

Aju – a Unifying Force among Obinagu Udi People

by

Ezeagagwo kingsley A.
M.A.Student of Faculty of Arts
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

The study is focused on Obinagu Aju festival. The community which is located in the present-day Udi Local Government of Enugu State holds this annual festival every year either in Augusts or September. The occasion calls for a mass return of the indigenes of the community to celebrate the Aju festival which was believed to be initiated by Onyiaja, the forefather of Obinagu town. The aspirations of the people are showcased through various cultural displays by the three main quarters which make up the community; Umuneboagu, which is the first son followed by Enugwueze the second son and Akpulu the third son of Onyiaja. As a cultural heritage Obinagu cultural festival (Aju) under study marks the celebration which started many centuries ago by the great fore fathers of the community. The festival serves as a cohesive force in fostering peace and unity among the people and villages of Obinagu Community. Aju festival is bedrock of many developmental projects in the community. In carrying out

this study which gives detailed explanation of Aju festival, descriptive method is used.

Introduction

Nigeria remains a country with 36 states and Abuja as its federal capital territory (FCT). It derives its name from a widely known River Niger. Nigerian is rated as the largest and most populous black nation in Africa. It is located within the tropics on the West Coast of Africa. It is also bounded on the West by Republic of Benin, on the North by the Republic of Niger, and on the east the Republic of Cameroon. According to Okolo (2015), the population of Nigeria as at 2006 census is about One hundred and forty million, three thousand, five hundred and forty two (140,003,542). This figure is made up of hundreds of ethnic groups. Nigeria has diversified geographical regions which make the place highly interesting.

However, it is also interesting as well as important to note here that the Igbo are one of the major ethnic groups which made up Nigeria. The igbo ethnic group has multi-cultural and traditional groups. Within the Igbo ethnic group there abound different cultures and traditions each of the clans and communities, which make up the Igbo society. The cultures of these sub groups in Igbo ethnic groups help in identifying each sub group. And having explain this far, in this study therefore concentration will be focused on the feast of Obinagu town, called Aju. The rich cultural heritage of Obinagu town in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State shall be looked into with a view to coming up with their proper identity as fraction in Igbo ethnic group. The study gives elaborate details on the early preparation of the festival, Aju festival of Obinagu in the past, rules and regulations of modern Aju

festival, activities marking modern Aju festival and modern Aju festival. Finally, the study highlights on the significance of Aju, summary, conclusion, recommendation and references.

Early Preparation of the Festival

The early preparation of the festival features the most eldest man of the community and one eldest from each of the three major quarters that make up Obinagu Community two weeks earlier going to the shrine at 'Okpuike' which is the head of all the shrine in Obinagu community. The eldest man along with three other elders will go to the shrine with the following items:

1. 2 gallons of palm wine
2. A cup that looks like elephant tusk
3. Kolanuts (Oji)
4. Yellow Okra (Odo)
5. A wooden gong (Ekwe) and
6. One white cock

According to Aneke (2016) we learnt that the eldest man along with the three other elders representing the three major quarters in Obinagu consult the gods of the land by giving them their rites, in his words, he says:

"I have to give them wine, kolanuts to appease them as well as getting assurance of their approval and protection during the festival period. The white cock offered as sacrifice signifies peace. As the

eldest man in the community, I do commune with the gods of our forefathers in order to get clearance and assurance of safety and a successful festival. It has been like this over the centuries and handed down to us. So, we will not let the culture to die or pale into insignificance especially, in this new millennium”.

Asked whether the festival can go on without consultation with the gods? Aneke replied. “No, it cannot be done. The tradition is that the gods must be consulted anytime such an occasion must be carried out in our land”.

Aju Festival of Obinagu in the Past

According to Aneke (2016) Aju festival of Obinagu town in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State started many centuries ago. He stated that he knew his grand father well before he died yet his grand father did not know when Aju festival started. Aju festival in the remote past in Obinagu Community was a feast celebrated by only traditional worshippers. During this period, everybody in the community was traditional worshippers. The feast was carried out to strengthen their relationship with their gods. They also believed that human fertility, progresses in their endeavours and good health would always be assured when they carried out Aju festival

accordingly. In view of this, everybody thin, would contribute his or her roles in order to appease the gods.

Aju festival is celebrated only two (2) days starting on 'Orie' day and ended on 'Afo' day. These two Igbo market days were very important because the two days were the only days 'Okpuike' shrine could be consulted. On the second day of the feast which was 'Afo' day, many traditional dances like 'ikoro', 'gedegwu', 'achikolo', ubonkwa and so on would be staged at 'Okpuike' shrine while people dance to their satisfaction. While these dances were being played people would be drinking palm wine, singing and dancing with joy.

Rules and Regulations of Modern Aju Festival

The Obinagu Aju festival is one cultural event which observed a lot of discipline in the area. According to Nnoli (2016) during the festive period. It is mandatory that:

Firstly, nobody fights, people must not fight one another, no matter the provocation. Secondly, nobody exchanges verbal blows with each other or one another. Thirdly, nobody steals, or robs anybody. Fourthly, all compounds must be kept clean, all bush paths must be cleared market placed must be swept clean, and everybody is expected to appear neat and smart. The fifth rules is that no man beats his wife

during the festival period. Finally all family heads are advised to make sure that laws and orders are maintained in their various homes. Violation of any of the above rules and regulations stated above attracts a penalty of twenty thousand naira only (N20, 000). The community in other words, makes and rakes in money through such fines in most cases.

Activities Marking Modern Aju Festival

Modern Aju festival in Obinagu town started about five (5) decades ago. Ever since then the tone and tempo of the festival had changed. With the influx of many people that joined in the celebration of the festival, it is now a five days programme with many activities a colourful one.

Many programme of events had been added which include modern dance and their dancers, traditional wrestling matches, concerts, football matches and fund raising. The festival now attracts the participation of the entire community with the Igwe of the town and the town union executives organizing it every year to make sure that the festival is a hitch free.

Before the festival takes place these time around, relations, friends and well wishers of Obinagu community are normally invited to come and witness Aju festival. Aju festival is now a feast that has given Obinagu Community and its people a proper identity.

Modern Aju Festival of Obinagu

The Obinagu town for the past centuries has remained one notable community for its rich cultural heritage. Obinagu Aju festival, in its entirety is an annual event which comes up every year either in the months of August or September. It is an event which makes case for a mass return of the sons and daughters of the community to celebrate their Aju festival. It is a festival that started many centuries ago by the great progenitor of the town ONYIAJA. He had three sons known as Umuneboagu, Enugwueze and Akpulu. And these sons established in three different quarters and locations called Umuneboagu which is the first son, Enugugwueze which is the second son and Akpulu which is the third son. These three quarters came up to make up what is called Obinagu town today with twenty-one (21) kindreds.

At present, Obinagu is under the able leadership of Igwe Emmanuel Eneugwu, the Okobo – Onyia-Aja the 3rd. While on the other hand, Dr. Calistus Eneh is the President General of Obinagu town union.

Location – Obinagu town is located in Udi Local Government Area in Enugu State of Nigeria. It has common boundaries with Umuabi, Agbudu, Amokwe, and Udi towns all in Udi Local Government Area, and

also Isu-Awwa, Agbudummiri and Ituku towns in the present Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Population: According to Eneh (2016) Obinagu community has a population of over 100,000 people living in their.

Occupation: The occupation of the people according to Eneh is Palm wine tapping and farming because of good species of palm trees and rich humus soil. It is a food basket of Enugu State.

Religion: The people are now mainly Christians.

In an order of seniority, according to one of the citizens of the community Nebo (2016) each event is first performed by the most senior of the sons. The Umuneboagu quarter firstly goes to dance, both the male and female dancers. However, before then, they must have gone to pay homage to the Igwe of the community according to seniority. Different dance groups come out enmasse to the village square otherwise called Okpuike centre to display their artistic and the acrobatic dancing prowess.

Dancing activities takes place the first day of the week. It is a five days programme. The second day of the week features the traditional wrestling matches between the three quarters. The wrestling music will be playing while the wrestler from the most senior quarter, Umuneboagu will first come out for a display. Not quite long, a willing and prepared wrestler emerges from the second quarter to throw a challenge. At the end, the overall winner emerges

and it will all be celebration and jubilation. Third day, concerts are organized by the various groups according to seniority in these three quarters. Different concerts which centre on historical events in the past or which rightly reflect the aims and aspirations or values of the people are displayed tactically. At the end, the committee set up by the President General (PG) comes up with the result of who won. According to Eneze (2016) "It is to keep our custom alive and well preserved. It is used to correct societal issues and errors".

The fourth day comes up with the event of fund raising for developmental projects. All the big wigs of the community and their invited friends within the state and beyond embark on fund raising. Millions of money that are raised on yearly bases are usually channeled on development programs like town halls, roads, pipe borne water and so on.

In the fifth day which marks the finality of the events, football clubs which reach to the final stage from the three quarters of Umuneboagu, Enugwueze and Akpulu will meet at the Central School Obinagu play ground to play. And at the end, whosoever emerges the winner will go with the 'OBINAGU AJU CUP' which attracts one hundred thousand naira only (N100,000). The winners go round the town celebrating their victory and a successful completion of the annual festival in grand style.

Significance or Importance of Aju Festival to Obinagu People

The importance of Aju festival to Obinagu can be likened to what Ezeojiaku (1997) says that culture does to people. Ezeojiaku in his words says:

Culture is a guidance of societal behavior, exercise of societal behaviours, serving as a stamp that marks Nigeria from other societies, furnishing the basis for social solidarity unity and development from time to time, storing the social heritage and value system of the people and keeping legacies going while developmental goals are made acheiveable and a reality.

The important roles Aju plays in the life of Obinagu people cannot be overemphasized. It serves as a cohesive force in maintaining law and order. Through this festival called 'Aju', the traditional event of Obinagu that started many centuries ago was passed to the present Obinagu people. It enables the people of present day to know the belief and value system of Obinagu forefathers. The relative peace and unity that characterized Obinagu Community is the handiwork of Aju festival. Finally, Aju fund raising among Obinagu people and their well wishers. Millions of money that are normally realized are utilized in developmental projects like road constructions, cottage hospital, pipe borne water, civil hall etc.

As a support to the above, Kammelu, Onuegbu, Nndi, Chukwu & Umeh (2002) emphasized the importance of cultural festival when they say that: "Cultural festival helps in keeping community in good form by acting as a medium through the achievement of developmental

projects and settlement of disputes among people in the community”. Okoye (2004) has similar view on the important of cultural festival when she says that “cultural festival helps to make people in a community happy when feast like new yam festivals, title taking and others are celebrated”.

Summary

In summary, Aju is an annual festival of Obinagu people that take place either in the month of August or September. It is a festival that calls for mass return of Obinagu sons, daughters and well wishers for the celebration of Aju festival that was initiated by the progenitor, ONYIAJA many centuries ago. The feast originally, was carried out only by forefathers who were traditional worshipers. Then, the core of traditions of the feast were followed but later about five (5) decades ago, many Christians joined with very few of traditional worshippers. Every since then, the feast has been modernized with the introduction of many activities to make the feast a colourful one. The significance of Aju to Obinagu people are many. It helps in maintaining law and order, bringing peace and unity among all the quarters and people of Obinagu. Aju serves as a forum for creating goodwill among Obinagu people and their well wishers. Above all, Aju is a pivot that sustain many developmental projects in Obinagu Community.

Conclusion

To come to conclusion on the study, one needs not to forget that Aju is a strong binding force which shoulders solidarity among the people. It is a force of cohesion in

the sense that people come to see themselves as one people, one nation or country, or community together in love for peace unity and progress. It goes on to create a high sense of belonging among the people. OBINAGU Community, no doubt has experienced relative peace, progress and unity. The spirit of oneness reigns supreme. Aju exerts great influence in the way the people behave or even reason to a level.

Recommendations

For the purpose of this study, the following recommendations were seen and considered important.

The Obinagu community should as a matter of fact, sponsor more research on the Obinagu Cultural Festival with a view to coming up with written materials such as journals, textbooks, magazines, local newspapers which serve as documentaries on the subject matter. This will serve as good reference materials for further studies on the issues.

Youth of Obinagu community should be given full enlightenment on the significance of 'Aju' festival as a way of preserving their cultural heritage so that the feast will not die in their own time but instead will continue to pass from one generation to another.

The town union executive and the members of the community should appeal for involvement of local government and state government support to enable them achieve more in their developmental programmes.

Aju festival should be upgraded to an internet material for easy accessibility for those who may want to know more about Aju.

References

Ezeikeojiaku, P. A. (1997). "The culture areas in Nigeria and their characteristics" In citizenship education for Nigeria universities. Ndoh, C. A. and Emezi C. (Eds) Owerri. Charismatic forum publication.

Kammelu et al (2002). Ntoala Omumu Asusu Igbo. Akure: Love and Peace Press.

Okolo, C. P. (2015). Citizen/National Current Affairs. Lagos: Noble Communications Project.

Okoye, O. L (2004) Ntuziaka Maka Udaasusu, Uto asusu na Omenaala Igbo. Enugu: Chelys Publishers.

Oral Interviews

Dr. Eneh, Calistus, the President General of the Obinagu Community

Eneze John, a citizen of the community but experienced
in traditional issues,

Eneugwu E. O., Igwe Okobo Onyia-Aja, the Igwe of
Obinagu Community.

Mr. Aneke Michael, the eldest man in Obinagu
Community

Mr. Nebo. Michael a member of Igwe's Cabinet

Nnoli Gilbert, the town crier of Obinagu Community