles as caregivers extend beyond their immediate families, as they often play a part in collective child-rearing, education, and the transmission of values that ensure the continuity of the community.

In many African societies, women are the backbone of religious congregations, often taking on essential responsibilities such as leading prayer groups, engaging in charity work, and providing support to vulnerable populations like widows, orphans, and the elderly (Maluleke 1997). Their service is an extension of their faith, driven by a commitment to God and the belief that serving others is a pathway to spiritual growth. African Muslim women express their spirituality through service, particularly in the form of *zakat* (charitable giving) and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity). Service is not only a religious obligation but a means of maintaining social harmony and fulfilling one's duty to the community.

African women, especially in rural areas, commonly serve as mediators, educators, and organisers for their communities, promoting social cohesion and growth. During the anti-colonial movement, and later in the fight for gender equality and social justice, African women served in ways that went beyond traditional gender norms. Many women became community organisers, educators, and peace activists, utilising their work as a means of resistance and empowerment (Kanyoro 2002). Many African women see their service to their families as an extension of their service to God or the ancestors, and thus, they approach their duties with a sense of spiritual responsibility (Phiri 2004).

Counselling and Guidance
Counselling is another critical aspect of women's spirituality, where they provide guidance and support to those in need. According to Oladele, "counselling is a person-

to-person relationship in which one person helps another to resolve an area of conflict that has not hitherto resolved" (Oladele 1987: 3). Women often offer emotional and spiritual support to other women, especially those facing personal or familial challenges. This role not only strengthens community bonds but also empowers women to overcome difficulties and strive for personal and communal development.The roles are often intertwined with their positions as mothers, spiritual leaders, healers, and community figures. In traditional African cultures, women are frequently seen as custodians of spiritual wisdom. They act as bridges between the physical and spiritual worlds, providing guidance through rituals, prayers, and divination. These ladies, sometimes known as priestesses, herbalists, or spiritual moms, offer assistance to help people deal with life's issues such as health, marriage, fertility, and sorrow.

African women counselling is comprehensive, addressing not only people's spiritual needs but also their emotional, psychological, and social health. African women in these positions usually employ traditional therapy methods such as storytelling, communal rituals, and ancestral worship. These activities promote spiritual growth by assisting people in connection with their ancestors, discovering their life purpose, and finding healing during times of adversity.

African women's roles in spiritual therapy frequently include emotional healing, which is regarded as an essential component of general well-being (Afua and Robinson 2000). African women typically mediate family disagreements, offer advice at difficult personal moments, and console individuals who have lost a loved one or are unwell. Their counselling efforts frequently centre on promoting forgiveness, reconciliation, and communal togetherness. In addition to their roles as spiritual counselors, African women often serve as mentors and educators in their communities. They provide spiritual guidance to younger women, passing down religious teachings, cultural values, and life wisdom that are essential for personal and spiritual development(Adichie 2003).
During times of crisis—whether personal, communal, or national—African women's roles as spiritual therapists become even more important. Women have always given spiritual direction in times of political turmoil, conflict, and disease. Their advice assists communities in navigating uncertainty, finding meaning in suffering, and working towards healing and restoration.Opara (2021: 163) opines that, African women's counselling and spiritual guidance have recently emerged as critical tools for treating the psychological and spiritual consequences of crises such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, civil conflicts, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Phiri 2004). Their spiritually based counselling encourages emotional and psychological resilience, which is essential for both individual and societal recovery.

Temperament of African Women Spirituality
Temperament is another element influencing women's spirituality, reflecting their emotional and behavioral responses. Women's spirituality often manifests in qualities

such as humility, patience, and compassion, which contribute to their distinctive approach to life and spirituality. Ultimately, the spirituality of African women encompasses a holistic approach to life, where love, faith, sacrifice, and prayer intersect to shape their identity and drive their contributions to development. Their unique spiritual practices enable them to navigate personal and communal challenges, making them pivotal figures in nurturing and sustaining their families and communities.

The four temperaments—Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic, and Phlegmatic—have their origins in ancient Greek medicine but have found application in a variety of cultural and spiritual contexts, including African women's spirituality. In African spiritual traditions, women frequently embody these traits in their roles as nurturers, healers, leaders, and spiritual advisors. These temperaments reflect not just personality characteristics but also spiritual forces that link women to ancestral wisdom, nature, and community (Armah 2020:45-61).

Sanguine (Optimistic and Social): African women with the Sanguine temperament are generally regarded as the centre of society, brimming with life and enthusiasm. They are social connectors who use their positive energy to encourage others (Nwoye 2017:80). In spirituality, these women may serve as community leaders or spiritual dancers in rituals, representing joy and vigour.

Choleric (Ambitious and Leader-like): Choleric women in African spirituality are frequently portrayed as warriors or powerful spiritual leaders (Nwoye 2017:78). Their forceful and action-orientated personality is associated with ancient responsibilities as queens, priestesses, or those in charge of spiritual ceremonies (Armah 2020:60). This temperament is compatible with leadership jobs, decision-making, and ensuring the spiritual and physical well-being of their community.

Melancholic (thoughtful and analytical) women are frequently regarded as spiritual healers or bearers of holy information in African cultures. Their introspective character enables them to fully connect with ancestral spirits and comprehend sophisticated spiritual teachings (Nwoye 2017:95). They are frequently involved in techniques such as divination or medical healing, which need consideration and sensitivity to spiritual worlds.

Phlegmatic (Calm and Reliable): In African spirituality, phlegmatic women are frequently spiritual anchors who provide stability and tranquility. Their calm demeanour enables them to act as mediators and counsellors in their communities. They are the ladies who maintain ritual harmony and assure the preservation of traditions, exemplifying a great sense of patience and spiritual balance (Olupona 2011).

Embodiment of women spirituality
The notion of embodiment in women's spirituality investigates how spiritual experiences and beliefs are interwoven with the physical body, emphasising the

interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit. This approach differs from traditional ideas, which frequently separate the spiritual and physical.

Body-Spirit Integration: Embodied spirituality recognises the body as an essential component of spiritual practice. This viewpoint holds that spiritual experiences are not only mental or emotional, but also physical. Ferrer (2000) emphasizes how embodied spirituality incorporates all human traits, including the body and sexual, and contrasts it with disembodied spirituality, which frequently entails dissociation or sublimation.

Embodied spirituality has the potential to heal and empower many women, particularly those from marginalised areas. It enables them to liberate their bodies and spiritual practices from oppressive narratives. Schmidt Siemens (2015) investigates how Christians might overcome sexual shame and achieve resilience through embodied spirituality.

African women's spirituality and development

This involves delving deeper into how spirituality influences various aspects of African women's lives, including personal growth, community involvement, and socio-economic development.

Spirituality as a Source of Resilience: For many African women, spirituality is an important coping technique in the face of adversity. This resilience is based on a strong connection to ancestral traditions and community support structures. Graham (2016) explores how Black women use spirituality to manage and resist structural oppression, emphasising the significance of spiritual practices in promoting resilience.Community and Social Development: Spirituality is a communal experience that promotes social cohesiveness and collaborative action. African women's spiritual traditions frequently include rituals and gatherings that foster community relationships and social growth. Mattis (2000)

Economic Empowerment: Spirituality can contribute to economic empowerment. Many African women use their spiritual beliefs to fuel business endeavours and community-based economic initiatives. This facet of spirituality is frequently associated with a sense of purpose and a desire to improve the well-being of their communities.

Health and Well-Being: Because African spirituality is holistic, it addresses physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Traditional healing techniques, which are frequently spiritually based, play an important role in promoting health and wellness. These practices are essential to the entire development of African women because they offer a holistic approach to health that includes spiritual well-being.

Traditional healing traditions in South Africa are intensely spiritual and are frequently guided by sangomas, or women healers. These women serve an important role in their communities, offering not only medical treatment but also spiritual direction and counselling. Ashforth (2005) found that sangomas use their spiritual practices to alleviate health difficulties, increase mental well-being, and develop social

cohesiveness in their communities.In Nigeria, women's spirituality is frequently linked with social engagement. The Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) exemplifies how spiritual beliefs may motivate social change.In Ghana, the Dipo rites of passage for young girls in the Krobo tribe are an important spiritual exercise that also acts as a communal development tool. They educate young women about their cultural heritage, social obligations, and health practices, preparing them to take an active and educated role in their communities.

Conclusion

The spirituality of African women plays an essential role in their personal and communal lives. Through their dedication to prayer, meditation, and acts of service, women foster the moral and spiritual fabric of their families and communities. Their spirituality is not just a personal journey but a force that drives social development, nurturing future generations and promoting peace, unity, and growth. By embracing their spiritual gifts, African women continue to make invaluable contributions to the development of their societies.

The realm of fantasy is a vital aspect of African women's lives. It serves as a source of comfort, resilience, and inspiration. By recognizing and celebrating this imaginative world, we can gain a deeper understanding of African women's experiences and contributions to society.Reasoning and meditation are essential pillars of African women's spirituality. They provide a framework for understanding the world, cultivating inner peace, and fostering resilience. By recognizing the importance of these spiritual practices, we can better understand the experiences and contributions of African women to development. The spirituality of African women is a dynamic and multifaceted aspect of their identity. Whether through traditional religions, Christianity, or Islam, African women use spirituality as a means of navigating life's challenges, finding hope, and fostering resilience. Their spiritual practices not only provide personal comfort but also serve as a foundation for communal well-being, making them central figures in the social and spiritual fabric of African societies.

Service is a fundamental motif in African women's life, influencing their identities and responsibilities within families, communities, and religious institutions. Whether via ancient Spiritual rituals, Christian or Islamic philanthropy, or leadership in social movements, African women demonstrate a deep devotion to both heavenly and societal well-being. Their acts of service, which are frequently interpreted as demonstrations of love, humility, and dedication, are essential for understanding their spiritual lives and the social fabric of African civilisations.

African women's contributions to spiritual upliftment through counselling and advice demonstrate their vital role in their societies' spiritual, social, and emotional life.

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