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Medicine and Surgery

An historical analysis of the evolution of the Nigeria state

        The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the pre colonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The Nigerian state is a colonial creation. It is a product of a historical arrangement that arose out of European adventure with its eventual culmination in the colonialism of Africa. The exact time when began to live in Nigeria is unknown but there are archeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed to the fact that man has settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000-9000BC. Nigerians also took part in the stone-age civilization. The Stone Age can be divided into several periods. These are: Early Stone Age 3,000,000-35,000BC; Middle Stone Age, 35,000-15,000BC and Late Stone Age, 15,000-500BC.

        The man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment and began to find various ways in which he could meet his needs. He soon began to invent tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools. Archaeologists called the tools Oldowan-type tools because it was first identified by the archeologists in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. He began to make hand axes, these tools were oval and pointed in shape. Early men then proceeded to invent another type of tool which is a heavy chopper. The type was first seen at Sango Bay in the west shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda, East Africa. For this reason it was called the Sagoan. One of the most active periods of technological efforts in Nigeria was during 500BC to 200AD.

        Moving on, the three majority ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa Fulani in Nigeria traditional political system of government were examined. It was said that the Yorubas are one of the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are United by language. Their origin is traced to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Another version in the origin of Yoruba is the version of The Oke Oranfe. The political structures of the Yoruba kingdom were similar in nature. Each consists of a capital town, subordinate towns, villages and farmlands. Each town has a king known as “Oba” who resides in the palace called “Aafin”. The Oba enjoyed many privileges but certain limitations were placed on his powers called “eewo” which was designed to curb tyranny on the part of the king. The lesser rulers were in charge of subordinate towns. The Baales were the third rank of rulers and they were in charge of the villages. The Oloja were the fourth rank of leaders and they ruled over the farmlands. The town(Ilu) was the basic political unit. The Alaafin was the fountain of authority and was therefore regarded as the “companion of the gods” (Ekeji Orisa). The Oyomesi is a council of seven members headed by Bashorun who acted as prime minister and regulates the Alaafin. The Ogboni cult had a very vital position in Yoruba society, it mediates conflict between Oyomesi and the Alaafin. The head of the Army in traditional Yoruba society was conferred with title of Are-Ona-Kankanfo.

         The Igbo people are best known for their segment art way of life. They are grouped into five sub cultures:

1. The Igbo of eastern Nigeria

2. The Igbo of south eastern Nigeria

3. The Igbo of north eastern Nigeria

4. The western Igbo

5. The northern Igbo

The Igbo society didn’t have any highly centralized authority but instead they had what could be a diffusion of authority into different groups. The ancestor of Igbo, Eri descended from the sky and sailed down the River Anambra. There is no highly centralized authority but the institutions that perform the functions in the society include family, council of elders, age grades and secret societies. Each family was headed by an “Ofo” title holder, among the “Ofo” title holders, one of them was recognized as the most senior to the others, he was known as the “Okpara” who held the “Ozo” title and presided over the council of elders meeting where issues affecting the lives are discussed.

        The Hausa land is located in the northern part of Nigeria. Before 1804, Hausa land consisted of 14 states and they were two distinct groups. The first group consists of seven states called “Hausa Bakwai”  which are Daura, Biram, Zaria, Kastina, Kano, Rano and Gobir while the second group called “Hausa Banza” the illegitimate states which are Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Bauchi, Zamfara, Kebbi, Yoruba. The sarki was known as the head of any typical Hausa state. The sarkin kasar combined both political and religious functions. He was also the chief executive and judge of the state, but he was aided by a council of state. Islam was introduced to Hausa land in the fourteenth century and by the fifteenth century it was accepted as the religion of the ruling class.

        The jihad of Uthman Dan fodio of 1804 further strengthened and consolidated the religion in this area. The emir was an absolute monarch in his emirate, he was the political administrative and spiritual leader.He administered his emirate in accordance with the provisions of the Islamic and sharia law. The emir controlled economic activities within his Emirates. He maintained law and order in his domain. The emir was assisted by a group of villager heads with different title holders, they include: he sarkin fada, waziri, galadima, madawaki, magaji etc.The judicial administration of Hausa-fulani was based on the Islamic legal system called Sharia. Sharia courts were established throughout the emirates and each was headed by a trained sharia court judge called Alkali.

        The British who have often been credited with the creation of Nigeria were not the first Europeans to land in Nigeria.The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive Nigeria through Bini kingdom. The trans Atlantic slave trade was the unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria. The trade got to maturity in the 16th century. The struggle among the European powers for colonies led to the partitioning of Africa among them in the 19th century. The scramble for Africa, by these European powers led to the partitioning of Africa after the Berlin conference of 1884-1885.

        Before the year 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were still under their original administration. Unfortunately in the year 1900, the whole Nigeria was under the responsibility of the British colonial administration. The may 1906 amalgamation is known as the first ever amalgamation of the British in Nigeria. The may 1906 amalgamation is known as the first ever amalgamation of the British in Nigeria. British amalgamated Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of southern Nigeria.

         The second amalgamation was that  of 1914. In January 1914, the British government amalgamated northern and southern Nigeria. The principal for this was the same as that of may 1906. Sir Frederick lugard is best known as the father of the January 1914. Britain governed Nigeria by a means of indirect rule. It is a system of Britain ruling her colonies through local traditional rulers. The British officers defined the framework of the policies to be adopted and left the implementation to the local personnel or the rulers.