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A History of the Traditional Rulers in Ogboin Clan From 1956 till Date

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Abstract

The traditional institutions were formed to play a vital role in our societies. This paper examined the history of the traditional rulers in Ogboin clan from 1956 till date. In the past, traditional rulers were taken as royal fathers in their various domains, and they performed better in accomplishing firm democracy, but with the coming of democratic policies, the roles of traditional institution became less recognized. This presents an historical account of the evolution of the traditional institution and its achievements in Ogboin Clan in Southern ljaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The work will contribute to the existing body of historical knowledge on traditional institutions, and will serve as a reference material to students and researchers who would want to carry out studies on similar topics. The work is qualitative in nature and Data were obtained from oral tradition, and secondary sources, and are systematically reviewed. These include books, journals, articles, newspaper, publications, and other unpublished and published documents. The research adopted one theory; Leadership Theory. This theory centers on the autonomy of the traditional institution and the quality of the rulers in each society. The findings show that government policies for the nomination of the electoral body and the inclusion of the royal fathers into Partisan Politics have reduced or destabilized the traditional institution in the Nigerian state. The paper concludes by stating that the traditional institutions which are the only remnants of our pre- colonial political system must be highly preserved, promoted and strengthened through official constitutional recognition and acknowledgement they deserve.

Introduction

Literally, tradition refers to age long, old, customary and established historic ways of something while institution means a system or organization that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people; often one that has been handed down from generations. Thus, traditional institutions are those social, economic or political organizations/bodies which derive their powers, legitimacy, influence and authority from the traditions of a particular people.[1]

The Ibenanaowei, in ljaw custom, is in the highest hierarchy of the holders of traditional power and authority. An Ibenanaowei of Ogboin Clan is ordained by the community's spiritual/natural authorities, acceptable by the community as a role model and unquestionable leader. The Ibenanaowei is not only the head of the Clan (kingdom), but is seen as a father to all. He's second only to the gods of the land and he is generally seen, recognized and acknowledged as the custodian of the people's history and culture. The Ibenanaowei is assisted by a chain of traditional chiefs and loyalists who also form an important part of the traditional institution of government in Ogboin clan.

The Ogboin clan is intersected by a network of creeks that are connected to several parts of the Niger Delta region. In addition, there are many smaller creeks usually passable by canoe. The land is extremely low-lying and swampy. The people of Ogboin clan are situated in the central part of Bayelsa State. The climate which is similar to what is obtained in other parts of the Niger Delta region is divided into two seasons: the dry and rainy season respectively. Rainfall lasts from March to October, with a very short dry season. However, the area is blessed with several kinds of animals both on land and in water. Examples of such animals include alligators, iguanas and crocodiles of different types; monkey, antelopes and a host of others.[2]

Origin, Migrations and Settlement of the People.

The Ogboin settlements comprise of Amassoma, Otuan, and Amatolo which are situated in the central zone /part of Bayelsa State. They have neighbours from the northern, Castern, Western and southern parts of the state. In the north are the Ogobiri, kabama, and Agoro. On the east are the Oyiakiri, Kumeu, Toru-Ebeni, Akedei and Osiama. On the western part are the Ekpetiama and Atissa. while on the southern part are the Oporomo and Onyoma. These people and communities are usually engaged in socio-economic activities together as brothers and sisters of one ethnic nationality. The stories of migration and settlement of the Ogboin people are in most cases, not written down. However, oral information from Chief Lucky Daniel (Acting Amananaowei of Otuan), Chief S.S Gbefa and Captain C. R.A Fuagha (rtd), postulate their own version of the Origin, migrations and settlement of the people and there are other scholars like E.J Alagoa postulate that the Ogboin people trace their origin to Orubiribaulou inside the Creek north of Otuan. He further opined that the Ogboin sons came out of the creeks to found Otuan, Amassoma, Amatolo, and the Ogboin in Delta State.

According to Chief Lucky Daniel (Acting Amananaowei of Otuan) the origin of the people can be traced to a man called Otuwon who had five children, four of these children were male while one was a female. When Otuwon had his first son, he called him Akama in remembrance of his father at Kalukubu in Seibiri (Opuama) area of Boma Clan. Oboro was the second son of Otuwon. He founded the present Amassoma town. Ekpoi was the third son of Otuwon. He founded the village called Ekpeibiri (now Amatolo) in Ogboin clan.

Uziriama, another male child of Otuwon travelled far and founded a village called Uwheru popularly known in Ogboin clan as Ugbono in Delta State, while the only female among the children and a sister of Oboro followed her brother during the dispersal from the ancestral settlement.[3]

Chief S. S. Gbefa postulates that Otuwon was the founder of Ogboin kingdom. He was one of the righteous sons of Izon, later called Ijaw, who travelled along with his father and relations from Ile-Ife to search for his father's uncle along the river/riverine areas down to the southern part of the River Niger into the sea of the Atlantic Ocean and returned to an

area known as Agadagbabou along the River Nun. It was in Agadagbabeu that Otuwon decided to leave his father and relations to start a new life. He left with his wives and children to settle first at the present site of Oporoma, the headquarters of the present Southern ljaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

One beautiful day, Otuwon set out for hunting and fishing and missed the channel out and got himself to a big lake in the forest known as Orubiribabou. This lake is presently on the bank of Otuan town. Otuwon decided to settle down around the new lake as the site was very quiet. With many beautiful flowers. food plants, fishes and animals, he later traced his way back to his first settlement in Oporoma to inform his wives and children of his new discovery. The next day, he assembled all his wives and children to go and settle down at the big lake known as Orubiribabou. Otuwon diligently created his Juju (god) under a mango tree. A mango tree in the ljo dialect means Ogboin ten and Ogboin means mango.[4]

Captain C.R.A Fuagha (rtd) mentioned the remaining five children as Chief Akama, Chief Oboro, Chief Ekpai, and Chief Ogbono. These four children are said to have separated from their father because of a dispute over the head of a hare known as konitubo in Ijo dialect.

The four brothers departed from their father's settlement in Orubiribabou and founded the following towns and villages;

1. Chief Akama jnr. was the founder of Otuan Community.
2. Chief Oboro was the founder of Amassoma Community.
3. Chief Ekpai was founder of Amatoto Community while.
4. Chief Ogbono was the founder of Ogbono now known as Ewhheru Community in Delta State.[5]

The analysis given by Prof. E.J. Alagoa on the history of the Ogboin people of the central Niger Delta region is highly acceptable based on his wide range of academic experience and research conducted over the settlers/dwellers of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

The Origin of Traditional Institutions in Ogboin Clan

A clan is a group of people united by actual or perceived kinship and descent, even if lineage details are unknown, a clan may claim descent from a founding member or apical ancestor who serves as symbols of a clan unity.[6]

The Ogboin traditional institution were seminary autonomous and democratic in nature. The people have a standard political constitution in place that ensured peace and harmony in the kingdom. According to Okaba independent clans were governed on the principles of gerontocracy. However, executive, legislative and judiciary functions were vested in the eldest man (Amaokusowei) as the substantial ruler of the people then. A cabinet is constituted by the eldest man who is randomly hand-picked from the major lineage groups.

The Amaokusuowei was also seen as the Chief Priest of the community deity, interceded on behalf of all for spiritual harmony. Furthermore, the knowledge of herbs and historical wisdom were basic qualifications for holding positions in the cabinet. Those roles were not hereditary. The Ibenanaowei (king of the kingdom) is also the custodian of the culture of the people. He has authority over all cultural affairs of the people.[7]

Next in the hierarchy are the paramount rulers of the various towns and villages that make up the kingdom. They have control over their respective towns and villages. Each town is divided into quarters and all the quarters are headed by quarters chiefs called Birinanaowei (Compound chiefs). These quarters are in turn sub-divided into compounds. The Ibenanaowei (king) also had his council of chiefs. The Ogboin-ebe executive council of chiefs comprises of seventeen (17) members, four chiefs and their royal highness from each of the three (3) communities, and his Royal Majesty and the Secretary to the clan. However, all these levels of leaders are placed in office through election.[8]

Traditional Rulers in Ogboin Clan in the Past.

From an administrative point of view, the village traditional institution has not undergone much change since earliest times. In fact, every title and position is still intact except for the introduction of Ibenanaowei who is no longer the Clan Head as Amakosowei (eldest man) in the village. One can see that the Ibenanaowei is no longer the oldest man but someone who has leadership qualities and the ability to head the people. However, the office of the Amananaowei is still maintained and is active in the village council, Okosuotu. It is well respected as it is occupied by the eldest man in the village. The position of the Ibenanaowei is not hereditary. Once an Ibenanaowei dies, another man takes over by presenting himself to the people. If accepted by the people, he becomes the Ibenanaowei (king). But if there are more than one person, an election is conducted by the village council, Amaokusuotu where they select one person to become their Ibenanaowei. For instance, the efforts at political advancement of the Ogboin-ebe can be traced back to the dtays of His Royal Highness, Zumoh, Efeke V. was born into the families of chief Zumotngha Ere Efeke of Amassoma in the former Eastern Region. “Now called Bayelsa State’, and Chief Ikoli of Olomoro in 1912.

His first primary school experience started at St. Stephen’s School, Amassoma, later proceed to Reu Proctor Memorial School at Kaiama in, he later pursued his secondary Education in Enitona High School, PortHarcourt, and Hussen College, Warri from 1930 – 35. However, after his completion of his secondary education, he was employed as a Dispensary Attendant at Amassoma between 1938 to 1940s. thereafter he left for Lagos and joined the Colonial Department of Agriculture and as a field overseer and worked in many stations in the Western Region, including Ota, Wasimi and Idofa.

Late H.R.H Zumoh Efeke finally returned home in 1951 to engage in full scale farming and active politics. He single-handedly educated his people “Amassoma on the importance of the census exercise” and he encouraged them of the benefits attached to such National

exercises, and he carried his people along in the 1953 census. The level of population brought about the installation of pipe born water to the community in 1960.

In 1952, he was made chief of his compound, Efeke Wari and was elected as Ibenana-owei of Ogboin clan in 1956. He single-handedly fought for the recognition of the Ogboin chieftaincy stool as a first-class stool in the Eastern Region. Thus, he became the first-class chief to represent the former Yenagoa province in the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs in 1960. And because of the love he has for his people, he played an active role in the creation of Rivers State. For that fact, he wrote a book titled "Why we demand a separate state", in his book containing his speech in the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs. Thus, that speech made him famous. In pursing the stunch belief for the creation of Rivers State, he quickly escaped to Lagos to agitate for it in 1967 during the Nigeria crisis. Several attempts were made to kidnap him to Enugu. He made his way to Dodan Barracks and disturbed General Gowon for the creation of Rivers State so much that Gowon called him "The Crocodile of Rivers State". By which this title became famous among his people "The Crocodile of the Niger Delta".

According to Chief P.G. Warmate, a one-time commissioner for Yenagoa province in the Eastern Region, attested to this in a Rivers State Television (RSTV) interview in 1992 during the 25th Anniversary celebrations for the creation of Rivers State. He said, the only man who is qualified to claim that he inspired the creation of Rivers State is chief Zumoh, Efeke.

Late H.R.H Zumoh Efeke was an educationist, he encouraged education. In his book titled in "English – Ijaw primary" was written in 1947. This effort was to attract secondary education to his own town, he also spear-headed the construction of an upstairs building at Amassoma by community effort in 1952. His love for education resulted in producing the first Cambridge holder, and the first University graduate in Amassoma. Among his children are six (6) University graduates, its regarded as the highest in a nucleus family in Amassoma so far.

He was an industrialist and a transporter. Late Zumoh Efeke established the first mineral plant in the Ijaw speaking area of the country, he also built transport boats which applied Amassoma and Onitsha, Amassoma to Port-Harcourt which boosted commerce in these areas.

Furthermore, HRH Zumoh Efeke, was a man of many parts in human form. He is an Educationist, Politician, natural ruler, civil servant, a father and friend to all. As a politician, he toured the length and breadth of the Ijaw speaking area of the country and came to be known as the Encyclopedia of Ijaw politics. In order words, he believed in work before progress and thus called his palace "Nothing Without Labour Palace". He was a bold and dynamic leader, fearless and never sold his people for his personal interest.[9]

In the days of King Jones/Ere II (1975-2002), as the Ibenanaowei of Ogboin-ebe. His reign as king will be highly remembered for his outstanding political initiatives which include the introduction of the house and age group systems in Amassoma, Otuan and Amatolo communities. In Otuan, they had one ward.five (5), which comprises of Eseniwari Ama, Azaba Ama, Ogudo Ama, Inaitaoromo Ama, and Founma. While in Amassoma alone, there are presently three (3) main wards, namely, Alomu ward (9) which consists of Sadiemo-Ama, Ebiladei Ama, Agbedi Ama, Oporumo Ama, Goin Ama, Ogbopina Ama, Ogbobia-Ama, Ebenikiri Ama, For-Ama, Bietebi-Ama, and Amatolo compound which had one (1) ward, comprising of Olotu-Pele, Ikpa-Pele, Obabiri Pele and Orobolowari Pele while Okpodu ward (1l) consist of Oweida-Ama, Okori-Ama, Waperefcki-Ama, Ebitimi Kondei-Ama and Azeni-Ama.

The D.S.P. Alamieyeseigha administration from 1999 to 2006 was highly influenced by the Ibenanaowei of Ogboin-ebe, HRM King Jones Ere II to divide Ogboin clan or Ebe into two (2) political blocks. Ogboin South and Ogboin North. Ogboin South comprises of Otuan and Amatolo communities for easy administrative convenience, while Ogboin North consists of Amassoma community alone. The Ibenanaowei initiated these ideas to favour Amassoma Community in terms of government policies, infrastructural development and economic empowerment in the clan.

Successive administrations like those of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, Chief Timipre Sylva and Hon. Seriake Dickson, also favoured Amassoma community because it hosted the state-owned Niger Delta University. This ideology was initiated by the late Ibenanaowei (King) Jones Ere II and late D.S.P Alamieyeseigha to favour their community with such laudable projects, instead of representing the good people of the state clan as a father of all. They preferred playing politics with everything that concerns the development to their community. This system has brought the other communities in the clan to see Amassoma as a well advantageous community among the communities in the Clan.[10]

Traditional Rulers in Ogboin Clan in the Present

After the death of his Royal Majesty, King Jones Ere II, in August 2002, the whole clan gathered and formed an electoral committe to look into the election of a new Ibenanaowei of the clan, but Amatolo, Otuan and Amassoma communities presented one candidate each for the throne. An election was conducted in Amatolo community being the eldest son of Ogboin. The election was free and fair and it was won by His Royal Majesty, King Oweipa, D. Jones Ere III through the assistance or encouragement of Chief D.S.P Alamieyeseigha administration.

Since the successful installment as the king of the clan from 2002, His Royal majesty, King Oweipa D, Tones Ere II, had done everything to improve the status of the traditional institution by consulting the clan elders to produce a constitution or a legal framework that will checkmate the activities or duties of the Ibenanaowei and his chiefs in council over

irregularities among them in the clan. This responsibility is seen as a guide in status of the traditional rulers in Ogboin clan.

The Ibenanaowei of Ogboin clan, HRM, King Oweipa Pele Jones Ere III has contributed significantly to the growth of the kingdom. For the past 13 years of his reign as Ibenanaowei (King), He has overseen the affairs of the people of Amassoma, Otuan, and Amatolo, and has also witnessed several crises in the Niger Delta region. However, as king by nature, He have involved in consultations and negotiations process sometime, when the need arises, sensitisation comes to play.

In the past, He has been holding meetings with the various clans Head to approach whatever problems of any communities when peace is under threat. This approach has paid well, this is because it was a collectively done by all the traditional rulers in this region. As most of the kings in this area, He have been consulting and comparing notes on conflicts in the region, and possibly referred sustainable solutions to manage such violent in the region to the state and federal government conflict related issues.

Roles of the Traditional Rulers

These rulers play useful roles in mediating between the people and the state, enhancing national identity, resolving minor conflicts and providing an institutional safety value for often inadequate state bureaucracies.

Mediation in Conflict

One of the major roles played by traditional rulers is mediating in time of conflict. They mediate in conflicts involving individuals or groups of people in their communities and even between their communities and other communities. By so doing, the traditional rulers are seen to be working with the local government to enhance overall peace and a secure environment in the local government. Because of the love people have for their traditional heads, it is always easy for the traditional rulers to mediate and douse tension and install peace.

Tax Assessment and Collection

Traditional rulers play an important role in helping the government to assess and collect taxes from its citizens. With their closeness to the people, they can better assess the incomes of their subjects and propose tax amount to be imposed. The traditional rulers can arrange for taxes to be paid at a particular point and thereafter remit the money to the government.

Custodians of Culture and Traditions

The traditional rulers are the custodians of the people's culture, arts and traditions. They also control traditional titles, offices and rituals. It is their duty to inform the local government when there are modifications in their cultural practices. They also inform the local government of major cultural events and possibly seek its participation in such

events. The traditional rules help the government in maintenance and development of culture which is one of the functions of the government.

Communication Channels

As Traditional heads are channels of communication between the people and the government. It is the duty of the traditional rulers to communicate government policies and programmes to the people in a manner they will understand, and encourage them to actively participate in the programmes. They are also channels through which the people express their grievances to the government.

Maintenance of Security

They assist government in ensuring security of lives and property in their various communities. They do this through the framework of village or community neighborhood watch or vigilante groups, and their membership of the government peace and security committees and police relations committees.

According to HRM, King Oweipade Jones Ere III, who disclosed this to the researcher that, if power and autonomy are granted to the traditional rulers, we will make laws and take decisions that will be constitutional binding on the people at the local communities. He further explains that the traditional rulers are at the receiving end, therefore, we can proffer solutions to several problems facing the people at the rural communities. However, with this autonomy, both the people and the government will be at peace as the traditional rulers will help in solving challenges at the grassroots with the constitutional authority granted to them by the federal government and state. Finally, he advised the federal government to reinstate the roles assigned to traditional rulers in the 1969 constitution. That recognized and grant constitutionals autonomy to the traditional rulers for peace to reign at the grassroots in various communities in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The traditional institution should not be politicized and their involvement in partisan politics shall make it lose its worth as a father figure, characterized by trust and neutrality of action. Rather a balance ought to be struck between modernizing the institution to fit into the present political set up and the obliteration of customs and traditions. According to the word of A Biodun form the pre-colonial era the traditional institutions have been strengthened and weakened, empowered and disempowered by the emergent political ruling class. In essence, if the traditional institution on their part can be courageous enough to stand firm against any government influence to act contrary to what is expected of them as an embodiment of truth. This will make them gain people’s respect even though they may face government wrath and reduced government patronage.

Endnotes

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