

# **GST 113**

## **NIGERIA PEOPLES & CULTURE**

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## LESSON 12

### THE CULTURE AREA OF THE RAIN FOREST REGION OF NIGERIA

#### **Who are the Inhabitants of the Rain Forest Region of Nigeria?**

First of all, the cultures of the Rain Forest Region of Nigeria can be easily categorized into four main groups, namely, the Yoruba, the Western Igbo, the Eastern Igbo and the Edoid. The Yoruba group is located in the Western part of the region stretching across the border of Benin Republic with incursion into Togo as well. The Eastern and Western Igbo sub cultures occupy a vast area along the River Niger. The Edoid culture group which includes Bini, Esan, Etsako, Igarra, Owan, etc., is located in between the Yoruba and the Igbo. The eastern part of Igboland to the Cameroonian border is occupied by the Yakur, Ekoi, Ibibio, Anang, Bokyi, Ejaghan, Bekwara and others.

The Efik people are also found in the Rain Forest Region with kingdoms such as Nir Akwa Akpa (Calabar), Opobo.

#### **THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE RAIN FOREST PEOPLE**

You should always remember that there is no common pattern of socio-political organization among the people living in the rain forest region. Nevertheless, some cultures are similar to others. Based on similarities and dissimilarities of culture among the rain forest people, we can retain at least two broad tendencies as far as their socio-political organization is concerned. The first tendency is what we may call Village democracies and the second is the monarchical states. The Igbo people, some communities of the east, and the Northern communities of the Edoid, fall under the first tendency, while the Yoruba and the Bini belong to the second category.

##### **a. Village Democracy**

The Igbo people are well known for it. In every Igboland, the village constitutes the basic unit of political organization. Villages are made up of lineages which are regarded as something similar to component states. Every lineage is headed by an Okpara, the oldest male member. He is the link between his people and the ancestors. He also controls the Ofo that symbolizes justice and authority. Anybody that can make meaningful contribution during general meetings is welcome irrespective of sex and age. When there are serious disputes or matters requiring crucial and careful decisions, the Okpara calls a general meeting of the adult members of the lineage. It is the same process at the village level. In Igboland, a number of villages that claim a common primordial ancestry constitute a village group or town.

##### **b. Monarchical States**

Monarchy is the second major tendency of the Rain Forest people. It is best represented by the Yoruba. Contrary to the Igbo, the town is rather the basic political unit in the Yoruba culture area. The town is made up of lineages, organized in order of seniority determined by the order of settlement. The leadership in every lineage in Yorubaland is hereditary. The leader of the founder lineage assumes the headship of the town. The Baale is the head of the town. He is also called Oba when crowned king. His duty is to conduct the administration of the town in consultation with the various lineage chiefs. At the local level, the town is divided into

wards. The ward chief is called Ijoye, Adugbo or Olorin itun. Wards are also made up of compounds which are headed by the eldest man called Baale.

In the traditional Yoruba politics, there was a distinction between judicial and legislative powers. There was rather a kind of hierarchy of powers. For instance, we have three judicial levels represented by the court of the Oba, the Ijoye and the Baale. The Oba's court is the court of last appeal.

### **The Arts of the Rain Forest People**

The Rain Forest people are best known for their highly sophisticated artistic traditions and skills. They are unbeatable in the science of metallurgy especially iron smelting and blacksmithing. Communities such as Ife, Nkwere, Awka, Abiriba and Oyo have iron smelting as their major business. In the Rain Forest of Nigeria, *terra cotta* figurines of very high artistic qualities have been found in several parts in the Igbo, the Ibibio, the Edo and the Yoruba lands. Ibibioland and her neighbours constitute the reservoir of great masks most of which are objects of deep religious meaning and symbolism. There is also an appreciable level of textile work in the whole of the rain forest region, particularly in Yoruba and Esan lands.

**What are the major artistic works of the Rain Forest people of Nigeria?**

### **The Religious Beliefs of the Rain Forest People**

Just like the Niger Deltans, the Rain Forest people are religious as well. They also share a general belief in the existence of a Supreme God. Although God is supremely the same, he is differently called according to the various cultures. For instance, in Yorubaland, God is called Olodumare or Olorun. Among the Benin he is called Osanobua. The Esan call him Osenobua and the Etsako call him Oghena. The Igbo call God Chukwu or sometimes Obasi while He is Abasi among the Ibibio, and so forth. Almost all the various cultures of the Rain Forest region of Nigeria consider the Supreme God as the Creator of the whole universe. To them, God has unlimited powers and He is also benevolent and punitive. His residence is somewhere in space in the direction of the sky. This is one of the reasons why He hardly gets involved directly in the affairs of men. The people of the Rain Forest are more concerned with their deities who are closer to them than God Himself. The most powerful of these lesser deities are Orisa in Yorubaland, Alusi in Igbo and Ebo in Edoland. The attachment to deities is so powerful that in the Ife area, for instance, as many as 2001 deities are said to exist and only 25 days in the calendar year are free from official religious activities devoted to them. There are lesser deities in Yorubaland in than Igboland but all of them are powerful. Sango, Ogun, Sopono, Olokun, Obatala, Obalefun, Orunmila, Orisanla, Yemoo and Oluorogbo are some few powerful deities in Yorubaland, while Amadaiaha or Amadiora, Idemili, Igwe, Ana or Ani are some powerful Igbo deities.

It is important to note that the general philosophy behind the religious spirit of the Rain Forest people is the search for good health, long life, blessing in terms of children and wealth, and general protection against misfortune and evil influences. Of course, they want all these in exchange for constant worship and purity of heart. In their own understanding, failure to worship or make sacrifices to these supernatural forces may make them withdraw their protection and blessing. Unlike in the Niger Delta region, witchcraft belief, especially in most of Igboland, is not of paramount importance.