

Osu-Caste System in Igbo Land and Its Contemporary Implications: Uratta Community.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the caste system in Igboland, particularly in the Uratta community and its contemporary implications. The caste system, which categorizes people into different social classes, has been a longstanding tradition in Igboland, with the Osu being the most marginalized group. The study explores the historical and cultural background of this system and reveals its impact on contemporary Igbo society, including issues of discrimination, social exclusion, and human rights violations. This paper argues that the caste system remains a significant challenge to social justice and development in Igboland and suggests that efforts to address its negative implications should be intensified. The study adopts the documentary method for gathering data from secondary sources and recommends among others, the findings from this study have implications for policy makers, NGOs, and community leaders who seek to promote social harmony, equity, and inclusivity in Igboland.

Keywords: Outcast, Discrimination, Taboo, Human Rights Violation.

INTRODUCTION

The Igbo people are seen and recognized and is one of the strongest or so to say the strongest tribe in the world but to maintain strength and unity among them some fetish practices and believe must be erupted or eradicated, this issue of Osu caste system and method has engulfed the Igbo climate and atmosphere, this article has the work to explore on the Osu caste system and also to know the way forward in stopping this System from running in the Igbo blood and spreading in our atmosphere. Igbo nation like every other nation in the world has certain traditions, customs, culture, beliefs and worldviews, which constitute their dos and don'ts. Most of these traditions are handed over to them from one generation to the other, from their great fathers. The violation to these beliefs and traditions are seen by most of them as a great abomination (Aru).¹ Thus, they give a strict adherence to the laws even when they are no longer obtainable in a given epoch like in this contemporary era when and where scientific inventions, globalizations, civilization and soon have become the order of the day. Among these traditions and beliefs is the obnoxious, outrageous and annihilative tradition and belief of the Osu-Caste System which has in different places both in the past and present become a continuous humiliation, infringements and isolation in the places where it is practiced. Before moving further, it is only appropriate that the subject be defined for the better and quicker understanding of the reader. Rev. Dr. G.T. Basden, puts the word Osu to mean "A slave, but one distinct from an ordinary slave who in fact is the property of a god, and when once devoted to a god, he has no prospects of regaining freedom and he restricts his movements to the presence of the shrine to which he was attached."²

According to Nwachukwu J.O. "Osu is an ideology of class domination that incorporates the beliefs that a particular class of people is to be disinherited and excluded from association, with others, either because they are victims of ritual offering or they are descended from those who were victims."³

Victor C. Uchendu who seems to have concentrated his study on the South Eastern Nigeria on the Igbos of Imo and Rivers States wrote of Osu as a slave, "a slave who has been dedicated to the services of the dedicator's

deity, whose descendants are also Osu, be he dedicator and individual, extended family or a lineage.⁴ According to J.O Nwachukwu opined that “Osu is a sacred and holy being deserved to lead a secluded life like a monk in order to salvage and serve the people under him as a king and savior.”⁵ Also, the 1956 Osu Bill, echoes word for word the 1963 Eastern Nigerian Law on the Osu System: “any social way of living which implies that any person who is deemed to be an Osu or Oru or Ohu is subjected to certain prescribed social disability and social stigma or a deity, and that person and his descendants are therefore regarded as social right which non-Osu are bound to respect.”⁶

Therefore, it can be said that the Osu-Caste System is an invented conventional religious preposition established by our forefathers through religious ceremonies with religious apparatus to serve a religious purpose.

The Osu caste system is a controversial and discriminatory social structure that has been in practice among the Igbo people in Nigeria for centuries. The Osu caste system is a form of social stratification that divides the Igbo society into two groups. The first group comprises the freeborn (Nwadiala), while the second group comprises the Osu. The Osu are considered outcasts and are born into their caste, while the Nwadiala are born into theirs. The origin of the Osu caste system is unclear, but it is believed to have originated from the traditional belief in the spirit world. According to the belief, some individuals are dedicated to the gods, and their descendants are considered Osu, who are deemed inferior and are not allowed to integrate with the freeborn Igbo communities. The Osu are often discriminated against and denied access to basic human rights, such as the right to education, marriage, and even social interaction. They are believed to have been cursed and therefore considered unclean and untouchable. They are not permitted to partake in communal activities or even intermarry with the freeborn community, and this has made it difficult for them to integrate into society. The Osu caste system has been a source of social and political conflict in Igbo land. The system has caused a division among the Igbo community and has prevented them from maintaining a united front in times of political unrest. It has also hindered the development of the Igbo society by creating barriers that limit access to opportunities for social and economic advancement. In Igboland, the Osu caste system is a form of discriminatory practise where the Igbo society is divided into the Diala and Osu.

In recent times, there have been efforts to abolish the Osu caste system. Many Igbo leaders and scholars have spoken out against the discriminatory practice and called for its eradication. There have also been campaigns aimed at educating the public on the negative impact of the Osu caste system on the Igbo society and encouraging society to embrace more inclusive practices.

The Osu caste system is a controversial and discriminatory social stratification that has existed among the Igbo people in Nigeria for centuries. The system divides the Igbo society into two classes; the freeborn and the Osu. The freeborn are considered superior, while the Osu are regarded as inferior, untouchable, and impure. The Osu caste system has had significant negative effects on the Igbo community at large.

THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF OSU CASTE SYSTEM ON IGBO COMMUNITY

- 1. Social Discrimination:** One of the significant effects of the Osu caste system is social discrimination. The Osu are considered impure, and they are not allowed to participate in communal activities. They are not allowed to intermarry with the freeborn, and they are often treated with disdain and shunned by the community.
- 2. Economic Disadvantages:** The Osu caste system has also disadvantaged the Osu economically. They are often denied access to opportunities for social and economic advancement. They are not allowed to own property or participate in certain economic activities, leading to poverty and vulnerability.
- 3. Cultural Barriers:** The Osu caste system has created cultural barriers that impede the development of Igbo society. It has made it difficult for the Igbo community to maintain a united front in political and social issues.
- 4. Low Self Esteem:** The Osu caste system has also affected the self-esteem of the Osu. They have been made to feel inferior, leading to low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness.

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people in Nigeria for centuries. The system divides the Igbo society into two classes; the freeborn and the Osu. The freeborn are considered superior, while the Osu are regarded as inferior, untouchable, and impure. The Osu caste system remains a significant challenge in Igbo society, perpetuating the marginalization of the Osu and making it difficult for them to progress. It is crucial to take concrete steps towards eliminating this system, including education, legal intervention, public advocacy, dialogue, and reconciliation. These steps will enable Igbo society to embrace inclusivity, equality, and unity, which will contribute to the overall development of society.

The possible solutions to be bring to an end of this disastrous issue in Igbo land, these prospects are as follow;

- 1. Education and Awareness:** Education and awareness are essential in eliminating the Osu caste system. The community needs to be educated on the negative effects of the system and encouraged to embrace more inclusive practices.
- 2. Legal Intervention:** Legal intervention can also be an effective solution to eliminating the Osu caste system. The government can enact laws that prohibit discrimination based on caste or any other social status.
- 3. Public Advocacy and Activism:** Public advocacy and activism can also be significant tools in eliminating the Osu caste system. This can take the form of protests, campaigns, and other forms of activism that raise awareness about the negative impact of the Osu caste system.
- 4. Dialogue and Reconciliation:** Dialogues and reconciliation between the freeborn and Osu can also be significant in eliminating the Osu caste system. This will require both groups to listen and understand each other's perspectives and work towards finding solutions together.

The Osu caste ideology has more harm than good in our contemporary Igbo society. So for peaceful existence of all and sundry in every igbo Society in the globe there must be a STOP to all discrimination and also a stop to all archaic term and practices in Igbo society. This steps will eliminate all discrepancy of the Osu caste system and promote the peaceful coexistence of Igbo people at large.

In conclusion, the igbo people over the years have also been seen and recognized and is one of the strongest or so to say the strongest tribe in the world. The Osu caste system remains a significant challenge in Igbo society, perpetuating the marginalization of the Osu and making it difficult for them to progress. It is crucial to take concrete steps towards eliminating this system, including education, legal intervention, public advocacy, dialogue, and reconciliation. These steps will enable Igbo society to embrace inclusivity, equality, and unity, which will contribute to the overall development of society.

END NOTES

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