

# **GST 113**

## **NIGERIA PEOPLES & CULTURE**

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## LESSON 13

### THE CULTURE AREA OF THE GUINEA SAVANNA REGION OF NIGERIA

#### Who are the Guinea Savanna People?

To begin with, the Guinea Savanna Region is known as the home of an overwhelming majority of Nigeria's cultural or ethnic groups. The five major states of Kogi, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba, which constitute over fifty per cent of the cultures of Nigeria, fall under this region. The Middle Belt (sometimes called Kasashen Bauchi) is also part of this region. It covers the Idoma, the Ebira, the Igala and the whole of Zaria communities to the South. It shares the border with Cameroon in the East and with the Republic of Benin in the West. There is even a general tendency to believe that about seventy per cent of the peoples and cultures of Nigeria are found in the Guinea Savanna region. Apart from some large groups such as the Tiv, the Gwari and the Nupe, groups within the Savanna region are generally known for their small size. It is difficult to find groups with more than thousands souls. Such groups are the Mumuye, the Jukun, the Anok, the Kakanda, the Birom, the Higgi, the Jirai, the Ichen, the Kaka, the Chokobo, the Fyer, the Bassa, the Tikar, the Vergo, the Afizere, the Kambari, the Koro, the Anaguta, the Gade, the Shamo, the Anagas, the Vomni, the Lakk, the Jero, the Tangale, the Zaranda, the Limoro, the Rubu, the Amo, the Kurama, the Holma, the Mbula, the Lau, the Chamo, etc. You should remember that most of these groups claim origin of Hausa or Jukun ancestors.

#### THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE GUINEA SAVANNA PEOPLE

You should always remember that the socio-political organization of the Guinea Savanna people is very different from that of the Rain Forest people known for their large monarchies and great empires. History shows that before the rise of emirates along with their jihads in the early nineteenth century and the advent of warrant chiefs, as part of the colonial political arrangements, the Guinea Savanna people were never used to the culture of centralized government. Only few ethnic groups such as the Igala, the Nupe and the Jukun had developed elaborate monarchical structures dating back to antiquity. But these few cases cannot be compared with the majority of the groups within the region that do not have monarchical structures.

The Guinea Savanna people have always been known for their petty chiefdoms or village or lineage-based democracy. Some prominent groups such as the Ebira, Idoma, Tiv, and Birom have ultimately formalized the institution of the so-called "Royal Highnesses" with jurisdiction covering the whole ethnic group.

However, some ethnic groups in the Guinea Savanna region have been paying allegiance to the Sultan who has spiritual and political control of the greater part of the region.

#### The Economy of the Guinea Savanna Region of Nigeria

Farming is the major economic preoccupation of the people of the Guinea Savanna region. Yam is the most cultivated. The Nupe, the Koto and the Tiv constitute what is called the "West African yam belt". Among the other ethnic groups of the region, the primary crop is guinea corn and millet. They also cultivate cassava but not in abundance. Yam cultivation is

largely men's business. In the Guinea Savanna region there is land for everybody and fertility of the land there is exceptional. Even the hilly terrains of the Adamawa, Jos and Bauchi plateaux still produce enough food.

In the Guinea Savanna region land belongs to the community or lineage and not to individuals. Coincidentally, Nigeria's two major rivers, the Niger and the Benue, together with their several tributaries, flow through this region and provide ample opportunity for professional fishing. It is recorded that apart from Jos where the bulk of the tin being produced is in the hands of women, generally women of the Guinea Savanna region are not used to commerce.

### **The Religious Beliefs of the Guinea Savanna People**

The structure of the religious beliefs in the Guinea Savanna region is different from that of the Delta and the Rain Forest. For instance, the Yoruba of Ife have developed a kind of extensive pantheons which we cannot find in the Guinea Savanna region. Nevertheless, as it is the case in the Niger Delta, the Rain Forest, there is a general belief in the existence of Supreme God in the Guinea Savanna region as well. But you should remember that although the belief in a Supreme God is general in that region, He is differently called according to the ethnic groups. Among the Kurama, for instance, God is called Ashili or Bakashili. Among the Tiv, he is known as Aondo while the Rukuba call him Katakuru. Among the Gwari He is called Shekoki, Shesha, Esse, Sheko or Soko. The Nupe call him Soko. He is known as Agwatana among the Busa. He is called Owo or Owoico among the Idoma. The Kadara call him Onum. He is known as Shido or Chido among the Jukun, and Hinegba or Ihinegba among the Ebira, etc. The people of the Guinea Savanna region also believe in other forces such as astral spirits. The Igala, the Jukun and the Tiv are well known for their strong belief in witchcraft, magic and sorcery. It is recorded that the political significance of the groups aforementioned derives from their powerful attachment to ritual and magic. The political system of this group, especially the Jukun, is sometimes described as theocratic. You should also remember that in Tiv ethnic group only men are believed to be witches, while the witches of the Nupe and Gwari are almost invariably women.

It is also very important to note that the Guinea Savanna region is the most representative of religious balance in Nigeria. It is in this region more than anywhere, that we find an excellent rapprochement and cohabitation between Islam and Christianity. It is even recorded that in the Guinea Savanna region members of the same household can belong to either faith and still remains brothers. Therefore, this region represents the best hope for religious tolerance in Nigeria.

**Not all ethnic groups in the Guinea Savanna region of Nigeria believe in magic and witchcraft". Discuss.**