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Preserving Cultural Heritage: *The Story of Ossomala*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE

Preserving Cultural Heritage: The Story of Ossomala

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Ossomala is a town near the River Niger, inside Ogbaru Local Government Area in Anambra State, Nigeria. They call it an “ancient kingdom,” sometimes having fine river sides that make it special. Ossomala are Igbo people who speak their language very well, and they are part of the Igbo families in places like Onitsha, Aboh, and Anioma in Delta State. Here is the full gist about. ossomala, its origin, their culture, how they live their various lives, their Sources Of Income, and what happens now.

Ossomala people originated from Igbo a long time ago, maybe in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was said that those that moved from the Nri kingdom, which is a large Igbo community that started around the 10th century, settled close to the River Niger. They are mostly farmers and fishermen who see the value of the land close to the river and the water body itself. They came from Igbo lands like Nri, Aguleri, or Akwa and crossed the river to stay where they would be able to farm and catch fish.

The name Ossomala doesn't have a specific meaning that is being agreed upon by everyone; most people believe it is “Oso” (the river or a fast thing) and “mala” (land), which means “River Land” in Igbo. Some believe it has a link with the Igala Juking people because their king title, Attah Manyan, sounds like those people, but they are all Igbo. Years ago, Ossomala traded well with Aboh and Onitsha, and by the 19th century, the whites in the Royal Niger Company recognized it as a place for selling palm oil and fish.

Ossomala is led by a king known as Okakwu-Atamanya, who controls everything and prays for the town. The present king is His Majesty

Victor Igwe Chukwu-meaka Awogu, who ruled from 2015. Before he became the king, he worked as a journalist for the New Nigeria Wallpaper, Daily Times, and AIT, so he was educated and well-exposed. Attah Manyan shows that they were once mixed with other people, but their way of ruling is the Igbo pattern. The Attah does not work alone; he has chiefs and elders called Ndichie or Onotu that come from the nine villages in Ossomala: Okoti, Umuihe, Umuokwu, Umuokwe, Umuokoro, Umuezulu, Umunankwo, Umuokpu, and Umuagbo. They come together to settle disputes, keep the culture, and make plans. It is not being commanded by one person like a dictator.

Ossomala culture is an interesting part of Igbo, with small river styles.

New Yam Festival (Iriji): This is a big celebration during the yam harvest, during which people thank Chukwu (Big God) and Ala (earth goddess) for food. Everyone eats pounded yams, yam porridge, and roasted yams and then dances and prays. It shows their farming ability and respect for their gods.

Kola Nuts: Breaking kola is a holy act that means welcome and togetherness. Igbo people normally give it to visitors and pray with it, as do all Igbo people.

River Associated: Since they live closer to the river, they respect water spirits and sometimes play boats at festivals. This shows the important aspect of the river in their lives.

Belief: Before the church originated, they followed Odinani, an old Igbo way of worshipping their gods and ancestors. Most people are now members of the Catholic or Anglican churches, while some are still traditional worshippers.

They eat numerous fish from the river with yams, like pepper soup or porridge with palm oil. The river also gives stories and interesting songs.

Years back, Ossomala was a big trading place because of the rivers;

Fishing: The River Niger gives them many fishes, which they sell and consume, with the use of canoe and nets Learnt from a young age.

Farming: The land close to the River is good, so they plant yams, cassava, and vegetables. Ogbaru offers a good quantity of food, while Ossomala helps.

Trading: In the 19th century, they sold palm oil, fish, and things they produced to the Whites in The Royal Niger Company. Using the river as a means of transportation.

Presently, they still fish and farm, but on a smaller scale. Land transportation has taken over that of the water, making most people engage in smaller businesses or go to Onitsha and Lagos. Early schools introduced by churches help as well, as most children chase education.

The Ossomala people live together with their families and village

Family: Large families stay in the compound while being named by their paternal families. The oldest man (Okpara) is the head who settles fights amongst them.

Village: The nine villages work together under the Atah, each having its own leader. This brings freedom among them while keeping them united.

Age Group: Young ones join various groups by age to farm, fish, or plan festivals. It makes them grow together

Women: Women also farm, trade, and preserve stories. Some are into groups like Umuada, which helps settle minor disputes. Because they stay closer to the river, they are very close while also mixing with towns like Atani and Odekpe.

Challenges Faced by Them: Ossomala has some big problems, which may include

Erosion: River Niger washes the soil away every year, and most part of the ancient towns has gone underground. The king views it as a serious issue.

Lack of funds: The road has killed river trade, and there are no good roads or hospitals. People are surrounded by poverty.

Cultures Fading: Youths running to Onitsha and Lagos and books written by the whites making things less valued.

2022 Flood: A very disastrous flood spoiled Ogbaru, and Ossomala suffered it, carrying both houses and farms.

Most people like the Ugo Foundation, which sponsors most kids in Schools, and the king, who asks for government interventions.

Ossomala is proof that Igbo people can stay anywhere and do just as well. They traded enough before the coming of the whites, got educated early and held their culture firm. In Ogbaru, they help make the place, distribute foods and culture, and mix Igbo life and river life, festivals, kings, and everyday work. This is a special thing that shows Nigeria's many tribes.

In the story of the large Igbo, Ossomala joins eastern Igbo with western Igbo like Anioma, which shows how they moved and mixed long ago. The problems they have are erosion, lack of finance, and cultural reservations, which are what most riverine towns face. This also shows that they are trying their best. As the king says, "Ossomala is a place that manages trouble with wisdom, learns from old times and needs for tomorrow.

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An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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