An Historical Analysis of the Evolution of the Nigeria State

Introduction:

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves the pre- colonial period and the colonial period in Nigeria. The pre-colonial period is the period before the coming of the colonialists to Nigeria while the colonial period refers to the era that colonial administration was established in the country Nigeria. The Nigerian State is a colonial creation. Prior to the different independent chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires. These, among others, include the Borno Empire, the Hausa States, and the Sokoto Caliphate in the North; the Igbo segmentary societies in the East, Benin Kingdom and Oyo Empire in the West and several ethnic identities in the Benue Valley.

The Early Men and their Achievements

The exact time man began to live in Nigeria is unknown but are archaeological evidences from different parts of Nigeria which pointed to the fact that man had settled in the region now known as Nigeria since the Paleolithic period 500,000 – 9000BC. The artifacts, mostly stones tools, found by archaeologists further confirmed that Nigerians also took part in stone- age civilization. The stone- age can be divided into several periods which are; Early Stone Age 3,000,000 – 35,000BC; Middle Stone Age, 35,000- 15,000BC and Late Stone Age, 15,000-500BC. The excavation of a Stone Age skeleton at Iwo Eleru near Akure in Ondo state has thrown more light on the earliest occupation of Nigeria. The skeleton was dated some 12,000 years ago, and this suggests that the country has been long inhabited. The man who lived in Nigeria during those years worked hard to cope with his environment, first, he needed food, and for this purpose he began to hunt the animals and to gather fruits. He soon began to invent tools consisting of pebbles made into chopping and cutting tools. Archaeologists called the tools the Oldowan- type tools because this type was first identified by the archaeologists in Olduvai Gorge in Tanazia. Early man in Nigeria advanced from the Early Stone Age. He began to make hand axes. These tools were made during the Early Stone Age, but were refined during the Middle Stone Age and Late Stone Age. Small tools have been found in Jos, Plateau State and in Iwo Eleru in Ondo State. The Earl man proceeded to invent another type of tool, which is a heavy chopper which was first seen at Sango Bay on the west of shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda, East Africa. One of the most active periods of technological efforts in Nigeria was during this period, around 500BC to 200AD.During this period people made sculptures and many were human heads and figures. The figures were made of terracotta and they all possessed a distinctive artistic style.

The Scientific and Technological Development of Early Nigerian Societies

Major Landmark in Early Nigerian History

Information on the major land marks in early Nigeria history was made possible through the excavation work done on places where man lived in Nigeria in the very remote past which includes: Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife and Benin among others, they were referred as the center of the ancient civilization. Nok civilization is believed to be a transitional civilization between a combination of stone and iron objects. Benin civilization they were important for their art work. The craftsmen of Benin carved in wood and ivory and cast objects in bronze and brass. Ife civilization is also important because of its terracotta and bronze heads. Igbo Ukwu civilization; some bronze objects and ornaments were accidentally discovered while digging a toilet pit at Igbo Ukwu in 1939.

Traditional Political Institutions in Pre- Colonial Nigeria

In this section, the three majority ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa- Fulani in Nigeria traditional political system of government shall be examined.

Historical background of pre-colonial political system in Yoruba land, the Yorubas is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and is united by language. The Yoruba people trace their origin to Oduduwa who was the founder of the Yoruba kingdom. Ile- Ife is regarded as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people. Oke Oramfe is located in Ile- Ife. It is believed to be the center from which the world was created. According to the legend, there was a period when the world was covered by water, the Almighty God then decided to send some of his messengers to the world and included Obatala and sixteen Oye (immortals). They were given five pieces of iron, a lump of earth tied to a white piece of cloth and a cockerel. The leader Obatala got drunk on the way and Oduduwa seized the symbol of authority from him and led the party to the world and the world was created. The political structure of the Yoruba kingdoms was similar in nature. The king was known as the Oba. The government of the old Oyo Empire is a typical example of the pre-colonial administration in Yoruba Land. The first organ of government in Oyo Empire was the known king as Alaafin of Oyo then second is the Ogboni cult administration and then the Army. Historical background of the pre- colonial political system in Igbo Land, The Igbo people were best known for their segmentary or cephalous way of life. This is because from the ancient time, they had no centralized states. One of the most popular versions of the migratory stories of origin of the Igbo people is the one that points to Israel. Some Igbo scholars consider themselves as off- shoot of the lost tribes of the Hebrews who migrated southward. The political structure of the pre- colonial Igbo land; In Igbo traditional society, there was no highly centralized authority but instead they had what is called a diffusion of authority into different groups, in other words, they practiced direct democracy or decentralized system of government because there was no traditional ruler. Although, there was no highly centralized authority, some socio- political institutions existed in each village to perform legislative, executive, administrative, military and judicial function, such as institutions include the family, council of elders, age grades and secret societies.

Historical background of pre- colonial political system in Hausa land, Hausa land is located in Northern Nigeria. Hausa land, before 1804 was made up of fourteen states, and they were of two distinct groups. The first group consist of seven states called Hausa “Bakwai”states that is, the legitimate state. The second group consists of the remaining seven states and was known as Hausa “Banza” states which were illegitimate states. The oral traditional attributed the origin of the Hausa states to a man named Bayajidda an Arab prince. The political structure of the pre- colonial Hausa land, The “Sarki” was known as the head of the head of any typical Hausa state. He worked with a retinue of officials in a well-organized court. Sarki Kasar, which means “ruler of the land”. Sarki Kasar combined both political and religious or spiritual functions. It is worthy of note that between 14th and 15th centuries, socio- political organization of Hausa states took another shape, for instance, Islam was adopted and this gave birth to many new political institutions such as the office of the Galadima, Madawaki, Magaji, Dogari, Yari Sarki and Sarki Yau. The Islamization of Hausa land also influenced its judicial system. The Sharia law started taking shape. Some new title such as Alkali and Qadi’s (judge) became commonplace in the administration of justice.

Colonial Administrative and Indirect Rule System in Nigeria

Historical Background

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. According to Hodgkin the second half of the country saw the arrival of the first Europeans in Bini, the Portuguese Ruy de Sequeira in 1472. It became more important in the 15th century with the arrival of the Portuguese. In 1441, a Portuguese voyager, Gonzales presented 10 African slaves to Prince Henry the Navigator as gifts. By 1460, about 700 to 800 slaves were exported annually to Portugal from West Africa. The Trans- Atlantic slave trade was unfortunate channel that first put the British in contact with Nigeria.

The Birth of Nigeria as a Geo- Political Entity

Before the year 1900, all the different parts of Nigeria conquered by the British were still under their original administration. But by 1900, the whole Nigeria was under the responsibility of the British Colonial Office. The May 1906 amalgamation is known as the first ever amalgamation of the British in Nigeria. British government amalgamation of Lagos colony with the protectorate of Southern Nigeria to form the new colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The Second amalgamation was in 1914, the British government amalgamated Northern and Southern Nigeria. The principle reason for this is the same as that of May 1906. The Northern protectorate was not as economically buoyant as the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria.