

Marriage by Proxy: A Remedy to Divorce and Single Parenting as Presented in Ifá *Ogbèdí* Divination Poetry

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Abstract

Marriage is an important aspect of life in Africa and other nations around the world. In Africa, particularly among the Yorùbá, marriage institution is sacredly ordained by Olódùmarè for the purpose of procreation and mutual help. Therefore, anyone in the society that has attained marriageable age is expected to marry notwithstanding any form of deformity. However, it is unfortunate that the institution of marriage in the world today is facing a lot of hitches leading to divorce, and eventually, single parenting. In the past, marriage by proxy, which means marriage that follows due process with the help of intermediary and Ifá divination, was, considerably helpful in sustaining marital union. However today, some people have attributed the problem of marriage breakup to abandoned culture and modernity through western education, foreign culture and religions, while others premise it on women liberation. Yet, the latter argument may not be strong enough since many prominent women were successful in their business enterprises and marriage even in times of the gods such as Ajé who had 200 slaves that helped her to take her wares to the market. Whether these shared views are true or there are other factors associated with the issue of marriage and divorce is what this paper tries to find out. Hence, ten men and women were interviewed from each three principal religions in Nigeria and their opinions were content analyzed. Regardless of religious affiliation, at least 82% of the respondents

agreed that foreign culture, religion and education extremely contributed to the decline of African culture, which gave room for divorce of which the end product is single parenting.

Keywords: Yorùbá, Single Parenting, Marriage by Proxy, Divorce, Nigeria

Introduction

Marriage is a sacred institution respected all over the world. It is an institution of the Creator which is to be respected and honored for all¹. In Africa, particularly in Yorùbá society, marriage is anchored on the social and religious norms. Therefore, investigations are made physically and spiritually before anyone ventured into it. Again, in the time past, marriage was contract between a man and a woman. However, it is not the same story again today as women are marrying women while men are hooked to men all in the name of same-sex relationships. Socially, marriage is a union of two individual adults and their families. It is an instrument for maintaining social discipline and to guide against prostitution, rape and immoral acts in the society. For continuity reasons, marriage is contracted to re-establish family cycle and for the replacement of the dead ancestors. Religiously, marriage is contracted in heaven; we only come to the world to fulfill it. This is where the importance of consulting *Ifá* oracle comes to play a vital role so that one would be certain of his or her soul mate in heaven². This as well explains the reason marriage is always till death do us part.

It is unfortunate that in the contemporary time, marriage is no longer the way it used to be in the past. The common slogan now “It is now for better for stay, for worse to go”. All the binding factors that make marriage a sustainable one in the past have all been eroded. The reason for this is not far-fetched; the embracement of foreign culture and tradition, religion, western education and civilization and at the same time, how do we find a way out of the wood on how future success in marriage that endures till the end with joy and happiness will be achieved.

Yorùbá Marriage Institution

As earlier said, marriage is a sacred institution particularly among the Yorùbá. For this reason, all measures are taken carefully to avoid regret in the

1 Adebayo O. Odubiyi. 2015. *African Traditional Marriage, It's Acceptability or Otherwise to the Church*. Ijoko-Ota: Fountains Publishers and Commercial Enterprises 2.

2 Ayo Salami. 2008. *Yoruba Theology and Tradition, The Man and the Society*. Lagos: NIDD Limited (Publishers). 67.

future as the saying goes that, *Ìyàwó tí a fi ijó fé, iran ni yí ó wò ló*- a woman married in festive season will go same way³. Unlike nowadays that an adult man or woman can take wife or husband home to be introduced to the parents as husband or wife, in the past, no sane man or woman would do that without incurring the wrought of the parents, the land and the gods. To avoid this and some other unforeseen problems, proper structure was put in place as methods of choosing husband or wife. This includes marriage before birth. This is a system where a man saw a pregnant woman he knows he could marry from her family and then approach the husband of the woman to show his interest that if the woman delivers a baby girl, he would be interested in marrying her. If the husband of the woman agrees, then the man has temporarily becomes their in-law. From that time onward, he would be rendering some little help like fetching firewood for the woman to cook, giving the woman some of his farm produce (since farming was a common business then), and helping the husband of the woman in his farm. If he is lucky and the baby is a girl, he automatically becomes their in-law. He then intensifies his helping hand till the girl is matured and given to him in marriage; after all other necessary things had been done. Although sometime the girl may consider the man too old to get married to and may not be too happy about the marriage but since in those days, hardly one can see a child that will disobey his or her parents because children always had the notion that their parents knew better in a matter like that. This is evident in the saying of the Yoruba that *oun tágbà rí lórí ijókó, bómódé gùn irókò kò lé è ri*- what a man saw while sitting down, a child cannot see it even if he climbs *irókò* tree⁴. However, if the man is too old to marry such a girl, his son will do. In most cases, such method of marriage is usually for the son of the person that approached the husband of the pregnant woman since it was the duty of the parents to marry wife for their children⁵. Again, marriage in the past was always family affairs. Therefore, children have no moral obligation to reject or refuse to obey their parents.

Another method is for an adult man to see a marriageable lady and send *alárinà* (an intermediary and usually a woman) to her. The work of *alárinà* is to speak on behalf of the man to the lady. However, this is not done until necessary enquiry had been made about the family of the lady. The lady too will make her own investigation about the man and his family to find out whether

3 Kolawole Abimbola. 2006. *Owe, Akanlo Ede ati Asayan Oro Yoruba*. Ilorin: Timiagbale Ventures. 58.

4 F. I. Sotunde, 2009, *Yoruba Proverbs and Philosophy*, Abeokuta: Damsan Nig. Company, 285

5 Olu Daramola ati A. Jeje. 1975. *Awon Asa Ati Ise Ile Yoruba*. Ibadan: Onibonjo Press & Books Industries (Nig.) Ltd. 34

they have one sickness or the other in their family before she consented. After necessary things had been done, they become husband and wife.

The Understanding of *Ifá* in *Ogbe-di* to the Yorùbá System of Marriage by Proxy

Another method is through the oracle. *Ifá* may dictate the wife or husband even before or after conception. It could also be after birth. That is, during *Àkosèjayé*. If this happens, for such a child to prosper and achieve success in life, the parents must obey what *Ifá* dictates concerning the child. This is evident in *Ogbe-dí*⁶ where *Ifá* says:

Ìrọ́fá abẹnu gíngíní
Ló dífá fún àgàn àìbí
Èyí tó tori ọmọ dífá
Wọ́n ní yíó bí ọmọ, sùgbón ẹbọ níkó rú
Ekuméjì, ẹjaméjì
Àgbébò adíe méjì àti ègbàájì-ó-lé-okòò
Ifáníyíó bíomọ̀bìnrinkan
Dàda ni ọmọ náà yíó maa jẹ
A kò sì gbọ̀dọ̀ pa orúkọ rẹ̀ dà
Babaláwo niyí ósì ẹẹ ọkọ rẹ̀.

Ìrọ́fá with pointed mouth
 Casts divination for a barren
 who consulted the Oracle because of a child
 she was told she would bear a child but should offer sacrifice
 two rats, two fish
 Two hens and two thousand and twenty (cowries)
 Ifa says she would give birth to a baby girl
 Her name would be Dada
 Her name must not be changed
 An Ifa priest must be her husband

Again, it could be a marriage by curing, which is known in Yorùbá as *gbàmi ora mí*- buy and rescue me. It was the custom in the past to give a sick maiden to a Babaláwo with a promise that if he cures her sickness, she would be given to the Babaláwo as wife. Since the Yorùbá do not believe in mercy killing, and it is not mandatory that a man must marry only one woman as we have it today. This method of marriage is done out of desperation because, the

6 C.L. Adeoye. 1980. *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*. Ibadan: University Press Ltd. 157 & 236.

parents of such a sick girl must have spent fortune on her sickness and realizing that this is the only option left to save the life of the sick girl, they will give her out with the hope that the Babaláwo would do everything possible to cure the girl of her sickness⁷.

There is also marriage by captive. This happens when war ensues among villages or towns. This was common among the Yorùbá in the past to wage wars for political, geographical and economic reasons. Such a weak and defeated towns or villages lose her young girls and boys to a powerful town that wage war against them. At the end of the war, these girls and boys were shared among the warriors that won the war after settling the Oba and Chiefs in the town by given them war captives.⁸A very good example is Eḡúnṣetan Aníwùrà, the Iyalóde Ibadan of her time who had money and bought many slaves, male and female from war captives⁹.

There is also elopement method whereby a man connives with his fiancée and they both run away without proper marriage process¹⁰. Although this is not an acceptable or popular means of marriage among the Yorùbá in the past, couples usually take to this method if they realized that parents' consent to their union is not guaranteed. Though it may sometime attract parental curse, but one thing is sure, thin or thick, they both weather it by sticking together since they realized that they have no one to help. As a sacred institution, all efforts are made by the Yorùbá to make sure that marriage process is followed so that there would not be any problem in the future, and peradventure if there is, it can be resolved without leading to divorce that can lead to single parenting.

Divorce and Single Parenting, a Menace to the Future of 21st Century Children

Divorce is a common problem in Yorùbá society today, which hitherto was a source of regret, shame, humiliation and disappointment in the past. As explained before, divorce is not part of Yorùbá marriage system because it goes beyond the couple involved. Rather, it is a union of the two families of both husband and wife. Since two families are involved, all factors of marriage separation must have been taken care of from the onset before the two are joined together in marriage. This is done through marriage process that will involve physical and spiritual investigations. Therefore, if at the end of the whole

7 C.L. Adeoye. 1980.*Asaati Ise Yoruba*.Ibadan: University Press Limited. 236.

8 O. Daramola and A. Jeje. 1975.*AwonAsaati Orisa Ile Yoruba*. Ibadan: Onibonaje Press and Books. 5.

9 Isola Akinwumi. 2010.*EḡunṣetanAniwura Iyalode Ibadan*. Ibadan: University Press PLC. 8-9.

10 J. Hastings.(ed.) 1958.*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 5. Great Britain: Morrison and Gibb Limited. 429.

exercise, the husband is discovered to be impotent or unable to impregnate his wife, or some other issues, they always have a solution to every challenge. As a result, factors that are causing divorce in the society today such as improper preparation for marriage, sterility, laziness, lunacy, barrenness; unfaithfulness and so on must have been taken care of at the beginning before the conjugation of the couple.

However, there are extreme cases where divorce will occur. However, before this could happen, the two families must have tried all their possible best to make sure the couples stay together without thinking of separation. Therefore, if there is any misunderstanding, the elders of the two families are always there to settle it and they are never tired of this. However, divorce may occur when a woman is not well fed, which could lead to stealing, fornication, joining of bad company like *àjé*-witchcraft and change of character from a good behavior to a bad one. To avoid this, the woman may decide to divorce her husband. If a woman is experiencing *àbikú*-(born to die) children and all efforts to stop this failed, she may be advised by her parents to try marrying another husband. Again, on the ground of fornication, a woman can be divorced by her husband. Also, if a woman is accused of witchcraft, the husband will surely divorce her¹¹.

Divorce and single parenting has become a prevalent menace in our society today due to acculturation and the influence of foreign religions, culture and customs. Besides, women in this contemporary period are more empowered than before. There are educated women today who are one way or the other gainfully employed by companies, and institutions like the university we are in now. Some even earned more than their husbands in some cases. Although this is not surprising because even in the past, women had been well empowered especially from the time of the gods till now. A very good example of this is Ajé who had 201 slaves that were helping her to carry her goods to the market before she became Òrúnmilà's wife. *Ifá* made this clear in *Ìwòrì túrùpòn*¹² which says:

Èkìtì bàbààbà
A dífá fún Òrúnmilà
Ntuwóerújòláiìwíf'ésù
Ní ojò keta tí Òrúnmilà raerú yì,
Ní ó fò sánlẹ̀ tó kú...

11 C.L. Adeoye. 1980. *Asaati Ise Yoruba*. Ibadan: University Press Limited. 235.

12 E. A. Lijadu. 1998. *Ifa Mimo Alabalese, PaleroKinni*. Ondo: J.A. Ifeoluwa Printing Press. 122.

Èkìtì bàbààbà`

Casts divination for Orunmila

Who was saving money to purchase a slave without the knowledge of Esu

On the third day he purchased the slave

The slave died...

Òrúnmilà and his household were crying over a slave when Èṣù came to visit Òrúnmilà and met them all crying. He asked why they were crying and was told that it was because of the slave that died. He collected a goat from Òrúnmilà and took the dead slave and the goat away. At the end, Èṣù came back with Ajé and her two hundred and one slaves to Òrúnmilà by reporting Ajé to Òrúnmilà as the person that killed Òrúnmilà's slave. As a replacement, he had brought Ajé and her slaves. The point we are trying to make here is that Ajé was a wealthy woman that had more than two hundred slaves that were working for her on daily basis. Aje had been empowered to the level of having more than 200 slaves that she could afford to dash out 200 without regret.

According to an informant, the major factor that is leading to divorce and single parenting today is lack of adequate preparation. Although some claimed they do these by going to their pastors and spiritual leaders, this often lead them to more problems than what they bargained for? Through this means, there could be an arranged wife or husband and since it is the spiritual father or mother that vouched for such relationship, they will both consent to the arrangement only to discover later that they are not compatible¹³. Madam Èniolaalso emphasized on the fact that the abandonment of core indigenous culture and tradition of marriage by proxy creates room for improper investigation of marriage both physically and spiritually. Narrating her experience, she said she had someone at heart when she was young and when one of her relations saw her with the boy, she reported to her parents, and her parents told her that she had been betrothed to someone when she was still a kid. As a result, they must not see her with anybody that could bring shame to the entire family. Today, parents no longer have hands in the marriage of their children. They only brought wives/husbands home without parent's knowledge¹⁴. Another informant is of the opinion that initially in the past; love was the fulcrum upon which marriage stood love development. This is the reason why when the love eventually developed; it is always to death do us part. However, today, marriage comes before love when the couples barely know each other well. This is why love will enter through the door and go out through the window. That

13 JumokeAdenrele, Priestess of Osun, *Oral Interview*, Ibadan, 15th January, 2018.

14 Madam Eniola Oluki, Palm wine Seller, *Oral Interview*, Ibadan, 15th January, 2018.

is, I do today divorce tomorrow.¹⁵ More importantly, uncontrollably access to social media such as internet services, WhatsApp, Telegram, Vibe, Badoo and Facebook just to mention a few have done the society most especially the youth more harm than good as far as issues relating to marriage are concerned. Several cases of death not only as a result of divorce have been reported due to internet chats and the subsequent visits of the victim, without thorough investigation of the partner to be. Such was the case of three Colombian teens who were found shot without any reason in 2010 which was the beginning of a digital reign of terror. Again, Sarah was killed by Edward Richardson over Sarah, his ex-wife change of status on Facebook from married to single. Also Danielle Booth and Torrie Lynn Emery died over a boyfriend. In his own case, ArunRao was killed over a comment he made on Facebook¹⁶. Anorey Elaine Elrod became a global crime pawn through online darting¹⁷. In Nigeria, Cynthia Osokogu was killed in 2012 in Lagos by her boyfriend through a Facebook dating¹⁸.

Other factors that usually lead to divorce and single parenting are external influence especially from in-laws. If the husband is believed and viewed by the in-laws not to be suitable husband for their daughter, even if the union had been blessed with children, they can still withdraw the wife. Again, women of today detest polygamy. They do not like sharing their husbands with another woman. The moment such a thing happened; they will prefer to live their lives as single mothers with the hope of avoiding unavoidable problems that would still rear its ugly head later in life¹⁹. For instance, majority of the 21st century children lack home training, though in most cases, it may not be their fault, majority of the blames come from their parents who are busy chasing shadows instead of reality. Besides, many parents are busy running after money, job and some other things, leaving behind their children to the care of the house helps, radio, television and internet. At the end, if such children get married, they behave badly by giving their husbands or wives undue stress. Also, many ladies do not want any man to control or dominate them. This is much rampant among working class ladies with good jobs and better pay. Since they can afford to take care of themselves and their kids without any control from any angle, they will prefer to stay single than to be dominated. Some became single parents out of their own volition. This could be as a result of husband's

15 BabalawoEluwoleIfalosobee, Ifa Priest, Ile- Ife, *Telephone Interview*, 10th November, 2017.

16 <https://m.ramker.com>, accessed on 19/01/2019

17 <https://www.wired.com>, accessed on 19/01/2019

18 <https://www.vanguardngr.com>, accessed on 20/01/2019

19 Helen Kunbi Labeodan, (Associate Professor), Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, *Oral Interview*, 12th June, 2017.

or wife's death. Such people may decide not to remarry after such an incident, and they can hardly be blamed for that.

Indeed, the implication of divorce and single parenting is tripartite in nature, namely: the children, the parents and the society at large. When separation occurs, it brings along hardship and suffering on the children of such marriage. This may happen in terms of inadequate resources to care for their material needs, and even time to care for them. Thus mostly, such children lack adequate training, physical and mental care²⁰. There are occasions that such children are given to the relations and friends to care for; with this, there might be a clear departure from the peace, love, oneness and stable life such children have been experiencing before separation. In most cases, such children are not well taken care of by their guardians thus making the children to suffer physically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically, which could later in future turn them to a big threat to the society through the bad habits that have been implanted in them as a result of lack of close supervision and maltreatment. At the long run, they become uncontrollably hostile, violent and irritable to themselves, their parents and the society in general.

Divorce and single parenting that is not caused as a result of death or inadequate care always brings defeat and shame on the couple involved. As a man, he is looked down on as a man who could not take care of his home, except the whole community is aware that the wife is a fighter who will not take no for an answer from anybody regardless of his or her age, or the woman is a terror that could endanger her husband's life.

Divorce and single parenting regardless of circumstances that led to it often puts an end to the peace, joy and harmony hitherto existing in a family, particularly among the children who are at the center and victims of such act. They may end up not being useful to themselves, the parents and the larger society²¹. Although, there are few exceptions of people whose lives were okay at the end of their sojourn as victims of divorce and single parenting.

Wrong teachings from religious leaders often contribute to the problem of divorce as viewed by Adewumi²². This stems from the fact that it is not all these men and women of God that were actually called by God to do his business as they claimed. As we are told and read in the scripture that there are so many departments and ministries one can be called to occupy by God such as evangelists, teacher church planters, prophets and pastors. However, today,

20 Clifford Kirkpatrick. 1963. *Family as Process and Institution*. New York: The Ronald Press Company. 607-8.

21 Gerald R. Leslie. 1977. *Marriage in a Changing World*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 327.

22 Adewumi Aribisala (An Elder in Christ Apostolic Church), *Oral Interview*, 13th August, 2017.

because of economic hardship in the country, every department mentioned above had been muddled together by these so called men of God. Many were not even called but claimed so because of the financial benefits or their greed for money. As a result of these factors, many do not have the necessary experience to lead or preach. Thus, they preach wrong teachings, such as saying that, “men and women are equal before the Creator”. What this could mean to them I cannot say but all I know is, naturally, men are different from women physically and spiritually. With this kind of cajoling, women would hope and believe that all responsibilities in the house must be shared between husband and wife. Couple with embrace of foreign culture, sometimes, women, particularly career women would want their house chores to be done by their husbands or house help. This is what an African man would not succumb to thereby leading to tensions at home because African husband is a commander in chief and a controller of his house, no one contests this position and if such a woman is unyielding and does not realize this fact, it could cause a break up²³.

Another big factor is leadership greed and hunger to be called general overseer, a position that commands a lot of respect in Africa. If a convert is asked to eat grass or do some other unthinkable things, they will joyfully do once the order comes from the general overseer. A lot of these, we have seen on social medias such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

Also sexually insatiable, lack of sex in marriage and inadequate/ regular sex are all factors today that are leading to divorce. There are complaints in most customary courts in Nigeria seeking for divorce over irregular sex, lack of sexual satisfaction and other sex related complaints that were not common in those days²⁴. Some men may take to drugs to satisfy his wife and if at the end he could not cope as a result of excessive demand for sex that is very common in the world today will seek for a divorce. In the same manner, if a woman cannot tolerate a relationship that is lacking sexually, she opted out to seek for sexual fun elsewhere rather than be suffering in silence.

Marriage by Proxy as a Form of Rescue for Divorce and Single Parenting

Before the advent of foreign religions, western education, culture, custom and civilization, we had a perfect marriage system devoid of divorce and single parenting. In spite of the above variables, the rate of divorce and single parenting is very alarming. Can we then conclude that they are the factors responsible for the act? Since it would be very difficult to do away with these

23 Samuel O. Oloruntoba. 1987. *Family Bliss*. Ilorin: Atoto Press Ltd. 4.

24 <https://www.vanguardngr.com>, accessed on 20/10/2019

variables in our midst today, is it not right to blend the old with the new? If the answer is yes, then the Yorùbá old system of marriage by proxy could do the trick. First, parents should get hold of their future by spending more time with their children to give them the proper home training required for their future homes. We should let the children see values in our culture and traditions. If the old is not faulty, there cannot be new so says the Bible. But the old and new testaments of the Bible are still in use till today. However, in our own case, there is nothing wrong with the Yorùbá old means of getting married. We only abandoned it because of greed and wish to love the culture of our colonial masters. However, we have seen how far we have gone by following their footsteps.

We pushed an African indigenous religion that teaches sound moral to the background for foreign religions, but today we realized that the religions have failed us through their teachings as far as morality is concern. We have also seen our gain of emulating their culture and customs through provocative dresses that our women are wearing today. Boys no longer dress well all in the name of sagging. We are lucky to have had our culture and tradition at the same time the colonial masters gave us their own. This is what I will call double portion anointing, but we should be careful so that what *Ifá* says about us in *Írèntẹ̀gbè*²⁵ will not come to pass that:

Ohun abí wọn bí kii wù wón
Tẹ̀ni ẹ̀lẹ̀ni nń́ yá wón lára
A dífá fún iwò dẹ̀rẹ̀
Tíí ẹ̀salábàrìn ẹ̀ja

They are never inspired by their own historical legacy
 The ones for the others are what they catered for
 Cast divination for the fishing hook
 The close formed of the fish.

Conclusion

To every continent, nation and ethnic groups in the world are given by the Creator, their system of religions, which constitute a means of reaching him without stress. In the same way, he has given to them their culture and ways of life so as to live a peaceful and meaningful life, a life devoid of sorrow and unhappiness. However, many nations, particularly Africa are in trouble today because we failed to recognize this fact. This is the reason why we left

²⁵ Ayo Salami. 2008. *Yoruba Theology and Tradition, the Worship*. Lagos: NIDD Limited (Publishers). 22.

our culture and tradition for others, the price we are paying for today in many ways of which divorce and single parenting are part. We are wiser and call the Creator a fool. If not so, we would not throw away our heritage for others that we are not gaining anything from more than misfortune. Until we are ready to attach importance to our culture and tradition, until then we are ready to move forward and the earlier the better for the sake of future generations yet unborn. Again, the present generation that money hungry as a result opted for divorce to gain freedom to be wayward should realize that money is not everything in life. What about the dangers that is associated with this freedom as Ifá says in Ìrosùn Dì²⁶ where *Ifá* says;

*Kòtò gbùn,
Yàrà gbùn
A dífá fún Èlémọ̀nà
Ọ̀mọ̀ atàdí ọ̀wọ̀
Wọ̀n ní kó másetara rẹ̀ kiri ọ̀...*

*Kòtò gbùn
Yàrà gbùn
Casts divination for Èlémọ̀nà
The child of he that turns her buttock to money making
She was advised to desist from selling her body...*

Elemona was told to desist from having illicit affairs but refused to heed warning. At the end she contacted a terrible disease that terminated her life. We should note that every marriage has its shortcomings as a result should try and endure if not because of anything, but because of the children that would be at the receiving end. However, if the association will endanger any of the party's life or put the life of the children in danger, then one should consider opting out to avoid irredeemable consequence.

Finally, parents who believed that because they are rich, their children must also marry from rich home for the tradition to continue should take heed and know that money cannot buy happiness and joy of marriage. They should know that they did not bring wealth from heaven and when they finally die, they will not go with any. Their children happiness and joy should be on their priority lists. They should remember Yoruba proverb that says *Ilé tí a bá fì ọ̀ ọ̀mọ̀, ìrìní yóó wo o-* a house built with spittle will be demolished by dew²⁷.

26 Ifalere Odegbemi Odegbola, 2014, *Iwe Mimo Ifa: Esin Akoda Olodumare*, Faleye, A. A. (ed) Ibadan: Odegbola Traditional Global Services, 240

27 F. I. Sotunde, 2009, *Yoruba Proverbs and Philosophy*, Abeokuta: Damsan Nig. Company, 241

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