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The Impact of Christianity on Women's Power in Anioma: *From Pre-Colonial Influence to Modern Subjugation*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

"Igbo woman from Illah. Southern Nigeria." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. [Postcard]

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In the present day, Christianity has really subdued women's power. Christian practices changed how women lived from what it used to be during Pre-Colonial times. Back in the day, Anioma women had a strong influence in society; they controlled numerous happenings.

However, since Christian missionaries landed in Anioma in the 1900s till this date, their religion brought the men's top trend that has drastically reduced women's power and robbed females of their rights in numerous ways.

Prior to the advent of Christianity in Anioma Igbo areas, women were in control of the markets. In farming, they were in charge of major crops like cassava and many more. The wealth women acquired earned them respect. Women earned prominent titles like the Only woman position that is akin to a queen. This position settles disputes and even contributes to big meetings attended by men.

Spiritually, women also worship river goddesses and earth spirits, which shows that women are also as sacred as men.

But when the Anglican commission came in the 1840s, and Catholics followed in 1885, everything turned for the worse towards women's rights. The missionaries implied they wanted to civilize Ndi Anioma, we are unsure if they're also implying that our ways weren't civilized; also, they called the ways of giving women so much right devil's works and brought the idea of how a woman is supposed to be under a man,



cooking and raising kids for him rather than involving in bigger things or involved in leadership.

In the schools that they established, girls were taught how to see and be good wives and not how to be independent. This scattered the money and power women had before and limited them to doing housework.

In the present day, Christian ways still hold ground in Anioma and other Igbo areas as all churches still teach how man is the head and women should be followers of men.

Churches succeeded in inculcating Ephesians, which says wives must obey their husbands. So, in church and in communities, men have more voice.

Most religious leaders are men, and traditional and Community leaders weren't left out as the Omu institution lost its relevance due to the forced "Western type of Civilization." the institution was left with little influence as Christianity handed men all the big seats.

The old goddess worshipping was stopped, and they called it "Idolatry." This took away the spiritual power women used to use in balancing things before.

At present, the Christian religion made it so that God is a man-like reign, so women have no backing anymore.

The Christian practices forced women to stay quiet and have fewer body movements; they were also forced to endure difficult marriages no matter how bad they were.

Prior to "western civilization" women could freely leave a bad husband and get hailed by the society but the church shames women when they attempt to leave a bad husband or give birth out of marriage. This has drastically increased women that die in abusive situations and reduce their voices.

Still, some women still emerged in towns like Ahaba, schools and markets helped them to gain wealth and some had the opportunity to lead women's group in church (under a man's establishment).

The Western Religions practices in Anioma and Igbo areas at large has really subdued women's power down proper. From how they were in control of trade and farming, and how they have sacred religion that makes their power stronger, church changed everything and put men on top. Women's strength still surfaces sometimes but things are now organized to give men more voice in the society.

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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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